

Scramble

By Susan D. Holmes

I am having a panic attack.

It's very clear to me, and it's a small comfort to be able to give a label to it. It gives it a sense of predictability, even though, in its very name, it is an attack of panic. Now that I can consider myself a seasoned Depression sufferer, I can recognize the onset of a panic attack and brace myself for impact. "You are having a panic attack," I say over and over again as I'm engulfed in the chaos that should be familiar to me by now but never is, and never will be. I've had depression and anxiety since I was a child (which I suppose I still am, or never was, if you want to be cryptic about it), though I was only properly diagnosed and medicated this past September.

This is an odd piece of writing. I had thought it would reflect my state of mind right now, but it seems quite composed. I suppose I should attempt to describe it better.

Manic.

Panic.

Crazy.

Madness.

Insanity.

Break.

Dark.

Frenzy.

Grip.

Scramble.

Those are some of the words that come to mind. It feels like your mind is scrambled, that's the most eloquent way to put it. It's running a million billion miles per nanosecond, like one of those machine/cash register things, I can't think of exactly what it's called right now and I'm too impatient to try, that gets triggered by something and starts reeling off a mess of receipt paper that pours and tangles all around the room, unstoppable. I feel like I want to cry and laugh at the same time. I feel on the very verge of insanity, and it terrifies me more than anything in the world. I never want to lose my mind. It is perhaps my greatest fear, although I have a lot of them to rifle through before I can reach a solid verdict.

Solid. That's another thing I feel, but I feel the opposite of it. Shaky, fragile, I don't know; I'm too impatient to similize. That's not a word, thanks for letting me know Microsoft Word. Think I could've figured that one out for myself. I thought writing this all down would help, but it seems to make me crazier. There's too much I want to write and I can't remember it all and I'm rushing to fit it all in.

The thing that scares me most about a panic attack is wait no I can't say what I was going to say because I thought of too many other fears that contest it too closely. There are a lot of things about panic attacks that scare me, though I think that should be quite obvious. "Panic attack" is a scary word. It sounds insane itself, and it has a connotation of insanity. Even when I hear people say "panic attack," I think of a crazy person. Does that constitute me as crazy? My Psychiatrist would say no. But that's kind of what she's paid to do. Besides, how do you go about telling someone they're crazy, and why on earth would you do it? The repercussions far

outweigh the benefits, if there even are any to add to the scale.

...And *there's* the paranoia!

I feel shaky. I feel exhausted and energized at the same time. I don't know what to do. There is nothing to do. I feel lonely. It's 9:41 at night. These things never seem to occur in daylight. Nighttime is better suited for madness, I suppose. I'm so lonely. I almost cried repeating that line. It's true though, I am. And I have other friends with depression. Some are people I am only acquainted with, whom I know little else about; diagnosis being our uniting factor. I have my great friends and sister from camp, but they live halfway across the country or further, and even if I called them which I must shamefully admit I have before, I would feel weak and needy and I wouldn't want to give them the burden. Especially not my sister, she just got into the best theatre program in the world for college. I would never want to dampen the moment. I mean that sincerely, even though it came out sarcastic.

It's weird how we find out about each other's Depression. That always bugs me, by the way. "Each other," I mean. It definitely should be each other, everyone agrees and knows it instinctively, so I don't know why it isn't. We make up the words, we can change them if we feel the need to, can't we? Anyway, I've digressed. I was talking about how we find out. Well, some people go around talking about it to seek attention, but I don't know many truly depressed people who do that. It's too embarrassing, and it's too often met with "come on, you're not actually depressed...chill." A lot of times when you do share it with an empathizer, it's triggered by something simple. A fleeting remark about medicine to someone who, as it turns out, understands the remark and, in a moment of excitement at a possible connection, relates

