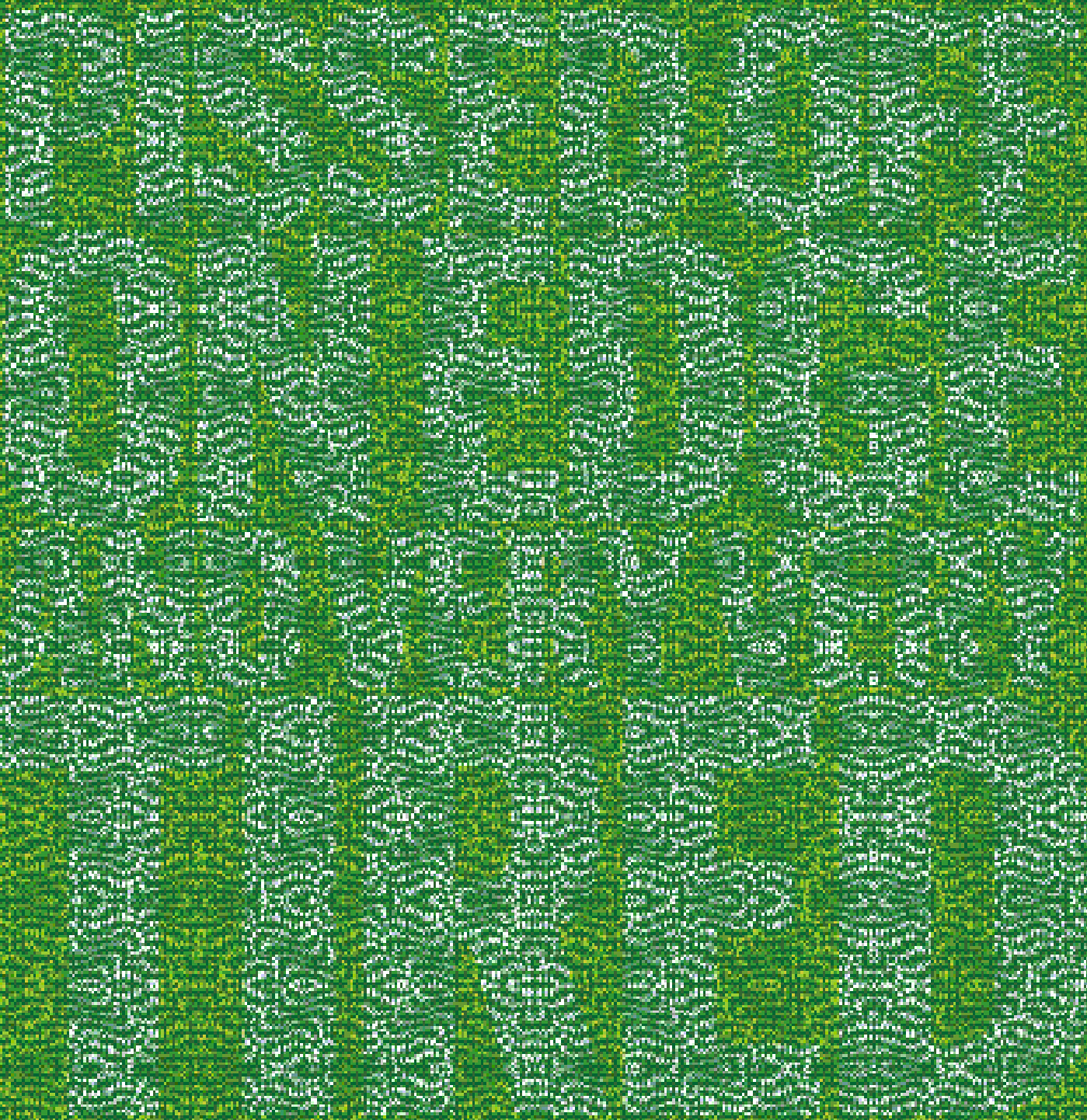


SECONDS



WHO THE HELL ISN'T? BUT WHAT CAN START OUT AS FEELING PISSED-OFF, ON EDGE, OR VERY, VERY TIRED CAN QUICKLY BECOME RAGE, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION. HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING—AND WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IF IT ALREADY HAS.

TYPOGRAPHY BY HAWAII DESIGN



DAMAGES

WHAT A MAN AND HIS ANGER ARE CAPABLE OF

BY TOM CHIARELLA

» At seventeen, my father bench-pressed 310 pounds while living at a Brooklyn YMCA. Years later, when I was seventeen, I watched him lift a refrigerator, grabbing it like a dance partner, holding it eight inches off the ground while I reached underneath to free up the tangled power cord. He was calm about it. Strong guy. He was forty-four, and much stronger than I would ever be. ¶ That strength certainly scared me every now and then. Me: dope, stumblebum, lousy student, prevaricator, liar. I needed straightening out. My father—

architect, builder, more tradesman than draftsman—could tame me with a nasty glance, beat of silence, the merest hint of a deeper anger behind some petty sarcasm. His anger was as simple as a dark look, thrown at me as if from a distance, like the sound of a train that might one day actually arrive at the station.

Sometimes that train pulled in and rage—the really naked, unadulterated loss of control, the kind where noise is made, dishes thrown, mirrors smashed, tables tossed—came to town. I once sat and watched

my father splinter a wooden squash racket with a single hard swing against a locker-room bench. Then swing again. Thirteen strokes, blind tomahawk chops, leaving him holding a ragged stump and me, head down, with a lap full of splinters. Yeah, I cowered. It slammed me emotionally.

But there is no real agony in these moments. No agony at all. I always sensed that rage came to my father with a whiff of abandon. Giving in to your own rage is far more like ecstasy than the kind of anger that festers before exploding.

Here's a rage story. Years after I left my parents' house, I lived in a cheap duplex in Northport, Alabama, nagging out a sublet from a friend who'd gone off with his new girlfriend. First morning, before I >

THE UPSIDE OF ANGER

If you're feeling challenged or threatened, signals in your brain tell the adrenal glands on top of your kidneys to start pumping cortisol, adrenaline, and other catecholamines into your bloodstream. When the adrenaline reaches your heart, it beats faster and gives you the rush you need to conquer fears and take action.

...AND THE DOWNSIDE

When these biological events are triggered by irrational thoughts instead of actual threats, anger can morph into rage. Or what technically is known as IED, Intermittent Explosive Disorder. When a guy's IED goes off, he loses control. Something gets smashed or broken, or someone gets hurt or threatened. It wrecks havoc on your home and work life and may up your risk for heart disease and high blood pressure.

