

calm the
F*CK
down

how to control what you can
and accept what you can't
so you can stop freaking out
and get on with your life

sarah knight



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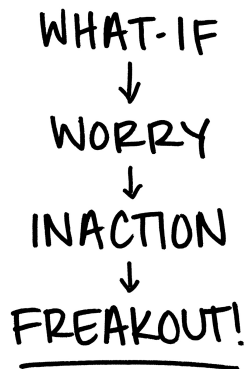
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MY TARANTULAS:

EVOLUTION OF A FREAKOUT:



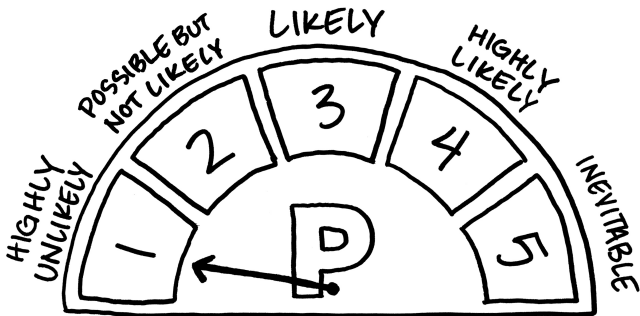
**3 ways in which
overthinking wastes
time, energy, and
money**

If you change your outfit
seven times before you
go out, you'll be late.

If you spend more time
fiddling with fonts
than writing your term
paper, you'll never turn
it in.

If you keep second-
guessing him, your
interior decorator will
fire you and you'll lose
your deposit.

The Probometer.



**10 WHAT- IFS I MAY OR MAY NOT
NEED TO WORRY ABOUT**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Category key

1. HIGHLY
2. POSSIBLE BUT
NOT LIKELY
3. LIKELY
4. HIGHLY LIKELY
5. INEVITABLE

TEN WHAT- IFS I MAY OR MAY NOT NEED
TO WORRY ABOUT:
RANKED BY PROBABILITY

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Category: _____

Here's a little quiz:

1. **You fucked up at work, but your boss doesn't know it yet because she's on vacation for two weeks.**

Category: _____

Status: _____

2. **Your wife is 9.2 months pregnant.**

Category: _____

Status: _____

3. **This is a two-parter:**

- a. **Your car is a relatively new make and reliable model. What if it breaks down?**

Category: _____

Status: _____

- b. **Surprise! It just broke down.**

Category: _____

Status: _____

WORRYING



THINGS THAT EXIST IN
YOUR IMAGINATION



THINGS THAT EXIST IN REALITY



ACCEPTING THOSE THINGS AS REALITY



CALMING THE FUCK DOWN

ANXIOUS? → FOCUS

SAD? → REPAIR WITH SELF-CARE

ANGRY? → PEACE OUT WITH
PERSPECTIVE

AVOIDING? → ACT UP

**10 WHAT-IFS I MAY OR MAY NOT NEED TO
WORRY ABOUT:
CAN I CONTROL THEM?**

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

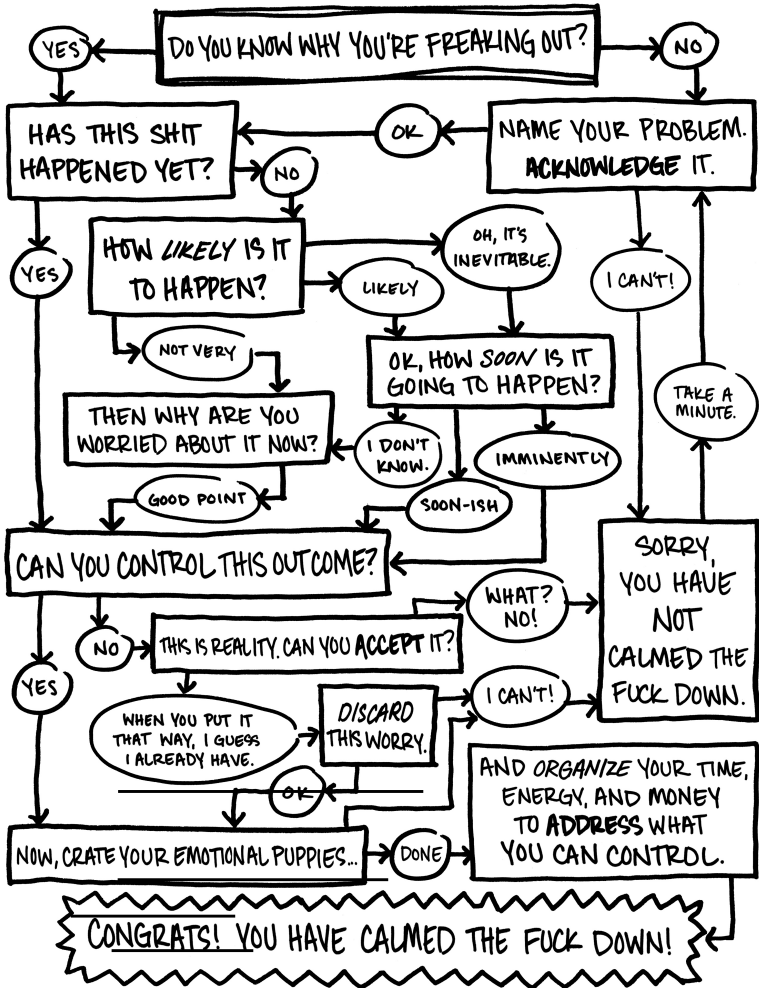
Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

Category: _____

Can I control it? [Y] [N]

HOW DO I CALM THE FUCK DOWN?



IV

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE:

When shit happens, how will *you*
calm the fuck down and deal
with it?

Part IV is going to be so much fun! In an effort to put everything I've taught you throughout *Calm the Fuck Down* into practice in one zany, interactive section, I'll present you with a totally plausible shitstorm and YOU get to react to and solve it your own damn self.

Ready?

Good. Because shit just *happened*, yo.

You're traveling far from home. Far enough that you had to fly, and for a duration long enough that you couldn't fit everything into a carry-on and had to check some luggage. Also, you're traveling for an occasion that required you to pack a few specific, very important items *in* your luggage. Now that luggage is lost somewhere between your point of origin and your final destination.

What was in your bag? Well, I want to make sure this whole Choose Your Own Adventure deal works for everyone, so let's say **you're missing one or more of the following:**

- An important article of clothing you are supposed to wear on this trip — such as your Spock ears for the Trekkie convention; a custom T-shirt for your BFF's birthday bonanza (I SHOWED UP AT RASHIDA'S 40TH AND ALL I GOT WAS PERIMENOPAUSE); a tuxedo for a work trip awards ceremony; or your lucky bowling shoes for the Northeastern Regional League Championships.
- Your favorite pajamas.

- A difficult-to-replace specialty item.
- All of your charging cords and cables. Every single one.
- The framed photo of your cat that you always travel with. (What? I would be shocked if not a *single* reader relates to this example.)
- A really great sex toy.

How do you react?

