
ANXIETY, STRESS AND DEPRESSION

I

ANXIETY

“OH MY GOD, I’M GOING TO DIE!” screamed Marvin as he lurched up in bed in a frozen sweat. It was his fortieth birthday and he was all alone, with lousy prospects, loathed his job and had a receding hairline migrating towards his back.

Marvin grabbed his alarm clock, wailing its terrifying shriek, and crushed the plastic clock face between his teeth. Silence. Well, almost. Just the roaring sounds of DC 10’s descending over his apartment, a blasting leaf blower and the droning freeway outside his bedroom window.

Marvin slid out of bed like a stalking cat and crept to the bathroom, shivering with expectant dread. The icy tile electrocuted his senses as he peered into the cracked mirror of his medicine cabinet.

Marvin’s greasy hair was blasted back like he’d stuck his head out his car window at ninety-five miles an hour. His

bloodshot eyes were bulging with fright like he'd just seen a woman sawed in half . . . and it was no magic trick. A throbbing vein bulged out of his throat like an engorged earth worm, then slithered around his neck and down his spine.

Marvin was ready for his first cup of coffee.

But first, a quick shave. He turned on the hot water, the pipes creaking like an old woman cracking her arthritic knuckles. Rust pitifully dribbled from the faucet like Montezuma's revenge and Marvin sympathetically groaned as if from intestinal cramping. There was no hot water, again.

Marvin impulsively plucked five wispy hairs from his receding hairline before reaching for his dull disposable. He would have to shave with cold water, like in the army, only Marvin hadn't been in the army and his hand was shaking unnervingly. Even worse, as he stared at himself in the mirror, it appeared that he was about to be shaved by an insane madman. Marvin suddenly grinned at this notion, noticing how yellow his teeth had become. Four packs of cigarettes and twelve cups of coffee a day all contributed. That, and the fact that he had a dark phobia of dentists and hadn't been to one in thirteen years.

Marvin raised the shaking razor in his palsied hand towards his terrified face. Suddenly, as if his hand had a mind of its own, he impulsively swept downwards over his stubble covered jaw. It was far too aggressive of a move, even for Marvin, and he burrowed off a healthy fruit roll of flesh.

Marvin shrieked, not from the obvious pain, but because he realized he was dilly-dallying. He dove for his Timex. It was six forty-seven! He was running terrifyingly late. He had actually been staring at himself in the mirror for over twenty minutes.

His face a gory mess, Marvin sat at his breakfast nook with a wash rag stuffed into the bloody cheek cavern. His mouth felt dry as he stared out the breakfast room window at the brick wall of the sanitarium next door.

Suddenly, Marvin started sobbing. Large ribbons of snot dangled like bungy cords over the breakfast table. He wiped his nose on his bare forearm which quickly began to harden, as if it had been permaplaqued. Marvin, unfazed, was already digging into a bowl of Instant Lumpy Oatmeal.

Marvin's Doberman, Helmut, stood barking beside the breakfast table as Marvin rooted out countless oatmeal lumps. The barking hadn't bothered Marvin ever since he had his dog's larynx removed, which he had accomplished moments earlier with a pair of barbecue tongs.

Just then, one of the lumps of oatmeal seemed to have something to say. Marvin, curious, lifted the lump in his spoon and placed it on the side of his ceramic bowl. The lump seemed to be anxious, or was it the sight of Marvin that so terrified this shivering lump?

The lump nervously cleared its tiny throat and said to Marvin, "You're late, you're a worthless failure, you'll never get a raise and you're going to pass a kidney stone."

Perhaps to prove this last point, the lump snapped its glutinous fingers and Marvin instantaneously experienced the sensation of barbed wire being slowly dragged through his sex organ as if by a weary pack mule. The pain was indescribable (though flaming Napalm comes close). Marvin tightly gripped the sides of his chair, holding on with white-knuckled abandon, as the tiny piece of gut glass mercifully found the exit into Marvin's boxer shorts. Marvin reached in and removed the bloody pebble from his B.V.D.s.

With a deranged grin, Marvin grabbed the laughing oatmeal lump off his bowl. “No! . . . Noooooo!” cried the miserable lump. But this was payback time. Marvin shoved the kidney stone into the lumps gaping mouth. The lump gagged, choking on the calcified stone, and then horribly expired, falling back into the steaming bowl with a moist thud.

Marvin glanced at his watch. It was past seven! He bolted from his chair. He was running dangerously late and he hadn’t even completed any of his paperwork from the previous day. If his boss found out he’d been slacking off he would surely hack him to death with a machete. Oh, it had been done before. First, the pleads of mercy emanating from the bosses office. Then . . . the hacking sounds.

