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Current Theories and Practice

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A few years ago, my older brother experienced a devastating loss when his best friend, someone he considered more like a brother, committed suicide. My brother, who lives alone in another state, far from our family, had built close relationships with a few people, and this friend was central to his life. The loss hit him hard, and he spiraled into a deep depression. However, the depression he experienced didn't manifest in the typical ways I had expected. When I think of depression, I usually picture someone who is sad, crying, or perhaps even struggling with suicidal thoughts. But for my brother, the symptoms were different and, in some ways, more insidious.

It started with severe chest pains and excessive sweating. These episodes were alarming, and he went to the doctor multiple times to get checked out. Each time, they ran tests on his heart, blood levels, and stress indicators. But every time, the results came back normal. As the months went by, his symptoms only worsened. He began to experience what he described as "attacks," where the chest pains became so intense that he felt like he was having a heart attack. These attacks were terrifying for him, and he began to live in constant fear. He told me once that he didn't want to die alone in his house. The thought of passing away without anyone knowing was so frightening to him that, during these attacks, he would force himself to go outside. He figured that if something happened to him, at least someone would find him on his lawn rather than inside his house, where he might go unnoticed for days.

This fear and anxiety led to a significant change in his behavior. My brother, who had always been active and enjoyed working out, suddenly lost all interest in physical activity. He stopped going out with friends and started drinking heavily. Alcohol became his crutch, a way to numb the pain and the fear. He began to drink all the time, and it quickly became clear that this was his way of coping with the overwhelming grief and anxiety that had taken over his life.

When I visited my brother, I was shocked by what I saw. He had gained a lot of weight, and it was evident that he wasn't taking care of himself. He couldn't sleep without drinking, and he was constantly fidgety, always needing to have a drink in his hand. His house, which had always been tidy and organized, was now the opposite. It was unclean and disorganized, reflecting the chaos that had taken over his life. I could see the toll that his friend's death and the subsequent depression had taken on him, and it broke my heart to see him in such a state.

Seeing my brother like this was one of the most difficult experiences of my life. It made me realize just how profoundly a loss can affect someone, especially when they are already isolated and alone. My brother's experience with depression was unlike anything I had imagined, and it opened my eyes to the different ways in which grief and mental illness can manifest. It wasn't just about feeling sad or hopeless; it was a complete unraveling of the life he once knew, replaced by fear, anxiety, and an overwhelming sense of loneliness. The weight of his grief was evident in every aspect of his life, from his physical appearance to his living environment, and it was clear that he was struggling to cope with the immense pain he was feeling.

Recently, my brother finally decided to seek help from a doctor and shared everything he'd been going through. The doctor prescribed him a medication that has had great results. It's nicknamed "the happy pill," and after a few months of taking it, I can honestly say that it's working. My brother has started to get back to the things he used to love. He's working out again, losing weight, and, most importantly, he's cut down on his drinking significantly.

I ask my brother often if his doctor has mentioned how long he will need to stay on the medication. I'm curious to know whether this is a permanent solution or if he'll eventually be able to wean off of it. Unfortunately, my brother doesn't have an answer to that yet. However, he has also started counseling, which I think is a great step toward helping him process his grief

properly. It's encouraging to see him taking these steps to heal, and I'm hopeful that with the combination of medication and therapy, he'll continue to make progress.