Hey, don't look at me. I don't know your life. But for the sake of this complicated gimmick I'm about to embark on, let's say your first instinct is to freak out. Pick whichever one of the Four Faces seems most likely to descend upon you in this time of extreme duress and shittiness, and then follow it on an illuminating adventure into calming the fuck down and dealing with it. (Or not, depending on which choices you make.)

Then, just to be thorough, pick another one and see it through.

Actually, you know what? Read 'em all. What the hell else do you have to do tonight?

Ready, set, FREAK OUT!

If you pick **ANXIOUS**, go to page 214.

If you pick **SAD**, go to page 250.

If you pick **ANGRY**, go to page 255.

If you pick **AVOIDANCE**, go to page 261.

You picked 😬 ANXIOUS

For what it's worth, I'm totally with you on this one. Although I do not know your life, I know *my* life — and if I'd lost every stitch of beachwear I'd brought with me to Bermuda for Spring Break '00, plus the copy of *The Odyssey* I was supposed to be studying for my world lit final, PLUS the Advil bottle full of weed that I forgot I had in my toiletry kit, I would have been seriously anxious. My potential tan and GPA in jeopardy, and, if they *did* locate my bag, the threat of a Bermudian SWAT team banging down my hotel room door — and me without my “calming herbs”? Yikes.

Back to you.

I totally understand why you're feeling anxious. But anxiety is not going to solve the Mystery of the Missing Luggage nor get your Spock ears and Magic Wand™ back in good working order. You need to calm the fuck down.

But how?

We went over this in part II. FOCUS, JIM!

Give anxiety the finger(s): Go to page 215.

Get down with O.P.P. (Other People's Problems): Go to page 216.

Nah, I'm just going to panic. Go to page 217.

You picked “Give anxiety the finger(s).”

As you’ll recall, this coping mechanism finds you doing something constructive with your hands to give your brain a rest. Such as:

If you’re standing at baggage claim being hypnotized into a panic attack by the rotations of an empty luggage carousel, you need to snap out of it. Why not literally? Try snapping your fingers a hundred times and when you’re done, it’s time to walk away.

Or, head to the nearest airport tchotchke shop and scope out their wares. If they sell stress balls — huzzah! — you’re in business. But if not, buy a container of dental floss. While in the taxi en route to your hotel, unspool the whole thing and then play that Cat’s Cradle game until your fingers bleed, minty fresh. There, now you have something different to worry about.

Finally, once you arrive at your hotel and it sinks in that your vibrator may never get out of Denver International — well, there are ways to lull yourself to sleep that don’t require batteries. All hands on deck.

Whew. Feeling a little calmer, all things considered? Good, good. Would you like to give that second coping mechanism a whirl as well, or just go straight to dealing with it?

You know what? I think I will try “Getting down with O.P.P. (Other People’s Problems).” Why the hell not? Lovely. Go to page 216.

I’m ready to deal with it! Go to page 218.

You elected to “Get down with O.P.P. (Other People’s Problems)”

You’re having a hard day, pookie. One way to distract from or make yourself feel better about your own problems is to focus on someone else’s.

Like the lady with the screaming toddler who was sitting a few rows ahead of you. I bet she *wishes* that human vuvuzela was hanging out in Denver International Lost & Found right about now. Then there’s the flight crew, who have the privilege of capping off an eight-hour shift by probing the crevices between every cushion on this two-hundred-seat airplane looking for crumbs, loose pretzels, and lost pacifiers. **BONUS:** If you’re getting a taxi to the TrekFest convention hotel, this is the one and only time you may *want* to engage the driver in conversation by asking “Hey, what’s the worst thing that happened to you this week? Tell me all about it!” In my experience with loquacious cabbies, your current predicament is likely to seem mild in comparison to tales of greedy landlords, student loan debt, stabby ex-wives, and “that time Eric Trump got a BJ in my backseat.”

Feeling a little better? Oh come on — admit it, you temporarily forgot about your lost luggage as you pictured that poor cabdriver catching sight of Eric’s O-face in the rearview mirror. That was all you needed — distraction with a side of *schadenfreude*. But if you want to go back and try giving anxiety the finger(s), feel free.

That was helpful, but I want to see what else you got. Go to page 215.

I’m ready to deal with it! Go to page 218.

Uh-oh, you decided to PANIC!

You're hyperventilating so hard you can barely explain to the desk agent why it is TERRIBLY URGENT that Delta retrieves your suitcase AS SOON AS POSSIBLE because you will NEVER BE ABLE TO GET A NEW PAIR OF CUSTOM-FIT SPOCK EARS DELIVERED IN TIME TO EMCEE TOMORROW'S BATTLE OF THE BANDS: "THE SEARCH FOR ROCK."

Friend, you are boldly going nowhere with this shit. Or as Spock himself might put it, "Your illogic and foolish emotions are a constant irritant." Are you absolutely sure you don't want to see what's happening over on the Flipside?

YES, YES I WOULD LIKE TO TRY GIVING ANXIETY THE FINGER(S), PLEASE. Good choice. Go to page 215.

I have erred. Please redirect me to "Getting down with O.P.P." In retrospect, that seems much more prudent than the course I have thus far taken. Go to page 216.

Fuck it. I've already wasted too much time. Take me straight to dealing with it. Go to page 226. (But don't say I didn't warn you...)

Dealing with it after you've calmed the fuck down (from ANXIETY)

My, how well you're holding up in this time of crisis! You're a beacon of hope and light to us all. You recognized the creeping Freakout Face and you resisted. You returned your heart rate to normal and staved off a full-blown panic attack, so now you can focus on solving (or at least mitigating) your problem in time to enjoy the rest of your trip. You've been looking forward to TrekFest for an entire year — now's the time to be *enterprising* in your efforts to deal with this shit.

TAKE STOCK:

You already know what you're missing. Now think about where you are and how easy/difficult it might be to shop for or order replacement gear, in whatever time you have to get that done. Ruminates, too, on your other resources. How much energy do you really want to expend running around an unfamiliar city all night when it's *possible* your bags will arrive on the early flight into Kansas City tomorrow? And how likely are you to find Spock ears on short notice? Furthermore, if you already tested the limits of your Amex card on the Fest tickets, you may not have a lot of spare cash (or credit) to replace all your AWOL electronics in one go. Survey the damage, assess the recovery potential, and then make some game-time decisions. You got this.

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

PICK ONE:

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on in the morning. Go to page 233.

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them. Go to page 241.

Dealing with it after you've calmed the fuck down (from SADNESS)

My, how well you're holding up in this time of crisis! You're a beacon of hope and light to us all. You recognized the creeping Freakout Face and you resisted. You dried your tears, practiced some emergency self-care, and now you can focus on dealing with this shit and solving (or at least mitigating) your problem in time to enjoy the rest of your trip.

TAKE STOCK:

You already know what you're missing. Now think about where you are and how easy/difficult it might be to shop for or order replacement gear, in whatever time you have to get that done. Ruminates, too, on your other resources. How much energy do you really want to expend running around an unfamiliar town all night when it's *possible* your bags will arrive on the early flight tomorrow? (And if they don't, you're going to need all the energy you have to deal with Rashida when she finds out you lost the custom birthday T-shirt AND her gift.)

