



Rev. Ann Fuller

Even the most commonly read passages at weddings can add a surprisingly personal touch to your ceremony, but only if they have been selected with care and woven into the ritual well. Readings can consist of scripture, poetry, song lyrics, excerpts of prose from books, etc. The following tips will make sure any readings at your wedding add to the emotional depth of the occasion rather than detract from it.

- Do not be tempted to include more than two readings in your wedding ceremony.
- Keep each reading to a reasonable length. – i.e. short and sweet
- Ask friends and family who are comfortable speaking in public and are likely to practice before the ceremony if you want someone besides your officiant to read at your wedding.
- Pick out readings that are meaningful to you. Guests are turned off when a reading does not reflect what they know of the couple. It should sound genuine rather than contrived.
- Consider doing a responsive reading if you are able to provide your guests with a printed program. The reader and your guests alternate reading portions of the text aloud.

For more information about readings within a wedding ceremony, you can refer to this [blog post](#). The selections below hardly begin to scratch the surface of what is available and suitable for a wedding. Let your imagination run wild...and comb the internet and wedding books.

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Scripture Readings

Many people are surprised to learn the Bible does not anything in the way of passages specifically for a wedding ceremony. There is, after all, no wedding liturgy contained within the Bible. The most common passages read at weddings are not drawn from the context of addressing marriage, but their expressions of love are beautiful and capture the regard for one another couples wish for their union. Another thing to consider about using scripture is the wide array of translations. If you find a passage of scripture you like, you may want to look at the way a variety of translators have rendered the original Hebrew and Greek. Some translations lend themselves to the ritual of a wedding ceremony better than others.

Hebrew Bible

Song of Songs 8:6-7

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.



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Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ruth 1:16-17

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

New Testament

Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:12-14

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

John 15:9-12

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.



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1 John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Classic Poetry

I am only including a few examples of classic poetry because these are not particularly popular with contemporary weddings. They are quite beautiful and work well when used in weddings with a more traditional than contemporary feel to them. I have only included the text of Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 as well as a link to a paraphrase that makes this piece work even better in a contemporary wedding. but Sonnet 18 is another good choice for those who want a more classic feel.

Sonnet from the Portuguese, XLIII

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, - I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.



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From The Passionate Shepherd to His Love
by Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And I will make thee beds of roses,
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs,
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherds' swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning;
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

To My Dear and Loving Husband
by Anne Bradstreet

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me ye women if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persever,
That when we live no more, we may live ever.



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Sonnet 116

by William Shakespeare

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/116detail.html>

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come:
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Contemporary Poetry

The word contemporary covers a broad range of time periods. I am using the word loosely to refer to poems that use language that simply does not sound as dated as the English in the classic poems above. These examples barely scratch the surface. Do a web search of “contemporary wedding poem” or something similar and you will be reading for days!

An Excerpt from The Prophet

by Kahlil Gibran

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.
Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,
Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.
Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.
For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.
And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.



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An Excerpt from The Prophet
by Kahlil Gibran

Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.
But if you love and must needs have desires, let these be your desires:
To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night.
To know the pain of too much tenderness.
To be wounded by your own understanding of love;
And to bleed willingly and joyfully.
To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving;
To rest at the noon hour and meditate love's ecstasy;
To return home at eventide with gratitude;
And then to sleep with a prayer for the beloved in your heart and a song of praise on your lips.

To Love is Not to Possess
by James Kavanaugh

To love is not to possess,
to own or imprison,
Nor to lose one's self in another.
Love is to join and separate,
To walk alone and together,
To find a laughing freedom
That lonely isolation does not permit.
It is finally to be able to be who we really are
No longer clinging in childish dependency
Nor docilely living separate lives in silence,
It is to be perfectly one's self
And perfectly joined in permanent commitment
To another—and to one's inner self.
Love only endures when it moves like waves,
Receding and returning gently or passionately,
Or moving lovingly like the tide
In the moon's own predictable harmony,
Because finally, despite a child's scars
Or an adult's deepest wounds,
They are openly free to be
Who they really are—and always secretly were,
In the very core of their being
Where true and lasting love can alone abide.



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From Love
by Roy Croft

I love you not only for what you are,
But for what I am when I am with you. I love you,
Not only for what you have made of yourself, but for what you are making of me.
I love you for the part of me that you bring out;
I love you for putting your hand into my heaped-up heart
And passing over all the foolish, weak things
That you can't help dimly seeing there, and for drawing out into the light
All the beautiful belongings that no one else had looked quite far enough to find
I love you because you are helping me to make out of the lumber of my life
Not a tavern but a temple.
Out of the works of my every day not a reproach but a song.
I love you because you have done
More than any creed could have done to make me good.
And more than any fate could have done to make me happy.
You have done it without a touch, without a word, without a sign.
You have done it by being yourself.
Perhaps that is what being a friend means, after all.

