

I  
Carter

***Content Warning: This story includes self-harm and suicidal thoughts. 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.***

Most of us experienced a first love. Or we experienced what we call a first love even though it wasn't necessarily love at all. Most of us will call it a delusion to think this person was going to be the one that you would spend the rest of your life with. The reason it felt so real was because it was your first glance at what love and hope for a future with someone could feel like.

Coming out at a young age and wanting to find a girlfriend meant that I would have gotten with any other girl that considered herself even the slightest bit gay. I didn't know my type yet. I didn't have any options to have a type. I wouldn't change who my only option was - Carter. For children, we had quite an intense relationship. I quickly understood how deep a bond between two girls could actually be. Let me put it this way: we were two undiagnosed, unmedicated lesbians being introduced to our hormones for the first time. There were a lot of tears, a lot of fights, and a lot of sex.

Carter and I have known each other since we were about eight. We played on our town's softball team together. I was the weird kid from catholic school while everyone else went to the same public elementary school together. Carter and I weren't super close at that point. We were both catchers. She was way better than I was. She even coined me with the nickname "mini-me." Other than that, we didn't say much to each other.

During the summer of my transition between catholic school to public school, I decided to add and message her on Facebook, "Hey hopefully you remember me because if you don't I would sound like a creep. haha"

Her response, "Of course I do"

It made me smile to get a message back from her, but I ignored her response. I didn't know what I was trying to get from messaging her.

Carter and I were the only openly queer girls in eighth grade. Carter was more of the girl that everyone just assumed was gay. She didn't really need to come out. Her closet doors were made of glass. She had a very masculine energy. She wore her dark, wavy hair with a middle part. She wore hoodies with sweatpants or skinny jeans, even in the summer. She was a solid 5'2" that walked around with the attitude of a 6'7" man. Her entire personality revolved

around sports and video games. Honestly, picture the type of young girl that adults look at and think, “yeah, I don’t see a man in her future.”

The summer ended and I went to the same junior high as her. We didn’t say a word to each other in seventh grade. I had a boyfriend who was the pitcher of the baseball team. People hated us because we would make out on the bus rides to the game. I get grossed out just thinking about it.

My boyfriend and I broke up in eighth grade. She messaged me on Facebook that year, “Are you seeing our last convo xD” (yes, we were in that time of using the “xD” face before emojis were a big thing).

I message back, “Omg that was a year ago. I totally had a crush on you xD”

“What?! Since when?” She messaged.

“Hmmm xD Forget I said that.” I replied.

“Fuck that’s adorable.” Carter said.

We didn’t have any of the same classes. I never saw her in the hallway. Realistically, I never ran into her until softball season came around.

It started off as a test-the-waters deal. We texted about our curiosity for girls and possibly trying some things out together. Our closest and mutual friends knew that we were into each other in a more-than-friends way. We went to our friend’s house for a sleep over. That friend was the type that liked to push people way out of their comfort zone.

Once our friend’s mom went to bed, we played the obligatory truth-or-dare game as young kids at a sleepover do. Our friend dared Carter to take my shirt off. I felt awkward about people watching me get my shirt taken off. My face was red and I got a little sweaty. Carter could feel that I was uncomfortable. She grabbed my hand and brought me to the door of our friend’s bedroom. She whispered in my ear, “Are you ready?”

Carter counted down with her fingers. Three-two-one. She quickly flipped the light off and helped me take my shirt off in the dark. We giggled and she turned the lights back on. I was standing there in my sports bra which didn’t phase me at all. She got me through the awkward part of it.

She was thoughtful like that. She knew how to read me. She knew what I was feeling even when I didn’t say it out loud. This was before we started dating. It was easy to fall for her when she showed me how well she knew me. With that small gesture, it felt like she could take care of me.

After that night, it happened quickly. We texted and flirted for probably less than a week before deciding to be girlfriends. It was an instant need to talk to each other 24/7. We used to text all day then switch to Kik at 9pm

because her mom had some parent lock on her phone. Remember Kik? The sneaky, private messaging app that we were all too young to be participating in. We slept on facetime with each other an embarrassing amount of times. We also used to write each other notes at school and hand them to each other as we passed in the hallways.

The notes were sappy and corny. “I’m sitting in Math, bored out of my mind. I figured I would write you a note to tell you how cute you look. I can’t stop thinking about you. I can’t believe I get to call you my girlfriend” she wrote.

