

V
Lauren

Content Warning: This story includes self-harm and a suicide attempt. Please take care of yourself while reading. If you or anyone you know is struggling with mental health, help is available. Call or text 988 in the US and Canada to reach the Suicide & Crisis hotline.

On June 6, 2015 I filled in for Carter's softball team during a weekend tournament. Carter and I ended up becoming close friends. I was going with her to watch her play in the tournament. One of her teammates ended up getting into a car accident. The coach knew me and asked me to fill in. I enjoyed being the wild card when I played with a team that wasn't my own.

I got along with Carter's team. They allowed my extroverted side to come out. Carter's presence added to that as well because we were so comfortable around each other.

Carter and I were in line during warm up drills, doing what lesbians do best at softball games: talking about who we found attractive. I raised my eyebrows and nodded at Lauren.

"Eh, I guess," Carter said aloud.

"No, she's actually so hot," I insisted.

I watched her the entire first game hoping I could catch her looking at me. She was goofy. In the dugout, she went into her softball bag and screamed while pulling out what she thought was a condom. It was one of those socks that you wear to try on shoes at the store.

We had a break between the first and second games. A few of us sat on the grass to watch the next two teams play. We were all joking around. The girls started talking about their birth control. Lauren was showing us the implant in her arm. It was the perfect time to expose myself, "My birth control is just being a lesbian."

Lauren rolled to her back while cracking up. I grinned, "You liked that one, didn't you?"

"Yeah, you're a funny one," she said while grabbing my arm.

I was feeling bold. *If not now, then when?* "Give me your phone," I said.

"Why?" She asked.

"I'm putting in my phone number," I smiled.

We began texting right after our second game ended. I went to Cracker Barrel with Carter's family but my sole focus was impressing Lauren one text at a time. That goal fell out of reach with one text.

“I have a boyfriend by the way,” she texted.

“Oh. I mean that’s okay, I thought we could be friends,” I replied.

“Well he’s not great to me. We fight all the time. I’ve been thinking about breaking up with him.”

“I can’t tell you what to do, but you definitely deserve to be treated like a princess,” I told her.

I pushed the boundaries of flirting with her, but she never told me to stop. She texted me first. She kept the conversations going. She sent me music and selfies. Everything she did was another green light that encouraged me to keep trying.

A week later I went to a pride parade with a few friends. She kept repeating how she wished she was there, “Don’t go and find another girl. I want you to myself,” she texted.

She brought out a new type of romantic side to me. I thought I liked the girls I was with before. I didn’t realize that I could become utterly obsessed with a human.

Sitting on the bus on the way to school while listening to Cheerleader by OMI on repeat, I got the best text from her. “I’m ending it with him today. I want to be yours, not his.”

By late June, I was calling Lauren mine. I’d finally figured out, and found, my exact type. Outgoing, athletic, and feminine in all the right ways. Long, brown hair with big, brown eyes.

We hid our relationship for a couple months. It was new to her. I discovered my patience with her. I would have waited in the shadows for years if it meant being with her.

On August 4, 2015 Lauren went on a camping trip with her parents. Before she left, she warned me that she wouldn’t have service for the weekend. I didn’t pay attention to my phone because I would have just missed texting her. While I was busy, she walked back to town to leave me a voicemail that I still have saved in my phone:

Hey babe. I went to the fire station so I could call you because I told my dad and he took it really well. He’s really excited to meet you and he’s happy that I’m happy. So, yeah! Now we can post it everywhere. Love you. Bye.

Validation. I am enough when I’m with the right person. I went right to Facebook and Instagram to show my girlfriend off. I got more likes than I’d ever gotten when I posted a picture with her. She was pure gold.

Being with her gave me full confidence. I felt attractive enough, funny enough. I finally felt good enough. The boys at school started treating me

differently. I became one of them. I gained their respect. I got the perks of being with her in and out of the relationship.

It was the closest I'd ever felt to having a hetero-normative relationship. The weird looks disappeared. Having her by my side elevated my entire life. No one ever warned me that the higher you get, the longer the fall feels.

A city near us had a pride event in September. I bought her a shirt that read, "I'm not gay but my girlfriend is." That became my personality. I was dating a straight girl thinking that my time would never run out.

In October, Lauren was my date to my junior year homecoming dance. She wore a tight, black dress. High heels and makeup done to perfection. We posed for pictures with Carter and her girlfriend. My sister took a picture of us to post on her social media and captioned it, "cutest couple around."

