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## Black Dog Blood

Ashleigh Mounser

**I should say in advance**, that this is not a love story. It is not an adventure story, nor a mystery.

This is just my story; it is just a story about survival.

I'm sixteen years old, and twice now I have been crippled by depression. I am not an angst-ridden teenager; I have not immersed myself in melodrama for the sake of attention. I am not a liar. I am not ashamed.



When I was ten years old, I got sick overnight. I screamed, because I didn't know what else to do, and cried because I didn't know how to stop.

By the next morning I was swathed in depression.



At ten, the concept of an emotion as a diagnosable disease was beyond me. Unfortunately, having the disease was not. It had never occurred to me that a word like 'suicidal' existed, let alone applied to me. The naivety of childhood combined with an adult's disease, and I was caught somewhere between thinking I'd gone utterly mad, and thinking I had a greater understanding of life than those around me.

I couldn't understand how anyone else could see things the way I suddenly did and keep existing. I was left with the conclusion that I was the first to think them — that I was the

only enlightened person in the world. I was sure that I was utterly alone in this. And so, in martyr-like acceptance, I resolved to never tell my secret.

I would never tell that I no longer saw any point in life, nor a way out, that I saw nothing but death when I spoke to my family, that I cried every time I was alone, or that I would give up on God before the end of summer.

I had written down everything I felt since before I was legible, but for the first time, I had no words.



I eventually knowingly engaged in a fascination with murderers and became so terrified, so fascinated that I was distracted.

Knowing this, I encouraged myself in my phobia, and within three months I was so afraid, I was no longer sad. Eventually the fear, too, faded and either due to unwillingness or post-traumatic stress disorder, I forgot I had ever been sick.

I quickly reverted back to a child, my defences down, and subsequently I was sick again before I turned thirteen. With age came knowledge, and I finally understood what was happening to me; still I told no-one.

This time I kept my secret because I was a teenager, and no-one would have believed me.



This is the contradictory society we live in. One that tells us to talk about our problems, but condemns us as drama queens. One in which girls are prudes for not having sex, and become sluts when they do. We are 'emos' if we feel anything other than complacency. Slackers if we drop out and nerds if we try.

In a world where you're insipid if you're afraid of life and a fool if you're not, why shouldn't we be depressed?

Doesn't it seem more likely that kids would do a tap dance if they wanted attention, rather than slit their wrists?

Shockingly, self-harm usually means there's something wrong.

Still, a teenage girl cannot say she has a mental disease without being challenged, looked down on, made assumptions about or called an 'Emo'.

Regardless of contradiction, depression is still viewed as a scapegoat, as if people blame an illness beyond their control when their lives get out of control. You can do all the reading on depression you like, you can literally write the book on it, but you cannot have an informed opinion, an opinion that counts, until you have been smothered by it.



I have been handed depression by both sides of my family. The black dog is in my blood, but for personal reasons I have never sought professional help, I have never taken anti-depressants. As a result, I will probably always be different.

My low points will be lower than anyone else's. I will see signs in ordinary things. I will restrict every and any extreme feeling; I will analyse every emotion from polite disinterest to boredom to make me feel like I will see it coming.

Like I have the ability to see it coming. After two years of post-traumatic stress disorder and years of denial, I can honestly say that I'm happy. What's more, I am more grateful for happiness than most people. I feel appreciation every time I laugh, every time I get through another birthday and every time I realise how long it's been since I thought about the dog days.

Still, I am the first to admit that I will never be cured. I cannot be cured. I am the first to admit that if I were to become sick again, I would lie again, I would burrow into myself and rely on no-one; I would not be accountable for my actions.



At the end of this year, it will be seven years since I was introduced to depression. I will cry, I will feel sorry for myself. But I will not dwell, because I know what it would mean if I did.

I'm sixteen, and twice now I have been crippled by depression. I am not an angst-ridden teenager; I have not immersed myself in melodrama for the sake of attention. At ten years old, I chose to live when it felt like I was dying. I chose to stay, when all I wanted was to go. I chose to survive, when it would have been easier to die.

I am not a liar. I am not ashamed.



**Ashleigh Mounser** wrote this in 2011 when she was in Year 11 at Kincumber High School in New South Wales.