For 12-years-old, we managed to spend every waking minute consumed by each other. She got me into her little guilty pleasures: Adam Lambert’s “For Your Entertainment” album and Call of Duty. I got her into mine: Glee and Flappy Bird.

The amount of sleepovers we had felt like our parents were sharing split custody of both of us. I liked sleeping over her parents’ houses more. Her dad lived in a small apartment with his brother. Carter and I slept on a twin size bunk bed together in the only bedroom at his place. I preferred her mom’s house even though her mom was schizophrenic with a hoarding problem. Her mom loved me and always told Carter to be more like me. Mainly because I had good manners. Carter lacked in that department.

Her room at her mom’s felt like such a safe place to me. The second floor only had her room, her sister’s room, and a very small bathroom. No A/C. Her ceiling was slanted over her tall bed. A huge TV was placed on a shelf across from her bed. She used the end of her bed as a seat while she played her videogames. The floor had a pinkish carpet that had definitely never been cleaned. It was usually covered in clothes and cat hair. It doesn’t sound amazing when I think about it. Maybe it was her that was my safe place.

The beginning of our relationship was the definition of the honeymoon phase. Multiply that by a thousand because we were both getting the chance to be romantic with another girl. Our conversations were about building a life together. We were delusional to say that we were each other’s soulmate.

One day Carter’s mom was driving us to softball practice. We always sat in the backseat together. We made our parents drive us uber-style. I was sitting closest to the window and she was sitting in the middle seat. We were holding hands. She looked in the rearview mirror to make sure her mom was distracted by driving and the radio. She grabbed my cheek and pulled me in for a kiss. It wasn’t a makeout session. To this day I have never experienced a kiss the same way which is weird because it wasn’t our first kiss, it’s the kiss

that always stuck with me. It felt like we melted into each other. Our heartbeats were in sync. It was just us.

She pulled back. We put our foreheads together. She pulled my hand over her heart and asked, “Did you feel that too?”

The problem with Carter and I was that we lived in a cycle. We were both insanely depressed. We dragged each other down while foolishly believing that we were helping each other. We were both young and self destructive. We would talk about dying like it was a birthday gift we couldn't wait to get.

“I just have this feeling that I wasn't meant to live a long life,” Carter texted me.

“Same here” I replied.

I recall sitting in health class in eighth grade. Carter was facing me but sitting at the end of a table on the other side of the class room. We were texting during class. I could tell she was off more than usual. Her eyelids were heavy with the weight of her emotions. It took me a while to pull anything out of her until she texted me, “I'm so sorry. I couldn't stop last night.”

I'd witnessed self harm on a few other classmates. But Carter. Carter's were different. Hers were deep. Hers were so specific. This might sound weird but they weren't the cuts that look like hundreds of long paper cuts. There were about ten cuts on each arm from her wrists to shoulders. They were horizontal from one side to the other. She measured them. Each the same length and about two inches apart.

She probably sounds insane to you. But she wasn't crazy. She was in pain. That pain didn't define who she was, though. Carter has one of the sharpest minds I've ever come across. She was effortlessly intelligent. Watching her in school felt like watching someone miles ahead of the rest of us. It was like watching a high schooler do kindergarten work. Honestly, she's the only reason I passed science in eighth grade. She'd sit next to me, finish her test, then casually switch it with mine. I always ended up with an A because of her.

I was too young to understand what helping her was supposed to look like. There wasn't even a question of telling anyone. She couldn't hide the cuts if she tried. Her mom found out the same day. You'd think that would've been the moment everything shifted. The moment that someone stepped in, took it seriously, and got her real help. But nothing like that happened. She was sent to the school counselor, like that was enough to hold something that heavy.

I did the only thing I knew how to do. I stayed by her side. One day at her mom's house, she pulled down a tapestry from her wall. Behind it was a suicide note, written directly onto the wall in thick black Sharpie. It covered more space than I expected. Neither of us said much. I grabbed something to clean it with and started scrubbing. We stood there for over an hour, trying to erase something that felt a lot bigger than ink.

In that year and two months, I learned that getting better doesn't just happen. You have to find a way to reach out for help even if it seems like the scariest option. When two people are both hurting and don't understand why, they can't fix each other. No matter how hard you try, you are bound to weigh each other down.

