

Introduction to the Good Girl Trope

When I was in third grade I didn't really think about power dynamics and the way I was socialized. I just listened, did what I was told, got good grades, and just like every girl in my grade I tried to go above and beyond. This isn't really a story of bystanders and upstanders because there are some injustices in the world that you don't know are injustices until you reflect on them.

My third grade teacher always seemed to prefer the girls and it was pretty clear why. The girls were just kinder and more respectful in general. That's just the way we knew to act. Often we would stay inside during recess to clean up the classroom, missing our recess just to earn our teacher's praise. The boys lacked any social obligation to do this and so they spent that time running around outside. We earned her praise and approval and they got to have their childhood. Reflecting on this I sort of understand why girls mature faster. We give up our childhood to be considered good girls.

One day this boy in my class, who struggled with anger issues, tipped over his desk in pure rage. The contents of the desk spilled all over the floor. Pencils rolled to the toes of little light up sneakers and books piled in a dramatic mess of educational material. He stormed out of the classroom causing an inevitable panic among the school staff. After the initial panic our classroom returned to some semblance of normal but a problem still remained. His desk sat there tipped over, but instead of waiting for him to return our teacher scanned the classroom of stunned faces.

Her eyes fell on me and the inevitable happened, “Sophie, could you come help me clean this up?” *At that moment the last thing I wanted to do was clean up the belongings of a boy. It wasn't my stuff and I hadn't contributed to this mess. It felt like I was being punished for something he had done. But of course I couldn't tell her no because she wouldn't like that. It felt like breaking the rules to say no.*

“Of course,” I replied with faked enthusiasm. She enlisted the help of another friend of mine, also a girl, and so there we were cleaning up his mess.

I was so proud of myself and the first thing I did when my mom picked me up from school that afternoon was to brag about my cleaning adventure. Being as young as I was I couldn't see the sadness appear in her eyes. I didn't really understand her explanation that it wasn't okay for me to be asked to do that.

I still remember that day. My mother and I have had many similar conversations over the following years and I eventually began to understand her perspective. Even with this perspective always fresh in my mind my behavior has never changed. I still let stuff like it happen to me every day and I know I'm not alone. It's the way I know how to live life and it's certainly the most widely accepted. I'm a good girl. I'm not proud of it but it is who I am. To be completely honest I'm afraid to be anything else.

#2

My Personal Mean Girl

The sunlight filtered in through the shafts of pine branches, making the clouds of dust from the dirt road glitter and dance. In the far off distance, I could see the sparkling lake, partly obscured by tree trunks and the occasional tent. The air was clean and cool, each breath

refreshing. I sat with my head on the car window, overlooking this beautiful scene, feeling completely terrified. My best friend Sarah and I were on our way to the annual Buckman Alumni camping trip at Trillium Lake. I loved this trip the first time I went. Four days of old friendships, swimming, games and s'mores? Yes please! This year however, an ominous cloud hung over the weekend. I would have to see Chloe, my friend-turned-bully, in public. The last I had truly heard from her was when she was sending me strings of cruel texts to break off our friendship. Before that, she had ignored me, teased me, and pulled away whenever I needed her most. She lowered my self esteem through snide comments, and I ended up focusing completely on her happiness rather than my own. I was supposed to be her best friend, but she had treated me horribly. Part of me still ached for the friend I had lost; we had been so close, telling every secret, sharing every thought, spending all our time together.

The car pulled up near the campsite, surrounded by plumes of dust. Sarah and I emerged, legs stiff from the long drive, surveying the landscape for familiar faces. We only saw parents, who then informed us the rest of the kids had gone on a run. We were perfectly fine with this, opting to swim in the inviting lake for a while. We hugged and laughed when we inevitably saw everyone else, Chloe and I avoiding each other's eyes but remaining pleasant enough. I felt a weight lift off my shoulders. It seemed as if we'd be able to handle the aftermath of this friend-break up maturely.

I had a great time on that trip. We played games, explored, swam, talked, tanned and laughed. Basically everything you would hope for for one last vacation before the impending beginning of school. There may have been awkward moments between Chloe and me, but those

were glossed over by the adventures we had. I left Trillium Lake feeling settled and cheerful, glad to have good friends, and drama in the past.

That feeling did not last very long.

A week or two after 8th grade started, my friend Violet brought up the trip.

“So, what really happened between you and Chloe? You guys used to be so close.” She asked.

“Oh, she kind of just decided she didn’t like me anymore, and we stopped being friends. Why?”

“Well she talked about it a lot at Trillium, and I wanted to know your side.”

I narrowed my eyes, confused.

“She did?”

“Yeah.” Violet looked uncomfortable.

“She kind of...like...called you a horrible person.”

“Wait, she did? Are you serious?”

“Yeah.”

“I...uh, okay, what happened between us, honestly, is that she started ignoring me and being rude, she sent me mean texts, then we argued, then we stopped being friends. I didn’t do anything to her, that I know of.”

I showed Violet the texts she sent me then, and she frowned.

“Oh. That’s not what she told us.”

“What did she say?”