—WILL COURTENAY

About Will Courtenay: A psychotherapist who specializes in men's mental health, he has served on the clinical faculty in the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and is the author of *Dying to Be Men: Psychosocial, Environmental, and Biobehavioral Directions in Promoting the Health of Men and Boys*.

► was even out of bed, I woke to the sound of the neighbor crashing around his apartment, as if repeatedly dropping a bag of cement on the floor. Then it seemed he might be throwing that same bag of cement up against the wall between us. I could hear him yelling, issuing a throaty horn of pain. Then the wall popped forward, belching one little chip of plaster onto my chest. Someone was pounding his way through the wall. I heard the cracking of lath. Then a voice: “Kenneth!” calling for my friend. And I shouted back, “I’m not him! Kenneth’s not here!” Then a bloody fist shot straight through the plaster wall right to the elbow.

His eye against the hole: that’s all I ever saw of him, a black guy I later learned they called Metro. “Kenneth!” he said. “Kenneth!” He put his hands on the wall hole and gave it a yank. “He’s not here,” I shouted. Then he called for the woman, the one Kenneth had left with—making a sound that came from every part of this throat. This was the voice of rage. “Tanya!”

Maybe you’ve seen angry men fighting at the end of a dark alley, like in a movie, under a single lightbulb. That’s not rage. That is theater, meant for seeing. True rage is private, roiling up inexplicably, and played out in dingy apartments in the acute corners of unimportant cities. It is stronger when proximate, when close enough that it can reach out and choke you. Now, as then, I would tell any one: run. Protect yourself. Get away from blind anger. But I did not. I could not. I stayed close to rage. Sometimes that’s the point.

The rage I grew up with was never any danger, which is a tribute to my father, who was beaten as a boy. He hit me only once, when I was an adult, just a few years before he died. It happened in a rage on the driveway of an old house in Rochester, New York.

It was the last time I ever saw him really angry. He’d had several strokes and was no longer allowed to drive. One afternoon he somehow got hold of the keys and went out to the car. I reminded him he couldn’t drive, and he cursed me out. He got the car open and was around the door when I tried to grab the keys from his weaker left hand. His right hand shot up and grabbed me by the throat.

He had me in enough of a grip, with the car door between us, that I had to respect it. “Don’t!” he said. I could smell his sensible Aramis cologne and see his dental work gleaming between his teeth. “Just don’t!” And I didn’t say a word. I couldn’t. I thought he might be of a mind to crush my windpipe—that’s exactly how mad he was. By then, and in the years that followed, my dad had a lot to be mad about.

So he shoved me and I flew from the icy driveway to the cement stairs, after which he lost his balance and crumpled next to the car. Seconds later, I knelt over him, said his first name, and he cuffed me in the neck. Hard, too. Hard enough that I wanted to hit him back. But I just knelt, rubbed my neck, tried to stay conscious.

My dad didn’t do one thing except stare at the empty sky, trapped in his failing body and in an ever-shrinking life. From a distance, you would have thought the two of us to be the fallout of a quiet domestic slip-and-fall. From outside, you couldn’t see the rage. But just then he would have swung a thousand squash rackets into a thousand benches a thousand times each, had he been able. He would have made splinters of the world. He would have stormed. I wanted it for him. I wished he could pull me closer and choke me down again with the grip of his agony. I wished for his rage then. I sure wish for it now.

ESQUIRE QUIZ

(Select which answers apply, then add up the assigned points.)

ARE YOU ANGRY?

How would you describe your current frame of mind?

- Fine, thank you. (-5)
- Kind of pissed, actually. Yesterday, see, this guy cut me off... (2)
- That is the stupidest question I’ve ever heard. (7)

You’re stuck driving behind a guy who is going way too slow, and you can’t pass him. You:

- Recognize there’s nothing you can do about it and enjoy the ride. (-10)
- Work the horn a little and hope he picks up the pace. (0)
- Lean on your horn, and if he doesn’t speed up, make an illegal pass. (2)

Scream, “Screw you, Grandma!” while making that illegal pass. (5)

This man made \$61,000,000 last year.



How does this make you feel? (Choose all that apply.)

- There’s a pit in my stomach. (2)
- My face feels hot. (2)
- My muscles are tensing. (3)
- My heart is pounding faster than usual. (4)
- My fists are clenched. (5)
- You know what? Seacrest works his ass off. What do I care? (-5)

When was the last time you raised your voice to someone, only to regret it later?

- I can’t remember. (-10)
- Last week—and I felt pretty bad about the whole thing. (-2)
- Yesterday—and I don’t regret it. (5)
- Actually, that is the stupidest question I’ve ever heard. (7)

Do you ever fantasize about retaliation after a conflict with someone?

- Not really. Life’s too short. (-8)
- All the time. Some things just get under my skin. (4)
- First, I’d start with pliers. Then, I’d move on to a blowtorch. Then things might get interesting. (20)

Have you ever been called a loose cannon?

- Nope. (-5)
- Yes, and it made me think twice about my behavior. (1)
- Yes, and I took it as a compliment. (3)
- Right. Like anybody is stupid enough to say that to my face. (8)

When was the last time you were involved in a physical altercation?

- I was twelve. (-5)
- Within the past year, and that guy deserved it. (5)
- Yesterday, and today’s not over yet. (10)

Do you ever feel the need to bite your tongue?

- Sure. Some things are better left unsaid. (-5)
- Now why in the hell would I do that? (5)

ANSWER KEY

0 points or less: You exhibit an unnatural calm in the face of adversity and conflict. Namaste.
1 to 15: You get annoyed, but most of the time, you keep that anger inside of you. You want to yell at the guy who just cut in line in front of you, but you don’t act on that impulse. This is normal. Carry on.
16 to 30: You’re pissed off. You’ll find yourself frequently getting mad at yourself, your coworkers, or the world in general. Your behavior isn’t out of control, but others can tell that you’re irritable or grouchy. Sometimes you surprise yourself by how angry you can get, and you’ve been told that you can easily fly off the handle. You might want to talk to someone about it.
31 or more: You’re angry. You’re frequently struggling to keep from losing it. People have told you you’re intimidating and that you sometimes use threatening body language—like thrusting a pointed finger or a clenched fist at others. You think about retaliation and about how you want to hurt others. You find yourself being ruled by your anger—sometimes even irrationally. See a doctor or psychologist.