Marvin dashed to the bedroom, tripping over Helmut, his amazingly silent barking Doberman. His heart thumped in his temples and he felt an oncoming panic attack as he realized there was no way he could make it to work on time. Unless, of course, there had been a nuclear blast or an overnight plague and the streets were empty. But it was too much to hope for . . . He was doomed.

Marvin considered doing himself in but couldn’t afford a funeral and he wouldn’t give his enemies the thrill of seeing him buried in an unmarked grave. He abruptly stopped pacing and gasped a deep breath. Marvin hadn’t remembered to take a breath since waking up. Feeling dizzy with oxygen, the blue fading from his face, Marvin headed for his closet.

The closet door ominously squeaked open like Dracula’s coffin. He reached inside, suddenly remembering what happened last time. But it was too late. A grey flannel suit yanked him in. The door slammed shut.

The arms of the flannel suit wrapped around Marvin's neck, obviously trying to strangle him to death. Fortunately, the suit was unaware of Marvin's superhuman breath-holding abilities as Marvin collapsed to the closet floor, playing dead.

The suit hung on its hanger, relishing the kill. Marvin, meanwhile, put plan "B" into effect. He felt around the back of the closet and located his 9mm Baretta. He checked the clip. Damn! No bullets. He had emptied it yesterday on a pair of murderous argyle socks.

Marvin realized he would have to find the bullets, take them from the box and load the clip without his suit noticing, a nearly impossible task in the cramped closet. He felt around the floor for his hollow-points, touched something in the dark and thought he had the bullets, but the object escaped his grasp. "Uh-oh," gulped Marvin, dreading his two-toned Oxfords. As if on cue, Marvin felt a crushing kick to his ribs like a place kicker firing a field goal. He felt another dull kick in his other side and saw his Nikes getting into the act.

Marvin was being mercilessly mugged by his own shoes.

"Yahoo!!" whooped a pair of green lizard cowboy boots. Marvin now recalled last years business trip to Houston. He had never worn the boots but he'd paid too much to discard them so they had sat at the back of his closet collecting dust balls . . . until now. The steel-toed shit-kickers cocked backwards against the rear of the closet and then, like John Wayne on steroids, swung forward with a viscous mule kick, striking Marvin between the eyes. There was a cracking sound like a broken bat and Marvin reached up to feel his warm brains oozing through his fingers.

Meanwhile, Marvin's other hand finally located the bullets. He loaded the clip while the cowboy boots attempted to stampede him to death. The other shoes, feeling left out, joined in for an impromptu flamenco on his forehead.

A second later, Marvin started firing.

First, he nailed the cowboy boots with two clean shots. Then, he rolled on his other side to blast the Nikes which exploded in rubber carnage.

The flannel suit leaped off its hanger onto Marvin's back, attempting to take his gun, as the Oxford two-tones repeatedly kicked him in the groin. Marvin's testicles blossomed like the Elephant Man but he kept his composure as he blew away his dress shoes.

There was now only one bullet left . . . for the suit. Marvin gnawed the flannel sleeve draped over his mouth, biting off the buttons. He heard his front teeth crack, but it was worth it as the suit grabbed its sleeve in pain. Marvin took the opportunity to fire, striking the suit squarely in the pocket hankie. The suit tumbled back grabbing its ragged chest, fabric flying.

Marvin victoriously declared, "I got you, you cheap, friggin', off-the-rack suit!" The suit begged Marvin for mercy, but he just coolly reloaded. Marvin took aim and unmercifully shot the suit in one knee, then the other. He was firing like a maniac now, emptying the clip, until the suit was a wrinkled smoking heap on the closet floor.

Marvin selected a blue polyester suit hanging petrified on a hanger, then limped, triumphant, out of the closet.

Marvin gazed at himself in the mirror. It wasn't a pretty sight. He had an oozing gash on his forehead, his cheek divot

had consumed the wash cloth and his swollen groin was audibly groaning . . . and Marvin hadn't even made it out of the house.

Bloodied, but not beaten, Marvin took another deep breath, his second of the day, and went to find his briefcase, no small task in this castle of horrors he called home.

"Here boy . . . here boy," sang Marvin, then whistled. Helmut came galloping.

"My briefcase . . . go find briefcase!" commanded Marvin. But Helmut wasn't budging, holding out for a liver biscuit.

Marvin didn't have time for Helmut's antics. His blood pressure was frightfully high, his head throbbed like a Zulu war drum and his pecker burned like he'd just pissed Drano. So, Marvin just stood there and ripped off his fingernails between his cracked teeth, one at a time, until the bones poked out the end of his fingertips.

