Dear Gillian,

I am writing to tell you about my MS diagnosis.

Four years ago, I decided I couldn't stand my job as a partner in a particular law firm anymore. My 40th birthday was approaching, I felt my life was whizzing by in an increasingly miserable blur of stressful clients, billable hours targets, managing other lawyers and trying to meet the crassly stupid greed of management - weeks of 12-hour days; constant availability on the Blackberry; weekends of crashing out with exhaustion. I was very good at my job - but it was killing my soul.

So I found another law job, in a much smaller, more easy-going place. A new city. A new lease of life I (naively) thought. I got busy letting my house and finding another to rent in the new city. A 40th birthday bash was being planned. Excitement.

Then my right eyelid started twitching like a tiny creature trying to escape. I put it down to stress and caffeine. But it didn't stop. A few days later my lips went numb and felt twisted - this time I went to my GP.

He recommended I go to hospital for tests. 'When?' I asked, plotting my movements over the next month and how busy I was.

'Right now,' was his answer. My brain realised he was thinking something serious was going on, but the rest of me didn't get it. I thought he was overreacting. I called my aunt, very calmly, and asked if she'd come with me.

I waited many, many hours for a CT scan. The people in the Acute Neurology waiting room ranged from those like me, who looked 'normal' to those who were in serious difficulty.

The CT scan showed some abnormalities, the young registrar told me, looking at me tentatively as if afraid of my reaction. Very calmly, I asked her what she was thinking. 'MS,' she replied. I felt nothing. I closed down. She referred me for an MRI - another long wait. A friend went to my home and collected some overnight stuff for me.

The MRI went by in a blur of emotional (rather than physical) numbness.

An hour later, when my aunt and friend had popped out for a coffee, I was called into the consulting room. A different registrar showed me my MRI scan. I looked at some white patches, like mould or lichen on my brain scan.

'We believe you have MS,' he said in a thick accent. 'Your current symptoms are treated as a Clinically Isolated Incident, but it's likely to be MS.'

I don't recall asking a single question. I got up, walked out and as I saw my aunt and friend walking towards me down the corridor, collapsed into tears. 'I'd rather it was a brain tumour,' I told them. 'At least with a brain tumour you might be able to have some treatment, or you die.'

My grandmothers both had Parkinson's disease, an aunt died from Motor Neurone Disease, a cousin has MS. I was well acquainted (or so I thought) with neurological illness.

After the diagnosis I insisted on being alone. I'd been surrounded for two days by intensely anxious family, calls from friends, the hectic atmosphere of an Acute Neurology centre. I went home and remember silently howling at my reflection the mirror. Howling like an animal.

Then, the next day, I shut down. That shut down mode lasted for well over a year. I went to the new city, the new job. Established myself. But all the while, was living in twilight.

I am now a different person, four years on. I accepted the illness as part of me, eventually. I got treatment. I resigned from my job and my career. I returned to my home county and family.

I now live a richer life: poorer, financially, but so much richer in terms of compassion for myself and others. I have time to paint, draw, sing, do Iyengar yoga, mindfulness. I eat well, exercise well. My soul finally feels connected to my body. I thank MS for that.

I wouldn't choose to have this illness but I accept it as part of me. And for some things, I can thank it.

Yours,

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