

## Sad Girl Syndrome

I have not always been sad. People have told me I was an outgoing child with an optimistic personality, even after my parents divorced. I cannot recall if I was actually sad when that happened. I was a toddler then; I couldn't comprehend what was occurring. All I knew was that dad got a new house with Alex while mom, Michael, and I had to move in with Nonna and Poppop. I loved my grandparents so I found the whole ordeal exciting rather than depressing. But something changed in the third grade. Not only did I transfer schools and suffer the loss of my grandfather, but I became painfully aware of my appearance. It took nine years for me to learn sadness.

While sadness is no stranger to both men and women, there is a particular type of sadness entangled within the essence of femininity. It is tied to an outdated portrait of what womanhood is: how a "lady" should and should not act. Women are too often told to "smile more" as if our emotions are something to be regulated and restrained. And for those of us who are self-proclaimed "sad girls," these notions further isolate and shame us for natural emotions.

Self-hatred greeted me like a friend when I gained consciousness of the world that society had so carefully constructed. The expectations served to me on a silver platter by the media, the patriarchy, and the American public school system forced me to conclude that I was different from all of the other nine-year-old girls in my class. I didn't look like them. Even though I played the same sports they did, I was still chubby, and I bet their moms hadn't put them on Weight Watchers like mine. It wasn't fair. They received extra candy on their desks on Valentine's Day. I got a pack of Starbursts from our homeroom teacher. Maybe I didn't deserve to be treated the same as them because I had brown eyes instead of blue and curly hair instead of

the silky straight hair they all had, clipped with purple butterfly barrettes. Those girls brought more sadness into me than I was prepared for.

The older I became, the worse I felt. Like many other sad girls my age, I didn't have a healthy relationship with my body or those around me, compelling me to turn to strangers on the internet who blogged about similar struggles – the blind leading the blind. They offered no logical solutions to my sadness. In fact, the advice they gave seemed to worsen my condition instead of better it. But for some reason, I kept going back and falling into the void. Especially in moments when I needed the most guidance, like when my dad decided he no longer wanted me and kicked me out, or when my best friends ditched me in high school. I tuned everyone out, except my fellow sad girls, and started listening to the demons that called my name so sweetly at night, telling me to press a razor to my skin or stick my fingers down my throat.

Although I knew that hurting myself would only cause more mental strain, it strangely offered me a sense of comfort. When I was in pain, the sadness disappeared for a little while. I grew fond of this feeling of ease and sought after it as often as I could. But in reality, it only ended up bringing more despair. I felt it when I caught a glimpse of my scars as I stared at my naked body in the mirror. I felt it when I was late to class after dispelling my lunch into the school toilet. I felt it when I wore sweatshirts in July. The longer these emotions lingered, the tighter I held onto them.

At sixteen, my doctor explained to me that I had a problem. This whole time I had been thinking that *I* was the problem. But the problem was capital-D Depression. You see, “normal” people don't think about killing themselves. Well, in passing they might but they don't obsess over it, and they surely don't make a plan to execute the idea. And “normal” sixteen-year-olds don't sip rum straight on school nights to make themselves feel something other than sadness.

She suggested I take a pill (Prozac, which I had read about on all those Tumblr “sad girl” forums), that it would make me feel better, but by that point in my life, I didn’t know if I really wanted to get better. I had started to appreciate the pain. Call me a masochist but I actually began to enjoy it. It was almost as if misery was a part of me now. It grew to be an ordinary character trait, not a flaw.

Once sadness comes into your life, it never seems to leave. It evolves from something avoided to something familiar. It grows on you like weeds in a garden, trapping your spirit and robbing you of dopamine. If you allow it to dwell in your heart it will make a home there, and it is not a pleasant guest. It will not care if you have plans to go out with your friends on the weekend, it will confine you to your bed. It will become the only constant companion in your life. I still don’t know if I am willing to let that friendship go.