

Chapter two
The never-ending shower.

I usually shower once a day, preferably about 10 to 15 minutes while a classic rock playlist fills the bathroom with sounds of the '60s and '70s as I play along on my waterproof air guitar.

Now, why the ever-loving fuck would I mention my shower habits here? Because I want to share with you the secret of 'darkness time manipulation'. On a bad day, something happens when I get in the shower... The music changes from rock to gut-wrenching sad songs, dancing around in the nude turns into leaning against the wall or even sitting down and the warm and fuzzy feeling that invokes the most interesting #showerthoughts in 'normal people' now supplies a list of all the crippling obstacles I have yet to face. At that point, a simple thought crosses my mind. Nothing bad happens to you in the shower. Sure, you may feel sad, but no one expects you to pick up the phone, you can't clean your apartment covered in soap, and bills tend to get quite unreadable when they're soaked. So, I simply leave the shower running.

From that moment on, getting out of the shower becomes a life altering choice, time will resume as usual, and there is no more excuse why I can't do the things I should be doing. With the risk of leaving a sizeable footprint on the environment, I've spent a lot of time just over-hydrating in there. Apart from the fact that

I now possess the skill of drinking beer and smoking cigarettes in the shower (the latter being rather tricky), I never once considered this to be a particularly good idea. But an odd thing happens somewhere along your dark path, where you tend to rationalize irrational choices. You know it's stupid or detrimental to your cause, but it might give you a little bit of time to regain some strength by hanging on the ropes. Sadly, life hits like a motherfucker, leading you to expand your little time manipulation scheme to other things in life. Stick your head under your pillow for a few more hours and the day hasn't officially started, stay up as late as you can so you maximize the hours you have until a new day is undeniable. Doing this long enough will grant you the power of expanding this fallacy to even more pesky real-life problems.

No money to pay your bills or terrified of an eviction notice? Just don't open your mailbox. Hell, get cocky and try to convince yourself you're conducting the 'Schrödinger's cat' experiment: As long as you don't intervene with the situation, the outcome is simultaneously bad and good. Quantum physics for the win! I may have lost you by now, and that might actually be a good thing. The important point here is that in those moments, 'real-life' and 'fantasy' are no longer a matter of fact but a matter of choice. You start to convince yourself that you need this 'alternate reality' in order to even make it through the day, factual reality becomes a concept way too heavy to even consider taking on. In a way, this is actually true. The stress of certain things can be debilitating, and for someone with a limited supply of strength and energy ignoring or blatantly denying certain parts of reality will enable you to get by just well enough so that you can fix your situation. The problem with bad habits that offer a small solution is that you cannot live in that state of mind for too long. It might offer a solution if you limit it to a period of two weeks, but anything longer than that and the problems you are ignoring will grow exponentially. On top of that, this way of living becomes normal to you, causing you to care less and less while your problems keep growing. The bigger the problems get, the more you ignore them. You are just digging your own grave deeper and deeper, with the only result being that you've dug too deep to climb out of it.

So how do you get out of this?

The only way I've found so far is to make sure that you keep talking to people and unapologetically and shamelessly share with them this twisted and clearly delusional version

of your world. When you get dark, you start warping the world around you, intentional or otherwise, and rather sooner than later, you find yourself in a 'Tim Burton-esk' wacky yet very dark version of the truth. But the dark don't become stupid or oblivious. All of us know that this is a skewed perspective viewed through a very dark lens. This leads to hiding our wacky world and trying our best to blend into normal society. Your secret life of exiting the shower every day looking like an even more wrinkled version of the bathtub woman from 'The Shining' won't get mentioned very often. You lie about all of your interpretations of reality because the few times you've told them to someone, it was met with either patronizing laughter or incredibly, stupidly simple solutions that you've already considered about a million times. The warped reality lifestyle you lead will actually make sure that you will warp the stories you share with the people around you. As much as I love Tim Burton movies, it's not the best world to live in. The thing you should force yourself to do is try to keep the secrets of your situation to a bare minimum. Don't be afraid to let people into the weird habits you've developed and prove to yourself that you can share the actual way you are living right now. You'll still encounter a lot of laughter, stupid solutions, and a lot of disbelieve, but once in a blue moon, you'll encounter someone that will just take the time to listen and maybe even go out of their way to help.

A lot of the times, the challenges you face in life feel like they are yours to carry. Yours alone. You know that everyone carries a tremendous weight on their shoulders as well, but it seems like their weight consists of things like trying to find love, problems with their health, social status, taking care of kids, or what color they should paint the living room. Rather relatable human issues, one might say. And that does show in 'normal life' because everyone they talk to will either understand or relate to those challenges and offer a helping hand or shoulder to cry on. In my case, it always felt like those helping hands were miles away.

The problem I've found in the struggle with depression is that it feels like no one will take your problems at face value. It might actually feel quite embarrassing to have to admit to someone that as a grown-up, you can't seem to get yourself to get out of bed or open your mailbox. That's why you just don't tell anyone. Actively trying to get myself out of this, I started pushing myself to set aside my pride and shame and just tell people my sneaky little secrets. This got me to a place where reality started getting back to normal. I found a couple of people who would listen. Not judge, but listen. And once the secret was out, and I didn't get lectured on how to live a normal life, I found myself in a new world where it wasn't just me who decided what was real-life and what was fantasy, but I had a second opinion to consult. By sharing my thoughts with the outside world, I normalized the weight on my shoulders and found a lot of helping hands. Hands that helped me in a bunch of different ways. Hands that helped me with sorting bills I was ignoring, hands that set an extra plate when I was starving myself and hands that would simply high five my progress when I was doing better. I found a way to make my weight shareable, and by warping my world back to normal, I found the hands that don't mind sharing a bit of that burden.

So, go out there, tell everyone about your weird little Dr. Seuss world of green eggs and ham and find yourself those helping hands.