Evaluate your gumption levels! And your cash reserves: if you already tested the limits of your Amex card on the plane tickets, you may not have a lot of spare cash (or credit) to replace all your AWOL electronics. Survey the damage, assess the recovery potential, and then make some game-time decisions. You got this.

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

PICK ONE:

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on tomorrow. Go to page 235.

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them. Go to page 243.

Dealing with it after you've calmed the fuck down (from ANGER)

My, how well you're holding up in this time of crisis! You're a beacon of hope and light to us all. You recognized the creeping Freakout Face and you resisted. You channeled your energy into more fruitful, peaceful pursuits, and Mexican Airport Syndrome failed to claim another inmate. Now you can focus on dealing with this shit and solving (or at least mitigating) your problem in time to enjoy the rest of your trip. Though I suppose "enjoy" might be a strong word for it; this is a work conference and the best part about it is going to be the unlimited shrimp cocktail at the awards ceremony.

TAKE STOCK:

You already know what you're missing. Now think about where you are and how easy/difficult it might be to shop for or order replacement gear, in whatever time you have to get that done. Assuming you've landed in a city known to host conventions requiring formalwear, tuxedos probably aren't tough to rent, but ruminate, too, on your other resources. How much energy do you really want to expend running around an unfamiliar town all night when it's *possible* your bags will arrive on the early flight tomorrow? And if you already tested the limits of your corporate Amex this month, you probably shouldn't be using it to replace all your AWOL electronics — unless you're looking forward to a stern email from Helen

in HR come Monday. Survey the damage, assess the recovery potential, and then make some game-time decisions. You got this.

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

PICK ONE:

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on tomorrow. Go to page 237.

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them. Go to page 245.

Dealing with it after you've calmed the fuck down (from OSTRICH MODE)

My, how well you're holding up in this time of crisis! You're a beacon of hope and light to us all. You recognized the creeping Freakout Face and you resisted. You cast off your cloak of avoidance and actually managed to make some headway. Perhaps all is not lost (where "all" equals "your luggage"). Now you can focus on dealing with this shit and solving—or at least mitigating—your problem in time to kick the crap out of Reverend Paul from Pittsburgh and his team, the Holy Rollers.

TAKE STOCK:

You already know what you're missing. Now think about where you are and how easy/difficult it might be to shop for or order replacement gear, in whatever time you have to get that done. Ruminates, too, on your other resources. How much energy do you want to spend running around looking for a pair of KR Strikeforce size 11 Titans vs. holding in reserve for the tournament itself? And if you already tested the limits of your Amex card on three nights at the Econo Lodge, you may not have a lot of spare cash (or credit) to replace all your AWOL electronics *and* fancy shoes in one go. Survey the damage, assess the recovery potential, and then make some game-time decisions. You got this.

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

PICK ONE:

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on tomorrow. Go to page 239.

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them. Go to page 247.

Dealing with it when you are FREAKING THE FUCK OUT (with ANXIETY)

This is so much harder than it had to be. Not only have you started to panic, your brain is now cycling through worst-case scenarios like that girl next to you at Flywheel last Sunday who was obviously working out her dating-life aggression on the bike. You're not just overwhelmed, you're OVERTHINKING — and this nemesis will *Klingon* to you for the duration of your trip. Look, I know that was an egregious pun, but you brought it on yourself.

TAKE STOCK:

Oh shit. You can't think clearly about any of this, can you? In fact, you've added a few new line items to the Captain's Log since you first discovered your bags wouldn't be joining you in Kansas City for TrekFest. For one, you posted your woes to the whole Slack group and now Cory from Indianapolis is gunning for your spot as emcee of tomorrow's festivities, and two, you ran down the battery of your phone in doing so, so your lack of charging cords is now just as critical as your lack of silicone ear tips.

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

Before you freaked out, it would have been to call the only friend you have who has the right size ears and *isn't* at this convention using them himself, and beg him to get up and go to the nearest FedEx location to overnight them to you. (Pledging your firstborn Tribble in gratitude, of course.) But

now that you've wasted a bunch of time FFs, Gordon is fast asleep, and—realistically—the best you can hope for is to buy a new cord, charge your phone overnight, and manage the fallout on Slack tomorrow while you prowl KC for Silly Putty and Super Glue.

Go to page 249.

Dealing with it when you are FREAKING THE FUCK OUT (with SADNESS)

This is so much harder than it had to be. Not only did you wear yourself out with all that crying, your makeup is a *shambles* and you're without your toiletry kit. Even if you felt like going out tonight, you look like Robert Smith after a tennis match in hot weather. And of course, that's cause for further wallowing. Why does this shit always happen to YOU? How come Brenda and Traci never lose THEIR luggage??

To top it all off, your phone battery died while you were posting a flurry of vague, sad memes intended to generate concern from your Facebook friends and now you can't even see who commented. God, this is so depressing.

TAKE STOCK:

Ugh. You'll *never* be able to replace the AMAZING birthday gift you had lined up for Rashida on such short notice. (The Je Joue Mio was for her.) At this point all you want to do is lie down on the bed and sleep this ruined weekend away. Except — *oh nooooo* — you just remembered you're in South Beach and your favorite jammies are lost somewhere over the Bermuda Triangle.

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

Before you freaked out, it would have been to get your suitcase back at all costs, or at least squeeze Southwest for a free ticket — and barring that,

get shoppin'! But now that you've wasted so many freakout funds sniffing, moaning, and vaguebooking, the best you can hope for is to call in depressed to welcome drinks and hope one of the girls can lend you an outfit for tomorrow. *If* you even feel like getting out of bed tomorrow, that is.

Go to page 254.

Dealing with it when you are FREAKING THE FUCK OUT (with ANGER)

God-fucking-dammit. It turns out that asinine comments and rude gestures neither win friends nor influence people at airport security. Thankfully you didn't get arrested, but your blood pressure is soaring, your mind is racing, and you're t-h-i-s-c-l-o-s-e to making a lifelong enemy of the United customer service helpline.

Also, you rage-ate a Big Mac and got yellow mustard all over the only shirt you currently possess. Smooth move, Mr. Hyde.

TAKE STOCK:

This whole situation got a lot more complicated when you decided to give in to your anger. Now you've got time-sensitive shit to deal with, you have to do damage control on that YouTube video, add another dress shirt to your shopping list, AND you can barely see straight, you're so agitated. (You may also want to think about how you're going to explain the video to Helen from HR when you see her at the awards banquet. It has 300,000 views and counting.)

WHAT'S YOUR REALISTIC IDEAL OUTCOME?

Before you wasted all that time, energy, money, and goodwill tarnishing both your shirt and your reputation, your RIO would have been to get to the hotel, plug in at the Business Center, put out a few feelers on the stuff you need to replace, and wind down with some Will Ferrell on Pay-Per-

View. However, realistically the best you can hope for now is to not get fired for conduct unbecoming a regional sales manager, and (if you're even still invited to the banquet) scoring a rental tux that doesn't smell like cheese.

Go to page 260.