"Find briefcase!" Marvin angrily ordered Helmut, pointing a bony digit towards his office. But Helmut instead growled and backed Marvin up against the kitchen sink. Marvin dropped the box of Crunchy Liver Chunks and raised his open palms to his shoulders, surrendering. Helmut ripped apart the box of biscuits as Marvin tiptoed past.

Marvin was in his study now and could see his imitation alligator briefcase beside his desk. He approached the briefcase, looming ominously closer with each step.

Remembering what had happened the day before, Marvin wasn't taking any chances. He held a broom in front of him for protection as he gingerly crossed the high pile carpet like a mine field. Two feet away, Marvin reached forward with the broom stick, lifted the briefcase by the handle and placed it

onto his desk like a ticking bomb. So far, so good. But now came the tricky part. As horror music crescendoed in his head, he clicked open the latches one at a time. The alligator briefcase yawned open. Once again, so far, so good. Marvin lifted the briefcase lid and was horrified to see . . . nothing. He put his hand on the edge of the briefcase as he peered inside. Where was all his paperwork?? Then again, what the hell was he working on?? And, even worse, he thought with soaring dread . . . where do I work??? But his frenzied contemplations were cut short as the case suddenly snapped shut, biting off his hand.

Marvin howled in agony, his severed wrist pulsing blood like a Las Vegas fountain, as the briefcase scurried under the desk with the hand inside its vinyl belly.

He thought of calling 911, as plasma drained from his wrist, but the ambulances had stopped responding to Marvin's calls ages ago. So, he frantically crawled under his desk and came face to face with Helmut, clutching the briefcase in his rabid jaws.

"Good, good doggie," encouraged Marvin, realizing he was experiencing the first positive emotion of the day and worrying about it at the same time. He lunged for the case with his only hand, but Helmut viciously growled.

What could he possibly want now? wondered Marvin as his blood formed a lily pond on the floor and Helmut mimed a bark. Then, he remembered, the dog's larynx! Yes, the larynx! Marvin dashed for the kitchen garbage and began rummaging through maggoty remnants of decomposing meals. There, tangled in a knot of leftover sweetbreads was Helmut's larynx.

“Fetch!” commanded Marvin as he flung the larynx. Just as he had hoped, Helmut dropped the briefcase and ran for his voice box.

As Helmut futilely lapped up his vocal cords, Marvin opened the briefcase and retrieved his severed hand. The case was filled with blood and he decided he wouldn’t be needing it, since there wasn’t any paperwork in there anyhow.

With precious seconds to spare, Marvin stapled his hand back onto his wrist. It would have to do until he had time to properly stitch it on with dental floss.

Grimacing in pain, he staggered towards the garage, determined to make it to work. That is, if he had a job to go to? . . . What if he was fired for being late? . . . They were probably replacing him right now . . . unless . . . unless . . . he hurried . . . he really, really HURRIED!

Marvin became a madman, a wild demon ready to hit the highway like the Tasmanian Devil on speed. He flicked on the garage light and leaped to his Ford Festiva.

With his operational hand, Marvin removed the keys from his pocket. Unfortunately, his fingers were trembling so with shock and hypertension that he dropped them on the garage floor. “DAMN!” He bent down to pick them up and when he stood back up he brutally banged his tender cranium on the car’s door handle. A guaranteed concussion, though merely a minor annoyance at this point.

Marvin unlocked the Festiva’s door, gratefully without incident, jumped into his therapeutically beaded bucket seats and took a cursory glance at himself in the rear-view mirror. Marvin tried smoothing back his electrified hair but it was like Medusa trying to tame the snakes. He gave up and tugged at

the washcloth embedded in his cavernous cheek. It wouldn't budge. The washcloth had become a part of Marvin's anatomy and he decided to leave it there until he got to work. He made a mental note, however, to remove it when he arrived, recalling the embarrassing episode when he spent a whole day with a roll of toilet paper wrapped around his neck, holding on his severed head.

He turned on the ignition. "Vrooooo!" Amazingly, the car started. He revved the engine, until the garage filled with black smoke and he considered ending it all right there. Instead, he opened the automatic garage door and peeled backwards onto the freeway on-ramp.

The tattooed trucker Marvin cut off in traffic, leaned his head out the window and suggested to Marvin that he go, "fornicate himself," in more ways than the Kamasutra.

Unimpressed, Marvin attempted to flip-off the trucker with his severed hand but the staples broke and he wound up flipping-off himself instead.

Nevertheless, he was on the road and on his way to work. Maybe it wasn't going to be such a bad day after all, thought Marvin as he suddenly hit the breaks and skidded over the embankment.

