

Sad and Angry Man

(52,000 words)

by Phillip Good

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Chapter 1

I let myself go, I reach down toward the sadness.

I'm not sure my father ever really loved me. He took me places he wanted to go, football games (never hockey, I liked hockey), baseball (I saw Jackie Robinson break into the big leagues), and the golf course (he taught me to swing left-handed, his way, and ever since I've thrown right and batted left).

Later, in my teens, when I didn't do what he wanted, he cut me off completely. He didn't speak to me or try to contact me after my sixteenth year, not even a letter.

It took me so long to learn to love my mother. I dumped all the hatred and anger on her that I felt toward my father.

She collapsed once on the steps of the bus that was taking us to Nova Scotia on a vacation she could ill afford. I pretended I did not see her fall; my younger brother was not conscious of what had happened; the other passengers and the driver rushed to her aid; "Anemia," she said after she'd been attended to.

I ran away from home, failed at it, and came running back to her again and again.

I have always been an angry person. There is no injustice over which I'm unwilling to rage. The daily paper sends me into a frenzy—corrupt politicians, libraries with \$5 million for construction and nothing for books, pro-lifers who kill. But I cry, too, over a story of a small child kidnapped from his parents, and the photograph of another child, a victim of a bombing, viewed standing outside the remnants of her burned-out home. If I were God . . . But I am not. I don't have the power to set things right. I can only stand, my blood pressure rising, and rage.

Many people use their sadness to mask a harsh aggressive anger; I am just the other way around. When I started working with Dr Berman, my new therapist, he taught me to go beneath my anger, to tap the well of sadness that my anger camouflages.

Bring back that time of sadness now. Bring back those days of weeping, the three months in therapy with Dr Berman, the six months afterward.

Dr Berman was not a good person. A masterful technician, perhaps; his therapeutic skills brought me back to his office week after week, two hours on the freeway for each hour of attention, but his narcissism, his lack of consideration for others were why I left.

I learned from him to accept my father's rejection and to forgive myself. I am no longer quick to anger and if I do grow angry, it is an anger I can control, can work with, can shape.

Once while hypnotized—another of Dr Berman's "techniques," I regressed back to my mother's womb, to perhaps six months after my conception. I could hear my mother thinking, or thought I could: "My mother will respect me now." she thought.

So I know why I am the way I am, compulsive and determined to succeed. I am acting out my mother's fantasy of pleasing her mother. I forgive my mother for her own need to succeed, her own way of going about it. Now that I forgive myself, I can forgive others.

I reach down and touch the sadness.

Dr Berman was trained in psychodrama and is licensed in hypnotherapy. Despite or because of this training, he sees his patients only as a means to an end—money and his own self-gratification.

His narcissism is insufferable. At the end of each session, he has his patients recite a credo. Standing behind me, he whispers in my ear:

"I'm getting better."

"I'M GETTING BETTER," I repeat in a loud voice.

"I'm a good person."

"I'M A GOOD PERSON."

"I can relax now."

"RELAX."

"and let Dr Berman make my decisions for me."

““

The silence hangs in the air between us. Whatever poise I've gained from the hour is gone. I don't know whether Dr Berman is happy or unhappy that I will not recite his credo.

"I'll let Dr Berman make my decisions..." he repeats tentatively, before his voice trails off. But happy/unhappy I might be, I will let no other person make my decisions for me. The imprint of my mother/father/grandmother/grandfather is too strong for that.

Dr Berman's inner corruption was revealed most clearly at our last late-evening group session. I watched him yawn, not even bothering to cover his mouth, while Joan our child-abused child-abuser spilled out her guts to him. And should I forgive you for this act of rudeness, Doc, because you work long hours, sixteen a day, at \$150 per?

Dr Berman insists on being paid at the end of each session.

"My insurance will pay."

"We'd like you to pay up front. When your insurance does come through, we can apply what you've already paid to your future co-payments."

We could, I suppose, if I planned to spend the rest of my life on the freeway driving to your office twice a week. But I came here to be cured, today, now.

"You are hostile," Dr Berman says, "reach down for the sadness."

I am a sad and angry man. I reach inside and we part angrily.

He telephoned me several times afterwards. "The other members of the group miss you," he said.

"And I miss them too," I replied, sobbing, for I felt in fleeing him I had abandoned them.

The crying continued for more than six months afterward. I cried for my lost children, my lost life, my father ridiculed by his father, ridiculing his sons in turn, and my mother, ridiculed and belittled first by her mother, then her husband, and then her sons. I cried for what I could have been and for what I have become. I am a sad and angry man.

The crying stopped; the sadness never left me.

I turn to the newspaper: “When Huldi was twelve years old, the police, responding to allegations of child abuse, came to her fifth-grade classroom and took her away. Afterward, she was shuttled from one foster-care home to another, thirteen in six years, to be discharged from the system six years later without a high school diploma.”

I continue reading. “Huldi’s first nights on the street were spent in an alleyway. Over the course of the next few weeks, she met other abandoned teenagers. Two months ago, she and six of her friends stumbled upon a condemned apartment building that had been damaged in a fire. They live there together now.”

Huldi’s best friend was raped last week. She told the reporter she hoped she and the other teenagers could stay together as a family; “we hold each another when one of us has a bad dream; we steal enough each day to live.”

Sitting over a second cup of coffee, reading this story, I burst into tears. Yet other people, normal people whom I might meet and marry, could have the girl herself, dirt-stained and weeping, walk up to their cars to beg for money, and not feel a thing.

“Just before her 18th birthday, Huldi was handed a token for her bus fare and a Hefty garbage bag to hold her belongings and was told the government was no longer responsible for her.” I read and I burst into tears.