Dealing with it when you are FREAKING THE FUCK OUT (via AVOIDANCE)

I'm afraid that the end result of succumbing to Ostrich Mode is that you NEVER, EVER DEAL WITH IT. Sorry, game over. Better luck next time.

However, if you decide to change your mind and take my advice to calm the fuck down *before* you try to deal with shit in the future, I recommend turning to page 262 or 264.

I also recommend reading this book over again, cover to cover, because — and I say this with love — I don't think you were paying attention the first time through.

<p>To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213. Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.</p>

TrekFest

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on in the morning.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

The most urgent element is to get through to a human being at the airline — ideally one in each of your departure and arrival cities — to lodge your complaint and ask if there are any other human beings who might be able to track down your bags and find a way to get them to you. It would be much better to be reunited with your custom Spock ears than to have to canvass Kansas City for a new pair.

If your phone battery is low, move “buy a new phone charger” up in the queue. If you're still at the airport, this should be easy. If you didn't manage to calm the fuck down until you were already outta there, that's okay — just ask your taxi driver to reroute to the nearest Target or comparable store and pay them to wait fifteen minutes while you perform a one-person version of *Supermarket Sweep*, grabbing the bare essentials off the shelves.

If you're driving a rental car or got picked up by a friend, this step is even easier. You'll have a bit more time and may be able to replace a few other lost items there too — as much as your energy and money FFs allow.

Plus your hotel probably has complimentary toiletries; for now, get the stuff that's only available in-store.

And if the only nearby shop is a gas station 7-Eleven, give it a shot—the teenage cashier is almost certainly charging their phone behind the counter and might be willing to sell you their cord at a markup. (If they sell Snickers bars, buy yourself a Snickers bar. You need it.)

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements—and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Winner, winner, Kansas City BBQ dinner.

<p>To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213. Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.</p>

Rashida's Birthday Bash

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on tomorrow.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

The most urgent element is to get through to a human being at the airline — ideally one in each of your departure and arrival cities — to lodge your complaint and ask if there are any other human beings who might be able to track down your bags and find a way to get them to you. Life will be a LOT easier if Rashida never has to know how close you came to ruining her birthday photo op.

If your phone battery is low, move “buy a new phone charger” up in the queue. If you're still at the airport, this should be easy. If you didn't manage to calm the fuck down until you were already outta there, that's okay — just ask your taxi driver to reroute to the nearest Target or comparable store and pay them to wait fifteen minutes while you perform a one-person version of *Supermarket Sweep*, grabbing the bare essentials off the shelves.

If you're driving a rental car or got picked up by a friend, this step is even easier. You'll have a bit more time and may be able to replace a few other lost items there too — as much as your energy and money FFs allow.

Plus, your hotel probably has complimentary toiletries; for now, get the stuff that's only available in-store.

And if the only nearby shop is a gas station 7-Eleven, give it a shot—the teenage cashier is almost certainly charging their phone behind the counter and might be willing to sell you their cord at a markup. (If they sell Snickers bars, buy yourself a Snickers bar. You need it.)

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements—and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Winner, winner, Cuba libres with dinner.

To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213.
Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.

The Business Trip

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on tomorrow.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

The most urgent element is to get through to a human being at the airline — ideally in each of your departure and arrival cities — to lodge your complaint and ask if there are any other human beings who might be able to track down your shit and get it delivered to you.

If your phone battery is low, move “buy a new phone charger” up in the queue. If you're still at the airport, this should be easy. If you didn't manage to calm the fuck down until you were already outta there, that's okay — just ask your taxi driver to reroute to the nearest Target or comparable store and pay them to wait fifteen minutes while you perform a one-person version of *Supermarket Sweep*, grabbing the bare essentials off the shelves.

(PSA: Don't forget underwear — if you end up having to wear a rented tux, you have no idea whose crotch has rubbed up inside that thing.)

If you're driving a rental car, this step is even easier. You'll have a bit more time and may be able to replace a few other lost items there too — as much as your energy and money FFs allow. Plus, your hotel probably has

complimentary toiletries; for now, get the stuff that's only available in-store.

Finally, use your recharged phone to call your wife and ask her if she knows your jacket size, because you sure don't.

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements—and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Winner, winner, room service dinner.

<p>To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213. Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.</p>

Northeastern Regionals

RIO #1: Assuming your bags won't show up of their own volition, you want to make as many inquiries as you can, then get a good night's sleep and muster the will to carry on in the morning.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

The most urgent element is to get through to a human being at the airline — ideally one in each of your departure and arrival cities — to lodge your complaint and ask if there are any other human beings who might be able to track down your bags and get them to you.

If your phone battery is low, move “buy a new phone charger” up in the queue. If you're still at the airport, this should be easy. If you didn't manage to calm the fuck down until you were already outta there, that's okay — just ask your taxi driver to reroute to the nearest Target or comparable store and pay them to wait fifteen minutes while you perform a one-person version of *Supermarket Sweep*, grabbing the bare essentials off the shelves.

If you're driving a rental car or got picked up by a friend, this step is even easier. You'll have a bit more time and may be able to replace a few other lost items there too — as much as your energy and money FFs allow. I wouldn't count on the Econo Lodge having complimentary toiletries, so don't forget the toothpaste and deodorant.

And, rural though it may be, if this town is hosting the Northeastern Regionals, they probably have a decent bowling shoe store. Google it now and hoof it over there first thing tomorrow. (And make sure you pick up clean socks at Target; you don't need to add athlete's foot to your list of shit to deal with.)

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements — and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Winner, winner, cheesesteak dinner.

To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213.
Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.

TrekFest

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

You have zero faith in the airline to straighten this out in a timely fashion, so rather than waste precious hours (and battery life) on the horn to Customer Service, you make a list of the most urgent, replaceable items in your suitcase and a plan to acquire them.

For example:

Chargers first— Good luck finding your way around without the official convention app. You'll be drifting through Bartle Hall like one of Wesley Crusher's neutrinos.

Spock ears— Your best bet is probably to hop on the TrekFest Slack channel and ask if anyone brought spares (for which you still need internet connectivity, hence a charged phone/laptop).

Febreze— Luckily, you wore your Federation blues on the plane, but they could use a little freshening up before you put them on again tomorrow.

Too bad about your favorite pj's and that cat pic, but you can sleep naked, and now that your phone is charged, you can FaceTime the

cat-sitter to say hi to Chairman Meow when you wake up tomorrow. Just keep the sheets pulled up tight; the Chairman doesn't need to see all that.

CONGRATS!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements — and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Live long and prosper.

To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213.
Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.

Rashida's Birthday Bash

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

You have zero faith in the airline to straighten this out in a timely fashion, so rather than waste precious hours (and battery life) on the horn to Customer Service, you make a list of the most urgent, replaceable items in your suitcase and a plan to acquire them. For example:

Chargers first — This whole debacle basically *exists* to be chronicled on Instagram Stories.

Rashida's birthday gift — You're already going to be in trouble for misplacing your party T-shirt; they're all going to think you made up the whole "lost luggage" story just to get out of wearing it — which, come to think of it... Well, anyway, you CANNOT show up empty-handed. The Je Joue Mio was for her, by the way, so that's one more reason to get your smartphone up and running — you'll need to find the closest sex shop *and* summon a Lyft to get you there.

