

Food is my family's love language.

Love is wandering through the produce aisle, massaging the sliced watermelon for the best one. It's car rides through summer heat with the windows down, so the wind can flow through your hair or head if you're my dad. Trying to balance the little styrofoam tray of cut watermelon in your lap so it doesn't spill all over your pants. Giggling around bites as it streams down your arms and your chin. It's that cool, juicy crunch of that perfect piece as the sun beats down on the world.

Love is stealing tacos while your dad is in the bathroom. It's horchata squirting painfully out of your nose because people can't stop joking. It's practicing your order in Spanish in the car because you're scared to mess up your grammar. It's pozole, and huevos rancheros, and sopes, and tamales, and quesadillas, and arroz, and bugs, and you can't forget the beans. Always limon on everything. It's mango stickiness, not washing off your hands. It's going to 3rd grade and flexing the full-size Mexican candies you got over the weekend. It's the spicy, the sour, and the hearty flavors of your culture.

Love is chicken lo mein with extra peanuts. A side of the world's best egg rolls (don't tell Grandma), potstickers, and a glass of lemonade. It's watching the TV on the restaurant wall together with unnecessary intensity. It's having lightsaber battles with chopsticks. Listening to the same stories over and over with fresh ears. It's questionable fortune cookies and sliced oranges for dessert.

Love is McDonald's hotcake breakfast for the first and last chunk of school. Pretending the eggs made from powder don't exist and having your dad cut your food for you even though you're well past capable. It's tradition. It's talking about the drama of the week and about science fiction and new books coming out. It's burning your tongue on the hot cocoa because you "forgot it was hot" and playfully insulting one another on the words they suggest for the Wordle. It's immediately fighting over the hash brown when the cashier hands you the tray, and the winner gets the first bite.

Love is going to a fancy restaurant in a shirt with a hole in the sleeve because you "forgot it was there." It's lamb chops, beef rib, filet mignon, and picaña. It's loading up your plate with garlic mushrooms and roasted peppers from the buffet, chiles toreados, and heavenly bread rolls, and limeade. It's saying it's your birthday for free dessert, and eating so many of the bread rolls, the manager comes out and gives you a bucket of them. It's the nostalgia of the server bringing out a tablecloth for you as a blanket when you were little and joking about it every time.

Love is a homemade trail mix on the way up to the cabin. It's wrestling over it because you were caught picking the ones you like out. It's eating pasta salad with a bottle cap because you forgot to bring utensils. Roasting hot dogs over a campfire and coughing because you get a lung full of smoke. It's the picture of your face covered in marshmallow goop you have no recollection of that your mom keeps teasing you about. It's eating the fish your grandma caught because you are horrible at fishing.

Love is the world's second-best egg rolls for Christmas dinner, and picking cherry tomatoes from the garden. Love is root beer floats, and tea time tassies, and conversation hearts, and pot roast day. Love is the food court at The Mall of America, and everything at the state fair, and a pickle to eat instead of popcorn at the movies, and putting spicy stuff in your miso soup. It's reminding each other what they like to order. Love is food.

Love is hash brown day at school. It's too little and too sweet syrup, stale pancakes, and greasy breakfast sausage. It's trading one of your hash browns for strawberries and swapping stories about crushes and classes. It's taking up two tables with barely enough kids for one because you want to keep your spots and squeeze in to hear each other over the ruckus in the lunchroom. It's panicking because you have a test next period and your friends are giving you food.

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