

## **We Weren't Meant to be Friends**

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We couldn't be separated. We were two peas in a pod. My best friend all of middle school decided whether or not my days would be good or bad. If she wasn't smiling, I wasn't smiling. Everything we did, we would do together, from sports to shopping and everything in between.

But by the end of middle school, our relationship grew quietly unhealthier. We were always competing.

"The boy you are talking to said I was cute yesterday," she'd say.

"Do you like my new shoes?" I'd ask.

"Ya, but the pair I got in white are better," she'd respond.

It got to the point where I would not talk to her because I couldn't stand the fact that it was either me or her. My brown eyes or her green eyes, my brown hair or her blonde hair, my brown skin or her white skin. Our differences didn't help. This competition that was arbitrarily ruining our friendship never surfaced. Until it was too late. I began to be hostile towards her. Everything I had she wanted. I was perplexed at how such a great friend had become a frenemy.

*Why can't we be great together? Or at least support and encourage each other?*

Every time I tried to distance myself, she always seemed to find a way to creep her way back into my life, and I let her. I would tell her we weren't friends, but her apologies consumed my thoughts and wooed me back. I didn't want to lose the memories we shared of our once-healthy friendship. This was a back and forth occurrence—me leaving, her chasing, me caving. It was toxic. It wasn't the friendship it had once been. She played tricks on my mind; she made me feel guilty yet innocent, ugly yet pleasant, stupid yet sensible. I was indignant about the power she had over my life.

When I was alone and I got to sit back and think about our relationship, I knew it wasn't right. *Why aren't you okay with any decision I make on my own? Why do you always have to disrupt what I am doing?* I never had the courage to discuss these thoughts with her.

It was a Saturday night that changed everything forever. We were both freshmen in high school when we started to talk about kissing each other. I will never understand how it got to this, but I can assume some of it was hormones and the curiosity of two teenage girls. It was how it always was; we were hanging out in my room talking, letting the TV play in the background when we made the unconventional decision to be intimately physical with one another.

Nothing ever seemed to be right between us. There was always something wrong, and this decision reached the peak of things wrong with our relationship.

The intimacy was mutual. I enjoyed it. But I was not the instigator. Anything further than making out was not discussed, so I was taken aback, but I let it happen. I never asked for her hands to touch my body, but I let them.

*Why are we doing this? Why am I enjoying this?*

The next morning, everything appeared normal. We woke up, and I saw my friend, nothing more.

“Good morning. What time is your mom coming to get you?” I asked.

I intended for that night to be a onetime thing, but, boy, was I wrong. It became something I wasn’t ready for, sneaking around and doing things in uncommon places on a consistent basis. I would risk being five minutes late to classes just so she could kiss me, or I would wait until the P.E. locker room was clear to let her touch me. It must’ve been the feeling. How I physically felt when my body was being treated the way it was. I had never been touched below my waist or kissed by anyone except my parents. I take full responsibility for it continuing, but I made sure my actions were private from the people who would view them as wrong.

My parents always said, “You are always one decision away from a totally different life.” The choices you make can dictate how people treat you, and with choices come consequences.

I believe these few weeks to have been the most perplexing time in my life. I didn’t know what I was doing. I wanted to be friends with someone that was fiending for my physical attention. I had gotten myself into something I didn’t even know could happen. At least not between us; we were best friends. The physical interactions between us ceased when my parents found out. What is done in the dark will come to light, and you can never be too careful. I became sloppy with this personal information – telling my closest friends across different social media platforms. *You will not believe what happened...*, I’d start. Though I was not wrong to trust my best friends, I was wrong to trust social media. With my older brother and me having linked Twitter accounts at the time, he received all of my direct messages. *Would you do it again?*, my friend would ask. *Ya, but I don’t like her*, I’d say. The vulgar correspondence between my friend and me sickened him. Though I felt like I had done nothing wrong, he felt my words were detrimental enough to tell my parents.

I quickly learned that I couldn’t trust my brother. He could have talked to me about his concerns. He could’ve asked me questions. Instead, he betrayed me. The immediate consequences showed me a side of my parents I never thought I’d see.