enthusiastically. Then, even if you hardly know the person, you complain about your medicine and psychiatrists and panic attacks together, because you can't with anyone else. Sometimes you find things to complain about just for the sake of complaining. It's hard to explain. Having a mutual confidant is like a luxury. With closer friends, it usually comes up in conversation, especially with girls (hope that's not too much of a generalization). That's how it happened at camp, and it's usually something that occurs in similar bonding situations, like sleepovers. You get to that conversation stage where you reveal extremely personal things about yourself simply because you long to reveal them to someone. In a sleepover this is usually late at night, in the darkness and in hushed tones. At camp, it was in our dorm room, when we were bored of gossiping. A bunch of us had congregated in one particular girl's room. I hadn't even been a part of the group, originally. Looking back it was probably pretty forward of me, and it seemed like I was eavesdropping. I was walking by to my own room and the door was open, and I heard snippets about psychiatrists. I was instantly thrilled. It's a delightful moment when you learn of someone else "normal" with a psychiatrist. In that flash of glee, a little voice in my head said "no, this is reckless and intrusive, they'll think you're weird and rude and nosy!" I told the voice to shut up and poked my head in and said something along the lines of "sorry are we talking about therapy in here? I couldn't resist!" To my immense relief I was welcomed and everyone shared their psychiatrist horror stories, crazy stuff they did, and what meds they were on. We were all trying to one up each other, so we could allow ourselves to feel like we had it rough.

I feel crazy and I hate it. Panic attacks are awful. It's pessimistic and I'll probably read this back later and feel stupid and embarrassed, but the thing about panic attacks is they're completely in the present moment and nowhere else. It's all about now and how you're feeling

currently. You can't see on to tomorrow and you can't remember how you managed the last time. Your only comfort is the knowledge that you did at all. It doesn't feel like it will ever end. It feels like I will fall from the edge of the sanity cliff I've been teetering on so precariously. Wow, that was wordy. Panic attacks make you wordy without even requiring thought. I've never typed three pages so quickly. (Now it's five, because I've gone and added so much.)

I'm rambling. But I don't know what else to do. There was something else I wanted to say. It was insightful and profound; at least it was in my head. I'm sure it will seem remarkably unremarkable later, but as I mentioned before, later doesn't matter much now. I think it was some sort of observation about the nature of panic attacks. Now I remember. You feel crazy during them, and you get this odd sort of over-logical, cynical way of thinking. There's no love, there's not God, there's no magic, there's nothing. Imagination is a coping mechanism. Optimism is a coping mechanism. Every fanciful, whimsical feeling is a coping mechanism. That's what makes me wonder, what is a panic attack, really? It's generally considered a period of muddled thought. What if it's the opposite, though? What if a panic attack is a very long moment of pure clarity and logic, when you see everything as it is, and that's why it's so terrifying? It's startling, and we as humans can't handle it. I sound like an atheist. Or a pessimist. One could say the two kind of go hand in hand, though that's hardly comforting.

I'm satisfied with this, at least somewhat. I think I got all the points across that I wanted to. I'm very tired. And still panicky, but to the point where I don't even feel motivated to write much more. Yes thank you Microsoft Word, I am aware that that is not a proper application of syntax. And I do not care. See, there's another example to prove it! Or maybe not. No green

underlining to tell me so. Oh, look, now there's some. I'm satisfied.

I want to get to get to five pages, so you'll have to endure my rambling for a bit longer, dear reader. Teachers hate that. Referring to the reader as the reader. But there is a reader whether you like it or not, and I think it's rather rude not to acknowledge them. No point in ignoring the dear reader, especially when they're so kindly reading this. Not quite sure who the reader of this is yet. Maybe just future me. Or the soul of my computer when the software mutates and develops a soul and possibly takes over the world. Oh, panic thoughts. So amusing.

Well, I'm on the fifth page now. Even though I double-spaced, so it kind of feels like cheating. I'm sad. Oh, I thought of another way to describe these panic attacks. One of the scarier bits, because it's so unexplainable, but I'll try. It's kind of like there's this veil, or you're trapped in a bubble, and everything's kind of hazy. You see things but they don't really resonate. You feel like you're slightly apart from the rest of the world or the rest of time or the rest of whatever. You want to burst through and feel *there* again; feel present. But you can't, and it's frustrating and scary.

It's so scary. I just want it to be over.