PANIC



SOME DAYS, YOU JUST WANT TO KILL YOURSELF

BUT WHO WOULD PACK UP YOUR STUFF?

BY CHRIS JONES

>> The middle of the Golden Gate Bridge is 220 feet above San Francisco Bay. It looks higher than that in some ways. It doesn't seem nearly that high in other ways. The water, from 220 feet—the water that's straight down, at least—looks less like water and more like air. It looks more blue than green. It looks warmer than it is. ¶ It looks softer. ¶ People jump off that particular bridge for a lot of reasons. Maybe most important, it's convenient. Death is right there, waiting. The railing is only four feet tall; the fall is only four seconds long.

It doesn't hurt that it's such a pretty spot, and it's romantic feeling, and that maybe for the first time in their lives, the suicidal don't feel so alone there. On that bridge, they're finally part of something, this massive vanquished army, growing by the dozens every year—all those ghosts and specters who stood on that railing, who looked out over the water to the city, who heard the sounds of it, who closed their eyes and spread their arms and tipped forward or fell backward or flexed their knees and really jumped—now destined to become one of the thousands of splashes below, all those concentric circles folding into one another, as though made by so many leaping fish.

And strangely, perhaps, many of them probably

jump off that bridge because it gives them an outside chance of living. The bridge takes the matter out of their hands, as though it's not their decision anymore: If they were meant to live, if this were all some terrible mistake, then maybe they would survive. It's unlikely, but it's possible—it's possible for a man, even a man aiming to kill himself, to jump off that bridge at such an angle, at such a velocity, and not be exploded by the water but embraced by it.

The truth is, if you were totally positive that you wanted to die, if you were 100 percent certain, then there are better ways to guarantee it: shooting a bullet into your brain (not front to back, but side to side) or lying down on train tracks (not standing, but with your head resting on a rail) or jumping off something higher, with a harder landing. If you really wanted to kill yourself, you could do it. But sleeping pills, carbon monoxide, jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge—those methods, more peaceful, >

THE UPSIDE OF ANXIETY

Say you're putting final touches on a presentation. You're tensing up, and your stomach's a little upset, but you still feel you've got things under control. This is a normal reaction to stress, and it's exactly what's needed to motivate you to do your best.

...AND THE DOWNSIDE

Say you're giving the same presentation, but you don't feel in control—you're panicking, you can't focus, and you even consider avoiding the meeting altogether. That is anxiety gone haywire, and it's painful and unproductive.

So what causes it? Anxiety is always related to the brain or, more specifically, the amygdala, which is responsible for processing and storing memories associated with emotional events—including anxiety and the "fight or flight" response. People with an overactive amygdala may have a heightened response to fear, which can cause increased anxiety, dramatic spikes in blood pressure, and damage to your heart and kidneys. —W.C.

➤ more serene, also provide that chance, however slim, that you might open your eyes and be alive. There's that tiny chance for a different kind of escape.

I thought all those things when I stood in the middle of that bridge one sunny, nearly perfect day in June more than three years ago. I thought all those things when I pulled myself tight against the railing and tried not to cry, choking on it so that no one would become suspicious or try to stop me. There were smiling people standing all around me, ice-cream-eating tourists thinking how pretty everything was, pointing to spots on the horizon. I looked just like them, except that my eyes were pointed straight down. I looked at the water, and I thought about my parents, my wife, my sons back home, maybe having their dinner on their little plastic plates or playing in their inflatable pool, and more inanimate things, too: my suitcase in my hotel room, my glasses on the bathroom counter, my half-finished book on the nightstand, with its corner folded over, page 164. Who would pack up my clothes and send them home? Would the police do that, or would it be a hotel employee, a maid or a concierge?

But mostly, I thought about jumping off that bridge because it seemed like exactly the right thing to do.

» **I CAN'T TELL YOU WHEN** or how the blackness started. For more than thirty years, I had been the definition of steady. My friends used to joke about my lack of emotional range. I was almost always in some benign, vaguely pleasant middle, even on that day when I was bitten in the face by a pig. When certain friends of mine talked about being depressed—and a lot of them did, which made me wonder whether I was the root of their col-

lective problems—my reaction fell somewhere between incredulity and disgust. If you're a white North American male—if that's all you are—then you're already in some tiny privileged percentage of the world's population. My friends were smart and healthy and loved; they had good prospects, cute girlfriends, food in the cupboards, beer in the fridge. What did they have to be depressed about? The Habs game was about to come on.

"There are starving children in Africa," I would say, and my friends would always look at me and say something like, "Yes, but that doesn't make me any less sad."

Oh, spare me, I remember thinking. Stop listening to Joy Division and go outside.

Whenever it was that my own blackness took hold, I didn't feel a thing. It must have been sometime that past fall or winter, months before the bridge. It surfaced at first in little hiccups and tics, a life gone slightly askew. I developed obsessions, weird ideas of perfection. There was a period when I couldn't bring myself to leave the house, because I'd decided that there was one perfect time—when, if I left just then, my day would go smoothly, and every other departure time meant some disaster awaited. But of course it was impossible for me to know when that one perfect time was, so I never left. Something tripped in my writing, too. I sat down one day and suddenly I had to have each line justified on the right-hand side of the page—not by some artificial, mechanical means, but by writing each sentence with exactly the right combination of letters and words and spaces so that they landed precisely on the margin. I wrote entire stories that way, writing and rewriting each sentence and paragraph until they fit inside these great long scrolls of intricate squares and rectangles. My stories looked like



(Select which answers apply, then add up the assigned points.)

ARE YOU ANXIOUS?

How nervous does this picture make you?

TK pic of Nancy Grace

- Not at all. She was *hilarious* during the Casey Anthony trial. (-5)
- A little bit. That woman could make coffee nervous. (2)
- I just peed a little. (4)

Are you decisive?

- Yes. (-5)
- Usually, but I like taking my time to

weigh pros and cons. (0)

- I'm not sure. (5)

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night and lay awake worrying?

- Nope. If I wake up at all, I go right back to sleep. (-5)
- Yes, but I've got a lot on my plate right now. (2)
- Yes, and the worst part is that I know I can't do anything about it and I worry anyway. (5)
- That's assuming I get to sleep at all. It usually takes me a while because I'm too busy worrying about global warming. (8)

How do you normally deal with major stress at the office?

