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After the Diagnosis: Transcending Chronic Illness

Julian Seifter

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***After the Diagnosis* is a heartfelt and moving lesson on the art of living well through serious illness.**

Dr. Julian Seifter understands the difficulty of managing a chronic condition in our health-obsessed, take-life-by-the-horns, live-forever world. When he found out he was suffering from diabetes, he was an ambitious medical resident who thought he could run away from his diagnosis. Good health was part of his self-image, and acknowledging that he needed treatment seemed like a kind of failure.

In his practice, however, as he helped his patients come to terms with serious conditions, he began to understand that there were different, better ways to approach a life-altering diagnosis. In this frank account of his experiences both as a doctor and as a patient, he shares the many lessons he has learned. Writing with his wife, who has been an essential partner in his own treatment, he teaches you how to contend not only with the physical problems, the social stigma, and the emotional fallout of illness, but also with the medical establishment. Convinced that a deeper understanding of the spiritual, emotional, and physical challenges will bring not only comfort and support but also better care, he emphasizes truths rarely acknowledged in medical writing:

• that a patient is not simply a collection of signs and symptoms, but someone with a particular personality, psychology, and history; someone

with idiosyncratic wishes and goals

• that blame, anxiety, obsession, and shame are inevitably part of the psychological journey, and that the doctor-patient relationship needs to make room for the whole person, including these difficult emotions

• that sometimes doctor and patient have to throw out the rule book and construct highly personal, creative solutions

• that denial, acting out, and "being bad" can sometimes be of benefit in managing illness

• that optimism and emotional resilience— both of which can be cultivated and nourished by the doctor—may contribute to what medicine calls luck

• that sickness, usually seen as alien and destructive, can become a vehicle for growth and self- realization

The message, in short, is: You are not your disease. You are you. Paradoxically, rather than destroy your identity, the experience of sickness can deepen your sense of who you are and what you can become.

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