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Was she spoilt? Self-indulgent? She felt ill, pathetic. Unhappy. And it felt like she'd got it so, so badly wrong.

When could she be happy again? And why did she have to ask herself such a stupid, stupid question.

She thought back through her history, her ancestry. All those letters she had, family letters. They'd been poor. They'd died young. But they'd gone on and had eventually produced her. And now she felt unhappy. She felt unhappy and she didn't know why and people, her friends, her family, pushed her and pushed her and said, you can find happiness, you can choose happiness. And looking at those portraits, she thought, they did not choose happiness or unhappiness. They did not buy it, discover it like a precious jewel. They did not sell it, they did not wonder about it. They did not say in those letters, 'I just felt depressed, don't know why.' They felt melancholy, but it was a melancholy of empty stomachs and actual death.

She thought back to those family photographs in her mother's dining room. All the portraits of boys who became men and girls who became women. They did not smile, because no one said 'smile.'

All these people who had gone before her, to evolve to this point where her happiness was seen as a right, and she'd blown it. More than blown it, she had chosen something else. Because that's what everyone said, that you chose to be unhappy, or you chose to be happy, but it was all your choice. And here she was, choosing tears, endless tears, for no reason. Did all this sadness, that felt so present and painful, did it just amount to sheer laziness?

On the bus this morning a cheery young man said to her 'smile, babe. Things can't be that bad.' His tone was accusing, like the boys in the playground who used to call her four-eyes.

'Fuck off.' She didn't say it. She smiled at him.

'That's better,' he said.

'Fuck off.' She didn't say it.

A friend wanted her to do a course, at the Happiness Institute. There was a place called the Happiness Institute. She imagined a room full of lab technicians, researchers, exhausted but smiling men and women in lab coats, taking readings, crunching numbers in the search for happiness. She imagined a bright white place, holding devoted staff, ready to crack the code.

The course was being run by the man who ran the Institute himself. His title was C.H.O., or Chief Happiness Officer. She felt so sad when she read it, sorry for him. She thought how difficult it would be, getting out of bed,

being a C.H.O. Smiling face, lightness of step, a whistle in your walk. She couldn't bear to think of this poor man's life. Not that you did all that, but that you had to do it. Even if his cat died or he fought with his wife or he just felt a blackness and exhaustion inside. She simply could not imagine this life.

People told her to cheer up. People insisted that her life was good. People suggested holidays, change, shopping, facials. People pursued her with happiness. And she had so wanted happiness but she did not want it thrust upon her. She wanted it to grow, organically. She did not want to spend money or discover herself or rebirth to find it. She wanted to wait until it simply replaced this fog in her body.

She had tried a facial. A young woman had shown her into a room, had asked her to change into a fluffy robe. She had turned up the heat gently, turned on the CD with its soft synthesised music, like a bubbling brook without the charm. She had rubbed guava and honey on her face, purified her skin with water from the streams running down the Swiss alps, covered her skin with mud from far off jungles. And it was not at all unpleasant. The beautician had been sweet, had a lovely soft touch, did not talk too much and let her lie in peace. But when she found herself, ejected back on to the street, it felt worse, because she did not feel any better. It had felt that this had been so obvious, such a simple thing to make her feel better, to make her better. And she had failed. Again.

She'd tried shopping. In the change room, she tried on a pair of trousers that seemed forgiving if she stood in them a certain way. But then that wave hit her again, and she felt anxious, knowing that trousers were not the answer, and feeling that this was all so out of her reach. She took off the pants, conceding defeat. She took them to the counter, and bought them even though she didn't want them because today, today, she didn't want to be found out. She didn't want those shop assistants knowing she'd been defeated by the inability to get happy through her credit card.

Would this happiness that people spoke of grow inside her body again? Would she lose her toxic blackness? She felt panicked sometimes, panicked that it would never be better than this. She felt that having chosen this state of unhappiness, she was bound to it, because she seemed to be running away from those smiling faces so fast and with such determination, and she could not run like that from anything or to anything else.

She wondered what the boys and girls and men and women, who gave her their genes and let her lie in bed with them, crying, would possibly think of her.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sophie Townsend.