ANXIETY, STRESS AND DEPRESSION

II

STRESS

Marvin was horrifyingly late for work. In front of his Ford Festiva wound a thirty mile snake of bumper to bumper cars. He clenched his teeth like a scrap metal press and listened to them crack as he pressed the accelerator to the floor mat. Smoke billowed from the wheels as they wildly spun in place, held stationary by a million other cars inching forward. It went this way for the next three and a half hours.

He arrived at his office just after twelve o'clock. Unbeknownst to Marvin, he was to be giving a marketing speech at lunch. Saying Marvin was ill-prepared for his presentation would have been a gross understatement, considering he didn't even know about it. But when he arrived, his secretary cheerfully informed him of the speech and Marvin raced for the multi-purpose room. He hadn't any idea of what he was to be speaking on, or to whom, all he knew was . . . he better be eloquent.

Marvin raced onto the auditorium stage. A thousand heads simultaneously turned towards the podium as he slid across the waxed boards.

His boss sat in the front row, sharpening a machete on a pumice stone. Marvin gulped and stared out at the sea of what appeared to be Swahilis wearing turbans. The room was dead silent. The air heavy. Someone cleared their throat and it loudly echoed throughout the auditorium. Marvin realized it was him, and the microphone was loudly broadcasting his every muscle move. He nervously sniffled and that too was broadcast in quadraphonic stereo, sounding like a giant pig with a nasal infection.

He began to sweat. Really, really sweat, like a water main had broken under his suit, pooling on the floor. For some odd reason he felt a sense of relief, then realized he had lost all bladder control.

His ticking Timex sounded like a bomb about to go off, making each second seem like an eternity. Marvin nervously glanced towards the front row. His boss was now pedaling an axe grinder, polishing the machete. Marvin would have to speak and soon. Only about what? If he said the wrong thing it would mean his head. Think Marvin, Think! But his mind was a blank chalkboard, being scraped by fingernails. His stomach churned like a washing machine on agitation cycle. He hadn't needed a bathroom this badly since eating that pile of furry green pork in Tijuana, Mexico. The green, it turned out, was not a sauce.

His gaseous stomach discharged an air pocket, plunging like a depth charge towards his recalcitrant rectum. Marvin's eyebrows quivered and he made a sheepish expression, almost

apologetic, as he released an invisible puff of methane, which was picked up by the microphone and boomed across the auditorium like an A-bomb. The audience remained silent; their turbans unraveled. Marvin waved his hand subtly behind him, pretending he was swatting at a persistent fly.

Marvin's nerves felt like they had been stretched across the auditorium and were being wildly strummed by a hillbilly banjo player. He had lost seven pounds in the forty-five seconds he had been standing at the podium. He cleared his throat, again, sounding like an Indianapolis racer on the starting line. Say something! . . . anything! he begged himself, hoping the microphone couldn't pick up his thoughts. And then it came to him, the word for which he had been desperately searching . . .

"Welcome."

The Swahilis rose to their feet in a standing ovation.

A moment later, Marvin realized he hadn't spoken a word at all and the ovation had taken place entirely in his head. The Swahilis were still solemnly seated, expressionless. But it was a good notion and Marvin decided to give it a try on the home crowd.

"W . . . Welcome," said Marvin, his voice catching in his throat.

The audience didn't respond, still sitting on their hands, possibly in some sort of religious rite. They were Swahilis, all right, he was relatively certain of that. Perhaps a bit of local color was in order. Yes, a joke, to break the ice.

"Did you hear the one about the Swahili prostitute?" quipped Marvin, possibly the worst joke teller on the planet, "Push the red dot on her forehead and her legs spread."

Deadly silence. Not even a rim shot.

Marvin didn't know if this was a good sign. Maybe they didn't speak his language? Or, were they laughing on the inside? Just to make sure, Marvin repeated the punch line, ". . . push the dot on her forehead and her legs . . . spread."

No response. No laughter. No expression. No escape. Only the blank stares and the sharpening sounds from the front row.

Things were definitely going from dire to disastrous. Marvin, weak and nauseous, prayed for a sudden coma to overtake him so he could be mercifully carried off the stage. Unfortunately, the self-destructive side of his brain was having too much fun to close shop.

Marvin decided it was time for a graceful and swift exit.

"And, in concluding, let me conclude by saying, thank you for coming," concluded Marvin as he rocketed off the stage, leaving behind a slime trail of bodily functions.

Marvin sprinted to his office and slammed the door behind, sobbing, "I'm dead—DEAD!" Then again, maybe he shouldn't be too hasty, maybe he had done all right. He was already having trouble recalling the event, his mind no doubt protecting itself from overwhelming feelings of worthlessness and suicide.

