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and back." — *NEW YORK TIMES*

a memoir
**PROZAC
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Young and
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in
AMERICA

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with a new
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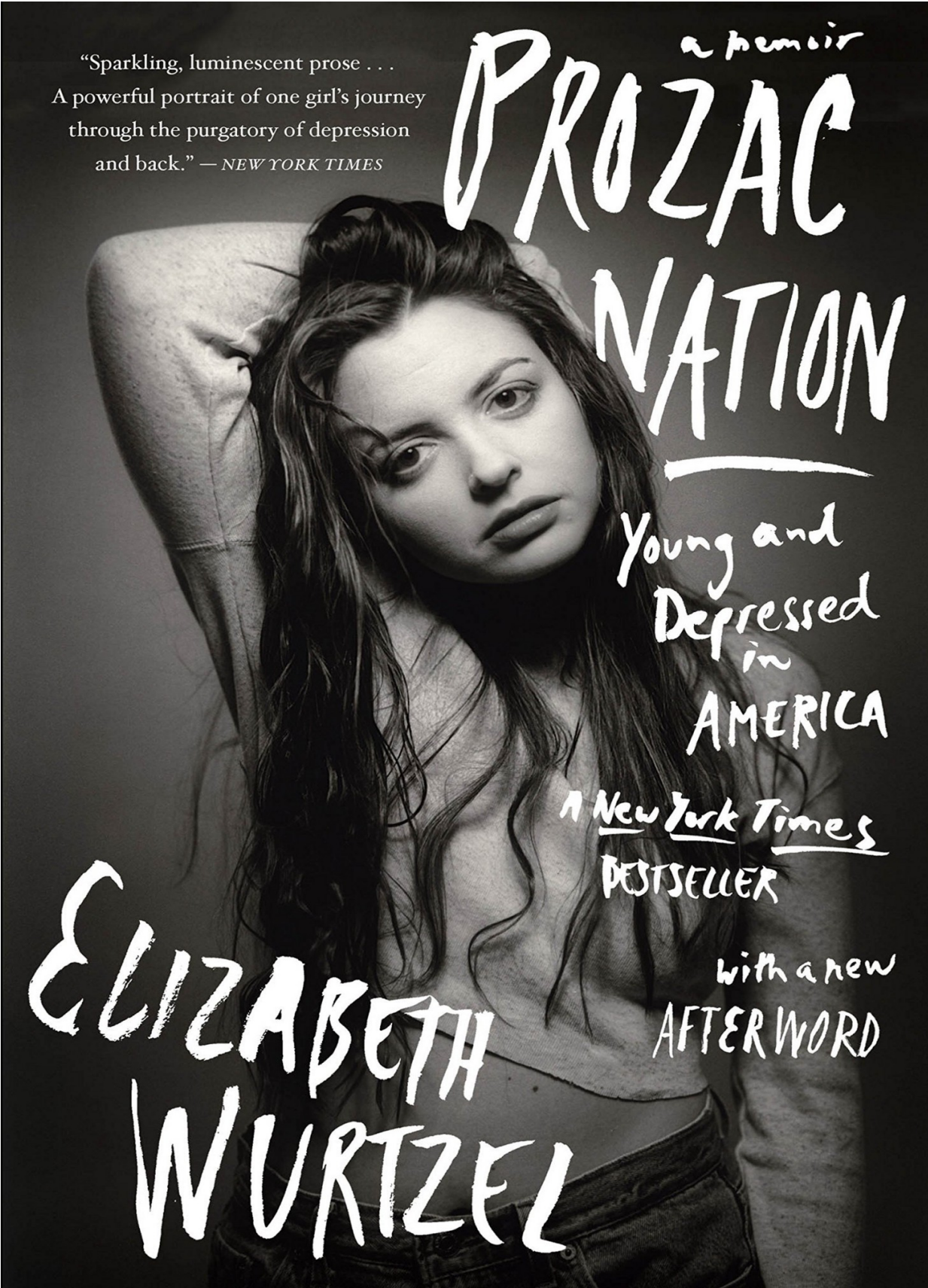
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Elizabeth Wurtzel



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*For my mom,
lovingly*

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Author's Note: Long before Derrida and deconstruction, the Talmud said, quite sagely, “We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.” As far as I am concerned, every word of this book is the complete and total truth. But of course, it's my truth. So to protect the innocent—as well as the guilty—I have changed most names. Otherwise, unfortunately for me, every detail is accurate.

