

Written by Neve Post

It's Love, It's Love, It's Love

Her soft red hands caress me, and as always, I mistake the pain for love. Why wouldn't I, when it I know it feels the same way for every woman, or at least that's what I've been told. This brutal rite of passage makes me want to hurl my guts.

All the doctors assure and reassure me that it's love, all natural, all part of some God given 'gift.' I don't agree.

My mother told me to love it back, that it was part of who I was, part of who I am, and part of who I will become. She told me that I must endure it in return for being a woman, as if it were a blessing, a miracle, and not a curse. She wants me to love the pain, told me that everyone woman does, and so I *must* be grateful, I *must* feel love.

My friends say I should appreciate my beauty, but at I wonder, at what cost? At what cost is it to me? Is it worth it to be beautiful if I must shed these tears of blood? And there's so, so, so many tears, they weep down my thighs, and I may as well be bleeding from an open wound.

I know it's perfectly normal, everyone must get these awful pains, but I wish I weren't in such agony, that I could suffer and bleed in peace. Some complain about mild cramps, still smiling, meanwhile a wolf has my guts in its maw, shaking its head, ripping me to shreds, and I feel like I might just pass out on the floor. At night I can't sleep, it hurts too much to breathe. This is no longer discomfort, it's debilitating.

Maybe it's a normal amount of pain, after all, this is love... maybe I'm meant to feel this way... maybe everybody does. Looking at it realistically, on the outside I suppose I'm fine, I mean, I walk and talk the way I should.

Except... do I really? I'm starting to believe I can't, it's as if this pain controls me with an ever-present dread. It's as if everything's all out of place, my body just doesn't fit. I'm a mismatched jigsaw puzzle – here, let's watch as my love seeps out between the holes of these ill-fitting pieces. Nothing's where it should be, so I bleed, and I bleed, and I bleed. I know myself, I know my body, and this is not how it's meant to be.

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Endometriosis. It's a big word, yet I still feel so small. Could this be me? Is this who I am? Is there a name to give my vicious wolf? Is there a name for this plague I'm meant to believe is love? I stare at it in silence for a while. I'm a picture-perfect tick in every symptom box.

What would the doctors say? What would my mother say if she knew? "Stop fussing, it's normal, it's normal." I'm sure you think it is, but please believe me when I tell you that it's not. Please just tell me there's something wrong, that it's not just in my head. Please believe that I'm really bleeding and I'm bleeding red.

Would a diagnosis even help? I mean, I know there's help – to try and make it better, but what if it *doesn't* help. What if nothing changes, all I've scored is a lousy label, another 'pity me' to add to the collection? I couldn't let that happen, then again, what if it helps, and for once I feel okay? What if I can be like the girls that surround me, all pain free?

I feel alone. I am alone. Who can I talk to? Who can I tell? Dr. Google says that 10% of reproductive age women have it. What if I really am part of that number? Why me? Why me? Why me? I'm really not sure what to do, who to talk to, or who to tell.

For now, I'll live with the pain of my womanhood, and I will learn to love this pain. I'll bleed out in agony, with a smile on my face. I'll remind myself every time it gets unbearable, that it's love, it's love, it's love.

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Endometriosis is a chronic disease in which tissues similar to those lining the uterus grow outside of the uterus.

It affects roughly 10%, around 190 million, of reproductive age women and girls globally, and is associated with severe, life impacting pain during periods, sexual intercourse, bowel movements and or urination. It can cause chronic pelvic pain, abdominal bloating, nausea, fatigue and sometimes anxiety, depression and infertility.

There is currently no known cure for endometriosis

The average time to get a diagnosis is 11 years, due to personal and societal barriers, and the actions and training of healthcare professionals.

Bindi Irwin – when reflecting on her experience getting a diagnosis, “A doctor told me it was simply something you deal with as a woman & I gave up entirely, trying to function through the pain. I didn't find answers until a friend helped set me on a path of regaining my life.” - it took her 10 years to get a diagnosis.

Amy Prescott – regarding when she went to the doctor after severe abdominal pain, “He told me that it was just my period, and I should go home and take some Panadol... I listened to him even though I knew this amount of pain wasn't normal.” - it took her 8 years to get a diagnosis.

Sargam Polra - when speaking about her experience getting a diagnosis, “I visited multiple gynaecologists and had countless blood tests. The doctors kept telling me to be strong and that it was all in my mind because nothing showed up on my scans. I had lost all hope and for the longest time, I thought I was the only one going through this.” - it took her 15 years to get a diagnosis.

Because it is so difficult to diagnose, and painful periods have been normalized for so long, it is incredibly difficult for women to get a diagnosis of endometriosis. Often times they suffer for far longer than necessary because not only is it not talked about enough, but a lot of doctors won't even consider it as a possibility when women mention severe period pain. Raising awareness of this issue is key to overcoming the boundaries of getting a diagnosis, and to improving the lives of many women who are affected by endometriosis.

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