



Imagine that you fall.

You fall so hard that you forget everything that led you to this moment; you become the fall.

You sit there, at the bottom of the abyss, enveloped by darkness; the only thing you have now is your thoughts. You notice that there are people above you, yelling down to you; they lower a rope. This is the only chance you have to get out – pure willpower. You clench your jaw and muster up all the strength you have, and you start climbing. You get halfway up, and you fall again. You do this for hours. Your hands are bloody and throbbing – you feel the warm tears streaming down your face. You are weak and exhausted; your hope wears thin. Days have passed now. You lie in the fetal position and all you can feel is the darkness surrounding you. You hear the voices above. They tell you to get up, to keep going, to not lose hope. But how could they possibly know what it feels like? They are above, and I am below.

Most people, to some degree, understand what depression and anxiety are. Borderline personality disorder, however, is far less understood. I'd like to give you a glimpse of my reality. *Every single day is both the best day of my life and the worst day of my life.* You could say that I experience highs and lows throughout my days, but it's so much more than that. I don't experience emotions the way other people do. When I experience an emotion, it is so strong that I completely forget anything else. I can't remember feeling any other way than I do in the present moment. Imagine the greatest happiness you've ever felt, now multiply it by 10 – that is how I feel when I am happy. Now imagine the deepest darkest sadness you've ever experienced, now multiple that by 10 – this is how I feel every time I get sad. When I'm sad, I can't remember ever feeling happy; when I'm happy, I can't remember feeling anything other than happy. The situation that brought on the emotion becomes obsolete; it doesn't matter if something big happened or if it was a minor inconvenience, it all feels the same to me. I'm strapped onto this never-ending roller coaster, and it doesn't have an emergency stop button.

The mental pain is exhausting, but there's physical pain too. The emotions are so strong that I can feel them festering in my body. It's like they are fighting me from the inside, and the only way to feel relief is to let them out. But there's such an urgency to it; it grows inside of me until my only option becomes lashing out. Then the feeling of relief rushes through me and I can catch my breath, but not to worry, there's another emotion already on its way – shame. Now the shame feels so intense that I feel like I cannot live in my own body. I feel like no matter what I do, the pain will never end. I'm constantly fighting this internal battle, but it doesn't end there.

There's internal and there's external – the constant craving for validation. My own emotions become dependent on the opinions of other people. And because people don't always tell you what they are thinking or how they feel, I guess, I read into every situation; I analyze everything I've said and done and come to my own conclusions about how they feel. I lie awake at night thinking about the endless possibilities of the next day. I plan out conversations so that I don't say the wrong thing. "If this person says this, how will I respond?". My mind is always flooding with thoughts, and I don't have a storm drain.

My purpose for telling you this is to lift the veil, to step out of the shadows.

My purpose for telling you this is to lift the veil, to step out of the shadows. To this very day, mental illness is a taboo subject. It's something people would rather look away from rather than face the harsh realities that millions of people face every day. And I understand that, I really do. To be honest, if I didn't struggle with mental illness, I can't say that I wouldn't look away too. But, more than anything, I want it to change, and I hope I can be a small part of that. My single greatest hope for this world is for it to be a more understanding place, where the answer to "How are you doing?" isn't always "good", and for that to be okay. Some of the gentlest souls I've ever met have been along my mental health journey, and my heart aches for them.

Most of all, I don't want anyone to feel alone. You're never alone. Often it seems like everyone is out to get you and no one truly cares. But I do. I care. And I understand. The older I get, the more I'm learning that being an adult is just faking it until you make it, but I don't want to do that anymore. I'm sick of faking it. I am a person living with major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and borderline personality disorder, and I am owning it, not being defined by it.

Katie H. (age 20)

