



THE SHAPE OF SADNESS

JOHN 11-12

*Marta is also called Martha. Miryam is also called Mary.
Eliezer is also called Lazarus. Yeshua is also called Jesus.*



LIKE ANY SIBLINGS, MARTA (MARTHA), MIRYAM (Mary), and Eliezer (Lazarus) had learned to share. Some things they shared with huffs, eye rolls, and reluctance, like sweets and forgiveness. Other things they were oh so happy to share, like chores, secrets, and their friend Yeshua (Jesus). They each loved Jesus wholly and uniquely. And Jesus loved them back, wholly and uniquely.

At least that's what they thought. Yet here were Mary and Martha, preparing for Lazarus's funeral. And Jesus was nowhere to be found. "I thought Jesus might heal him," cried Martha. "How could he stay away?"





sobbed Mary. They had sent a message to Jesus, warning him that Lazarus was very sick. Long days had passed as they waited and hoped for Jesus. Lazarus got sicker and sicker and then died.

And now, now that it was much too late, they got word that Jesus was on his way. *It's not fair. It doesn't make sense.* When they heard that Jesus was coming, Martha ran to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

Grief comes out in many different shapes. Sometimes silence. Sometimes busyness. And sometimes, oftentimes, anger. "If you had been here, Lazarus wouldn't have died!" Martha stormed. Jesus listened as she went on, her jaw and fists clenched. "But I know it's not too late! I know God will give you whatever you ask!" she pleaded. Her hope was all tangled up with her anger and sorrow.



Jesus did not untangle the feelings. "Lazarus will live again," he said gently.

"I know that," snapped Martha. "Someday he will live again. But I'm sad now."



Jesus sat with her. How could he explain God's dream? How could he fit words around the kingdom of Already and Almost, where they had only peeks and glimpses of how things should be? "Lazarus will live because of me. Death is not the end for anyone who trusts me. Do you trust me?"

Martha looked at Jesus and felt her heart ache. Sometimes things sit side by side. Hope and sorrow. Promises and disappointment. Sickness and praise. Heaven and earth. They squish and bump together in our hearts until we ache with the stretch of it all. "I trust you," she said in spite of it all. "You're the Messiah, the Rescuer."

Eventually, Mary also came out to meet Jesus, followed by the huge crowd that had gathered to mourn Lazarus. Collapsing at Jesus's feet, Mary looked up at her dear friend. She was weary and battered. For days, waves of sorrow, hope, rage, and disbelief had swept over her again and again. But Jesus was here now, solid and silent and much too late.

"If you had been here"—she gulped down a sob—"my brother wouldn't have died!" She cried and cried and cried. Her friends and family joined her until it seemed as though their tears would soak the earth in sorrow.

Jesus felt his own heart ache, and he began to weep with them. Sometimes it is so very hard to be a human. And just because he knew the end of the story, it didn't make the messy middle go away. Death, suffering, sadness—these things didn't belong in the kingdom of heaven. But in Jesus heaven bumped against earth, hope against sorrow.

"Show me where you put him," he rasped. They all walked slowly to the tomb, trailing tears behind them. But when Jesus told



them to roll the stone away from the entrance, Martha jumped in front. "His body has been dead for four days!" Martha protested. "It's probably starting to . . . stink."

But Jesus was God in a human body. Jesus was stronger than death. "Watch and see God's glory," he told Martha, grinning through his tears. And he prayed, thanking God for sending him to earth, this messy place of hope and sorrow. And then he opened his eyes, opened his mouth, and shouted.

"Lazarus!" he called to his beloved friend, his voice echoing out beyond the mysteries of death. "Lazarus, come out here!"

Shuffle . . . shuffle . . .

Gasp!

Lazarus walked out of the tomb! Now the tears were of joy, thankfulness, and wonder. *What? Why? How?*

They had no answers, only a peek. Like the peeled-back glimpse at the river with John, Jesus had shown them again what God's kingdom was like. A kingdom with no suffering. A kingdom with no grief. A kingdom with no death.