- I take deep breaths and try to keep a level head. (-10)
- I count the minutes till 5:00 P.M. so I can have a drink. (3)
- I duck into the copy room and hope nobody finds me. (6)
- Forget 5:00. A man needs a drink, he needs a drink. (10)

Which of the following provokes a sense of dread? (Choose all that apply.)

- Speaking in front of a large group of strangers. (2)

- Attending a dinner party where you know only the host. (4)
- Making small talk with a coworker you don't know particularly well. (6)
- I don't mind doing any of that. (-2)

Do you regularly bite your nails?

- Nope. (-5)
- 'Fraid so. (5)
- ...And I bite the skin around my nails, too. (8)

When was the last time your boss or significant other asked you to calm down?

- Never. I'm the one usually telling them to relax. (-6)
- Last year. We talked about it like adults, and I realized I needed to calm down a little. (1)
- Last week, but I told them, "Listen: I'm the only one standing between us and Armageddon. And you're telling me to relax?" (10)

Who would play you in a movie of your life?

- A young Jeff Bridges (-10)
- A young Brad Pitt (-5)
- A young Woody Allen. (5)
- An older Jonah Hill (10)

ANSWER KEY

0 points or less: What, you, worry?

1 to 15: You get stressed out. You've got a lot going on, but you ultimately feel like you're on top of it. Plus, you worry only about the things you can control. Carry on.

16 to 30: You're on edge. You have trouble concentrating. You often have trouble making decisions. You have trouble making peace with a conflict or an issue even after it's been resolved. You are sometimes overly concerned with things like money, health issues, or work. You might want to talk to someone about it.

31 or more: You're anxious. You experience sudden terror of something terrible happening and your heart races. You have a deep fear of losing control. You lose sleep worrying about things over which you have no control. See a doctor or psychologist.

a serial killer had written them.

My temper came next. Normally, it would take me a long time to get angry, but now my anger rallied quickly and often viciously. A guy was clapping in a bar and his clapping bothered me, so I dragged him outside by his beard. Another guy dug his boots into me during a soccer game, and I'm sure he still talks about the time this fat keeper absolutely lost his shit. A tranquilizer dart wouldn't have been out of order. Three of my teammates had to hold me back, and not just for dumb show. After, I tried to find out where he lived.

Then life seemed to conspire against me, just when, for whatever biological or chemical or spiritual reasons, my defenses had fallen. Everything started going wrong, or at least everything looked that way to me. I was surrounded by giants dragging clubs.

I'd been sick for several years, plagued by a host of gut troubles. I'd just had a second surgery a few months before, another deep-fried section of me carved up and taken out; not long after, I'd ended up back in the hospital, filled up with drugs that didn't even begin to take away the pain. I'd just come out of writing what remains the most important story of my life, "The Things That Carried Him" (Esquire, May 2008), about how a soldier's body gets back from Iraq. After working on it for so many months, I'd lost my aim without it, coupled with the weight of so many visits to military morgues and grief-heavy kitchens. A book I wrote—the same paperback I was supposed to go to San Francisco to promote that June—hadn't been a failure, exactly, but it wasn't what I had hoped it would be, because nothing much was anymore. My first signing had been in a Houston bulk store. They sat me next to the huge bottles of ketchup.

The hardest part for me, though, was what should have been the best: my new young family, my wife and our two young boys. Nobody likes to admit this, but the first few months after a child is born, especially a second child, is really, really hard. When Lee and I got married, we had decadent, blissful lives. We traveled to the South Pacific. We ate vanilla cake in bed. Then we started trying to have children, and we lost two before we finally had Charley, and we'd nearly lost him, too, to a racing heart. Then came Sam that perpetual winter, this sweet, perfect child. Like Charley, he was this little baby elephant, this amazing little thing. But I was already sleepless by the time he came along. I'd lie awake all night and feel my chest vibrate with anxiety—this growing feeling that I'd never get anything right again, that the good half of my life was over. Now Sam's crying in the night sounded like cymbals crashing in my ears.

Today, I can say that my wife is the wife of my dreams, and we're the parents of two beautiful boys we fought so hard for. Charley and Sam are our victories.

Then, though, I just saw a woman who didn't love me as much as she once did, maybe she didn't love me at all anymore, and two boys who would never have the father they deserved, and I saw everything else, including water that looked like air and green that looked like blue, and not just for days or weeks, but for months and months and months.

LOOKING BACK NOW AT THAT MAN on the bridge, I can hardly believe that was me. It's as though I went temporarily Goth. Jumping was nothing like the right thing to do. It was as far from the right thing to do as is possible. I'm al-



WHAT MODERATE TO SEVERE ANXIETY FEELS LIKE

THERE IS FEELING STRESSED OUT AND THEN THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE. THIS IS SOMETHING ELSE.

You do not rouse with the sunrise or the sound of your alarm clock. It's midnight, it's 2:02, it's 3:19, and you wake as though shot from a cannon, speeding through the air, arms flailing, stomach in knots. It is dark, and it is quiet. And. You. Are. Flying.

You lie there, perfectly still and worrying, but it is not the low-grade worries of work or family. It is worry rubbed raw and coming out of nowhere. About something you said the day before. Or something you didn't do the week before. You look at your worry a hundred different ways, again and again.

You run to the toilet and heave. Nothing comes out, and you heave some more. The convulsions break the tension in your body, and this both settles your nerves and upsets your stomach. You pop a Tums and head back to bed. *There.* Now you can sleep.

You keep it together, and you hide it from everyone. Your bosses, your friends, the guys at the office. You focus single-mindedly on doing your job and getting through the day. In a way, this makes you better at your job, and that is what people notice. *Keep up the good work.*

You can't just relax. You can't just have a drink. The only thing stopping you from lashing out, or losing it, is your ability to control yourself, and you can't compromise that. You can't lose control.

You go through this until you can't any longer. You decide to go back on your meds, six months since quitting them, because you figure it's better to be on pills than fly out of a cannon every night. You accept help. You give up control. You no longer worry. —RICHARD DORMENT

most certain that I would have been just a few inches below that sun-warmed railing—that I would have felt that first rush of wind and that opening elevator drop in my stomach, the feeling that I'd imagined so many times—when I would have been overwhelmed by regret. For those four seconds it would have taken me to fall 220 feet, I believe I would have given anything in the world to be able to fly.