As emo as our story is, it was also exciting. We were mainly either depressed or turned on. We experimented with each other. We memorized each other. Simply put, "no" was never an answer when talking about sex. We were completely open with one another.

I won't get into the intimate details of my sex life just yet because... well because this was when I was twelve to fourteen and that just feels wrong to talk about.

I'm sure a lot of you had that experience with someone. The first time you are fully intimate with someone without any type of shame. Touching you in places that you probably never even touched yourself. You instantly get addicted. We had a habit of doing it at school: the woods, the bathrooms, the locker room. We weren't the best at hiding it either. Our softball team used to play rock, paper, scissors to see who would have to go grab us from the locker room for practice. How embarrassing.

It was nice. People accepted us and our relationship. It could have been the fact that Carter was scary as shit and no one wanted to mess with her. She probably protected me from a lot of hate that we could have gotten.

Towards the end of our relationship, she decided that she wanted to cut her hair off. That was a huge fight with her mother. I was so confused by her mom. She booked the appointment for Carter but at the same time was screaming at her that she shouldn't cut it off. Her mom brought her 70s yearbook to the appointment to show Carter what she might look like, "You see these girls. They ended up with afros. It's going to look ridiculous."

Nothing was going to change Carter's mind. She told her mom to fuck off and sat down in the salon chair. That haircut was the best decision Carter ever made. She looked so good. I didn't miss her hair for a second. Her jawline

was always perfect but the haircut made it look even more defined. Straight girls at our school began to drool over her.

I loved the haircut on her, but I slowly began to realize that she might be too masculine to be my type. I felt guilty coming to this realization. I began to think about the future. It shifted in my thoughts from *our* future to *my* future. I started picturing myself with a wife in a white wedding dress. A girl with motherly instincts. Soft. Femininity attracted me. Carter wasn't that. Which was completely okay, I didn't want her to change for me.

You know that curse of a lesbian relationship when you hit a point and you realize that maybe you two are actually just really good friends? I think we hit that point long before either one of us wanted to admit it.

My options began to expand. I couldn't help being curious. The captain of my high school softball team became a close friend of mine. Mikayla. Yes, I had a bit of a crush on her but that was because she was a pretty brunette that gave me some attention. She was very straight. A friend that she had at another school, however, was not. She paved a path for us to start talking and, well, that's when I became the villain in this story.

I never physically cheated on Carter but I didn't stop from feeling out my options while I was still with her. I fell for this next girl too quickly, as freshman in high school do. There was only the problem of the fact that I had Carter. I wanted to be honest with her.

We were fighting for a while. Jealousy was a big downfall for us. We fought over every look, every smile, every joke that we made with someone else. We were trying to hold on to each other way too tight. I think we were scared to think there was a world beyond us. We were accepting of ourselves with each other but what happens when we break up and have to try to find other girls that like girls. We didn't want to lose our comfort.

The honeymoon phase was bound to end. It was inevitable. Once that excitement faded, all we had were our fights. Our breakup was just like our entire relationship... overly dramatic. We knew it was over. She knew about this new girl that I was texting. I ended things with Carter over text. "I think that we've both been feeling like this for a while" I texted.

"Just fucking say it" she replied.

"I love you but we are just friends. Let's admit it. We are going in two different directions. This is fucking hard but I think it's what's best for both of us..." I said.

A week or two later we decided to really finish it in person. Her mom drove her over to my house with a bunch of my stuff. Carter and I went out to

my backyard and sat on my trampoline. We talked about the good times. The classic “we can still be friends.”

It was going well. We were even laughing until the collar of my shirt slipped a little too far. Shit. She saw a hickey where my neck meets my shoulder. She pinned me on the trampoline and said “you’ve gotta be fucking kidding me. Already?”

She had every right to be pissed. Hell, I would have flipped my shit too. She began to question me like I was being interrogated for murder. None of my answers were satisfying. In fact, my answers were just boiling her blood even more. She pulled her hand back and slapped me across the face. It sounds worse than it was. Looking back and thinking about my fourteen-year-old ex-girlfriend slapping me across the face because I was being an asshole is quite hilarious to me now.

I wish that slap had knocked some sense into me. It didn’t. I walked away thinking, “I’m glad I got that over with but that was dramatic.” Turns out, that was nothing. I would have been better off staying with Carter because my next relationship showed me just how much worse it could get.