He covered behind his desk, attempting to act normal, as he stared out the window at the brick wall of the slaughterhouse next door, picking out his ear wax with a paper clip.

This was the day he had been preparing to ask for a raise. He had worked for his boss for the past twenty-seven years without so much as a penny more in his paycheck. He would

simply have to be a man and ask him for more money . . . today.

Marvin probed inside his eardrum for the paper clip which was now mysteriously missing. Suddenly, he felt the grip of a panic attack. His breathing felt constricted and he tried to loosen his tie, but the knot was too tight. It was so damn stuffy in his office. He put his hand against the rusty air conditioning vent realizing that it wasn't pumping cool air in, but rather sucking it out, like a soul vacuum.

He desperately reached into his desk drawer, pushing aside a bottle of angina tablets, and grabbed his last pack of unfiltered Camels. He smoked the entire pack in five minutes. Though he longed for another pack, he was too terrified to leave his office, so he settled for licking the ash tray.

Suddenly, he felt as if he was choking, so he cut off his tie with a pair of scissors, and unbuttoned top of his shirt. Humid air hissed from underneath. Then, he realized the hiss wasn't escaping air but rather a throat snake wrapped around his wind pipe, slowly constricting. This had happened before. He had to work fast and kill the damn thing before the snake venom infected his brain. He grabbed his throat, trying to choke the snake, but he blacked out, banging his head on the intercom.

"Yes sir?" heard Marvin from the depths of consciousness. All Marvin could muster was, "Arggthhrggggppptthhhh."

"Right away, sir," his secretary replied through the intercom.

Marvin's secretary entered his office carrying a letter opener and he wondered whether she had come to help him cut out the snake. He blankly stared at her, his flushed face

lying like meat loaf on the blotter pad. Sally was absolutely nothing he wanted in a secretary. She couldn't type, operate a computer, or spell. She was grossly obese, with pale yellow skin and psoriasis on the back of her pudgy elbows which she incessantly scratched. The throat snake took one look at her and retreated to Marvin's spine.

Marvin could see through the door that all her phone lines were blinking.

"Any messages?" feebly inquired Marvin.

Sally appeared befuddled. He had ruined her day. Tears formed in her eyes and she ran from the room violently scratching her bleeding elbows. As she left the office, Marvin watched her flaccid butt cheeks bouncing together like deflated beach balls.

Marvin took a deep breath, his third of the day, as she closed the door behind. He woke up three hours later face down in his own drool on the blotter pad. The lines were still blinking.

Marvin felt drugged. He hadn't any idea what time it was, or how long he had slept, but he didn't feel a bit rested. He rose to his feet, the office a centrifuge. He tried to steady himself like he was on the stormy deck of a ship as he poked at the spinning buttons on the phone.

Finally, he hit one.

"Helllllo," slurred Marvin into the phone.

It was his boss. Marvin quickly hung up and selected another line. Again, his boss. Like the *Twilight Zone*, Marvin frantically punched each button and his boss was on every line.

Finally, Marvin got up his courage and responded, "Yessss, sir?"

His boss wanted to see him, “Immediately.”

Marvin hung up. He couldn’t tell if his boss was angry or not. He was a master at voice control, had trained with Tibetan Monks, and wasn’t about to show his hand, letting Marvin know if he had succeeded in his podium performance or was merely machete meat. Maybe this wouldn’t be a good time to ask for a raise.

Marvin attempted to chew his fingernails, but there wasn’t a speck of calcium left to gnaw or even flesh around his fingertips.

So, he locked his office door, sat on the floor, pulled off his shoes and socks and bit his toenails as he contemplated how to handle his boss. Be firm, show strength, thought Marvin as he whimpered into his bunions.

It was time. He pulled his socks back on, laced up his shoes and bravely headed down the hallway, marching towards the boss’s office as if to an execution. Several employees passed him in the hall, glancing at him as if he were the condemned. But mostly they tried to avoid his eyes, lest they be pulled into the pit.

The walls seemed to grow closer and closer together, the hall longer and darker the further he went. Finally, he was crawling down a pitch-black tunnel, like a mine shaft, and Marvin wondered if the boss had relocated his office as a security measure.

Marvin tripped over a miner’s helmet in the tunnel and put it on his head as he descended in a coal filled rail cart. His helmet light flashed on a bird cage containing a dead canary and he wondered if that was a bad sign. Up ahead he could see a huge mahogany door blocking the path of the tracks.

Marvin climbed out of the cart and flicked off his helmet light. He heard the sound of a chain saw and someone screaming on the other side of the office door but thought it was just his vivid imagination.