I Promise
by Dorothy R. Colgan

I promise to give you the best of myself
and to ask of you no more than you can give.
I promise to respect you as your own person
and to realize that your interests, desires and needs
are no less important than my own.
I promise to share with you my time and my attention
and to bring joy, strength and imagination to our relationship.
I promise to keep myself open to you,
to let you see through the window of my world
into my innermost fears and feelings, secrets and dreams.
I promise to grow along with you,
to be willing to face changes in order to keep
our relationship alive and exciting.
I promise to love you in good times and bad,
with all I have to give and all I feel inside
in the only way I know how,
completely and forever.



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The Art Of A Good Marriage

by Wilferd Arlan Peterson

Happiness in marriage is not something that just happens.
A good marriage must be created.
In marriage the little things are the big things.
It is never being too old to hold hands.
It is remembering to say "I love you" at least once a day.
It is never going to sleep angry.
It is at no time taking the other for granted;
the courtship should not end
with the honeymoon, it should continue through the years.
It is having a mutual sense of values and common objectives.
It is standing together facing the world.
It is forming a circle of love that gathers the whole family.
It is doing things for each other, not in the attitude of duty or sacrifice,
but in the spirit of joy. It is speaking words of appreciation
and demonstrating gratitude in thoughtful ways.
It is not looking for perfection in each other.
It is cultivating flexibility, patience,
understanding and a sense of humour.
It is having the capacity to forgive and forget.
It is giving each other an atmosphere in which each can grow old.
It is a common search for the good and the beautiful.
It is establishing a relationship in which the independence is equal,
dependence is mutual and the obligation is reciprocal.
It is not only marrying the right partner, it is being the right partner.

Marriage Joins Two People In The Circle Of Its Love

by Edmund O'Neill

Marriage is a commitment to life, the best that two people can find and bring out in each other.
It offers opportunities for sharing and growth that no other relationship can equal.
It is a physical and an emotional joining that is promised for a lifetime.

Within the circle of its love, marriage encompasses all of life's most important relationships.
A wife and a husband are each other's best friend, confidant, lover, teacher, listener, and critic.
And there may come times when one partner is heartbroken or ailing,
and the love of the other may resemble the tender caring of a parent or child.
Marriage deepens and enriches every facet of life. Happiness is fuller, memories are fresher,
commitment is stronger, even anger is felt more strongly, and passes away more quickly.



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Marriage understands and forgives the mistakes life is unable to avoid.
It encourages and nurtures new life, new experiences,
new ways of expressing a love that is deeper than life.
When two people pledge their love and care for each other in marriage,
they create a spirit unique unto themselves which binds them closer
than any spoken or written words.
Marriage is a promise, a potential made in the hearts of two people
who love each other and takes a lifetime to fulfill.

And I Have You
by Nikki Giovanni

Rain has drops
Sun has shine
Moon has beams
That make you mine
Rivers have banks
Sands for shores
Hearts have heartbeats
That make me yours
Needles have eyes
Though pins may prick
Elmer has glue
To make things stick
Winter has Spring
Stockings feet
Pepper has mint
To make it sweet
Teachers have lessons
Soup du jour
Lawyers sue bad folks
Doctors cure
All and all
This much is true
You have me
And I have you



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Touched by an Angel

by Maya Angelou

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

The vows I take will be forever

by Nicholas Gordon

The vows I take will be forever:
I'll love you all my life.
There's no part way, no holding back
Once we are man and wife.

The choice is made, and now I swim
In a far different sea,
The shores of which are bright green hills
Raised up for you and me.

Our love is like a mountainside
Awash in lovely flowers:
It is our home, our solid rock,
Where all bright things are ours.



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And though of need we often must
Spend our days apart,
Our love will always be with us,
Held within the heart.

I feel it now, so strong and free,
So part of every breath
That it must live--I swear it will!--
Even after death.

Prose

Excerpts from essays, sermons, novels, non-fiction books, etc. can be a great source of wonderful wedding readings. Nothing is off limits. One of the examples below is not a common wedding reading, but simply comes from the couple's favorite book. A note of caution for Harry Pottery fans: I have yet to find anything in any of the seven books that weaves nicely into a wedding ceremony. You think J.K. Rowling could have at least given us some of Bill and Fleur's wedding to work with!

From *Poetry and Marriage*
by Wendell Berry

The meaning of marriage begins in the giving of words. We cannot join ourselves to one another without giving our word. And this must be an unconditional giving, for in joining ourselves to one another we join ourselves to the unknown. We can join one another only by joining the unknown. We must not be misled by the procedures of experimental thought: in life, in the world, we are never given two known results to choose between, but only one result that we choose without knowing what it is. Marriage rests upon the immutable givens that compose it: words, bodies, characters, histories, places. Some wishes cannot succeed; some victories cannot be won; some loneliness is incorrigible.