Next stop: the mall — At a bare minimum, you need a party dress and a pair of shoes; the Uggs you wore on the flight won't cut it. Depending on how much those and the replacement gift run you,

you might try to pick up a cheap bikini and a sundress to get you through the weekend. The hotel will have toiletries, but don't forget to buy sunscreen. Skin care is important.

It's too bad about your pj's; that twenty-four-year-old shirt was the longest, most faithful relationship you've had. Oh well, with your new dress and attitude adjustment, maybe you'll meet another twenty-four-year-old this weekend who can take your mind off it.

CONGRATS!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements — and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Margaritas on me!

<p>To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213. Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.</p>

The Business Trip

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them.

You have zero faith in the airline to straighten this out in a timely fashion, so rather than waste precious hours (and battery life) on the horn to Customer Service, you make a list of the most urgent, replaceable items in your suitcase and a plan to acquire them. For example:

Chargers first— It's not just your phone; your laptop cord was in that suitcase too, and if you don't get up and running soon, your boss will see to it that you get the business end of this business trip.

Specialty item #1— If you can't find a replacement ugly Lucite statue thingy, what are you going to stare at on Helen's desk during your extremely awkward exit interview?

Specialty item #2— Assuming you manage to source the award, you're going to have to bring it with you to the black-tie dinner in Ballroom A, for which you need a temporary tuxedo and all the trimmings.

Sadly, the awesome martini-glasses bow tie and olive cuff links you packed are MIA, so you'll have to make do with standard-issue rentals.

On the bright side, this will make it easier to blend into the crowd while you drown your lost-suitcase sorrows in unlimited shrimp cocktail.

CONGRATS!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements—and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Helen from HR would be proud.

To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213.
Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.

Northeastern Regionals

RIO #2: The specialty items must be replaced ASAP; your whole trip is meaningless without them.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

You have zero faith in the airline to straighten this out in a timely fashion, so — newly invigorated — and rather than waste precious hours (and battery life) on the horn to Customer Service, you make a list of the most urgent, replaceable items in your suitcase and a plan to acquire them.

For example:

Chargers first — You'll be even more helpless trying to navigate rural Pennsylvania without Google Maps.

Bowling shoes — You're unlikely to find another pair as loyal and lucky as the ones you packed, but it's against league rules to bowl barefoot, and you're not leaving your fate as the Hook Ball King to a set of rentals.

The team mascot — “Strike” the taxidermied rattlesnake joins you at every road tournament, and it was your turn to pack her. (Come to think of it, it's possible your bag has been confiscated by airport authorities for this very reason.) To be honest, you're unlikely to solve

this problem—but at least you’re no longer trying to pretend it never happened. Strike deserves better than that.

You’re still down your favorite pj’s, but if you win this weekend, the prize money will more than cover a new set of Dude-inspired sleepwear.

CONGRATS!

Shit happened, but you calmed the fuck down, took stock of the situation, determined your realistic ideal outcome, and triaged the elements—and in doing so, set yourself up for the best-case scenario in this worst-case suitcase debacle. Doesn’t it feel good to abide?

<p>To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213. Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.</p>

TrekFest

RIO #3: Silly Putty and Super Glue

Neither desperation nor silicone polymers are a good look for anyone. It may be time to admit defeat, cede your emcee duties to Cory from Indianapolis, and focus your dwindling freakout funds on getting a good night's sleep. If nothing else, you want to be well rested for the Holodeck Hoedown on Sunday.

Oh, and if you decide you want to take my advice and calm the fuck down *before* you try to deal with shit next time, please feel free to revert to pages 215 or 216.

As a wise Vulcan once said, change is the essential process of all existence.

<p>To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213. Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.</p>

You picked  SAD

I know, this is a real blow — especially after you just spent two hours watching *Lion* on the plane. People might think you're sobbing at baggage claim because of that final scene, but really it's because tears are your go-to reaction when shit happens. It's cool. We all have our tells; some of them are just more mucousy than others.

So what exactly was in your bag, the loss of which has brought on the waterworks? Among other things, that "I SHOWED UP AT RASHIDA'S 40TH AND ALL I GOT WAS PERIMENOPAUSE" T-shirt is going to be tough to replace. And your favorite pajamas? I sense another sob session coming on. And I fully support a quick confab with the emotional puppies, but if you have any hope of salvaging this trip (and maybe being reunited with your Samsonite), now you need to crate 'em up and calm the fuck down.

Bu-bu-bu-but h-h-how?

We need to reboot your mood. Choose one of the self-care techniques from pages 112 and 113 and see where it takes you.

Laughter is the best medicine. Go to page 251.

You're in for a treat. Go to page 252.

Nah, I'm just going to wallow. Suit yourself. Go to page 253.

You picked “Laughter is the best medicine.”

On the face of it, there is nothing funny about the pickle in which you find yourself — and far be it from me to make light of your situation in an effort to cheer you up — but . . . might it be just a *teensy* bit amusing to think about the look on the face of the insurance adjuster who has to Google a “Je Joue Mio” in order to approve your claim?

When you realized the baggage carousel was empty, your mind leapt immediately to that Hard Rock Daytona Beach XXL T-shirt you’ve been sleeping in since 1994. You got a little choked up, sure. But I suggest digging a little deeper, and recalling the story *behind* the shirt? THAT might bring a smile to your face.

Now take a deep breath. Connect to the airport Wi-Fi. Go to YouTube and search for the following:

“Hey cat. Hey.”

“Alan, Alan, Alan.”

“Dogs: 1 Nash: 0”

(If none of these do it for you, I give up. You’re dead inside.)

Alright, feeling a smidge better? Did you, at the very least, stop crying? Good. Baby steps. Now, would you like to give that other coping mechanism a shot to help you calm down even more — or just go straight to dealing with it?

It probably wouldn’t hurt to get yet more calm. Go to page 252.

I feel like I can deal with it now. Go to page 220.

You picked “You’re in for a treat.”

This would be my go-to as well. I don’t know what it is about stress or feeling sad that makes me want to engage in some balls-to-the-wall emotional eating, drinking, and shopping, but there you have it, sports fans—if I’m leaving the airport without my suitcase, I’m ALSO leaving it with three Cinnabons, a novelty shot glass, and the latest *Us Weekly*.

Furthermore, there are worse places to hang out for an hour while the Southwest rep “double-checks the baggage carts” than an airport bar/restaurant that serves alcohol, dessert, and alcoholic dessert. A Baileys-infused Brownie Sundae never hurt nobody. If you’re teetotal, or if savory treats are more your bag, I have it on good authority that at any given time an airport contains more Cheddar Cheese Pretzel Combos than you are capable of eating. I smell a challenge!

And think about it this way: on one hand, if your bag doesn’t materialize, you’ll be the odd woman out at Rashida’s birthday party. But on the other hand, you have an excuse to shop for a sexy replacement outfit, and while everyone else is wearing their PERIMENOPAUSE tees, you’ll be—as Robin Thicke maintains—“the hottest bitch in this place.”