He took another deep breath (the fourth that day, if you're counting), turned the doorknob and entered a plush office. The first thing Marvin noticed was what appeared to be raw meat flung about on the walls. There were also sculptures of severed body parts around the reception room. Marvin felt this a strange decor as he sat down and picked up a magazine entitled, *Failure Illustrated*.

Marvin just looked at the pictures.

He waited several hours to be announced, the receptionist ignoring him. But Marvin was entranced by her beauty, a real *Penthouse Pet*, and he marveled at the way she typed five thousand words a minute on her computer while simultaneously answering phone calls on her head mike.

She finally spoke to Marvin without turning her head from the computer screen. He was hypnotized, watching her lips move as if she were fellating the words, "Mr. Himmler will see you now."

Marvin, dumbfounded, realized she was speaking to him. He apprehensively walked over and opened the door to his boss's office.

On the walls hung a collection of medieval torture devices. Mr. Himmler was facing away from Marvin in his swivel chair, screaming at someone on the phone. The words, "Kill, maim, dismember and rip-to-shreds," dotted the conversation.

As Himmler finished the phone call, a secretary, more gorgeous than the first, stood up from under the desk wiping the corners of her smeared lipstick. She looked at Marvin, gulped, and exited. Himmler swiveled around in his chair, zipping up his fly and stared at the intrusion . . . Marvin.

“Sit down,” offered his boss observing Marvin’s every facial nuance as he had learned from his Zen master. Marvin, burning up like a bug under a magnifying glass, was rapidly loosing his nerve. He needed to come right out and ask for the raise but his tongue had rolled back down his throat and Marvin knew it would take a gaffer's hook to yank it back up.

“WELL!” boomed his boss as Marvin’s knees knocked together like petrified wood blocks.

“S . . . Sir,” answered Marvin, his voice squeaking dangerously upwards like Minnie Mouse, “Sir, I’ve worked for this company for twenty-seven years and . . .”

Himmler interrupted with a laugh. Not just any laugh. A huge, belly-bucking, hand-wringing, jowl-shaking laugh. Marvin, not knowing what else to do, joined in. And there they were, a couple of idiot conspirators, buddies, good ol’ boys sharing a hee-haw, only Marvin didn’t know what the hell was so funny.

He soon found out.

“You’re fired,” said Himmler, suddenly solemn. Marvin was still laughing, not knowing when it was proper to stop. But when the boss took the machete out from behind the desk, he thought it was a good time.

His boss seemed to transform now, from an ordinary disagreeable prick into one of the hounds of hell . . . the mean one. His face cracked into a hideous grimace, horns broke

through the top of his skull and his shoes broke off as hoofs formed on his feet.

Marvin was, naturally, looking for the door. But it was suddenly gone. They were in a box with no exit.

Himmler, juggling five flaming machetes, weighing the best for the job, flung the discarded choices at Marvin, who ducked and watched them cleave into the walls.

Himmler, a.k.a. Satan's evil twin, selected the largest and dullest machete of the bunch. Marvin was presently clawing at the walls of his not so solitary confinement, hollering for the guards, or any of a variety of religious martyrs, to save him.

His boss was on all fours now, snarling and snapping like Beelzebub's watchdog, the machete wedged between his rabid canines, cornering Marvin. Suddenly, Himmler stood on two hind legs, raised the machete and swung downward, hacking Marvin on top of his head in the manner you might crack a coconut. But the dull blade just stuck across the top of his thick skull and he felt nothing more than the pounding headache he had endured for the past forty years. Himmler tried to remove the machete stuck in Marvin's cranium, but it was, well, stuck.

Just then, a body burst through the wall. It was Sally, Marvin's heavyweight secretary, to the rescue. Marvin's boss cowered as she approached and knocked him unconscious with a swing of her butt cheeks. She then tossed Marvin over her shoulder, in a fireman's carry, and exited into the reception area where three heavily armed centerfolds greeted them. Sally simply showed them her inflamed elbows and they instantaneously disintegrated.

Sally carried Marvin into the hallway mine shaft and saw that the cart was gone. Undaunted, Sally with Marvin slung over her ample shoulders, climbed hand over hand up the dangling cable until they finally made it back to the lobby.

Marvin was free!

That was the good news. The bad news was Marvin was now unemployed and soon to be destitute. Even worse, he had become infected by Sally's elbow rash and was itching uncontrollably, making him eminently unemployable.

Marvin, nevertheless, thanked Sally for rescuing him and she was so thrilled to be complimented that she threw her flabby triceps around him and gave him a big, fat kiss on the lips.

Unfortunately, her herpes were active.

