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# Need

*by Emily Homrok*

I allowed myself to purchase a drink for \$3.75 on the grounds that the one quarter returned would go toward another load of laundry, and also on the promise to myself that I would stay up and write and not give in to the cold sweat ushering me toward the under-the-covers. And I figured I deserved a small indulgence after what I'd gone through, another session.

It's not as if therapy is physically taxing. It's not like going to the gym and upon leaving you think, Gee, I'm beat, I deserve a Snickers for all that terrible work I put in, make it a king size. Like childbirth, I'm told, the moment you leave, it all ends. You are so tired, and yet the moment you lean your knees against the side of the bed, you do not really need to lie down. You need to pee so badly it's giving you prostate or uterine cancer, it's cramping you up into the shape of a wine rack inside, but you do not burst through the door, you turn the key and walk calmly into your apartment, and you check your email before walking still calmly toward the bathroom at the end of a long hallway. So I did not need this coffee concoction really, and I did not need to sleep off my chill really, and according to Dr. Marshall's unmistakable body language, I did not need a prescription, really.

Can you explain to me why you're so averse to talk therapy?

I've had some bad experiences.

Bad experiences?

My parents forced me to go to therapy when they got divorced a long time ago. It seemed pointless, it didn't do anything for me, so I stopped going. Then I went again a few months ago for this and she said she didn't understand. There wasn't anything she couldn't tell me about myself that I hadn't already figured out.

She would quickly find something objectionable in my completely reasonable thinking process.

What do you think made those experiences so negative for you?

I couldn't believe it, though I had expected it totally. It just proved my point. My point to no one. I couldn't fight the Man, the psychoanalytical Man, here in this office as compressed and muted as a room in a submarine would be (or the way I imagined a submarine might be when not in the midst of fiery World War II combat) when I was pleading the case that I was not alright and couldn't that be enough.

It was pointless. It didn't help me, at all. I didn't learn anything from it. Like I said, the second therapist said she didn't understand.

What didn't she understand?

Why I was depressed. Well, not why, but when. The timing of it baffled her.

I wasn't sure if I was going to say something so derogatory as "baffled," but when the time

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came I really wanted to be quite mean.

Dr. Marshall looked at me calmly, like a robot logically processing the sentiments of pity it cannot really feel for the human who is so glaringly inferior standing before its sensor-chip eyes.

So would you say you're averse to returning to talk therapy?

Yes.

Finally, she would get it. What was there possibly to analyze in a Yes. I hoped.

What are you hoping to get out of your visit here?

A referral to a psychiatrist. I'd like to try and get on antidepressants.

She wrote something down: "HA HA lets see her try!" There's an apostrophe between the t and the s you stupid horrible doctor. I wondered what she really thought of me and hoped it was some stereotype that would prove her ignorance when she was called to trial in the apocalypse not of good versus evil but of real people versus empty people. This apocalypse had nothing to do with Satan or meteorites, though possibly it was connected to overpopulation or government spying. People would have to defend themselves in an ultimate trial. I wondered what the doctor, whose bubble of immediate personal space was cool and clean unlike my own polluted sweaty air, was thinking of while I daydreamed a preposterous apocalypse. Maybe she wasn't so bad. I felt like a fool and receded into the seat. But I found no matter which position I assumed I could not improve my body's awful feng shui.

Generally people get the best results from talk therapy sessions while they're taking the antidepressants.

Does this mean I'm going to get them? I thought.

I didn't know what to say, so I waited for some doctor jargon to come coursing easily out like strings of math equations over rocks.

I'm going to give you a card, she said, stretching toward a glazed clay pot which I imagined had been made by her niece because she seemed too young to have a daughter, especially now that it was fashionable to bear children in one's forties and early fifties. She wrote something on the card and handed it to me between two fingers the way a man on Wall Street with slicked-back hair would. I looked at it.

It's for the Avery Behavioral Center.

ABC. I imagined a clinical white lobby split with the bright colors of grotesque clowns and tumblers, honking rubber horns. I would run back into the street screaming, and then my troubles would really begin.

That's the main phone number. You'll be prompted and then there'll be a brief over-the-phone screening that usually takes ten to fifteen minutes. Don't mention not wanting therapy right off the bat.

Why not?

It's frowned upon.