Or maybe, remembering that day now, from such a great mental distance, I just hope I would have felt that way. Maybe in reality I would have twisted myself around and tried to land flat on my back to increase the damage, to break my spine and blow my ribs out of my chest. Maybe even now, all these years later, I'm still trying to convince myself that it wasn't so bad, just a temporary stumble rather than what it was. Because it was pitch black.

When I'm in my usual good spot, I think of the planets or I think of the moons that circle Mars, and they make my problems disappear. They're my version of God, those little lights in the sky. But when I was depressed, Phobos and Deimos had the opposite effect on me—actually, they had the same effect, but on my joys rather than my sorrows. Then, I thought of something as massive as the Stickney Crater, and I remembered that it's just one crater on one moon orbiting one planet, and it wasn't my challenges that vanished but my aspirations. That's why depression is so dangerous. It makes a mockery of faith. It turns belief [continued on page tk]



THE UPSIDE OF DEPRESSION

The same way physical symptoms are your body's way of letting you know that something's wrong, depression can be your mind's way of telling you that you need to deal with a psychological problem. Plus, many people who change their habits to relieve their symptoms of depression end up feeling better than they did before they became depressed.

...AND THE DOWNSIDE

There's the guy who experiences depression as it's commonly known—feels hopelessness, worthlessness, and, yes, very, very tired—and then there's the guy who's working sixty hours a week, being short-tempered with his coworkers, and drinking too many martinis at lunch. Good chance he's experiencing depression, too.

The exact causes are unknown—low levels of serotonin in the brain are commonly cited, as are unresolved traumas from your past—but depression has been proven to have a direct link to heart disease—the leading killer of men.

—W.C.

THIS MAN IS NOT DEPRESSED, GODDAMMIT

THE THIN BLUE LINE BETWEEN SADNESS AND DEPRESSION

BY MIKE SAGER

After all the lies and painful discoveries, the sleepless nights and anxious dawns...after all the phone calls and retellings and ineffectual commiserations from well-meaning relatives and friends...after the movers, the truck from the Salvation Army, the trash-removal guy, the new-furniture deliverymen...after the expensive and time-consuming visits to the various adult and child therapists, both together and separately, and to the mediator, the several lawyers, the broker, the accountant, and the

notary public...after his house was retiled and remortgaged, his investment and pension accounts nearly drained, his everyday custody of his own teenage son cleaved in half...after his familiar life had been deconstructed so swiftly by the twin machetes of narcissism and no-fault divorce and he had received in the mail the final decree, signed with an honest-to-God rubber stamp, the paperwork folded so carelessly by some lame government functionary that the adhesive from the envelope ended up bonded to the precious original document, causing it to rip upon opening...

After all this—but not, of course, after the grudging years of alimony and “equalizing payments” yet

to come—he got a letter from his health-insurance carrier informing him that his insurance rating had been changed.

From Tier 1 to Tier 5.

From \$1,000 a *quarter* to \$1,206 a *month*.

Due to a diagnosis of: “Affective Psychosis, Major Depressive Disorder.”

er they'd seen together ten times for marital counseling—\$125 per fifty-minute session, paid by check at the end of each visit—had sought (additional?) payment from the insurance company.

With one check on a standard billing form he'd been branded a serious mental-health risk. A man likely to be hospitalized for periods of time due to his abnormal psychology. A man likely to require meds for his entire life. A man likely to kill himself at some point if not closely monitored.

ANGER

ANXIETY

DEPRESSION

He called the therapist, who said it would be “unethical” for him to change his diagnosis. He called an insurance broker, who said he’d never even *heard* of Tier 5. Lacking other recourse, he did what modern people do: He lawyered up. *Here we go again.* Letters were written; the specters of fraud and malpractice were raised.

And then it was Easter vacation, one year since the domestic *denouement*. He went to Hawaii with his son, their first vacation together without the mom.

At last, on the beach, he had some time to rest and reflect. He went ahead and asked himself the question.

Am I depressed?

The next day his sister called from Baltimore.

His father was dead.

YOU MIGHT ASK: How much can a man take?
He did. Many times. Fist to heavens.

What did I do to deserve this?

His wife had rejected and humiliated him on the deepest possible level. His father—a generous and loving but distant man who kept his own counsel—was dead at eighty-one. (Somehow, his father’s death was less traumatic than the death of his marriage. His father’s health had been declining; their love was strong and eternal; he knew that parts of his father would always be inside of him, had already been passed along to his son. But the divorce had blindsided him. With the dissolution of their union, most of the accepted notions about his future were razed.) Left behind was his mom, alone now after nearly sixty years of courtship and marriage, and his little sister, a private person in her early fifties who still called her father “Daddy,” symbolic he supposed of the special relationship they shared.

His days and nights blurred together; time crawled and flew. His stomach churned. His heart did flip-flops. Sometimes he had trouble catching his breath. A time or two he heard wailing in the dark of his office, well separate from the house. He spirited from room to room. *What am I doing?* he’d wonder internally. Putting

the scissors away. Recycling the newspapers. Shelving dishes. Making lunches. Raising or lowering the shades depending upon the time of day. Changing passwords. Folding endless stacks of laundry. Matching socks. Bingeing on television—the dim and timeless purgatory of on-demand viewing, a blessed mindless salve with no calories or particular addictive consequences and plenty of opportunity for cathartic release.

Meanwhile, people he knew worried about him, climbed up into his ass with good intentions. They wanted to know why he wasn’t seeking treatment. *How do you know you’re not depressed?* they submitted. *Shouldn’t you be Googling your symptoms and monitoring your vital signs in case you really are depressed. Millions of people get help. Why can’t you?*

See another therapist?

You’re kidding, right?

Sure, he was very sad and very angry. Sure, he felt like run-over dogshit. But he was not depressed, not big-*D* depressed, not William Styron or Kurt Cobain depressed. Never for a moment did he think of suicide. Not even for a nanosecond did he even *consider* considering it. If anything, he felt like he was in a fight to stay alive, to keep moving forward with his lifelong goals, to keep intact what he’d built for himself and his son, with or without the ex, good riddance, there was more room now in the bed.

How much can a man take?

There was only one answer for him: as much as he has to.

As much as *need be*.

As much as his son and his mother and his sister needed him to. He was the man of the family now, the Patriarch. There was no going back.

He manned up, carried on, pushed through. He did the things that needed doing. He tiptoed the thin blue line between depression and sadness, a walking-around pneumonia of the soul. (And meanwhile he thanked his maker—obviously his brain was not factory wired to reach the depths that some people do, no matter what that stupid asshole therapist had said.)

