

Prologue: I Hate Myself
and I Want to Die

Prozac Nation
By Elizabeth Wurtzel

I start to get the feeling that something is really wrong. Like all the drugs put together-the lithium, the Prozac, the desipramine, and Desvrel that I take to sleep at night-can no longer combat whatever it is that was wrong with me in the first place. I feel like a defective model, like I came off the assembly line flat-out fucked and my parents should have taken me back for repairs before the warranty ran out. But that was so long ago.

I start to think there really is no cure for depression, that happiness is an ongoing battle. and I wonder if it isn't one I'll have to fight for as long as I live. I wonder if it's worth it.

I start to feel like I can't maintain the facade any longer, that I may just start to show through. And I wish I knew what was wrong.

Maybe something about how stupid my whole life is. I don't know.

My dreams are polluted with paralysis. I regularly have night visions where my legs, though attached to my body, don't move much.

I try to walk somewhere-to the grocery store or the pharmacy, nowhere special, routine errands-and I just can't do it. Can't climb stairs, can't walk on level ground. I am exhausted in the dream and I become more exhausted in my sleep, if that's possible. I wake up tired, amazed that I can even get out of bed. And often I can't. I usually sleep ten hours a night, but often it's many more. I am trapped in my body as I have never been before. I am perpetually zonked.

One night, I even dream that I am in bed, stuck, congealed to the sheets, as if I were an insect that was squashed onto the bottom of someone's shoe. I simply can't get out of bed. I am having a nervous breakdown and I can't move. My mother stands at the side of the bed and insists that I could get up if I really wanted to, and it seems there's no way to make her understand that I literally can't move.

I dream that I am in terrible trouble, completely paralyzed, and no one believes me.

In my waking life, I am almost this tired. People say, Maybe it's Epstein-Barr. But I know it's the lithium, the miracle salt that has stabilized my moods but is draining my body.

And I want out of this life on drugs.

I am petrified in my dream and I am petrified in reality because it is as if my dream is reality and I am having a nervous breakdown and I have nowhere to turn. Nowhere. My mother, I sense, has just kind of given up on me, decided that she isn't sure how she raised this, well, this thing, this rock-and-roll girl who has violated her body with a tattoo and a nose ring, and though she loves me very much, she no longer wants to be the one I run to. My father has never been the one I run to. We last spoke a couple of years ago. I don't even know where he is. And then there are my friends, and they have their own lives. While they like to talk everything through, to analyze and hypothesize, what I really need, what I'm really looking for, is not something I can articulate. It's nonverbal: I need

love. I need the thing that happens when your brain shuts off and your heart turns on.

And I know it's around me somewhere, but I just can't feel it. What I do feel is the scariness of being an adult, being alone in this big huge loft with so many CDs and plastic bags and magazines and pairs of dirty socks and dirty plates on the floor that I can't even see the floor. I'm sure that I have nowhere to run, that I can't even walk anywhere without tripping and falling way down, and I know I want out of this mess. I want out. No one will ever love me, I will live and die alone, I will go nowhere fast, I will be nothing at all. Nothing will work out. The promise that on the other side of depression lies a beautiful life, one worth surviving suicide for, will have turned out wrong. It will all be a big dupe.

It is Saturday night, we're about at that point when it starts to be Sunday morning, and I am curled up in fetal position on my bathroom floor. The black chiffon of my dress against the stark white tiles must make me look like a dirty puddle. I can't stop crying. The twenty or so people who are still sitting in the living room don't seem at all fazed by what's going on with me in here, if they notice at all, between sips of red wine and hits on a joint someone rolled earlier and chugs on Becks or Rolling Rock. We decided-my housemate, Jason, and I-to have a party tonight, but I don't think we meant for two hundred people to turn up. Or maybe we did. I don't know. Maybe we're still the nerds we were in high school who get enough of a kick out of the possibility of being popular that we actually did bring this on ourselves. I don't know.