Marvin wrenched himself from Sally's embrace, suffocating from her sweaty rose perfume, and headed into the elevator a beaten man. He pushed the down button, wondering how low his life could go, as a large pustule began to blossom on his lip.

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III

DEPRESSION

Marvin thought he was all the way down but he had only reached the first floor. He numbly watched the numbers as the steel box plummeted to the bowels of hell, maybe beyond. At least it felt that way.

BING

The alloy curtains glided open revealing a woman staring at her shoes. The show was about to begin. She entered, occasionally moaning as she chewed her cuticles, and steadied herself by gripping the ballerina safety bar. Marvin wanted to interrupt the moaner, utter a nicety as it were, but felt compelled to speechlessness by the unspoken elevator rule.

They were picking up speed now and that was good. Quicker to the bottom. Last one down was a rotten egg and all that, he mused as he inhaled an encroaching odor. Maybe the carpet was moldy?

She must have been thinking the same thing because she turned towards him and momentarily locked eyes in a non-verbal “he who smelt it” mode.

BING

She inverted her insomniac eyes back to her hypnotic shoes as another tragic soul entered the elevator, wedged his face in the corner, and silently scraped his belly lint with his pinkie nail.

Marvin, bored to suicide, suddenly felt an excruciating pain in his appendix before remembering it had been removed. Feeling better, he solemnly checked his watch with nowhere to go and no one expecting him. He bleakly observed the illuminated descending numbers flip by . . . minus 3 . . . minus 4 . . . minus 5 . . . wondering how far down could this sucker go? . . . And, where did he leave his car?

. . . minus 6 . . . minus 7 . . . minus 8 . . .

Marvin considered punching the “stop” button but the mere effort of the notion overwhelmed him and he grew dizzy, albeit it was a mere arms length away. He doubted it worked anyhow. Merely a prop for false hopes.

BING

Marvin blankly beheld a wretched woman crawling on her knees into the elevator, her hands clasped skyward, moving her chapped lips in hopeless prayer. Jets of stale breath wafted towards the rafters and Marvin held his breath, fearing infection, begging for a swift death as he stared at the red stop button in complacent dread.

The praying woman with the purple eyelids glanced his way and Marvin attempted a pervious smile. She immediately recoiled in fear. Did he show too much teeth? Or, was she too

sensitive? He had lost his judgment on such things long ago which is perhaps what spurred him to get on the elevator in the first place and take the plunge to the darkest depths of reverse narcissism.

. . . minus 12 . . . minus 13 . . . minus 14 . . .

There were many factors leading to Marvin's demise . . . and it was only Tuesday . . . before lunch. What was it that had thrust Marvin into such unmitigated anguish? What caused him to carry the weight of the world on his hunched shoulders? Was it the decline of civilization? The fall of humanity? The dip of decency? Or, was it restricted coffee breaks? Life had symbolically ripped off his skin and plunged him in lime juice. And still, the elevator plummeted.

. . . . minus 21 . . . minus 22 . . . minus 23 . . .

BING

The elevator lurched to a stop. A man and a woman entered on all fours and trotted beside Marvin. Every so often they would simultaneously sigh, filling the elevator with a bouquet of dread which everyone inhaled like a drug.

Marvin studied the couple wondering if they had mutually plunged themselves to despair at the water cooler or were they married? Marvin knew how dangerous it was to have a relationship with anyone smelling of depression. It could immediately double your inevitable tail spin, which perhaps explained why this couple had gotten on at level minus 23.

The elevator was getting crowded. Marvin had never seen it like this. Times must be tough, he thought, suddenly breaking into tears. The others tried to ignore Marvin, desperately holding on by their fingernails above his whirlpool of woe,

knowing that to cry on the “down” elevator could lead to a spontaneous group crash.

They were now all in danger of even deeper levels thanks to Marvin, who had even driven his own therapist to suicide contemplating the quagmire of all time . . . How to be happy and depressed at the same time?

Level minus 46. Marvin had never been to this depth before and they were still sinking like an anchor on a two ounce test line. He feared the worst was yet to come.

BING

In slithered three anorexic, naked, bald chicks on their bellies, razor blade slashes self-inflicted on their thighs. Marvin stopped feeling sorry for himself and stared slack jawed as they piled one atop another in a steamy heap at his feet. The doors were just about to close when a man sporting a Cheshire grin, his freshly cut ears pinned to his lapel, squeezed in and joined the sardine-like affair. Blood poured out of the holes in his head like a Venetian vase.

Marvin nervously checked the elevator weight chart . . . eight-fifty max. Was that in depression pounds? Whatever, he knew they had long exceeded it and wondered about the margin for error.

The elevator was making a whizzing sound as it reached new elevator speed records. The flashing numbers were a blur.