When my father entered my room, I knew there was something on his mind. His face was long, and his emotions were dull. I knew from his body language that he was getting ready to talk to me about something important. As he told me he knows what happened my belly grew bigger, my stomach sank to my knees, my throat began to close, and my mind went blank. “What does this mean?” he asked. I couldn’t listen. I couldn’t talk. When my brother came into my room shortly after, he simply summoned me: “You should go say sorry to your mother.” The discomfiture I felt was indescribable. I slowly crept down the stairs hoping I’d die halfway.

When I finally made it down the steps, I saw my mom curled up on the couch. I didn't want her to look up at me. I didn't know what to say. As the words "I'm sorry, Mom" snuck out of my mouth, she looked up and frowned with loathing. Anything else I tried to say didn't matter. I wasn't apologizing for my actions; I was apologizing for how my mother felt.

My parents were blindsided by the explicit details I shared with others. A night that I was supposed to be having a harmless sleepover, I had been kissing the girl they knew to be my best friend instead. My mother was disgusted.

"How could you do this?" she asked.

She couldn't look at me, couldn't talk to me. My father felt guilty and angry that the first person to show physical interest in his daughter happened to be a girl. *What are my parents thinking?* The one thing I was not wrong about was that they questioned my sexuality.

"What does this mean? Do you like girls?"

I had no idea. The prolonged consequences ruined my teenage life. I was never allowed to go anywhere or do anything with companions of mine that my mother thought might be gay, and I wasn't allowed to have sleepovers anymore. I began to lose friends because of my lack of attendance at planned gatherings. It was forced upon me to hang out with boys and to have guy friends. My parents did everything to make sure that, on their watch, I was to do nothing "out of character" again. When I would ask to hang out with friends, I would get an immediate "no" from my mom. It took me two years after my life-changing decision to understand why. My physical interactions with the girl whom she knew to be my close friend were the reasons why.

At the time, I wasn't conscious of the backlash I would receive. I was just an innocent, curious girl. But the choice I made when I was 14 influenced the way my parents would treat me, think of me, and trust me for the rest of my life.

I do not regret this life-changing chain of events, because they made me who I am, and I truly believe everything happens for a reason. The girl and I cut off all ties, which was rather easy for me. I didn't need her, she needed me. Sometimes I wonder if what we did was to heal the open wound in our relationship. If us kissing every day was supposed to fix things, then our ignorance only made us strangers. I hate that this incident made people question me. I never wanted to be in a relationship with her. To me it was simply two bodies being physical. I understand why my sexuality was questioned...I kissed a girl.

*Why does one kiss have to identify my sexual preference? Why does any occurrence have to define an entire being?*

I lived my high school years afraid to have fun. I wouldn't even ask to hang out with friends anymore because the word "no" became habitual. I was afraid of what my mom thought of me. I was afraid to express myself. I never wanted my mother to be as disappointed in me as she was the day she found out about what my friend and I had done. I wish she was more understanding of my adolescence and environment. I wish she believed me when I said I did not like my friend.

I wish she believed me. There is nothing worse than being misunderstood by the sole person you want to make the proudest.

*Was it really my fault? Was my curiosity and naïveté something to make me feel shame?*

It took me a while to realize that my parents' sudden protectiveness was meant to protect me from myself. But I didn't want to be saved. Let me learn. Let me yearn.

As I grew older, I began to express my feelings more toward the topic that kept me up at night. Kept tears rolling down my face. Kept turning recurring murmurs into headaches. I will never escape the conversation of sexuality. Not just mine, but anybody's. My parents always sought to pick my brain on the topic. To this day I worry how my parents might react to things I do. These ruminations crowd my head to the point of constant pounding. It wasn't easy. I was always afraid of the reaction. What was to come because of what I said or did? I ran away from my parents, even though they were the people I was supposed to express my feelings to. I was afraid of my own parents. For years. Because of something that happened when I was fourteen. It's like they didn't believe I would grow up or move on from my adolescence.

This sense of entrapment I dwelled in I blamed on my friend. I wish I could tell her how I felt. What had happened to us being happy seventh graders running around playing capture the flag? That was all I ever wanted for us...to be friends. Best friends. But the love I have for my family and repairing what you broke was more important to me than your friendship.

With growth comes discernment and I've realized that my experience served as a learning opportunity for me. My emotional health should have been more important than a physical connection. My friendship should be valued and reciprocated, but without complexity. Henceforth, my relationships will be genuine, easy and enjoyable. I know what was done, and what was done is done. I can't dwell on what happened. I can't let it continue to keep me up. It was supposed to happen this way. We weren't meant to be friends.