But there is relief and freedom in knowing what is real; these givens come to us out of the perennial reality of the world, like the terrain we live on. One does not care for this ground to make it a different place, or to make it perfect, but to make it inhabitable and to make it better. To flee from its realities is only to arrive at them unprepared. Because the condition of marriage is worldly and its meaning is communal, no one party to it can be solely in charge. What you alone think it ought to be, it is not going to be. Where you alone think you want it to go, it is not going to go. It is going to go where the two of you – and marriage, time, life, history, and the world – will take it. You do not know the road; you are committing your life to a way.



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From *The Irrational Season*

by Madeleine L'Engle

But ultimately there comes a moment when a decision must be made. Ultimately two people who love each other must ask themselves how much they hope for as their love grows and deepens, and how much risk they are willing to take... It is indeed a fearful gamble... Because it is the nature of love to create, a marriage itself is something which has to be created, so that, together we become a new creature. To marry is the biggest risk in human relations that a person can take... If we commit ourselves to one person for life this is not, as many people think, a rejection of freedom; rather it demands the courage to move into all the risks of freedom, and the risk of love which is permanent; into that love which is not possession, but participation... It takes a lifetime to learn another person... When love is not possession, but participation, then it is part of that co-creation which is our human calling, and which implies such risk that it is often rejected.

When We Marry Wisely

by J.A. Stewart

We do not usually associate romantic love with friendship, but the qualities that make a good friend are essential to the foundations of a strong marriage. We look forward to time spent with our friends. We share common interests, appreciate their company, and can relax and confide in them. This is also what we should expect in marriage, for the alternative is unthinkable. The excitement of first love transitions into something more enduring as we face the inevitable changes life brings, changes that only true friendship can help navigate us through. When we marry, we tell the world we love this person unconditionally and will from this moment on, regard the other as our first and highest priority. When we marry well, we join our lives, not with the person we *cannot* live without, but with the person we would never *want* to live without. When we marry wisely, we unite in common purpose with our most important confidant, companion, and playmate. We marry our best friend.

From *Gift From The Sea*

by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

When you love someone, you do not love them all the time, in exactly the same way, from moment to moment. It is an impossibility. It is even a lie to pretend to. And yet this is exactly what most of us demand. We have so little faith in the ebb and flow of life, of love, of relationships. We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. We are afraid it will never return. We insist on permanency, on duration, on continuity; when the only continuity possible, in life as in love, is in growth, in fluidity – in freedom, in the sense that the dancers are free, barely touching as they pass, but partners in the same pattern. The only real security is not in owning or possessing, not in demanding or expecting, not in hoping, even. Security in a relationship lies neither in looking back to what was in nostalgia, nor forward to what it might be in dread or anticipation, but living in the present relationship and accepting it as it is now. Relationships must be like islands, one must accept them for what they are here and now, within their limits – islands, surrounded and interrupted by the sea, and continually visited and abandoned by the tides.



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From *Union*
by Robert Fulghum

You have known each other from the first glance of acquaintance to this point of commitment. At some point, you decided to marry. From that moment of yes to this moment of yes, indeed, you have been making promises and agreements in an informal way. All those conversations that were held riding in a car or over a meal or during long walks — all those sentences that began with “When we’re married” and continued with “I will” and “you will” and “we will” — those late night talks that included “someday” and “somehow” and “maybe” — and all those promises that are unspoken matters of the heart. All these common things, and more, are the real process of a wedding. The symbolic vows that you are about to make are a way of saying to one another, “You know all those things we’ve promised and hoped and dreamed — well, I meant it all, every word.” Look at one another and remember this moment in time. Before this moment you have been many things to one another — acquaintance, friend, companion, lover, dancing partner, and even teacher, for you have learned much from one another in these last few years. Now you shall say a few words that take you across a threshold of life, and things will never quite be the same between you. For after these vows, you shall say to the world, this is my husband, this is my wife.

From *A Wise Man’s Fears*
by Patrick Rothfuss

I touched the loose peg gently, running my hands over the warm wood of the lute. The varnish was scraped and scuffed in places. It had been treated unkindly in the past, but that didn’t make it less lovely underneath. So yes. It had flaws, but what does that matter when it comes to matters of the heart? We love what we love. Reason does not enter into it. In many ways, unwise love is the truest love. Anyone can love a thing because. That’s as easy as putting a penny in your pocket. But to love something despite. To know the flaws and love them too. That is rare and pure and perfect.

