





SAD HAPPENS

A Celebration of Tears

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(musician, writer)

Crying has always been infuriatingly elusive to me. I remember when my mom told me my grandmother had died. I was nine. I wanted to cry. I wanted to communicate that I understood, that I was deep. I wanted my mom to remember how much I cried when I asked if I could skip the funeral and go to the Harry Potter–themed hot lunch at my school. But it was all I could do not to laugh. I settled on furrowing my brows and nodding like I imagined very intense, introspective people did, and hoped it would read as me bottling up my feelings and staying strong.

The internet tells me that my episodes of nervous laughter could be symptoms of a mild form of Tourette’s. I think to myself, “Don’t laugh. It is literally the least appropriate time on earth to laugh,” but sometimes I just can’t hold it back. I laughed when the girl dies in *Bridge to Terabithia*. I laughed when I broke up with my first boyfriend and saw him cry for the first time. I have held my face in my hands at funerals, hoping no one is looking too closely while I try and pass off stifled laughter as sobs.

I went to a performing arts high school in Los Angeles, kind of like *Fame* but with more drugs. People smoked weed and sometimes

heroin in the bathrooms and gave each other stick-and-poke tattoos with eyeliner. I let a girl shave half my head in a bathroom once. I saw my English teacher at a Dinosaur Jr. show, and again at a Joyce Manor show. I saw a different English teacher shred lead guitar with his band at the Grove. My math teacher wrote a rap verse on the board every day, and spent at least fifty-five percent of class deconstructing it with us. Reminds me of someone's romanticized idea of art college, but high school.



Mr. Howell was my history teacher. He was different, almost normal. He wore a sweater vest every day, and gave lectures accompanied by meticulous PowerPoint presentations which he never deviated from in all the years he taught there. The closest thing was maybe when he made us watch *Dances with Wolves*, his favorite movie. I'm not sure what the historical relevance was there. His ordinariness was completely out of place at my high school.

One day he announced he was going to start working part-time, meaning he would stop teaching our class at the end of the semester. Rumors spread that his wife was sick, and he needed the time off to take care of her.

I was a horrible student. I ditched school so often that it felt safer to not even bother going to class because I'd draw too much attention to myself. Mr. Howell's class was pretty safe though. He didn't know everyone's names, so I'd occasionally go to his class and sneak some highly fraudulent homework onto his desk.

One particular Friday I decided to brave it. Fridays were tough.

Less structured than a normal day at my school, classes started at ten, and we had half-hour periods of all six of our academic classes. The second half of the day was an art elective we only attended on Fridays: hip-hop history, gospel, experimental film, etc. So every half-hour academic period was pretty much total chaos. No one could focus and the teachers didn't care.

On this Friday, Mr. Howell's class was relatively calm, until we had five minutes left. It was his last day teaching, and everyone started talking, and Mr. Howell just gave up and started packing up his desk. When it was time to let us out, he muttered under his breath, while no one listened except for me, who caught it for some reason, "Guess I'll see you guys around." Something in my head said "Don't cry"—and I fucking lost it. I sobbed into my hands and all over my clothes. Everyone stopped talking to stare at me. No one had any idea why I was crying, including Mr. Howell, who came over to me and said, "It's going to be okay," and I snotted all over his sweater vest.