And every morning, without fail, he greeted the new day with ➤

ESQUIRE
QUIZ

(Select which answers apply, then add up the assigned points.)

ARE YOU DEPRESSED?

It’s a beautiful day outside and you have a few hours to yourself. What’s the call?

- Phone up some friends and hit the course or court. (-10)
- Hole up with a girl. (-5)
- Use the time to catch up on e-mails, read a book, or run mindless errands. (0)

- Get in bed and try to sleep. I only got, like, ten hours of sleep last night and I’m exhausted. (8)

Has anybody told you you’ve been acting strange lately?

- Nope (0)
- Once or twice (5)

Have you been acting strange lately?

- I don’t think so. (0)
- For chrissakes: no. I’m fine. (1)
- Maybe, but in case you haven’t noticed, the world is going to hell and I’m kind of down about it. (5)

When was the last time you cried?

- A few months ago. At a funeral. (0)
- A few days ago, and I can’t remember what started it. (10)

- 2006. (Season one, *Friday Night Lights*.) (-2)

Which of the following applies to your current circumstances? (Choose all that apply.)

- You’ve recently and inexplicably gained weight. (5)
- You’re hungover more often than not. (5)
- You’d rather stay in at night than go out with friends. (8)
- You’ve joined a basketball league and met new people. (-4)
- You’re training for a marathon. (-8)
- You’ve never felt better. (-10)

What’s tomorrow going to be like?

- Awesome (-10)
- Same as today. (-2)
- I’m bummed just thinking about it. (10)

ANSWER KEY

0 points or less: Eternal sunshine.

1 to 15: You get bummed out from time to time. Things at work and home have been challenging lately, but you’re pushing through it and trying to look on the bright side. Carry on.

16 to 30: You are down. You’re tired all the time. You’re not in the mood to see anybody. You’re drinking more frequently, or more heavily, than usual. You’re not even that interested in having sex anymore. You might want to talk to somebody about that.

31 or more: You’re depressed. All you want to do is sleep. You hate your job. You actively think about how unhappy you are. You feel sad for no apparent reason. You don’t have any hope that things can get better for you. You’ve felt this way for more than a month now. See a doctor or psychologist.

► hope. He rose with first light and performed his morning routine. He made the coffee (four scoops now instead of six). He made the breakfast (for two now instead of three, or sometimes for only one). And then, barring another of the endless and costly appointments, he'd end up in his home office, fingers dancing joyfully across the QWERTY keyboard that gave him voice and identity. For an hour or two he would type, working on a column, a story, the last third of his second novel. For an hour or two he'd be again the master of his universe, the master of his screen. For an hour or two he'd be something of himself again... until the sun climbed higher and real life intervened, the phone rang, the lawyer sent an e-mail, the child therapist called, the ex e-mailed to bitch about something... and the shitstorm rained down again, making everything slippery, dark, and foul.

His sadness was like a difficult winter in the frozen north. Stuff got done... eventually.

In the interim, there was a lot of shoveling.

►► **THE THERAPIST FOLDED** after the first volley. After an exhaustive review by an insurance-company underwriter, it was decided that the therapist had made a diagnosis "normally made by a psychiatrist, not a licensed social worker," and "may have been in error."

His record was expunged. He was returned to his original payment tier.

The biggest shame was probably this: On the way out the door the final time, the therapist had actually given him some good advice. "Next time, don't settle for crumbs."

He liked the sound of that.

►► **EVERY DAY HE FELT A LITTLE BETTER.**

Except on the days he didn't.

Slowly, his focus returned. He bought new sheets, tore out the carpet in the bedroom, found joy in the quiet peace of his new domestic arrangement, in his ability once more to make his own, uncompromised decisions. His relationship with his son blossomed; together they had faced the sudden and befuddling tsunami of this domestic upheaval and come out stronger. And of course, from the depths of his suffering had come new knowledge of the world and of himself—to a writer, a tangible gain, the unintended dividend paid by his difficult times.

Eventually, there would be dating.

And flirting. And kissing. And...

Holy cannoli.

Maybe he wasn't so sad anymore.

THE BIG QUESTION

OKAY: MAYBE I NEED SOME HELP. WHAT DO I DO?

First, go to your general practitioner, tell him what's going on, and ask him to rule out any physical conditions that could be causing the problem. (If you've got a history of head injuries or if you've got low testosterone levels, for example, that could contribute to anxiety and depression.) Do not, however, rely on your GP for a mental-health diagnosis—ask him to recommend a mental-health pro (a psychologist, licensed professional counselor, licensed clinical social worker, marriage and family therapist for talk therapy, or a psychiatrist for drugs), or you can go to the Web sites for the American Psychological Association (apa.org) or the National Institute of Mental Health (nimh.nih.gov).

THE TOOLS

PREVENTION

HOW TO KEEP ANGER, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION AT BAY THROUGH EVERYDAY HABITS

GOOD SLEEP: Research shows that people who go without enough good sleep (generally considered at least six hours a night) are up to six times more likely to become depressed than those who get good sleep.

low-fat dairy products. Carbs have also been found to raise the level of serotonin in your brain, but best to stick with low-fat, whole-grain sources.

ALCOHOL: Take it easy and limit to the standard two drinks a day. —W.C.

GOOD SEX: Levels of the "happy neurochemicals" serotonin and endorphin have been found to rise in post-orgasmic rats. At the same time, there's a surge in oxytocin—which is believed to reduce stress levels—as well as an uptick in prolactin, thought to be associated with the sleepy feeling after sex. These findings suggest that having sex (or taking matters into your own hands) brings some temporary relief to stress or anxiety.

PLUS: A FEW WORDS ON MEDITATION

How to clear your head of anxious and angry thoughts, compliments of Jack Kornfield's *Meditation for Beginners* (available at soundstrue.com).

► Sit down on a chair or cushion, and make sure your back is straight. (No slumping: You'll nod off.)

► Close your eyes and breathe in and then out. Feel the coolness in the back of the throat or in the nose. The tingling. The movement of the chest. The rise and fall of the belly. Try to feel the breath without directing it.

► For ten minutes, feel each breath as it comes in and goes out, and if any strong body sensation should arise—tingling, itching, a pain—let go of your breath, receive the sensation with awareness, and give it a name. So you name tingling "tingling" or itching "itching," whatever it is. Feel it as fully as you can, and then, when it passes away, go back to the next breath.

