

Day one: finding your breath. "Take a moment to listen to your breathing," the recording of Dr. McCourt said, through the car's speakers. "Don't try to control it, just feel the air as it enters and exits your nose." Garry slammed his brakes and his horn. Just like the driver ahead. Just like the driver behind. "Stop fucking honking at me asshole!" he screamed over his shoulder. He could see the driver behind him, screaming himself red. Look at this guy! What an idiot. Somewhere a light turned green. All the cars lurched forward a metre and then slammed their brakes again. "Move! Move! MOVE!" Therapy was off to a rocky start. \*\*\* Day two: the raisin exercise. "Have you ever taken a close look at a raisin?" Dr. McCourt said, through Garry's earbuds. Garry sat on his bed, holding a single raisin in his left hand while prodding it with his right index finger. Christ, I can't believe I paid money for this. "Take a moment to appreciate how the raisin feels." That therapist really saw me coming. "Examine how the light falls on the raisin. Explore its texture." I'm such a moron. Kate, his wife, appeared in the doorway. Scowling. "Gar." "Busy." She rolled her eyes. "Garry, I gotta go." "Busy!" "Feed the dog," she said. "Christ!" Garry's hands shook, but Kate was already gone. They shook so hard he dropped the raisin. "Fuck! Look what you made me do! Therapy was your idea!" "Christ, Garry!" she called from the front hallway, and a door slammed. Garry reached for his raisin but Beans, their golden retriever, swooped in, ate it, and bolted. "Damn it, Beans!" Garry lurched to his feet. "Dogs don't eat raisins." But if Beans was willing to eat one, maybe Kate was right. "Okay, Beanie. I guess it's dinner time." \*\*\* Day three: breathing from the belly. "Have you ever seen a baby breathe?" Dr. McCourt said, "They use their whole diaphragm – their whole belly – for each breath." Great, Garry thought, lying on the carpet of the living room. I paid for a doctor and I'm learning from a baby. "We stop doing it as we grow older, but breathing deeply has many benefits. It's very calming. Imagine a storm on the ocean. At sea level it rages, wild and chaotic. That's shallow breathing. But deep breathing – breathing from the diaphragm – is like the depths of the ocean. Cool and calm." Christ. "Lay down somewhere comfortable, without any distractions. Put your hands gently on your belly, and just breathe deeply. Feel how your belly moves up and down." Let's just get this over with. Garry closed his eyes and felt his belly rise. When he took a really deep breath, felt his diaphragm expanding under his palms, rising with an unexpected smooth intensity, his eyes shot open again. "Whoa..." He'd never felt his body do that before. It was... weird. Not bad though. He closed his eyes again. "Daddy!" Molly shrieked, running into the room. "Daddy daddy daddy!" She was on him before he could react, and even though she was only six and small for her age, when she fell on him she thoroughly crushed his diaphragm and any breath in it popped out as a grunt. "Damn it, Molly!" he said, peeling her off. "What's the matter with you? You can't just jump on someone like that! You're getting way too big." Her joy vanished, replaced by a quivering lip and eyes threatening tears. Jesus, I bet Kate put her up to this. "I'm-sorry-Daddy-" Molly said, between great heaves just shy of sobbing, "-I-just-wanted-to-play-Lego-with-you." She took a shuddering breath, and then added at a whisper, "You-promised!" Oh. Right. The stupid video game. He sighed. "Hey now, pumpkin." He wrapped his arms around her. "Listen, shh, don't cry. I did promise, didn't I? And we'll play, okay? Just please... no more jumping on me." Molly nodded, and a faint smile was already fighting the tears. She grabbed his hand and led him to the game console, and they sat down to play a Lego game together. It was all very stupid, he thought – Lego was a real toy back when he was a kid, not this digital crap with all the franchises, everything designed to bleed your wallet – but... but. He couldn't deny it was fun. Molly was having a riot and her laughter was catching. And he figured, maybe a set of real Lego would make a good birthday gift for her. They could do that together too. So in the end it was a pleasant afternoon. \*\*\* Day four: sitting meditation. "Find a chair with a straight back," Dr. McCourt said. "It should be tall enough that you can sit comfortably with your feet flat on the ground." Those would be the kitchen chairs, so Garry claimed one. "Place your hands on your lap, in a neutral position." Okay. What next? "Close your eyes, if you like, and—" Kate chose that moment to enter the kitchen in a flurry of needless distraction. "Do you mind?" Garry said. He felt his temper