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I left Dr. Marshall with my new card, my key into a scientific sub-community where I could make doctor contacts and be friends with pretty junkie girls with tangled hair. I would become a famous case study. They would take me around on a medical tour bus with a marble-top bar inside and stand me up in plastic gowns in front of huge psychiatric conventions and consortiums and indicate various parts of my body and my skull with a white pointer. I would get deafening applause for being so amicably ill and they would take me out to give interviews and receive examinations. After these ended one night I would strike up conversation with a kind, brilliant young medical student. The sex soon to follow would be the stuff of Hollywood or even tragic Grecian myth, because I would possess the kind of overwhelming, fervent passion afforded only afflicted, three-named people like Vincent Van Gogh or F. Scott Fitzgerald, and his combination of anatomical knowledge and deep anthropological love for humankind would make him excruciatingly potent. We would have the best sexual chemistry in the entire world, get married, own several beautiful properties (chic in New York City, relaxed in the New England woods, classically rugged on our ranch in Montana or Nevada), and that would be the end of my depression.

Needless to say, so I'll say it, that wasn't to be. Though I did call the ABC place once I got back to my apartment.

I removed my shirt first because I was sweating badly. I have small breasts so I generally don't wear a bra, especially not under sweaters, and doubly especially not under formless sweaters (i.e. grey hoodies, more so than say a form fitting purple wool sweater for fancy restaurants). So I was naked from the waist up while I spoke on the phone with a woman named Michelle. I like talking to friends, or strangers will do, on the phone casually while I'm naked from coming out of the shower, or maybe prosaically cleaning the small piece of stainless steel that is fixed through my clitoral hood. That kind of piercing, I was warned, can take up to a year to heal. That was fine with me. I wasn't going to be seeing anybody any time soon. Especially no sweet biology virtuoso with a dazzling future in place as firmly as the jewelry.

And have you been with us before, ma'am?

Her voice was loud enough to crackle through the speakers even after I turned them down, so there was a delay before I answered, and I couldn't help but prefix my responses with a dim Uh.

Uh, no I haven't.

Last name?

And so on. She asked me statistical questions like she was making a trading card of me for twenty minutes. During the intervals of keyboard clacking, which were almost comically lengthy, I thought about my trading card. I wouldn't be heart-poundingly rare, but I wouldn't be the card you get three of in every pack either. Some editions would be matte, others slick and metallic. There would be a 2009 version as well as 2010. I pictured the number 2010 in my head. It looked very futuristic. Science fiction movies I'd seen as a teenage had superimposed 2010s on the bottom of the screen, in blocky green or white computer font which would blink a few times before fading to reveal a dystopian Los or New Angeles beset by drugs and violent cyborg gangs.

Los. Los. Los. Angeles. What a romantic name. Los. So exotic, and we all took it for granted.

Alright, now I have to give you a starter screening over the phone. Do you have ten minutes?

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Uh, yes, I do.

Alright, give me just one second.

Lots of noisy typing. I couldn't imagine how the office must sound, all day from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. But they were professional bangers of keys and tuners out of other equally loud cubicles, they would be unfazed by it.

Have you had any problems sleeping?

Uh, yeah. I can't sleep. I wake up really early too, when I do. I mean sleep.

Any changes in appetite?

Mm, I don't eat as much. Yeah.

Crying fits?

Yes.

How frequently?

It seemed so ridiculous now, to be admitting and assessing in one fell swoop my bottomless and inexplicable crying fits. They came out of nowhere. I would curl up in bed, sweating under the covers in the dimming late-middle of the day, and grimace hideously for minutes to hours at a time, squeaking and sniffing. It wasn't pretty crying like Humphrey Bogart would pull you close to get rid of. It was ugly modern day crying. More than once people thought I was laughing.

But I guessed this was what people did when they had a problem.

Maybe a few times a week?

Clacking, clacking, clacking.

She asked me more questions like this over the next five minutes. My answers seemed unimpressively normal. No, I didn't see or hear things others did not, No, I didn't want to hurt myself or others, No, I hadn't tried to kill myself in the past, and No, I did not have a problem with substance abuse. I was hardly worth helping at all. I was doing great compared to others more in need than I.

Nonetheless she scheduled an appointment for me, next Wednesday with Dr. Dominguez (ABCD – perhaps s/he would prescribe me Effexor, which would Fail, and I would have to Go to the Hospital, or to Hell) at 11 a.m. I wondered if Dr. Dominguez was a man or a woman, though I had no preference. It was a week away and besides that I could justify to myself taking the day off from work. Things were looking up, maybe.

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