The dance was in my high school's gym. The lights were dim. Music blaring. We danced. She brought me over to where all the athletic boys were getting grinded on by all the popular girls. She bent over in front of me and started grinding on me. The football player to my right slapped my shoulder. He gave me a nod of approval and a high five.

In November, I brought her to my family's Thanksgiving. It was my dad's side. There were about forty of us and more than half were strict Catholics. In my mind, bringing her was like proving to them that lesbians could be beautiful and have a "normal" relationship.

My favorite moment with her was in December. My mom gave me one of those light projectors to set up in our lawn. I took Lauren outside with me while I set it up. It was already dark and the second I plugged it in, it lit up the entire house. I took a step back and wrapped my arm around Lauren's waist, "I can't wait to decorate our home together one day."

She smiled, kissed my cheek, and said, "It's going to be amazing."

I took my eyes off the house and shifted them to her, "Promise to be with me forever?"

"I promise," she said.

I treated her better than I'd treated any other girl. I took her on real dates: Christmas tree shopping, restaurants, Broadway shows.

I look back at pictures of us and see the sparkle of obsession in my eyes. Parading my happiness to the world because I didn't know I was a step away from losing everything.

In January, we hit our seven month anniversary. I took her to my aunt's birthday party at a paint-n-sip. My cousin, Nate, was there. He's the same age as me, over six feet tall, with a super athletic build. All of my straight friends

were in love with him. I noticed that Lauren was hanging around him a lot at the party, laughing a little too loud at his jokes.

She went home the next day. I was cleaning my room. She texted me, “Hey bubs. Something is going on with my Twitter account. It logged me off. Could you try logging in on your phone?”

I knew all her codes and passwords, I got right to it. I pulled up Twitter, logged out of my account, and typed in her login information. It launched and let me in right away. It brought me right to her messages with one bold, unread message at the top, “I love you babygirl.”

It was her ex-boyfriend. *Maybe it's not what I think it is. Don't do it.* I opened the thread. Weeks of messages. “I love you bubs,” she wrote. That was her nickname for *me*.

“I miss you.”

“I want to be with you.”

“Meet me at our spot in the morning so we can hold hands on our way to class.”

No. No this isn't her. She's not doing this to me. We are in love. She loves me, not him.

I tapped her contact and hit the call button while I was on my knees. I couldn't catch my breath. She answered. I started talking right away, “What the fuck, Lauren? Tell me you're not doing this. Tell me you're not cheating on me with him. Please,” my voice faded in and out.

“No, bubs-”

I cut her off, “don't fucking call me that.”

I could hear her tearing up on the other end, “I don't know what I was thinking or doing. I'm with you. I love you.”

“I don't believe you. You want him. You love him. I knew you were going to leave me for a boy eventually but why does it have to be him?”

“I'm not leaving you for anyone. I'm with you-”

I hung up. I collapsed into a ball on my floor while clutching my chest. *No. No. I can't lose her. I have to be with her. I have to be her girlfriend.*

I fell asleep on my floor with my bedroom half-cleaned. I woke up to several long texts from her. I called my mom, who had already left for work, “Hey mom, you need to call the school and let them know I am sick and I won't be going today.”

“Okay sweetie. I will. Are you okay?”

I didn't want to admit that I could be losing everything. I replied, “Yeah. Just don't feel good.”

I never replied to Lauren. She texted me again, “I’m having my dad bring me to your house after school, we should talk about everything in person.”

She’s leaving me. I threw my phone on the floor, got in bed, and closed my eyes hoping to dream up a way to make it all work out.

I woke up to her sitting at the end of my bed, “Hey, my dad dropped me off. I wanted us to talk in person.”

I rubbed my eyes and said, “Yeah. Okay. You want dick and that’s something I can’t give you. I get it.”

“I don’t want that. I missed him as a friend and it escalated without me really putting thought into it. We’ve been together for seven months now and I’m yours,” she tried explaining.

“Were you mine while holding his hand? Were you mine when you kissed him? Or were you mine when you called him bubs and told him you love him,” I replied in a sarcastic tone.

She started crying, “Tell me how to fix this.”

“Why do you even want to fix this? You were just promising me forever. I’m not a man and you’re clearly not gay.”

We went back and forth for hours. I was worn down. I loved this girl. I wish her apologizing could have erased her mistakes from my brain.

I fell asleep with her in my arms. I woke up before her the next morning. *Why did you have to do this?* I traced my fingertips down her arm to her hand. *What could I have done better?*

She opened up her eyes. “So, Lauren, what happens next?”

