

Gracie Ham
CALLIE

I got my period the same day my parents told me they were divorcing. In fact—I kid you not—it happened the exact moment they told me. My thirteen-year-old self honest to God thought the bleeding was somehow a reaction to the news. We just don't love each other anymore, baby, they said. We still love you so, so much though! Don't you worry one bit!

And how, exactly, was I not supposed to worry? I wanted to ask. If my parents signed a literal contract promising to love each other forever and couldn't keep it, how the hell was I supposed to believe they'd still somehow love me? The short answer was, of course, that I didn't. And then, of course, as if watching them viciously fight over me in court and inevitably forgetting my favorite lip gloss at Dad's basically every weekend wasn't enough, I walked away from the entire experience completely and totally incapable of love. At the age of thirteen. Every girl's dream, right?

On the bright side, though, not having a boyfriend in high school makes you good at all kinds of things: studying for tests, making good grades, not crying yourself to sleep every night over a boy who weighs one hundred and fifteen pounds soaking wet, etc. I graduated third in my class and didn't get my nudes leaked—not even once—which is truly saying something in the town I'm from. I talked to a few boys throughout high school, but I couldn't force myself to feel anything serious for a single one of them. My friends went to college with their boyfriends (and broke up two months in of course, only to come out as lesbians and start dating each other—seriously.) and I went to the college I wanted. I was good. I was smart. I was completely fine without a man, and I was determined to stay that way.

My freshman year of college came about how it always does: surrounded by new faces and charged with the prospect of complete freedom. I picked a major—English of course—and began attending classes. I had a room to myself in one of the on-campus dorms and kept to myself. That is, of course, until a literal pink-haired, septum-pierced, tattooed girl moved in across the hall. I wish this was a joke. Up until this point, I was completely certain that I was straight. While I had never dated a guy, I truly never considered anything else as an option. The girl—Callie—and I became close friends almost immediately. We spent every moment of every day together. I took her home to meet my mom and then my dad. We were all convinced that Callie and I were the best of friends. Spoiler alert: we were very, very wrong.

I started noticing changes in the slowest, most covert way. Suddenly, I was shy about changing in front of her. I started getting jealous when she hung out with other people. She had been out as bisexual for three years by now (something that was becoming increasingly understandable to me) and was basically a pro. I felt like an immature child compared to her. I didn't really have any other close friends besides Callie at this point, so I tried my hardest to ignore it, because I certainly wasn't going to talk to her about it. Then came my nineteenth birthday. We had been in college for six months at that point and I was wholly convinced I was going insane. I'm

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from a small town, and I had never been friends with—let alone known—anyone who identified with the LGBTQ+ community. One thing I was sure of, though, was that I was in love with Callie. I remember agonizing for hours how I would tell her. She had a girlfriend at the time and seemed to really like her. On top of that, I was heavily confused if I liked girls or if I just like Callie, and I didn't want to bring her into the baby stages of my sexuality or ruin what she had for someone else over misplaced feelings.

Anyways. The night of my birthday, she had on this tiny little dress and a bit of blush, and I swear I couldn't breathe the whole night. I told myself I would tell her by midnight. When it was 11:56, I almost passed out. I pulled her aside, snuck into some random bathroom, and blurted it out.

"I'm in love with you."

The words hung in the air for several seconds. Or maybe it was hours. I honestly couldn't tell. Eventually, she opened her mouth. I wasn't sure what I expected: her to slap me, or maybe (hopefully) tell me she feels the same way. Instead, she leaned in and kissed me. It was my first kiss. It was everything the books tell you it will be. I felt it from my toes all the way to the tips of my ears. I might have died—I'm still not completely sure I didn't—except for the fact that my heart was beating faster than it ever had. I don't mean to over-simplify the experience, but we truly never even talked about it. She broke up with her girlfriend the next morning, and we began dating. We've been together ever since. I plan on asking her to marry me next month. So, the girl who was convinced that love wasn't for her and was determined that men weren't for her was right, in a way.