► The mind will wander, and when you realize it does, let go of that thought and focus on your next breath. Keep at it. After ten minutes, open your eyes.

GOOD EXERCISE: Particularly aerobic exercise. The best evidence to date—based on the analysis of fourteen random controlled trials—indicates that to prevent, and even effectively treat, depression with exercise requires three thirty-minute sessions per week of aerobic exercise at 60 to 80 percent of maximum heart rate (i.e., typically between 110 and 160 beats per minute) for at least eight weeks.

GOOD FOOD: Up your intake of omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin B12, both of which show promise in contributing to mental well-being. Tuna, mackerel, and salmon are good sources for omega-3 fatty acids, as are dark green vegetables, flaxseed, nuts, and soybeans. For sources of B12, look to seafood and

TREATMENT



MEN'S GROUPS

BY SCOTT RAAB

As a man who was part of a weekly men's support group for many years, I found few topics that created more discomfort in other men than the subject of men's support groups. Men I know and love well enough to call friends—including some who hold sacred their weekly poker or golf game with the guys—not only couldn't figure out the point of such a group but seemed to think of it as weird.

"You bang drums?"
 No drums. No sweat lodge. No praying. We talk.
 "About what?"
 Work. Women. Fatherhood. Friendship.
 End of conversation. Every time.

The problem isn't that men won't talk. The problem is that all they talk about is the usual bullshit. And the stuff that troubles most men most—how to handle office politics, how to weather a domestic shitstorm, how to do right by their kids—gets buried, if it's raised at all, under layers of ritual palaver about sports or sex.

Maybe you've got a mentor, or a father or uncle whose understanding and wisdom make him a reliable source of guidance, or a group of friends willing to go deep on issues that require more than a quick, glib analysis and a resolution that involves neither Las Vegas nor a hooker. I don't. Most men don't.

In fact, the men I know best, including myself, trust and rely on themselves alone to work out the hardest stuff, and have come to define that very self-reliance as a key component of their success as men. To talk about the struggle, the uncertainty, and the fear is not only a sign of weakness; to talk about such things—merely to admit to feeling them—feels like a kind of failure in itself. Better, then, to say nothing.

That's a lonesome way to go, brother. The struggles, at home and on the job, are universal, a necessary part of moving up in the world. Every fighter needs a cornerman, someone who knows his strengths and weaknesses. Any decent men's group will have one or two guys savvier than you, less crazy, with no ax to grind. Likewise, there'll be members of the group who'll look to you for illumination. A good group is an ongoing seminar with direct practical application and no downside. Most are run by therapists. Look online to start, or in the phone book.

TALK THERAPY

SO YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM AND YOU WANT TO TALK. YOU HAVE OPTIONS.

You are: Angry, anxious, or depressed and have no idea why.
You might want to try: Psychodynamic therapy. The idea here is to help you become aware of troublesome thoughts and feelings that are outside your conscious awareness. This in turn allows you to resolve them. Therapy sessions typically occur once a week.

You are: Angry, anxious, or depressed, but you think your behavior might be responsible.
You might want to try: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps you identify and modify patterns of thought and behavior that contribute to distress, and then works to develop new ways of thinking about things and coping mechanisms. This is a short-term therapy, averaging around sixteen sessions total.

You are: Angry, anxious, or depressed because you're having problems with someone in your life.
You might want to try: Interpersonal psychotherapy. Based on the belief that interpersonal problems contribute to mental illness, this therapy focuses on your relationships and on developing new interpersonal and communication skills. It may be particularly helpful in dealing with events like the death of a loved one, a conflict with a partner, or a divorce, and lasts twelve to sixteen weeks.

MEDS: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE SWALLOWING ANYTHING

DEPRESSION

ANXIETY

	DEPRESSION	ANXIETY			
THE CLASS	<p>SSRIs: Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors regulate the levels of serotonin in the brain. They include Lexapro (escitalopram), Luvox (fluvoxamine), Paxil (paroxetine), Prozac (fluoxetine), and Zoloft (sertraline).</p>	<p>Atypical antidepressants: Just like other types of antidepressants, atypical antidepressants affect the levels of neurotransmitters in the brain, including dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine.</p>	<p>Benzodiazepines: A group of sedatives that includes short-acting drugs like Ativan (lorazepam) and Xanax (alprazolam) that are used for acute symptoms of panic; and long-acting ones like Klonopin (clonazepam) that are used for persistent anxiety.</p>	<p>SNRIs: Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors affect the amount of norepinephrine and serotonin in the brain, and they include Cymbalta (duloxetine) and Effexor (venlafaxine).</p>	<p>Beta blockers: Beta-adrenergic blocking agents work by blocking the stimulating effect of adrenaline. The most commonly used beta blockers are Inderal (propranolol), Tenormin (atenolol), Lopressor (metoprolol) and Corgard (nadolol).</p>
THE PROS	<p>A recent and very large study of studies showed Lexapro and Zoloft are far more effective in alleviating symptoms of depression than Luvox, Paxil, or Prozac.</p>	<p>Two of these drugs—Remeron (mirtazapine) and especially Wellbutrin (bupropion)—have been found to cause significantly fewer sexual side effects than other antidepressants.</p>	<p>They act quickly, bringing rapid relief to acute anxiety.</p>	<p>They're considered the safest, most effective first line of defense for the treatment of chronic anxiety.</p>	<p>Serious side effects are uncommon with beta blockers. (Unless you've got asthma, in which case: No beta blockers for you.)</p>
THE CONS	<p>They can cause a range of side effects—and have significant effects on arousal and orgasm. They can also take a while to start working.</p>	<p>Anxiety can be worsened with Wellbutrin.</p>	<p>They work by slowing down the activity of the central nervous system, and the side effects are basically like you're on drugs.</p>	<p>Like SSRIs, they can take a while to take effect and can have sexual side effects. They can also increase anxiety or agitation when they're first taken.</p>	<p>Common side effects include tiredness, cold hands, headache, upset stomach, constipation or diarrhea, and dizziness.</p>

Panic

[continued from page 145] against you. All the little lights go out.

I can't really explain why I didn't jump that afternoon, why I eventually returned to the ranks of tourists brave men and women who made that jump before me, but I would guess that most of them made a number of soft attempts, exploratory, reading up on knots or taking half a bottle of pills, as though they were preparing for a fight, looking for the tender spots. I imagine they got a little bit closer each time, until finally they did it, and then they were dead, and then they were buried or burned, and everyone so fortunate as to still be happy and alive talked about how sad and selfish everything was, when for so long the soul that had been in that body now underground or reduced to ashes had been *suffering*, suffering so much that death—this thing that we're hardwired to fear more than anything else—had become relief instead.

