

Marketplace

"Can I help you, miss?" the man behind the counter asked.

"I was looking for a little bit of sadness, not a lot, nothing I can't deal with," she said, "I thought I'd get mine out of the way."

His eyes pierced hers. "You can't pick what you want, nor can you choose how much or little you'll get. That's not the part that's your choice," he said seriously.

"But, they said if I come of my own volition and don't fight, it won't be so hard. They said..."

"Who's they?" he interrupted.

"I don't know. They didn't say who they were." She already felt annoyed with him. "But, I thought I'd have a choice. Maybe I should go somewhere else," she said, looking around the room, wondering where the door had gone.

"You can choose," he agreed, his facial lines softening as he spoke. "But not about where your sadness comes from, only how you deal with it, how you live with it ... or not." He proceeded putting boxes onto shelves from a ladder, wiping dust from the nooks before sliding them in.

"My capacity is small. I'd die if something too bad happened."

"Yes," he said. "A lot of people do. You wouldn't be the first."

"You're not very helpful," she said curtly.

"It's not my place to tell you how to live," he responded, his back to her, continuing his work.

"Look, just give me a little sadness and I'll go," she said, folding her arms, waiting impatiently for him to dole it out.

"Sorry, that's not the way it works." He turned around. "Where will you keep your sadness?"

She looked at him, puzzled. How was she supposed to know where she'd put it?

"I suppose it will go inside my body, where else?"

"Yes, I know," he said patiently, "but where? Do you have a place, like these boxes, where you'll keep it? Will you stack your sadnesses up neatly and pull them out only when you need to look inside? It's much messier than that."

"I don't think so," she said sarcastically. She turned around, searching again for the door. He watched her eyes.

"You can leave if you want to. You'll find the same thing no matter where you go. It's unavoidable. That's just the way it is." He stepped off the ladder, wiped his hands on a towel and leaned over the counter, giving his full attention. His face showed his fair share of pain. "Where did you say you would put it?"

She'd never figured on where it would go. She thought she'd just take it out a little at a time so it was easier to handle. "I don't know, I imagine my heart would hold sadness."

"That's certainly the first place it goes. But I think you'll need more room than that."

"More room than my heart?" She thought he was nuts.

"Tell me," he asked then, "where do you hold joy?"

She laughed. "Joy is different. They're two opposite things. That's in every part of me." His interrogation was tiring.

"Joy requires the same amount of room as sadness. Neither exists without the other."

"Joy doesn't live with grief," she said smugly. "You can't have both at the same time."

"Oh, but they do. You have to accept they live there together, each as powerful as the other. Will you let joy propel you in your life or will sadness? How will you integrate them into your days?"

"I don't know. I haven't been that sad. I've known mostly happiness," she said proudly.

"That's marvelous, truly a gift!" His face lit up, then became serious again. "But it will change. It comes for all of us I'm afraid, and you can't run from it. It will threaten to beat you down, don't underestimate the force with which it will overturn you. It has the power to turn the light into darkness for a very long time, sometimes forever ... How will you stay joyful?"

She was angry. "I haven't experienced what you're talking about."

"I know."

How would he know?

"I can tell you," he started, "that it lives in the same place you experience joy, the very same place that sparked your life. It's where you begin but never end, your true light. Sometimes, you won't hear it or see it ... and it will be up to you to remember it's there. When the darkness threatens to sweep you away, you must listen for its call, though it might be so dim you may think it's not there at all. That, my dear, will always be your true home."

She had better things to do. "It's easy to be happy, and I plan on staying that way."

"Excellent. I wish great happiness always for you." He looked out the window at the wind whipping papers down the street past the shop. "It's coming," he said, pointing behind her. The sky had darkened.