Everything seems to have gone wrong. First, Jason opened the fire escape door even though it was the middle of January because it had gotten so hot with the crush of bodies, and my cat decided to make the six-flight climb down into the courtyard, where he got lost and confused and started

howling like crazy. I didn't have any shoes on and I was worried for him, so I ran down barefoot and it was freezing and it really shook me up to come back in to so many people I had to say, *Hello, how are you?* to, people who didn't know I have a cat that I am absolutely crazy about. For a while Zap and I hid in my room. He curled up on my pillow and gave me a look like all this was my fault. Then my friend Jethro, seeing that I was scared of all these people, offered to do a run up to 168th Street and get some cocaine, which would maybe put me in a better mood.

Being on so many psychoactive drugs, I don't really mess with recreational controlled substances. But when Jethro offered to get me something that might possibly alter my state just enough so I wouldn't want to hide under the covers, I thought, Sure, why not?

There's more: Part of the reason I am so meek is that I stopped taking my lithium a few weeks before. It's not that I have a death wish, and it's not that I'm like Axl Rose and think that lithium makes me less manly (he supposedly stopped taking it after his first wife told him that his dick wasn't as hard as it used to be and that sex with him was lousy; not having that kind of equipment, I'm in no position to give a shit). But I had my blood levels taken at the laboratory about a month ago, and I had an unusually high concentration of thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH)-about ten times the normal amount-which means that the lithium is wreaking havoc on my glands, which means that I could end up in a really bad physical state. Graves' disease, which is a hyperthyroid condition, runs in my family, and the treatment for it makes you fat, gives you these bulging, ghoulish eyes and creates all kinds of symptoms that I think would make me more depressed than I am without lithium. So I stopped taking it. The psychopharmacologist (I like to call his office the Fifth Avenue Crack House, because all he really does is

write prescriptions and hand out pills) told me I shouldn't. He told me that, if anything, the lithium was going to give me a condition the opposite of Graves' disease ("What does that mean?" I asked. "Will my eyes shrink up like crinkly little raisins?"), but I don't trust him. He's the pusherman, and it's in his interest to see that I stay loaded.

But he was right. Off lithium, I was fading fast. Some days, I'd sit with Jason reading the *Times* in the living room and I'd talk a blue streak, presenting him with all my theories about, say, the deterioration of the American family in the late twentieth century and how it all relates to the decline of an agrarian society. And Jason would mostly sit there, absorbed in the paper, wondering if I would ever shut up. But then most days I'd be bummed out, plain and simple, ineffectual, going blank again.

I really needed my lithium. But I was determined to cold-kick it. If cocaine would help, so be it. Coke may be really bad for you in every possible way, but it wouldn't give me a thyroid disease, thereby turning me into a younger version of my hysterical, exhausted, overwrought mother. So I did a few lines in the bathroom with Jethro, cutting them up on a Pogues CD. Not five minutes after the stuff first started floating around in my brain, I felt a whole lot better. I went out and mixed and mingled. I walked up to strangers and asked if they were having fun. When new guests arrived, I greeted them, kissing them on each cheek, European-style. I offered to fetch a beer or mix a screwdriver, give them a tour of the apartment, or show them where they should throw their coats. I said things like: There's someone you simply *must* meet. Or, grabbing some girl's hand and pulling her across the room: Have I got the guy for you. I was magnanimous and gregarious and all that stuff.

And then, a couple of hours later, I started coming down. I don't drink, so I didn't have any alcohol in my

take the edge off what was happening. But suddenly, everything turned ugly, grotesque. Spooky holograms all over the walls, like acid flashbacks without the color or wonder or other redeeming features. I felt a panic, as if there were things I needed to do while I was still on a coke high, and I had better do them before I completely dropped off. There was the guy I spent a misbegotten night with who said he'd call me and never did but came to the party anyway, and I felt pruned for a confrontation. There was my dad, who I really wanted to call just then, if only to remind him that he still owed me my allowance from the four years in high school when I couldn't find him. There were a zillion other things to do, but I couldn't remember what they were. I knew only that I wanted a few more minutes to live in this charmed, enchanted, wired state. I wanted just a little more time to feel free and easy and unhampered before returning to my depression. I wanted more coke. MORE! COKE! NOW! I started looking around the bathroom to see if there were any little bits of the powder left so I could keep it going.