“Um, she said you got really annoying, and always asked her if she was okay, and always wanted to help her. She also like...made fun of your clothes a lot, and your parents and sister even, and she made fun of what you said all the time. She also tried to make us all be mean to you, like she *told* us to be mean to you.”

I sat there, staring at nothing in particular, shaking my head.

“That’s-” I laughed a little.

“That’s completely ridiculous.” I was hurt: she had tried to turn all my childhood friends against me over an argument that was over six months old. It hadn’t particularly worked - everyone had stayed kind to me. I was angry too, as she had no right to say any of the mean things she had about me or my family. I also felt pity towards her. She must’ve been pretty insecure which unfortunately turned her into a classic, petty mean girl.

#3

Cats and Mouse

It happened in sixth grade, after lunch during recess. It was like September or October so one could run about with a light sweater on, however if someone wore shorts they probably would be cold. The playground/recess area is basically a large rectangular piece of blacktop with two backstops and two basketball courts. There is a moderately sized field, also rectangular with about half of the dimensions of the blacktop attached off to the side. I lied about the blacktop being rectangular, there’s a small rectangular protrusion opposite the field up against the parking lot, where the basketball courts resided. There was, and probably still is, a backstop in the corner of

the field which met with the boundary of the black top at the border of the playground, and two blacktop backstops sat in opposite corners from each other, one of those being next to the one in the field, the other across the blacktop near a corner in the school building. The three other sides to the field are closed off with steep tall hills maybe eight or ten feet tall with grass between a foot to two feet tall, aptly nicknamed the "hill." When this happened, enough grass was beaten down around the perimeter of the "hill" to make a path. The hill is surrounded by chain link fence. However the hill isn't a good spot to be when fleeing from multiple enemies, and a very bad place to hide, so all it does in this story is really create a border.

At that point I had three friends, Lilie, Aiden, and Finegan, who isn't important in this story. I don't recall exactly how it started, but it could have possibly gone something like this: Lilie, Aiden and I had met up outside for some reason or another and Aiden, being the extremely controlling friend that he happened to be, decided that he could take hold of my arm and parade me around the playground as he chose. I didn't appreciate this in the slightest. Eventually, through some trial and error, I figured out that Aiden's iron grip could be circumvented if I waited for him to relax and lessen his grip, go figure.

I guess that when I escaped they felt the need to pursue and reacquire me, through whatever force happened to be necessary. At that point I was, and probably still am, the more athletic of the three of us, but that didn't account for much because

one of them would follow directly in my footsteps while the other would swing out to one side to eventually catch me in a pincer maneuver (where one force is trapped between two enemy forces). If I was executing a long arcing turn, the one swinging out would do it on the inside of my turn to take advantage of the fact that a straight line is always shorter than a curved one. They seemed to like this tactic when I went behind one of the backstops, there being only two ways out, they both would cover one side, trapping me inside. I sometimes managed escape these traps, with limited success as I usually didn't make it very far before I eventually was recaptured. When one of them (usually Aiden) regained a hold of my arm I would just give up. It's not worth the energy to drag another person of similar weight along behind one's self.

When Aiden had secured me, the verbal abuse started, it wasn't too bad, it happened to be more annoying than distressing. It didn't get very far from him telling me I had a problem, and not telling me my problem. At least in English, Aiden, being quite fluent in Japanese, decides for whatever reason to use that. So he either repeated what he'd been saying in English, insulting me, or telling me what my problem had been, all in Japanese. However he could speak very quickly, so me and Lilie didn't have any idea what the English translation would've been. My English limited my participation in the extremely one-sided conversation to requesting information about my problem, telling him to speak in a language we both could communicate in, and requesting to be released. Only the latter request was ever granted when he loosened

his grip on my right forearm, though I don't think he intentionally did that. The part with the most irony being when once or twice when I asked about my problem I got:

"You see Miles, that's your problem right there, you don't know what it is." Small pieces or spit occasionally flying from his mouth and his short black hair going everywhere as he shook his head as he spoke. All I thought at this point went something like: *what? How? That's it? That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. If that is all there is how, no, no, that can't be it.* He inadvertently answered my question, so then I didn't really have to pay attention to his spiel so many times as it got very boring. However, I suspect there were at least two problems with me, maybe more, and he only ever told me one. I will never know what the second problem used to be because he probably doesn't remember the event, much less the details. However that doesn't trouble me much because the other problem probably happened to be something trivial that a normal person would dismiss as part of someone's character.

After about a week I started sitting alone or with Finn at lunch so then they couldn't find me to chase me, however I think they just got bored with the little game of cat and mouse we played. After that my friendship with them crumbled very quickly. By the time eighth grade came around, Lilie had also broken off her friendship to Aiden. In our last year of middle school me and Lilie had either forgiven, and in her case forgotten the incident in sixth grade, and trusted each other enough to share a locker. However Aiden stayed as toxic, obnoxious and dismissive to me as he ever had been.

My resistance may have just further propagated the entire chasing thing, I think they left me alone because I got too good at getting away, and I understood their tactics. Really the entire of the sixth grade outside and the two or three staff were bystanders, but they had more important things to pay attention to, three sixth graders parading around the school yard, or playing infection doesn't raise much attention, if any. I participated as both the target and, unwittingly, the perpetrator.