Somehow I still harbored this small filament of self-preservation. Some part of me had not been in agreement with my plan. It had refused to fall in line. I found my way back to my hotel room and read page 165 of that book and carried my own bags home. But it didn't get better after that.

The shower was much worse than the bridge.

One night, a few months after San Francisco, I went to see an outdoor concert with my best friend, Phil. The Weakerthans were playing. It was a perfect night. I stood in the crowd and looked up at the stars and sang along to all my favorite songs, and all the while I engaged in a weird kind of internal conversation, explaining to myself that I was happy: Here I was, with my best friend, seeing my favorite band on a starry night, when I might have otherwise been a corpse floating in San Francisco Bay. *Wow, that was kind of nuts, wasn't it? Close one!*

But I've learned that if you're truly happy, you don't need to convince yourself that you are. You can't employ relative calculus to make yourself happy. You're either happy or you're not.

That night, after the concert, Phil and I began walking home. We were on a bike path along the river, nearing the bottom of a steep hill. It was pretty dark. I was telling Phil—to whom I'd confided my depression, but nothing about that day on the bridge—that I felt like I was finally coming out of it. When suddenly, I heard screaming: a really high-pitched, hor-

rible wail. It took me a second to realize it was coming from someone behind me, and it was getting louder. I jumped off the bike path, my heart in my throat. And then some prick kid whizzed by us on a bike, laughing like a witch. He'd just been trying to scare us, which he had; my asshole actually howled. I yelled at his disappearing shape, screaming an incomprehensible sequence of terrible words at the top of my lungs. My chest heaved after. I imagined what I would do to that kid if I caught him. I imagined all sorts of violent, broken-teeth thoughts. I was as angry as I'd ever been—angry enough that I couldn't hear properly, the blood was so thick in my ears.

By the time we got to the bottom of that hill, I knew that I was still in a very deep hole, and I was never going to get out of it.

Not long after, Lee and I really fought for the first time, ever. In the eight years we'd been together, we'd never raised our voices. I can't remember what we fought about, but whatever it was, it wasn't just a fight. It was confirmation of my worst paranoid fears: She was going to leave me for a better man, I thought, and she was going to take Charley and Sam with her, and I was going to end up stripped of those few things that still mattered. I thought that I might as well save her the trouble.

After everyone went to bed and the house was dark and quiet, I went down to the kitchen, and I pulled a long knife out of the rack we kept on our counter. I didn't want to make a mess—the kitchen floor was cork, and it would soak up my blood like a sponge; cork is very absorbent—so I decided to go down to the basement, two floors removed from my sleeping wife and my sleeping children. When I walked down those stairs, I was certain that I was taking the last steps I would ever take. I climbed into the tub of the little bathroom we had down there. I turned on the shower, to help wash everything away, and I stood under the water, and I ran the knife over my wrists. I did that several times, dragging the knife between the bottom of my hand and the crook of my elbow, the way I had read that I should do it if I really wanted to get the job done. I was just scratching my skin rather than cutting it, but I was surprised by how much it hurt. For some reason, I thought that bleeding myself out would be painless. It wasn't. I turned the water to ice cold, to try to numb my arms, and I dragged the knife, scraping myself maybe a dozen times, and I sobbed, sobbed like a man who had just lost his dead father's watch.

I'd like to say that I saw a light, that I saw the faces of my sleeping wife and my sleeping children through my tears, that I saw how much I had to live for, but that's not what happened. I just couldn't force myself to cut my arms deeply enough. My body saved my soul that night. I turned off the shower. I dried myself off. I looked in the mirror. I was closer to death than I'd ever been. But I'd failed again.

I've never told anybody about the bridge or the shower. I never wanted people to know, not because I feel ashamed about it—that would be like feeling ashamed for having

bad eyesight or loving jazz—but because I didn't want people to treat me any differently, like I was fragile. Even my dad—who has worked for years in suicide intervention, who has saved however many lives with his gentle words—has only an idea. We were having dinner together one night just this past winter, we were sitting in the middle of a Chinese restaurant, when he asked me whether I'd ever thought about killing myself. I nearly choked. I told him I didn't want to talk about it, which I didn't, at least not just then, over spareribs and sticky rice. And my dad nodded, partly because he didn't want to force the truth out of me and partly because he already knew.

Besides, the blackness had receded by then, almost imperceptibly, the way it had arrived. It wasn't like a finger snap, the birds singing through my open window one sunny morning; it was more as though I'd been gradually released from its grip. Today, I'm as happy as I've been in years. Coming out of depression feels like surfacing from deep water. Colors are true again.

In the end, I just waited it out. I never went on drugs or saw a therapist. That was proud and stupid. I needed help, and I should have asked for it. Now I know better.

Several months after the shower, I felt myself going under again, my temper getting shorter and running hotter, my faith wavering. I hadn't been able to sleep for several nights. Early in the morning, at maybe two or three o'clock, I got out of bed, slipped out of the house, and walked through the empty streets to the Royal Ottawa—to the psychiatric hospital, a pile of glass and light several blocks away.

I walked very quickly to the hospital; I was almost running. There was a bench, and I sat down to catch my breath before I checked myself in. I was struck by how many people there were outside, even though it was the middle of the night. There were maybe a dozen patients, some of them having come out for a smoke or just to feel the cool of the night, propped up against the walls or wrapped up in their wheelchairs. I sat among them, and I felt stronger for their company. I felt as though we were all in this together. There are so many dead, but there are so many of us still alive; there are so many of us still in love. I sat on that bench and realized that I'd walked so quickly to the hospital because I was scared of dying. My heart nearly burst open. It was the best feeling in the world. I felt so good that I never did go inside; I spent a few hours on that bench, in that company, and that was all the help I needed. I watched my breath turning solid in the cold, and I looked up at all those little lights in the sky, and I made a wish for me and my friends: I wished that we would always be terrified of death, every last one of us, that we would spend the rest of our lives running from it, that we would dream about dying and wake up screaming, that we would be pathological in our fears—scared of heights, scared of bullets, scared of trains. *Oh, spare us, I remember thinking. Spare us, please spare us, because there are so many ways to die.* ❧