As I patted my hands around the sink and frisked the floor, I got the weird sense that this sort of behavior maybe had its place in the eighties, but it seemed really stupid right now, completely pass& in the ascetic, adult nineties. And then I reminded myself that life is not a media-generated trend, I'll be damned if I'm going to deny myself just because of Len Bias and Richard Pryor and whoever else.

So I'm getting ready to ask Jethro to go back up to Spanish Harlem to get us some more of this stuff. I'm making plans, I'm thinking grandiose thoughts, I'm listing all the people I'm going to call once I'm coked up again and have the nerve. I'm deciding to spend the whole night writing an epic Marxist-feminist study of Biblical villainesses which I've been meaning to get started on for years. Or maybe I'll just find a twenty-four-hour bookstore and get a copy of Gray's *Anat*

omy and memorize it in the next few hours, apply to medical school, and become a doctor and solve all my problems and everyone else's too. I've got it all worked out: *Everything is going to be just fine.*

But before any of this can happen, I bed crumple onto my and start to weep uncontrollably.

Christine, my best friend, comes in to ask what's wrong. Other people come in to get their coats, strewn on my bed, and I start snapping at them, telling them to get the hell out. I start yelling at Christine that I want my room back, I want my life back. As if on cue, Zap proceeds to vomit on a coat that apparently belongs to someone named Roland, which seems like just deserts for coming to my party and being part of my awful night.

I have this palpable, absolute sense that I'm cracking up, that there's really no good reason why, and that-even worse-there's nothing I can do about it. And the thing that's really bugging me, as I lie curled up, is that the scene I'm enacting reminds me of something: It reminds me of my whole life.

just outside the French doors leading into my room, Christine and Jason and a few other friends-Larissa, Julian, Ron-are conferring. I can hear them, the whispers of discussion, but they don't sound nearly as concerned and conspiratorial as they might have a few years ago. They've seen me this way before, many times. They know I go through this, I survive, I go on, it could be severe premenstrual syndrome, it could be in this case it probably is-cocaine blues. It could be nothing.

I can imagine Jason saying: Elizabeth's having one of her episodes. I can imagine Christine saying: She's losing it again. I can imagine them all thinking that this is all about a chemical

deficiency, that if I'd just take my lithium like a good girl, this wouldn't happen.

By the time I stumble into the bathroom and slam both doors and curl up tight to the floor, I'm certain that there's no way they'll ever understand the philosophical underpinnings of the state I'm in. I know that when I'm on lithium, I'm just fine, that I can cope with the ebb and tide of life, I can handle the setbacks with aplomb, I can be a good sport. But when I'm off the drugs, when my head is clean and clear of this clutter of reason and rationality, what I'm mostly thinking is: Why? Why take it like a man? Why be mature? Why accept adversity? Why surrender with grace the follies of youth? Why put up with the bullshit?

I don't mean to sound like a spoiled brat. I know that into every sunny life a little rain must fall and all that, but in my case the crisis-level hysteria is an all-too-recurring theme. The voices in my head, which I used to think were just passing through, seem to have taken up residence. And I've been on these goddamn pills for years. At first, the idea was to get me going so I could respond to talk therapy, but now it seems clear that my condition is chronic, that I'm going to be on drugs forever if I just want to be barely functional. Prozac alone isn't even enough. I've been off lithium less than a month and I'm already perfectly batty. And I'm starting to wonder if I might not be one of those people like Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath who are just better off dead, who may live in that bare, minimal sort of way for a certain number of years, may even marry, have kids, create an artistic legacy of sorts, may even be beautiful and enchanting at moments, as both of them supposedly were. But in the end, none of the good was any match for the aching, enduring, suicidal pain. Perhaps I, too, will die young and sad, a corpse with her head in the oven. Scrunched up and crying here on a Saturday night, I can see no other way.