From *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*
by Louis de Bernieres

Love is a temporary madness, it erupts like volcanoes and then subsides. And when it subsides you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots have so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part. Because this is what love is. Love is not breathlessness, it is not excitement, it is not the promulgation of eternal passion. That is just being “in love” which any fool can do. Love itself is what is left over when being in love has burned away, and this is both an art and a fortunate accident. Those that truly love, have roots that grow towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossom have fallen from their branches, they find that they are one tree and not two.



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Song Lyrics

Song lyrics are poetry. There is no reason you cannot have someone read the lyrics to a favorite love song if having the music at the ceremony does not quite work. What could be more obvious an example than the lyrics to *Wedding Song* by Paul Stookey?

I am not going to include any more examples, but I am going to provide a word of caution. Just because a song has the word “wedding” in the title or includes the refrain to “marry me,” that does not mean it is good wedding ceremony material. If you don’t believe me, pay really close attention to the lyrics of Billy Idol’s *White Wedding* or Train’s *Marry Me*.

Wedding Song

He is now to be among you at the calling of your hearts
Rest assured this troubadour is acting on His part.
The union of your spirits, here, has caused Him to remain
For whenever two or more of you are gathered in His name
There is Love, there is Love.

Well a man shall leave his mother and a woman leave her home
They shall travel on to where the two shall be as one.
As it was in the beginning is now and til the end
Woman draws her life from man and gives it back again.
And there is Love, there is Love.

Well then what's to be the reason for becoming man and wife?
Is it love that brings you here or love that brings you life?
For if loving is the answer, then who's the giving for?
Do you believe in something that you've never seen before?
Oh there is Love, there is Love.

Oh the marriage of your spirits here has caused Him to remain
For whenever two or more of you are gathered in His name
There is Love, there is Love.



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Humorous

The first example of a humorous wedding reading could go in either the song lyrics category or this one. It's from the movie *The Wedding Singer* and is used in weddings more commonly than you might think. If you two are known for your silliness, why not highlight that in your wedding?

I Wanna Grow Old With You

I wanna make you smile whenever you're sad
Carry you around when your arthritis is bad
All I wanna do is grow old with you
I'll get your medicine when your tummy aches
Build you a fire if the furnace breaks
Oh it could be so nice, growing old with you
I'll miss you
Kiss you
Give you my coat when you are cold
Need you
Feed you
Even let ya hold the remote control
So let me do the dishes in our kitchen sink
Put you to bed if you've had too much to drink
I could be the man who grows old with you
I wanna grow old with you

I Wanna Be Yours

By John Cooper-Clarke

I wanna be your vacuum cleaner
breathing in your dust
I wanna be your Ford Cortina
I will never rust
If you like your coffee hot
let me be your coffee pot
You call the shots
I wanna be yours



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I wanna be your raincoat
for those frequent rainy days
I wanna be your dreamboat
when you want to sail away
Let me be your teddy bear
take me with you anywhere
I don't care
I wanna be yours
I wanna be your electric meter
I will not run out
I wanna be the electric heater
you'll get cold without
I wanna be your setting lotion
hold your hair in deep devotion
Deep as the deep Atlantic ocean
that's how deep is my devotion.

A lovely Love Story
by Edward Monkton

The fierce Dinosaur was trapped inside his cage of ice. Although it was cold he was happy in there. It was, after all, his cage. Then along came the Lovely Other Dinosaur. The Lovely Other Dinosaur melted the Dinosaur's cage with kind words and loving thoughts. I like this Dinosaur thought the Lovely Other Dinosaur. Although he is fierce he is also tender and he is funny. He is also quite clever though I will not tell him this for now. I like this Lovely Other Dinosaur, thought the Dinosaur. She is beautiful and she is different and she smells so nice. She is also a free spirit which is a quality I much admire in a dinosaur. But he can be so distant and so peculiar at times, thought the Lovely Other Dinosaur. He is also overly fond of things. Are all Dinosaurs so overly fond of things? But her mind skips from here to there so quickly thought the Dinosaur. She is also uncommonly keen on shopping. Are all Lovely Other Dinosaurs so uncommonly keen on shopping? I will forgive his peculiarity and his concern for things, thought the Lovely Other Dinosaur. For they are part of what makes him a richly characterized individual. I will forgive her skipping mind and her fondness for shopping, thought the Dinosaur. For she fills our life with beautiful thoughts and wonderful surprises. Besides, I am not unkeen on shopping either. Now the Dinosaur and the Lovely Other Dinosaur are old. Look at them. Together they stand on the hill telling each other stories and feeling the warmth of the sun on their backs. And that, my friends, is how it is with love. Let us all be Dinosaurs and Lovely Other Dinosaurs together. For the sun is warm. And the world is a beautiful place.