Very early in my life it was too late.

MARGUERITE DURAS

The Lover

Prologue

I Hate Myself and I Want to Die

I start to get the feeling that something is really wrong. Like all the drugs put together—the lithium, the Prozac, the desipramine, and Desyrel that I take to sleep at night—can no longer combat whatever it is that was wrong with me in the first place. I feel like a defective model, like I came off the assembly line flat-out fucked and my parents should have taken me back for repairs before the warranty ran out. But that was so long ago.

I start to think there really is no cure for depression, that happiness is an ongoing battle, and I wonder if it isn't one I'll have to fight for as long as I live. I wonder if it's worth it.

I start to feel like I can't maintain the facade any longer, that I may just start to show through. And I wish I knew what was wrong.

Maybe something about how stupid my whole life is. I don't know.

My dreams are polluted with paralysis. I regularly have night visions where my legs, though attached to my body, don't move much. I try to walk somewhere—to the grocery store or the pharmacy, nowhere special, routine errands—and I just can't do it. Can't climb stairs, can't walk on level ground. I am exhausted in the dream and I become more exhausted in my sleep, if that's possible. I wake up tired, amazed that I can even get out of bed. And often I can't. I usually sleep ten hours a night, but often it's many more. I am trapped in my body as I have never been before. I am perpetually zonked.

One night, I even dream that I am in bed, stuck, congealed to the sheets, as if I were an insect that was squashed onto the bottom of someone's shoe. I simply can't get out of bed. I am having a nervous breakdown and I can't move. My mother stands at the side of the bed and insists that I could get up if I really wanted to, and it seems there's no way to make her understand that I literally can't move.

I dream that I am in terrible trouble, completely paralyzed, and no one believes me.

In my waking life, I am almost this tired. People say, Maybe it's Epstein-Barr. But I know it's the lithium, the miracle salt that has stabilized my moods but is draining my body.

And I want out of this life on drugs.

I am petrified in my dream and I am petrified in reality because it is as if my dream is reality and I am having a nervous breakdown and I have nowhere to turn. Nowhere. My mother, I sense, has just kind of given up on me, decided that she isn't sure how she raised this, well, this thing, this rock-and-roll girl who has violated her body with a tattoo and a nose ring, and though she loves me very much, she no longer wants to be the one I run to. My father has never been the one I run to. We last spoke a couple of years ago. I don't even know where he is. And then there are my friends, and they have their own lives. While they like to talk everything through, to analyze and hypothesize, what I really need, what I'm really looking for, is not something I can articulate. It's nonverbal: I need love. I need the thing that happens when your brain shuts off and your heart turns on.

And I know it's around me somewhere, but I just can't feel it.

What I do feel is the scariness of being an adult, being alone in this big huge loft with so many CDs and plastic bags and magazines and pairs of dirty socks and dirty plates on the floor that I can't even see the floor. I'm sure that I have nowhere to run, that I can't even walk anywhere without tripping and falling way down, and I know I want out of this mess. I want out. No one will ever love me, I will live and die alone, I will go nowhere fast, I will be nothing at all. Nothing will work out. The promise that on the other side of depression lies a beautiful life, one worth surviving suicide for, will have turned out wrong. It will all be a big dupe.

It is Saturday night, we're about at that point when it starts to be Sunday morning, and I am curled up in fetal position on my bathroom floor. The black chiffon of my dress against the stark white tiles must make me look like a dirty puddle. I can't stop crying. The twenty or so people who are still sitting in the living room don't seem at all fazed by what's going on with me in here, if they notice at all, between sips of red wine and hits on a joint someone rolled earlier and chugs on Becks or Rolling Rock. We decided—my housemate, Jason, and I—to have a party tonight, but I don't think we meant for two hundred people to turn up. Or maybe we did. I don't know. Maybe we're still the nerds we in high school who get enough of a kick out of the possibility of being popular that we actually did bring this on ourselves.

I don't know.