I mean, I don't know if there are any statistics on this, but how long is a person who is on psychotropic drugs supposed to live? How long before your brain, not to mention the rest of you, will begin to mush and deteriorate? I don't think chronically psychotic people tend to make it to the nursing-home-in-Florida phase of life. Or do they? And which is worse: to live that long in this condition or to die young and stay pretty?

I stand up to take out my contact lenses, which are falling out anyway, dripping down a sliding pond of tears. The pair I have on tonight is green, a spare set I got during a buy-one-get-one-free sale, which I wear when I feel like hiding behind a creepy, phony set of eyes. They give me an inanimate appearance like I'm spooked or from another planet or a lifeless Stepford Wife who cooks, cleans, and fucks with a blissful, idiotic smile. Because the lenses are already slipping off of my pupils, it appears that I have two sets of eyes, some sick twist on double vision, and as they slide out I look like a living doll, a horror movie robot whose eyes have fallen out of their sockets.

And then I'm back on the floor.

Jason comes in after everyone has left and urges me to go to bed, says something about how it will all feel better in the morning. And I say, Goddamnit, you asshole! I don't want it to feel better in the morning! I want to deal with the problem and make it better or I want to die right now.

He sits down next to me, but I know he'd rather be with Emily, his girlfriend, or anywhere else. I know he'd rather be washing dishes in the other room or sweeping the floor or gathering cans and bottles for the recycling bin. I know that I'm so awful right now that cleaning is more appealing than sitting with me.

Jason, how long have we known each other? I ask him.

He nods.

And how many times have you seen me like this? How many times have you found me bawling on the floor somewhere? How many times have you found me digging a grapefruit knife into my wrist, screaming that I want to die?

He doesn't answer. He doesn't want to say: Too often. Jase, it's like twenty-five years already, my whole life. Every so often there's a reprieve, like when Nathan and I first fell in love, or when I first started writing for *Die New Yorker*. But then the dullness of everyday kicks in, and I get crazy.

He says something about how when I'm on lithium I seem to be fine. Like that makes it all okay.

I start crying hard, taking little panicked breaths, and when I can talk it's only to say, I don't want to live this life. I keep crying and Jason just leaves me there.

Julian, who apparently is spending the night because he lost his keys, comes in next. I might as well be Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra*, receiving supplicants on the bathroom floor.

Julian says stuff like, Happiness is a choice, you've got to work toward it. He says it like it's an insight or something. He says, You've got to believe.

He says, Come on! Cheer up! Pull yourself together!

I can't believe how trite all this is. For a moment I want to step out of myself so I can teach him some better interpersonal skills, so I can help him learn to sound a little more sensitive, more empathic than all this.

But I can't stop crying.

Finally, he picks me up, mumbling something about how all this is nothing a good night's sleep won't cure, saying something about how we're going to go get some lithium in the morning, not understanding that I don't want to feel better in the morning: how that way of life is wearing me out that

I keep pushing away from him, demanding that he put me down. I am literally doing what people mean when they say, She went kicking and screaming. Poor Julian. I start poking at his eyes to get him to put me down because that's what I learned to do in a course on self-defense for women. Jason hears me screaming and comes in, and the two of them just kind of force me into bed, and I think that if I don't comply, maybe the men in white coats will come with a straitjacket and take me away, a thought that is momentarily comforting, and ultimately, like everything else, horrifying.

The first time I took an overdose was at summer camp. It must have been 1979, the year I turned twelve, when I had thin thighs, big eyes, peachy breasts, sunburn, and an edge-of-adolescence prettiness that would have made you think nothing could be wrong. Then one day during rest hour, I sat in my bed on the lower bunk, with my friend Lisanne napping just above me, and began to read a book whose epigraph was from Heraclitus: "How can you hide from what never goes away?"

