

by Jill Summers



Diagnosis
of Sadness

The undeniably fat and predictably astute 9-year-old Royal Rawrick had taken back roads to avoid a particularly menacing group of teenagers and was making his way over a rough patch of sidewalk when a century-old wire, hidden deep beneath the pavement, touched conduit through a bit of fray and electrified a manhole cover at the worst of all possible moments. It was just his luck that it had rained so unseasonably that fateful Wednesday in late November. It was an extra bad break that he had taken his shoes off to splash through a puddle just a block back. In his last stinging minutes, writhing atop a bed of wild calendula, Royal let out in shock, "...and on my birthday? Jesus H. Christ!" He had always been a very irritable little boy.

Agnes Abraham watched the boy's soundlessly moving mouth from the window of a passing El car and felt neither any more nor any less like she always did. As the unfortunate scene played out in her peripheral vision, she settled ambivalently into a vaguely nostalgic recognition of what the hopelessly flailing arms and legs meant and absentmindedly fingered the crisp pages of an informational booklet that she held on her lap. It had been given to her that afternoon by the team of doctors assigned to her case.

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The symptoms had appeared gradually: a twinge here, a pang there, a nagging sensation a few months later. After her final consult, the tallest of her doctors pulled the booklet from a stack of charts he held close to his chest. The shortest lowered his head. The black one frowned and explained that there was really nothing else they could do. The only woman said, "We are here for you if you need to talk, but not until Monday, due to the holiday."

Casps and sighs rose and fell in seasick waves as the train pulled slowly into the station and docked above where the little boy lay, a small mountain of stripes and corduroy. The other passengers pressed their faces and spread their hands hard against the windows. Agnes pushed her hair behind her ears and opened the booklet to Chapter 1.

So you have Sadness. Now what?

It was about the size of an owner's manual, one for something more like a microwave than a car. On its cover, printed in bold block letters, was a title:

Causes & Risk Factors

Over time, several factors may act together to cause normal cells to become devastated. And while Doctors often cannot explain why one person develops Sadness and another does not, research shows that certain risk factors increase one's odds. These are the most common risk factors for Sadness:

- Growing older
- Tobacco
- Sunlight
- Certain hormones, chemicals and other substances
- Some viruses and bacteria
- A family history of Sadness
- Alcohol or lack of alcohol
- Poor diet, lack of physical activity, being overweight

Many of these risk factors can be avoided. Others, cannot. If you had thought you were at risk for Sadness, you should have discussed this concern with your doctors.

A lonely ray of sun split the clouds and cut in through the windows of the train, picked up the dust of the El, suspended it in front of her, and came to rest on her hands as she closed the booklet on her lap. She thought about rain puddles and champagne flutes and the electrified ground.

A few miles away Mrs. Rawrick frosted a pink birthday cake and looked out the window for her son.

This is natural.

To ask these questions of your doctor.

You may be too afraid or too intimidated

like? Will it be painful?"

eventually die from this sadness, what will it be much longer do you think I will live?" or "If I questions: "What are my odds?" or "How one afflicted with Sadness, you may have As a patient or family member with a loved

Prognosis

in back of me, and they are looking for slices of sun and shade to be born in, but I catch them just as they disappeared, the moment I turn around. And I've finally decided," she said, "That I just don't give a fuck."

"I've always found melancholia romantic," said the black one. "Haven't you?"

Agnes shrugged her shoulders, and they looked concerned.

Treatment

There is no cure for Sadness. Treatment, while sometimes comforting to the victim's family, has generally merely proved annoying to the victim.

The train had still not moved, and was now filled with the sounds of weeping, of people crying into their hands. They hadn't known him. They didn't know it was his birthday. They had no idea how very much he was looking forward to the myriad pies of Thanksgiving. But still, they wept; wept as if it would make some difference. Agnes looked at their faces and remembered nothing.

She had been referred to the team of specialists when the constant unexplained feelings of impending doom took over completely. They had issued their final diagnosis when she suddenly failed to feel anything at all.

"Years and I am still followed by the ghosts," Agnes told them. "I am trailed by their shadows stretched out



and turned the page. Rawitck's lifeless body. The conductor announced there would be a delay. Agnes checked her watch

Outside a crowd of people had begun to flock Royal champagne flute shared with crisscrossed arms?

to line the seat with a protective layer of toilet paper, would that have been enough? She hadn't even seen of a bit of wood. She wondered if she had bothered exchange student named Aberto di Francesco instead not one might be made of a disenchanting Italian Agnes thought about splinters, and whether or have discussed this concern with us:

“Yes,” agreed the woman, “And not to be whatever, fountain...or a toilet seat.”

have heard, you just might have caught it from a water into the bloodstream. And contrary to what you may child, could let the Sadness up from the earth and as a splinter, slid into the bottom of the bare foot of surmised, “Even something so seemingly insignificant “And that's not the half of it,” the tall one in her system for years.

The doctors explained it could have lain dormant

Signs and Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of Sadness will depend on where the Sadness originated, the size of the Sadness, and how much the Sadness affects nearby organs or structures as it grows. Sometimes Sadness starts in places where it does not cause any symptoms at all until it has grown quite large, crowding nearby nerves, numbing auxiliary areas such as the newness of love or feelings of belonging. But if the Sadness is in a critical area, even the smallest bit of it can cause early symptoms, like crying at the site of a stray kitten or contemplating suicide after witnessing an old man purchase a single-scoop ice cream cone with change.

The doctor's had spent hours tapping her knees and feeling the soft nodes behind her ears. They took vials of blood and cups of urine. They made copious notes regarding her history of failed relationships, love handles, and financial improprieties on pages held tight in clip boards pressed close to their chests.

“Tell us,” they instructed her, “exactly how you felt when you realized it was over?”



as the pleasure of being sad?” she asked. Was it Victor Hugo that once described melancholy the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning... experiencing the proper sorrows of the soul? They say perspective. Who is to say, really, that you aren't merely said, adding, “And then there is the whole matter of “It's the cast that nobody will sign,” the woman resulting thing,” said the short one.

trying to cure something else. It is like staph. It is the all this, is that sadness is disease you can catch when “It may also interest you to know that the logic of disease in question...yet, at least.”

“What is difficult for some to understand,” the tallest doctor told her, “is the fact that you have these feelings at all precludes you de facto from having the

loses its definite borders should be reported to your doctor without delay, as it may or may not be an obvious sign of Skin Sadness. Although these signs may indicate, and the X-ray may confirm, the presence of an abnormal mass, they actually cannot solidly confirm that Sadness is the cause. This leaves some patients to wonder if there is any point at all to the diagnostic process.

“Did you experience any tears,” the woman asked her, “when you first conceived the impossibility of being on both sides of abandonment, to have been left before leaving one so desperately holding on?”

“Were you at all devastated,” the black one inquired, “when you tripped over the door jam and fell on your way in?”

At the time she had answers for them. It felt awful. Yes, there were tears, lots of them. There was embarrassment, yes; devastation, she didn't think so.

“That is good,” they told her. “This is not full-blown sadness. There is still hope...How have your bowel movements been?”

Diagnosis

When a doctor first suspects Sadness, an x-ray is performed, because a clear diagnosis is dependent upon accurately identifying the anatomical site of origin. Constipation, or alternately diarrhea, may be a sign of colon Sadness. Blood in the urine could be related to bladder Sadness. Sores on the penis may indicate testicular Sadness. Any wart, mole, or freckle that changes in color, size, or shape, or