spike, and that gave him a sliver of pride. The first step to managing anger was recognizing it. Still, it took all his effort to keep (most of) it out of his voice. Kate turned around from the stove, shaking her head, her jaw trembling. "Excuse me, what did you say?" "I'm trying to meditate here, and you're distracting me." She flexed her fingers as though squeezing an invisible stress ball. "It's going to be dinner time soon." Her tone quavered near as much as his. "Someone has to make it." "Well do you have to do it now?" Kate's eyes widened. "Yes, Garry. I do. It's a friggin' roast. You can't just throw it in the microwave. It takes time!" "Well," he said, bile tainting his voice, "I'm trying to get better. That takes time too. And I'd appreciate some god-damned support." "Oh-my-god." She dug her hands into her hair, pulled. "You're not the only one with problems. The world does not revolve around you." His face darkened. "You know what?" Kate said, before Garry could do anything. "Never mind. I give up. Have your kitchen. I'll just order another fucking pizza." She stalked out. Garry took a long, shaking breath. A part of him was aware of his anger, ever rising, ever hotter. He tried to breathe deep to calm it. He mentally shouted Stop. Then Stop! Then STOP! Then he even hissed "Stop!" out loud. Maybe it took some of the edge off. Maybe it interrupted the cyclone of She's sabotaging me and Nobody's on my side. But he was still pissed. He got up and went after her, and they argued. Later, he slept on the couch. \*\*\* Day five: return to your breathing. "Whenever you get distracted," Dr. McCourt said, "acknowledge it without judgement, and return to your breathing." Garry inhaled, enjoying the fresh patio air. It was a shorts-warm day and the birds were chirping. Every breath he was at once aware of how he shouldn't try to control it and how he definitely was because he couldn't help it. Dang it. "It's okay to get distracted. It happens to all of us." Super. Stop thinking, dummy. And then, he managed a couple satisfying breaths where he didn't do anything but focus on the air. This lasted until he started thinking about how good he was at not thinking. Dang. Return to the breath. His cell rang. Dang it! Caller ID said it was Rich. "What's up, Dickie?" "Hah. Hey listen man, you busy? One of my clients cancelled but I got a tee time at Hendersons. Wanna shoot a round?" Garry felt a pang of irritation, a flare of anger, but it subsided. Golf was fun. But he should be meditating. Kate found him an article that said nature was good for therapy stuff, so it was a perfect day to enjoy the back yard and practice. On the other hand, the article also said that socializing is good. "Yeah, sounds good! I'll see you there." \*\*\* Day six: lying down meditation. "Lie down somewhere comfortable," Dr. McCourt said. "Somewhere you won't be disturbed for a while. This meditation lasts about forty minutes." Jeez. Garry laid down on his blanket, on the south hill of the local park. It was another lovely day with a cloudless sky, and this time he put his phone on mute. He closed his eyes. I hope I don't fall asleep. "It's okay if you fall asleep during this exercise." How did he know? "Begin by focusing on your breathing. Nice deep breaths. Place your hands on your belly if you like." Garry did. The beginning was relaxing, and his mind started wandering. But then he found his mind wandering, acknowledged it "without judgement" in Dr. McCourt's voice, and brought his attention back to his breath. Then something hard struck him in the head. "Shit, ow!" Garry said, sitting up. He saw a strange yellow round thing beside him, which he picked up, and before he could process what it might be a full grown Dalmatian plowed into him. They both went tumbling down the hill, a mass of writhing limbs, swears, and barks. When he rolled to a stop he scrambled to his feet. His anger spiked red. The dog stood nearby, its entire back half wagging along with its tail, and it barked and kept jumping in place. In his hand was the yellow thing – a frisbee. "Oh my gosh!" he heard someone call out, and he saw a kid – a teen boy – running down the hill. "Oh my gosh! I'm so sorry mister! Patch! Down boy, down!" The anger spiked again. This little shit threw a fu–STOP! Garry took a breath. He threw a god-damned frisbee right at me–STOP! He let out a frustrated snort. This kid's trying to ruin–STOP! What evidence do you have? Maybe it was just an accident. He grit his teeth. What's more likely? Some random kid is trying to sabotage you on purpose, or he's just an idiot that can't aim? "I'm so sorry sir!" Garry's nose hissed as he inhaled sharp. The kid looked distraught. The dog was almost exploding with energy. Playful energy. The kind Beans got when you

waved a stick around. Garry waved the frisbee and then gave it a toss. Patch bolted after it. "Just be more careful," Garry said to the kid, barely able to push it through gritted teeth. "Yes sir! Sorry sir!" And they parted ways, without an outburst. Garry was too jacked to meditate, so the day was ruined. But, he managed to manage himself, so maybe the day wasn't ruined after all. \*\*\* Day seven: visualization. "Picture something soothing, like a nice stream," Dr. McCourt said. Easy enough. Another nice day, another excursion. This time a different part of the park, the wooded area by the stream. So, picturing it wasn't difficult since he had a real one burbling nearby. "Oh my god!" a woman screamed. Garry opened his eyes and his jaw tensed. There was a picnic lot beside the stream, and a young couple were using it. A moment ago they were invisible, but now the woman was stomping about with her hands in the air. "The fuck is your problem now!" her man said. "All you do is bitch." "You don't give a shit about anyone but yourself!" she screamed. And you don't give a shit about me at all, Garry predicted the man's response. And then he predicted her rebuttal, and then his, and then hers. He didn't get a perfect score, but he did hit eight out of ten lines. It was a tragic scene, but a part of him chuckled. He saw the map of their conflict. They were arguing with each other, but they were arguing about different things. Both needed to win and neither could listen. Jesus. They might as well be me and Kate. \*\*\* Day eight: yoga. "Stand at the foot of your mat," Dr. McCourt said. Garry stared down at his toes, wondering how he could ever possibly bend over to touch them. Maybe if I break my back. Jesus. Yoga? If the guys ever find out... ah screw them. He followed Dr. McCourt's surprisingly gentle instructions, but the clock kept distracting him. It was nearly five thirty. He stopped entirely when Molly came into the living room. "Where's mommy?" Garry rose, turned off the recording. I don't know. A considerate wife might call, but no, not my Kate. It was almost dinner time, and there was no dinner. And Molly looked upset. Garry sniffed. "Hey sweetie, what do you say we cook dinner together?" Her eyes lit up and she gasped. "Really?" "Yeah! Let's make some—" Uh... "—mac and cheese!" "Yay!"