Marvin, expecting the worst, remembered as a kid hearing that if an elevator cable broke and was crashing and you knew you were going to die, that at the last millisecond if you jumped up you wouldn't wind up a plasma pancake. (Unfortunately, the person is traveling at the same rate as the

elevator and will be most unmercifully crushed beyond recognition . . . except by dental records.)

Nonetheless, at that moment Marvin closed his eyes and jumped up about three inches just as the elevator struck bottom.

Amazingly, when Marvin peaked through his fingers they were all still alive . . . if you could call this living.

The elevator had come to the end of the line. Floor minus 100. The lowest level known to man. (Just to give you an idea how low that is, they were six floors below unintentional suicide . . . nineteen floors below nagging dread . . . thirty-seven floors below fear and loathing . . . and, eighty-two floors below bobbing for apathy.) Marvin shuddered, wondered what atrocity, what inconceivable mutated mystery awaited beyond the brushed aluminum doors.

BING

The doors glided open and . . . nothing . . . nada . . . zilch. Nobody entered. Nobody left. A bluish ethereal light illuminated the hallway. Silence, but for the sounds of the building's bowels churning like an angry intestine.

Marvin had a feeling this wasn't the parking garage. No one in the elevator moved. They were, as it were, frozen. It was quite an uncomfortable moment. But at least they had hit bottom . . . he hoped.

Marvin decided to brave the first move. He pushed his way through the icy throng and stepped out onto the tundra. Literally, the tundra. He was standing on a vast glacier, a plateau of misery as far as the eye could see.

Marvin turned back towards the elevator which cut a door into the void with no visible means of support. There was

another set of elevator doors just to the right, which were closed. Set between both elevators stood an ash tray filled with pure white sand and above that, hovering in space, were the “up” and “down” buttons.

One by one the gleeless gaggle got out of the elevator. They crawled, slithered and trotted out in single file as if to an execution. And who knew?

They huddled around Marvin for warmth, giving off none themselves, and contemplated infinity, judging by the blank stares on their passionless faces.

Marvin noticed something written in the ash tray sand. It was the word . . . “help.” Catchy, he thought, wondering if it had done the author any good. At least he knew they weren’t pioneers to this level, which gave him little comfort.

He wrapped his arms around his body hugging himself, and actually felt better—not because of the warmth but for some rather overtly obvious psychological reasons which to mention at this point would belittle its effectiveness.

Perhaps due to the hug experience, Marvin considered that he might . . . might . . . press the “up” button. The others stared on in gloominess as Marvin reluctantly rested his fingertip on the “up” button causing it to glow a luminescent green.

BONG

The right side elevator doors opened. Marvin hadn’t anticipated such an immediate arrival and doubted if he was ready to go back up. It was so damn comfortable down here. Chilly though.

He turned back to the open elevator, which had delivered them to this godforsaken hellishness, and was startled to find

that there was no longer an elevator inside. It was now quite simply a bottomless pit, an abysmal abyss dropping to deeper frontiers.

For the others, it took little time to decide. The man with his bloody ears pinned to his lapel took this opportunity to hop, skip and gleefully jump into the black hole. He disappeared without a peep. Then, the three naked, anorexic, bald ex-cheerleaders rolled one after another into the hole, their anxious PMS screams echoing a good half minute. Next up, the man preoccupied with his navel eagerly performed a 9.4 swan dive into the void followed by the dreary couple on all fours who momentarily reared up and whinnied before tumbling to their despicable destiny.

All that was left was the woman staring at her shoes . . . and Marvin.

Marvin peered over the edge of darkness, woozy. He could still hear the distant cries of the fallen. This shouldn't be too hard, he reasoned. One giant step for man . . . one small step for a terribly depressed, twice divorced, easily alcoholic, middle-management executive.

The woman moved to his side and tenderly slipped her weak, frigid hand into his plump, sweaty palm. Maybe this would be a team jump, Marvin theorized. Nevertheless, the gesture overwhelmed him and, as they stood teetering on the edge, he suddenly kissed her blue trembling lips.

He thought he heard angels but soon realized it was the persistent ringing in his ears from high blood pressure.

When she pulled away, with the sound of abalone pried from glass, her lips were stuck on her teeth leaving her with a grimace. But it was good enough for Marvin, who took it as a

sign and quickly ushered her into the “up” elevator before she changed her mind.

Once inside, the doors began to slowly close. They confidently gleamed at one another, their plastered grins transforming to expressions of extreme apprehension as the doors shut.

BING

A moment later the elevator started its slow climb . . . minus 99 . . . minus 98 . . . minus 97 . . .