“We can work through this. I don’t want this to end if you don’t.”

“I need to know you’re not going to talk to him again. I need to know that you’re actually fucking mine. Tell me that I am enough for you.”

“Yes, I promise bub-” she stopped herself from using that nickname.

Our relationship was like putting hot glass into ice. We were shattered but neither of us walked away when we should have.

Weeks went by. Our texts were dry. I had dead, heavy eyes every single day.

She texted me late one night, “I’m so sorry. This isn’t right. We shouldn’t be together.”

“Lauren, please don’t do this to me. Please don’t leave me. I love you. There’s no one else I ever want to be with. It’s you.”

“I’m sorry…”

That deep weight filled my chest. Hysterical tears of defeat. *I have nothing if I don't have her. I am nothing without her.*

I grabbed my pill bottle. One pill swallowed. I let out a deep breath. Two pills swallowed. *I'm a fucking loser.* Three pills. Four pills, five, six, seven. I lost count by the time I texted her back, "It's okay, Lauren. I understand. I'm not enough for you. I'm going to take care of it. It'll all be okay. I love you."

"What does that mean?"

Silence.

"Text me back."

Nothing.

"You need to text me back right fucking now, I'm not joking."

She called. I let it ring. I laid back in my bed and felt a relief that I'd never felt before.

"I'm going to call your mom."

Fuck. "Hey no it's okay. Don't call her. I'm going to be okay. I took my pills," I sent.

"I swear to god. You're going to get up and go tell your mother or I will. Your choice. Tell me right now what your decision is before I make it for you."

"No. Please, Lauren. Don't do that."

"Okay, I'm calling her."

"No, okay. I'll go talk to her," I gave up.

I went to my mom's bedroom down the hall and all that came out was, "Mom..." followed by tears.

She shot out of bed and turned her lamp on. "What happened? What's going on? Are you okay?"

"I... took... I took too many pills I think," I couldn't look at her.

She got on her phone and called poison control. Their response was to take me to the hospital. She didn't ask me any questions yet. I don't think she wanted the answers.

I was completely silent on the drive. She checked me in and they immediately brought me to a bed. I fell asleep.

I was in and out all night. I heard my mom call my dad, "You need to get a flight home now. She took too many pills... on purpose I think."

The next thing I knew, both my parents were sitting by my bed. I could hear my mom talking to my dad, "I don't know what happened. I don't know if this has something to do with Lauren."

The next morning I woke up early. I couldn't stop throwing up. The nurse said, "Yeah, you're going to be doing a lot of that. Your body is just getting everything out now."

I had to meet with the pediatric emergency psychiatric team. They were pushing for me to go to an inpatient facility. I don't know how I talked my way out of it. I was calm. I knew that I didn't want to die, I just wanted the pain to stop.

My mom left to pick Lauren up so she could be there when I was discharged.

We got home. My mom immediately hid every pill in the house. Lauren and I went up to my bedroom. We sat on my bed for a few minutes. She slapped my arm, "Don't you ever fucking do that again. You scared me."

"I scared myself. I promise I won't. Will you please just lay with me for a little bit."

We were laying in my bed. Staring into each other's eyes. "I love you so fucking much," I whispered to her.

"I love you," she said.

We both leaned into each other. We started kissing. I pulled back, "Please, don't leave me."

It was manipulative of me. I was holding her hostage. I felt more crazy with each day that passed. She deserved to be free.

It finally came to a real end. It wasn't easy. I stayed home from school for a while. I spent time waiting for my chest to feel light again.

Claire called me, "I'm coming home. I want to be with you. I think you should try smoking weed. You don't have to, but I think it could help. Brett and I will get you the stuff you need."

Claire didn't smoke but Brett did. For the first time, I understood substances. Not the hardcore stuff. If it meant escaping my reality, just a little bit, I was willing to give it a try.

When Claire got home, she gave me a big hug. A few teardrops fell, "You need to call me. I will always be here for you. I need my sister."

I'd never heard her say that before. I thought I needed Lauren to feel like somebody. But standing there, in my sister's arms, I realized I already was. Not because I was someone's girlfriend. Not because people liked our pictures. Not because I was chosen.

I was somebody because I was still here.

Day by day, Lauren showed up less in my thoughts. The silence she left behind wasn't as loud as I thought it would be.

I sat on the deck in my backyard. I flicked the lighter and inhaled. I spent so much time believing she was the reason I was living. But when she left, my life didn't go with her. It was mine all along.