Smiling yet? I hope so. But if you want to get additional self-care on, there’s more where this came from—or you can go straight to dealing with it. Your choice.

I am feeling better, but I could still use a laugh. Go to page 251.

I’m ready to deal with it! Go to page 220.

You decided to WALLOW...

Did you hear that? I think it was a sad trombone. This doesn't bode well for your vacation.

You moped through the taxi line, did the "Woe Is Me" dance up to your hotel room, and are considering skipping Rashida's welcome drinks to sit on your bed and cry into the minibar, waiting for Southwest to call. Right now, you're more focused on feeling sorry for yourself than you are on enjoying the girls' weekend you spent good money on (not to mention got waxed for). I'd tell you to snap out of it, but you already sealed your fate when you turned to this page.

Can we all agree that this is no way to fly? Are you *sure* you wouldn't like to see what's happening over on the Flipside?

I know when I'm beat. Gimme some of that "laughter is the best medicine" shit. It's got to be better than this. Word. Go to page 251.

Yes, I would like to try the treats. You won't be sorry. Go to page 252.

Nope, I'm a martyr for the cause. Time to deal with it. Go to page 228.

Rashida's Birthday Bash

RIO #3: Call in depressed to welcome drinks and hope one of the girls can lend you an outfit for tomorrow.

Well, that's just sad. If you were going to let something like lost luggage send you this deep into the doldrums, I'm not sure you ever had a fighting chance. If, someday, you get tired of being so easily brought to tears and wish to instead calm the fuck down *before* you try to deal with shit — and then, you know, actually deal with it — I humbly direct you to pages 251 or 252.

Or — and this is a novel idea! — you might just want to reread the whole book. A little refresher course never hurt anyone.

To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213.
Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.

You picked ANGRY

Simmer down there, Hulk Hogan. I know you're upset, but ramming your [empty] luggage cart into a wall is not going to win you any points with airport security.

What exactly was in your bag that's worth the scene you're about to cause at the United Help Desk? Are you really getting this worked up over a tuxedo for a work trip awards ceremony? Ah, or is it because you were in charge of transporting Helen from HR's lifetime achievement award to this annual shareholders' meeting and now you need a replacement ugly Lucite statue thingy by 5:00 p.m. Thursday?

Gotcha. This is bullshit. You were literally the first one at the gate for this flight—how the fuck did they lose your *and only your* bag? I don't know. But I do know this: you need to calm the fuck down.

Oh yeah? And how the hell am I supposed to do that?

Well, you have a couple of options, both of which I outlined on pages 114–115 of this very book. Pick one.

Work it out. Go to page 256. (And maybe do some stretches first.)

Plot your revenge. Go to page 257.

Actually, I've been looking for an excuse to punch a wall. Suit yourself. Go to page 259.

You decided to work it out!

Good choice. And although Terminal B at LaGuardia is probably not the *most* opportune place to do a naked cartwheel, there do happen to be endless roomy corridors in which you could hop, skip, or jump your way to calming the fuck down.

Or you could try walking in the wrong direction on one of those people movers. It might get you some dirty looks from your fellow travelers, but at this point, they're lucky they're not getting far worse from you. In addition to physical exertion, this activity requires focus and coordination—two more things that are better employed in service of calming down than they are directed from your fist to the face of the United rep who is wholly blameless but unlucky enough to be on duty tonight.

Now, with the remaining charge left on your phone (why you didn't pack your chargers in your carry-on, I'll never understand, but we'll deal with that later), may I suggest locating the nearest restroom, locking yourself in a stall, and completing a ten-minute meditation app before you continue on with your evening?

You're getting there. The angry juices have exited your body by way of perspiration or deep breathing, and you're feeling pretty calm, all things considered. Did you want to plot some revenge as well, or just go straight to dealing with it?

Ooh, plotting my revenge sounds fun. And so it is. Go to page 257.

Nope, I'm ready to rip off the Band-Aid. Let's deal with it! Go to page 222.

You decided to plot your revenge.

Excellent. <makes Dr. Evil fingers>

You're still well and truly pissed off, but you recognize that getting up in anyone's face — directly, at least — will probably not serve and may actually impede your end goal of getting your stuff back and/or getting out of this airport *not* in handcuffs. So once you do manage to exit LGA without a felony assault charge, in what ways might you direct your vengeance? (Hypothetically, of course.) You can't be sure precisely who mislaid your bag, but that doesn't matter in a hypothetical. Let's say it was the dude at the check-in desk whose brain freeze sent your stuff to Newark instead of New York. You could:

Find out his home address and sign him up for a lifetime subscription to *Girls and Corpses* magazine.*

Or

Have an exact replica of your suitcase delivered to his front door, but instead of your stuff, it's full of glitter. And a remote-controlled wind turbine.

That was fun, wasn't it? Now it's time to have a calm conversation with the gate agent, hand over your details in case they can locate and

* <http://www.girlsandcorpses.com/>

deliver your stuff in time for it to be of any use to you, and get in the taxi line.

Unless — did you want to try “Working it out” as well — just in case it suits you even better? Or shall we go straight to dealing with it?

I’m still a little peeved, to be honest. Let’s try to work it out. Go to page 256.

I’m ready to deal with it! Go to page 222.

Uh-oh. You decided to MAKE IT WORSE.

Although you fell short of being thrown in airport jail (barely), you did not conduct yourself in a manner becoming a Platinum Rewards member, that's for sure. You whined, you snarked, you said "You've got to be kidding me" about fifteen times — each progressively louder than the last — and then you demanded to speak to a supervisor. A request to take your grievance up the chain is not in and of itself a terrible idea, but you (and it physically pains me to type this), you preceded that entreaty with the words "Whose friendly skies do I have to fly to get somebody who knows what they're doing around here, Caroline?" and made, um, a *very rude gesture* to the gate agent.

Plus, the nine-year-old kid across the way was taking video. You're going viral in — oh, wait, you already have. Your boss, your wife, and your own nine-year-old kid are going to see exactly what you've been up to since you landed. And Caroline? She's going to "locate" your missing suitcase in the trash room behind the food court MexiJoe's. Good luck getting the cumin smell out of your tux.

Now, are you sure you wouldn't like to see what's up on the Flipside?

YES, YES I SHOULD PROBABLY TRY TO "WORK IT OUT."

Go to page 256.

Politely and silently plotting my revenge is a better use of my time and energy. I see that now. Go to page 257.

Fuck it. Take me straight to dealing with it. Okeydokey then. Go to page 230.

The Business Trip

RIO #3: Try to not get fired or smell like cheese.

TRIAGE AND TACKLE:

Remember when life was simpler and you didn't just put your job and reputation on the line for the sake of venting your frustrations at a perfectly nice gate agent named Caroline who was just following Lost Luggage/Angry Customer protocol? Those were the days.

Also: I just saw the YouTube video. It's not looking good for you, bud. You may want to save your pennies on that tux rental—you'll need them to supplement your unemployment benefits.