The thing about depression that sucks is that it's kind of been cheapened, in a way. The diagnosis has lost its value as the term itself has. Because now, everyone says, whenever they're sad or overwhelmed, "I'm so depressed." And they're not. Or, when they actually are, everyone says "nooo, you're not depressed, you're fine. You're just being dramatic, you're just sad or stressed or whatever." And it's annoying beyond explanation. Depression is a medical disease. You take medication for it every day and suffer panic attacks that make school really hard and

you have a ton of absences because you have to miss class to go to inconveniently-scheduled Psych appointments, because their offices are so *crazy*. Ha. Irony. And reading that back just now it sounds lame. And maybe it is. I use depression/anxiety as an excuse some times. Probably another coping mechanism. If I'm feeling sick? It's probably a reaction to the Prozac. If I haven't turned an essay in to my teacher, even though it's weeks late and I have an actual F in the class, not just an "OMG I am like failing" when it's actually an 87% or something but a real, true, F, and I will never get into college, even though people expect me to and expect me to be studious because I seem that way and I'm a nerd and I read all the time and just give off that sort of "studious" vibe? It's got to be the depression/anxiety. It's causing me to feel overwhelmed and procrastinate. It can't possibly be extreme laziness.

Oh look at that, six pages. Well now I have to go on to seven, because six is a creepy devil-number, and seven is an amazing good-luck number, anyway, so why on earth wouldn't I? I don't know what to do. I don't. I'm stuck. Ooh, thought of another analogy. It's like running on an out-of-control treadmill. You're not going anywhere, you're stuck on that treadmill and you can't get off, but you're going super fast and you feel like you're going a million directions at once.

Everything seems so bleak during a panic attack. Bleak. Good diction. I must confess that I'm not a very confident person in general, but during a panic attack my self-worth goes into the negatives, so that I actually repulse myself. I'm stupid and boring and absolutely nothing special. And, I'm ugly. The physical imperfections I notice everyday and push to the back of my mind burst forward with terrible force. I hate my nose. It's huge and crooked and points downward. I wish it were dainty and cute. I hate my lips. They're thin. Paired with my eyes and nose, I look

sleezy when I smile. My eyes. They're too small. They're too weak. They need loads of make-up to look nice, and I don't particularly like loads of make-up, and apparently it doesn't like me much either because it never stays on for very long. My eyes need more color. People in books always have gorgeous eyes. An electric, impossible green, or deep, chocolately, warm rich brown, or striking grey, or coal-black, or bluer than the sea. People possess those kinds of eyes in real life, but it's less common than it seems to be in books and it's very noticeable when it does occur. Gorgeous eyes are the mark of a unique individual.

Wow. Who would've thought a piece of writing about so deep a topic could be so shallow. This is the mere whinings of a teenage girl. Nothing more. Oh, well. I need to distract myself with TV or a book, and sit this thing through. I hope it's over before I go to sleep, because it's a miserable thing to go to sleep with. Worse, though is waking up with a lingering panic attack. The only comfort that gets you to sleep is the assurance that "The Sun'll Come Out Tomorrow," truly. In my experience with panic attacks, I always feel wondrously better in the morning, and very embarrassed when I think back on the things I was thinking the previous night. But, as I said before, I don't know whether that's my brain righting itself, or wronging itself because it can't handle being right.

However, the last time I had a panic attack, I woke up feeling just as awful the next morning. It was strange. I went to school still having my panic attack, though I didn't show it. I had never known that before. Usually, the regulation and familiarity and social interactions of school bring me out of the haze, but this time I couldn't break through. I'm very worried that that may happen again. And with my grandmother's wake tomorrow, it would seem

appropriate, though ill-timed, if that's not too much of an oxymoron to make sense.

Well, I think I'm done. I know this sounds pathetic and complaining. I do. I know that there are people in far worse states of depression, contemplating suicide or resorting to physical pain to feel like they're doing *something* to address their condition. But Depression, or at least panic attacks, kind of inhibit your sense of perspective. And maybe that's another excuse, but like I said before, it's all about now. Ha. More irony, or something of the sort. "Like I said *before*, it's all about *now*." Get it? Oh dear. I'm certainly not helping my case. I'm sane, I promise. I hope. I hope to God. Well, sorry to be anticlimactic, but... bye.

Oh wait. P.S. Another thing. A vent-y thing. *It is so annoying* when people make remarks about depression meds such as "that stuff messes you up, it's not natural, it takes over your mind," or "I think people need to be strong enough not to rely on depression meds to make them feel better." My mom always says "people don't say the same thing about people with diabetes. They're both diseases that need to be treated with medicine." Still, even though I have depression, I hear that and I think "diabetes is different." You can't help but think of depression in a similar way to alcoholism. It just seems like it's self-inflicted. I couldn't tell you why. Ok, now I'm truly done. Even though all my remarks about "what page I'm on" are probably messed up from me going back and adding things in random places. Ok, I'm done now. I mean it. See?