I cannot remember the name of the book, any of its characters or contents, but the quote is indelible, does not come out in the wash, has been on my mind ever since. No matter how many chemicals I have ever used to bleach or sandblast my brain, I know by now, only too well, that you can never get away from yourself because you never go away.

Unless you die. Of course, I wasn't really trying to kill myself that summer. I don't know what I was trying to do. Trying to get my mind off my mind or something. Trying to

be not me for a little bit.

So I swallowed about five or ten caplets of Atarax, a prescription allergy medicine I was taking for hay fever. The drug, like most antihistamines, was highly soporific, so I fell asleep for a really long time, long enough to avoid swim in

struction at the lake and morning prayers by the flagpole through the end of the week, which was really the point after all. I couldn't imagine why I was being coerced into all those activities anyway—the rote motion of newcomb, kickball, soccer, the breast stroke, making lanyards, all this regimented activity that seemed meant only to pass a little more time as we headed, inexorably, toward death. Even then, I was pretty certain, in my almost-twelve-year-old mind, that life was one long distraction from the inevitable.

I would watch the other girls in my bunk as they blow-dried their hair in preparation for night activities, learned to apply blue eye shadow as they readied themselves to become teenagers, as they conjured boy problems like, Do you think he likes me? I watched as they improved their tennis serves and learned basic lifesaving techniques, as they poured themselves into tight Sasson jeans and covered up with quilted satin jackets in pink and purple, and I couldn't help wondering who they were trying to fool. Couldn't they see that all this was just process-process, process, process—all for naught.

Everything's plastic, we're all going to die sooner or later, so what does it matter. That was my motto.

As it happens, when I took all that Atarax at camp, I fell so blissfully asleep that no one seemed to notice that anything was wrong. For once, in fact, nothing was wrong. I was, like the line in a Pink Floyd album I couldn't stop listening to that year, comfortably numb. I think I must have been sick anyway—nothing more serious than a cold or cough, and had been staying in bed a lot. I didn't really want to go back to the infirmary, where gooey grape-flavored Dimetapp was universally recognized to be the cure for all ills. Perhaps it seemed to everyone that I was recovering from a summer flu or something like that. Or maybe they took my bed-bound state for granted, just as my classmates at school no longer expected me to be at lunch, had come to accept that I would

be hiding in the locker room carving razor cuts onto my legs, playing with my own blood, as if that's what everyone else was doing between 12:15 and 1:00 P.M. Every time one of the counselors tried to prod me out of bed, I was too passed out, and they probably thought it was easier just to leave me alone. It's not like I was anyone's pet.

Eventually, I think maybe Lianne got to worrying. The lump of my body under woolen blankets had become a strange fixture in the room. After a few days, the head counselor came to see me in my little cot, I think to encourage me to see a doctor. I thought to tell her that I would love nothing more than to receive medical attention—any attention would be just fine with me—but I was too incapacitated to move.

"So how are you feeling today?" she asked as she sat down at my feet, sliding a clipboard with schedules of activities on it beside her. Through a blur in my eyes, I looked down at her legs, full of varicose veins. She was wearing Keds that were perfectly white, as if they'd never been worn before.

"I'm fine."

"Do you think you'll want your _____ to go play volleyball with bunk this morning?"

"No." Did I look like I wanted to play volleyball, lying here and shivering under a thick wool army blanket in the middle of July?

"Well then," she continued, like it was normal, "you should probably see the nurse so we can figure out what's wrong with you. Are you feverish?" She pressed her hand to my forehead, which my mother once told me was not a reliable predictor of anything, just a gesture of maternal authority. "No, no." She shook her head. "If anything, you feel cold. That's probably because you haven't been eating."