Next time, if you decide you do want to take my advice and calm the fuck down *before* you try to deal with shit, give page 256 or 257 a shot. (Or maybe just go back to the beginning of the book and start over. Yeah, maybe that.)

To choose a different adventure, go back to page 213.
Or, skip ahead to the Epilogue on 269.

You picked  **AVOIDANCE**
(aka Ostrich Mode)

Tempting. Very tempting. If you close your eyes and pretend like this isn't happening, maybe it will resolve itself like these kinds of things often NEVER do. Which is why you've decided your best defense is no offense at all, and that is the hill you're prepared to die on/bury your head in. Okay.

And I know you've already stopped listening, but can we talk for just a sec about what was in your bag? Your chargers and cables, the team mascot you were babysitting, and your lucky bowling shoes for the Northeastern Regional League Championships aren't going to replace themselves, and avoidance is neither going to solve the Mystery of the Missing Luggage nor help you defend your league-leading five-bagger from last year's Semis.

You need to calm the fuck down.

I REFUSE TO ENGAGE WITH ANY OF THIS SHIT. DOES THAT COUNT AS BEING CALM?

We've been over this. Avoidance is still a form of freaking out, and you *are* going to have to deal with all of it at some point. For now, can I at least convince you to choose a better coping mechanism and see where it takes you?

Get alarmed. Go to page 262.

Propose a trade. Go to page 264.

I'll just be over here with my head in the sand. Fine. Be that way. Go to page 266.

You decided to “get alarmed.”

Your initial instinct was to treat this debacle like the Republican establishment treated Donald Trump in the 2016 primary—just ignore it and hope it’ll go away. And we all know how that turned out. THANKS GUYS. Instead, you need to take *action*. Even if it’s just a small step forward, it’s better than standing by as a limp-dicked man-child destroys the world. Or, you know, as your lucky bowling shoes get rerouted to Tampa.

You may recall from my tip on page 116 that one surefire way to shock yourself into action is by way of an incessant noise. As such, here are some ideas to get your head out of the sand and back into the game:

Set a deadline. Give yourself, say, twenty minutes to pretend this isn’t happening. Set an alarm on your watch or phone and when it goes off, spring into action like one of Pavlov’s pooches. Get thee to the Help Desk!

Or, dial up the Econo Lodge right now and request a 7:00 a.m. wakeup call. Quick, before you can think too hard about it. You can spend the intervening hours in blissful ignorance, but when the handset starts squawking, that’s your cue to get a move on.

Talk to yourself. Not to be confused with sobbing uncontrollably or screaming at airline employees, a midvolume mantra can do wonders for your mind-set. Resist the urge to retreat inward, and repeat after me (out loud): I CAN DEAL WITH THIS SHIT. I WILL DEAL WITH THIS SHIT.

Well, would you look at that? You might have some life in you yet. Did you want to try my “propose a trade” tip too, or just go straight to dealing with it?

You know what? I think I could use a little more motivation. Go to page 264.

I'm totally ready to deal with it! Go to page 224.

You decided to “propose a trade.”

I know you, and I know this latest shitstorm isn't the only thing on your must-avoid list these days. So how about we make a deal? If you bite the bullet and march yourself over to the gate agent to start the torturous process of SPEAKING TO ANOTHER HUMAN BEING in hopes of tracking down your bag and getting it delivered to the Econo Lodge in a timely fashion (such that you can avoid having to avoid OTHER EXTREMELY ENERVATING ACTIVITIES like “shopping for new bowling shoes”), then I hereby grant you permission to *continue* avoiding any one of the following:

- Investigating those scratching noises coming from behind the wall in the kitchen.
- Opening that card from your ex. It might not be a birth announcement. (It is definitely a birth announcement.)
- Booking a root canal.
- RSVP'ing to Steve's Chili Cook-off. (Steve's famous recipe is less “chili” and more “hot dog smoothie.”)

What say you? Rapping with Delta Customer Service seems practically pleasant in comparison to some of those other tasks, eh? So come on—put one foot in front of the other and let's go see a guy about a suitcase, shall we? (Then maybe when you get back from the Regionals, it'll be time to let Steve down gently while you avoid unpacking said suitcase.)

But I don't want to rush you. Would you like to try "getting alarmed," just to see what that's all about? Or go straight to dealing with it?

If trying another coping mechanism means I get to avoid dealing with it for a little longer, sign me up. Fair enough. Go to page 262.

No, you know what? I am totally ready to deal with it! Go to page 224.

Northeastern Regionals

You decided to do absolutely nothing.

Which is why you find yourself wondering what the heck you're supposed to do in Doylestown, PA, for the next four days if you can't compete in Regionals because you don't really feel like having to go out and buy new bowling shoes (and you certainly don't want to wear *rentals* like some kind of *amateur*), but you also don't have the gumption to rebook your return flight home any earlier.

Actually, you're probably not even wondering any of that...yet. You're the type who waits for the shitstorm to pause directly overhead and deposit its metaphorical deluge before you even think about reaching for a metaphorical umbrella.

Let me tell you how I think this is going to go. (I'm trying really hard not to be judgy, but we've come a long way together and I hate to see you reverting to your ostrichy ways.) I think you're going to fall asleep in this lumpy hotel bed and wake up tomorrow with a dead cell phone and no toothbrush. I *hope* that one of those outcomes compels you to take action and at least cadge a mini-bottle of Scope from the sundries shop in the lobby. If they sell phone chargers, so much the better—you do love the path of least resistance! But this is the Econo Lodge, so don't get your hopes up. If they don't, you're either going to keep avoiding dealing with any part of this shitshow and waste four days eating the best the vending machine has to offer before you can go home and continue pretending

like it never happened; OR one of your teammates will notice you haven't been replying to his trash-talking texts, come looking for you, lend you some clean socks, and physically drag you to Barry's House of Bowling-wear. You may be hopeless when it comes to dealing with shit, but you're the Hook Ball King. The team needs you.

No matter how it plays out, you still don't have your luggage back because you totally gave up on that, which means your lucky shoes, your favorite pajamas, and the team mascot (long story) are lost to the same sands of time under which you buried your head for four days. Are you *sure* you wouldn't like to see what's up over on the Flipside?

On second thought, yes. I'm interested in "getting alarmed." Go to page 262.

I'm willing to "propose a trade." Go to page 264.

Gumption levels dangerously low. Better just go straight to dealing with it. Go to page 232.

Epilogue

I'm so pleased to see you made it all the way to the end of *Calm the Fuck Down*. Cheers! And I really hope you had fun choosing your own adventures because that section was a bitch to put together.

I also hope you feel like you're walking away with a host of practical, actionable methods with which to turn yourself into a calmer and more productive version of yourself, when shit happens.

Because it will. *OH, IT WILL*. Shit will happen both predictably and unpredictably, each time with the potential to throw your day, month, or life off course. Such as, for example, when the first draft of your book is due in one week and you break your hand on a cat.

Yes. *A cat*.

In fact, this epilogue was going in a totally different direction until such time as I found myself squatting over Mister Stussy — one of my two feral rescue kitties, affectionately dubbed #trashcatsofavenidaitalia over on Instagram — ready to surprise him with a paper towel soaked in organic coconut oil.

