

## SWEET CHILD OF MINE

I am in a familiar place. Again. “Sitting vigil” I call it.

“How can I help?”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“Couldn’t you just try to...”

“He needs to...”

“If only she could just...”

Loving kind people—family members, friends, colleagues—offer these replies when faced with some of the realities of the clinical depression/anxiety experience—the “evil twins.” I link depression and anxiety because they often go hand in hand in their devastating and capricious chaos. I say some of the realities because, it often seems, unless you have experienced the unique helplessness that comes with having someone you love suffer with this complex cornucopia of symptoms that conjoin, interact, and impede living with a galaxy of funhouse horrors ranging from the mundane to the life-threatening, you—the occasional observer—cannot fathom this reality. Maybe because you cannot see the illness? In cancer, the hair falls out, weight comes off, skin grows pale. Drugs have to be administered—often intravenously. Concerned loved ones, friends or neighbors set up GoFundMe pages to raise money for interventions, marathons are run, pink is worn. A circle closes around the sufferer to aid in healing and the potential cure for the disease is delineated. Of course, not always with success but, with unflagging support.

To the experienced observer, depression may also cause a few obvious indicators. For some, it’s weight loss—or weight gain, paleness, dark circles. “Dark Circles.” That is an excellent metaphor for the Kubrick-like spiraling staircase to hell that “DepAnx” (nickname mine) creates. The clusterfuck of symptoms of major depressive disorder with anxiety described in the DSM-V—the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fifth Edition—includes things like: “feeling sad, empty, hopeless, a loss of interest in things and an inability to feel pleasure; feeling worthless, guilty for no reason; inability to concentrate; inability to sleep or sleeping a lot”<sup>[2]</sup> and, of

course, the terrifying topper, suicidal ideation. Pair that with the poisonous angst clinical anxiety has to offer: feeling keyed up or tense, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, worry, fear of bad things happening or being out of control, to name just a few, and you have a hellish cocktail that not only knocks you back, it knocks you the hell out of your own life.

People mean well, though, so, for those who care, I offer only this: Sit vigil. Meaning, show up. Don't attempt to "fix"—you can't. Well, you could be the "49th person" whose gentle admonitions finally succeed in getting the afflicted into a psychiatrist's office or a counselor's suite, where a combination of meds and therapy offer hope. You could get your loved one out of bed and eating a meal for one day. Baby steps.

Mostly, I simply sit. And be. Next to...(continued)