I wondered how much she knew about me, if she'd been privy to my files, or if they even kept such things at summer

camp. Did she know that I really wasn't supposed to be here at all? Did she understand that it was just that my mother sent me here for an eight-week reprieve from single parenthood? Did she know that we had no money, that I was here as some sort of charity case, that they'd taken me because my mother worked too hard for too little and didn't know what else to do with me when school was out? Did she understand that this was all a big mistake?

"Look, I'm really not sick," I leveled with her. I was hoping that if I told her the truth about what was wrong with me she'd insist that my mother come get me this minute, which was all I really wanted. "I just have allergies, really bad allergies, and the other day I took some of my medication, and I must have taken too much because I haven't been able to move ever since."

"What kind was it?"

I reached into the tubby beside my bed where I kept tapes and books and pills, and flashed the near-empty bottle in front of her, shaking it like a baby's rattle. "Atarax. My doctor gave it to me."

"I see." Since I wasn't even twelve yet, she couldn't blame this on adolescent angst. She really couldn't blame this on much of anything. Neither could I.

I found myself wanting to explain it to her, to this middle-aged woman with the kind of haircut you call a hairdo, which needed to be set in rollers every night, who had a name like Agnes or Harriet, a name that even predated my mother's generation. I wanted to open up the vial and show her the Atarax, let her see that the white childproof cap could not fool this child. I wanted to show her the solid black pills and how pretty they were. They looked like what I imagined black beauties must look like. They were so tempting, their appearance was so

were meant to kill you. Never mind that they were just antihistamines, perhaps no stronger than what you get over the counter. Never mind that the person who prescribed them was thinking only of the pollen that was swelling my eyes and stuffing up my nasal passages. Never mind.

There was no way I could have explained my chronic moroseness to the head counselor, no way I could tell her how I had already alienated most of my bunkmates—who were themselves into Donna Summer and Sister Sledge and arguing over who got to be John Travolta and who got to be Olivia Newton John in their lip-sync renditions of Greaseby playing the Velvet Underground on my crappy little tape recorder late into the night. How could they possibly understand why it made no sense to me to listen to disco music and dance around the cabin when I could lie on the concrete floor with just the single bulb of bathroom light while Lou Reed's voice would lure me into a life of nihilism?

There was no way the head counselor or anyone else would ever understand that I didn't like being this way. How jealous I was of all the other girls who were boy crazy and loud and fun. How much I wanted to flip my hair and flirt and be rowdy but somehow just couldn't—didn't dare—even try anymore. How awful it would be for me when it was time to celebrate my birthday in a couple of weeks with a frosted cake at dinnertime. How horrible it would be when everyone sang and I blew out the candles, all the while everyone knowing that this was an elaborate act of pity or propriety, that it had nothing to do with anyone really being my friend. There was no way I could ever get them or the head counselor or anyone here who didn't know me from before to believe that it wasn't always like this, that I had convinced all the girls in my first-grade class that I was their boss (it was a simple swindle, a basic Ponzi scheme: if they didn't agree to accept me as their boss, none of the people I'd

be allowed to be their friends), that the teacher had to meet with the class as a group to explain that we were all free, that there was no such thing as a boss, and still my friends would not renounce me as their leader. How could I ever get her to see that I'd been the class bully, I'd been popular, I'd been in Pampers commercials at six months, had done Hi-C and Starburst ads later, had written a series of pet care books at age six, had adapted "Murders in the Rue Morgue" into a play at age seven, had turned construction paper and Magic Markers and tempera paint into an illustrated chapbook called *Penny the Penguin* at age eight, that no one in her right mind would ever have believed I'd come to this: eleven and almost gone.

My mother had attributed the changes in me to menarche, as if menstrual blood made everyone crazy, as if this were just a phase and I could still go to summer camp like I was okay after all. If my mom couldn't see what was happening, there was no way I could confide in this antediluvian head counselor, who seemed to have reached the safe verdict that I had mistakenly taken more pills than I should have, that perhaps the incessant rain was giving me such bad hay fever I'd gone a little overboard. "You realize you're supposed to give any prescription drugs to the nurse," she said, as if it mattered anymore. "You were supposed to do that at the beginning of the summer. She would have been able to administer these correctly."