He's very scabby. I'm just trying to help.

Unfortunately, just as I descended with hands outstretched, Mister Stussy spooked. And instead of running away from me like he usually does when I try to medicate him, he launched himself up and backward into my outstretched fingers.

Crunch!

I've been asked many times since that fateful day to explain — in both English and Spanish — the physics of how a cat manages to break a human hand. I'm not sure I fully understand it myself, though I'm told Mercury was in retrograde, which may have been a factor. The closest I can get to describing what happened is that it was like someone had hurled a large, furry brick as hard as they could, at close range and exactly the wrong angle, and scored a direct hit on my fifth metacarpal.

And remember, before I met him, Mister Stussy had long been surviving on garbage and mud puddles. Dude is a bony motherfucker.

I was momentarily stunned by the pain, and then by the deep, visceral knowledge that finishing this book was about to get a whole lot more difficult. The leftmost digits on my thankfully nondominant hand were — and I believe this is the technical term — *fuuuuuuucked*.

Would you like to know how I reacted?

First, I told my husband, "I need to go be upset about this for a little bit." Then I went upstairs and cried, out of both pain and

dismay. My emuppies were on struggle mode. Then I started to feel a little anxious on top of it, so I took a shower. Focusing on shampooing and soaping myself without doing further damage to my throbbing hand provided a goodly distraction and by the time I was finished, I was no longer sad/anxious.

I was *angry*.

Yes, for those of you keeping track at home, this is how my “I don’t really get angry” streak was broken. By a fucking CAT, to whom I have been nothing but KIND and SOLICITOUS, and who repaid me with ASSAULT AND CATTERY.

For the rest of the night I walked around the house muttering “I am very *angry* with Mister Stussy” like Richard Gere when he was very angry with his father in *Pretty Woman*. I imagined wreaking vengeance upon him — picture the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, with coconut oil — and that gave me some time and space to remember that Tim Stussert (as I sometimes call him) is just a fucking trash cat who doesn’t want coconut oil rubbed into his scabs. It wasn’t his fault.

Sigh.

In taking stock of my situation, I realized that in addition to finishing writing this book, I had my husband’s boat-based birthday party to sort out; a takeover of the Urban Outfitters Instagram Stories to film; a haircut to schedule *before* I took over the Urban Outfitters Instagram Stories; and then I was supposed to pack for a three-week, three-state trip to the US.

If you started the clock at that sickening *Crunch!*, I needed to do all of it in thirteen days. Hmm.

At this point, I didn't know that my hand was broken. I thought it was a bad sprain and not worth spending untold hours in what passes for an "emergency" room in this town when I had so little time to finish my work. In the immediate aftermath of the cat attack, my ideal and, I believed, still-realistic outcome was to finish the book on schedule so I would have six days left to deal with the rest of my shit.

So I took a bunch of Advil and got back to work.

For the next week, I pounded awkwardly away at the last 5 percent of the manuscript with my right hand (and three fifths of the left) while the affected fingers cuddled in a homemade splint fashioned out of an Ace bandage and two emery boards. The look was sort of Captain Hook meets Keyboard Cat.

Was there an anxious voice in the back of my head saying *What if you tore something? What if you regret not getting that looked at right away?* Of course there was. It just lost out to the other total shitstorm on the docket.

(BTW, I'd hate to be seen as promoting cavalier attitudes toward your health, so please rest assured, I am nothing if not a GIANT pussy. If the pain had been unbearable, I would have asked my editor for an extension and gone to get an X-ray. At the time, on a scale of relatively painless to unbearable, I gave it a "tedious.")

I was able to ice, elevate, and type (with Righty), and my husband started picking up my slack on chores. I missed out on a couple fun dinners with friends because the last 5 percent of the writing process was taking five times as long as it was supposed to, and when unwrapped, my pinky finger had a disconcerting tendency to jerk in and out of formation like James Brown live at the Apollo, but overall things seemed... okay.

When I finished the book, I decided a leisurely afternoon at the clinic was in order. That's when I found out it was a break, not a sprain. Score one for Mister Stussy.

The next several weeks were challenging. (You may recall that multistate trip I had to pack for. Blurf.) But along the way, I calmed the fuck down and dealt with it. It's almost as if writing this book for the past six months had been preparing me for this very situation—like some kind of Rhonda Byrne *The Secret* manifestation crap, except I manifested a shitstorm instead of untold riches.

I suppose that's what I get for being an anti-guru.

On the bright side: when the storm hit without warning, I emoted, then crated the puppies and gave anxiety the finger. I plotted revenge against him who had wronged me and in doing so released my aggression in a way that didn't make anything worse. I took stock, I identified my RIO, and I've been triaging ever since.

I don't want to alarm you, but think I might be onto something here.

Remember in the introduction when I said I'd always had a problem "dealing with it" when unexpected shit cropped up? In fact, readers of *Get Your Shit Together* know that the writing of that book ended on a similarly chaotic note — we'd been living nomadically for months and the Airbnb we moved into just when I was ready to make the final push on the manuscript turned out to be more of a Bugbnb. I fully freaked out and I did not calm down even a little bit. (I also drew heavily on the Fourth Fund, both at the Bank of My Husband and of the Friends We Subsequently Moved In With).

Eventually, I got over and through and past it — I know how to get my shit together, after all — but not without wasting an enormous amount of time, energy, money, and goodwill in the process.

Whereas if we fast-forward a couple years, in the wake of a much more damaging (and painful) shitstorm, I seem to have become rather capable of dealing under duress.

Fancy that!

I'm still no Rhonda Byrne, but I do have a little secret for you: I don't spend all this time writing *No Fucks Given Guides* just for shits and giggles, or to make money, or to improve your life (although these are all sound justifications). I do it because each book, each writing process, and each hour I spend chatting away about my wacky ideas on someone else's podcast provides ME with an opportunity for personal growth.

I'm giving fewer, better fucks than ever, and I'm much happier as a result. In teaching others to get their shit together, I discovered new ways of keeping mine in line. And holy hell, was *You Do You* exactly the book I needed to write to heal myself of a bunch of unhealthy trauma and resentment I didn't even know I'd been carrying around for thirty years.

But I have to say that for me, *Calm the Fuck Down* is going in the annals as the most self-fulfilling titular prophecy of them all. I know how hard it was for me to handle unexpected mayhem just a few years ago, so I also know how remarkable it is to have been able to get this far in training myself to chill the fuck out about it. Yes, a move to the tropics and a massive cultural paradigm shift helped jump-start my education, but I took to it like a feral cat to a pile of trash—and then I wrote a book about it so you can get your own jump start at a much more reasonable and sweet-smelling price point.

So my final hope is this: that if you internalize all of my tips and techniques for changing your mind-set, and implement the lessons I've striven to impart—you'll realize that most of the shit that happens to you (even failing to bcc more than one hundred people on a work email) doesn't have to be as freakout-inducing as it might have seemed before you read this book. And that you can deal with it.

I mean, that's *my* realistic ideal outcome for you, and I'm feeling pretty good about it.

CALM
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FUCK
DOWN

AND
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