I should have said, *Do I look like I give a shit about having my pills administered correctly? Do I?*

My little chat with the head counselor never really amounted to much. I saw her speak in hushed tones to my immediate counselors about why I was sleeping so much, and the next day one of the more senior medical people came to see me, but life went on as usual.

My parents never came charging up to the Pocono

Mountains to bring me back home. In fact, the way the head counselor looked at the Atarax bottle, you'd have thought that the pills were a danger to me and not, as was the case, that I was dangerous to myself. Once I got back home, my mother never mentioned the Atarax incident to me. My father, in one of our Saturday afternoon visits, which were dwindling to no more than one or two a month, did manage to express some concern. But I think everyone thought it was just a mistake, a little kid plays with matches and gets burned, a preteen has slightly more complex tools to mess with, takes too many pills, dozes (doses?) off for a little too long. It happens.

Monday morning, two days after the party, I am back at the Fifth Avenue Crack House, a.k.a. Dr. Ira's office. It's actually about three in the afternoon, but that's early for me.

Dr. Ira is berating me for going off lithium without discussing it with him first. I explain that I panicked, the Graves' disease and all. He explains that the blood tests I get every couple of months monitor me so closely that we would know if there were a problem long before it got out of hand, that we could take necessary steps in advance of such an emergency. He's making sense. I can't and don't argue. Besides, he tells me that the results on a second set of blood levels came out perfectly normal. He thinks the mistake was all about a misplaced decimal point, a computer error that turned 1.4 into, 14. Right now, the TSH level is a perfectly average 1.38.

Of course, I don't know what any of these numbers mean, don't really want to ask. But I can't pull myself away from a nagging suspicion that it just can't be this simple. What

I mean is this: Prozac has rather minimal side effects, the lithium has a few more, but basically the pair keep me

can't help feeling that anything that works so effectively, that's so transformative, has got to be hurting me at another end, maybe sometime further down the road.

I can just hear the words inoperable brain cancer being whispered to me by some physician twenty years from now.

I mean, the law of conservation says that no matter or energy is ever destroyed, it's only converted into something else, and I still can't say exactly how my depression has metamorphosed. My guess is it's still hanging out in my head, doing deadly things to my gray matter, or worse, that it's just waiting for the clock on this Prozac stuff to run out so that it can attack again, send me back into a state of catatonia, just like those characters in the movie *Awakenings* who fall back into their pre-L-dopa stupor after just a few months.

Every time I come in for an appointment, I run my misgivings by Dr. Ira. I say something like: Come on, level with me, anything that works this well has got to have some unknown downside.

Or, taking another tack: Look, let's face it, I was one of the first people to be put on Prozac after the FDA approved it. Who's to say that I won't be the test case that proves it causes, well, um, *say-inoperable* brain cancer?

He says a bunch of reassuring things, explains over and over again how carefully he is monitoring me-all the while admitting that psychopharmacology is more art than science, that he and his colleagues are all basically shooting in the dark. And he acts as if a million doctors didn't say the same things to women about DES, about the IUD, about silicone breast implants, as if they didn't once claim that Valium was a nonaddictive tranquilizer and that Halcion was a miracle sleeping pill. As if class-action suits against pharmaceutical companies were not fairly routine by now.

Just the same, I am leaving for Miami Beach the next day, am sufficiently sick of being miserable that I take two

little green and white Prozac capsules when I leave his office, and dutifully resume taking a twice-daily dose of lithium, also downing twenty milligrams of Inderal each day-a betablocker normally used to lower blood pressure-because I need it to counteract the hand shaking and the other tremorous side effects of lithium. Taking drugs breeds taking more drugs.

And I can't believe, looking at myself in the mirror, seeing what to all eyes must appear to be a young and healthy twenty-five-year-old with flushed skin and visible biceps-I can't believe anyone in his right mind would deny that these are just too damn many pills.