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## SundayStyles

**POSSESSED**

### A Small Bottle of Calm In a World Gone Mad



SUZANNE DECELLO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

**SHOCK TREATMENT** Naomi Klein and her panic fighter.

By DAVID COLMAN

**B**OOKSTORES and best-seller lists are arranged by, among other things, fiction and nonfiction. But with so much blurring of the two, do they truly merit segregation?

If you wanted a more clear-cut division, you could do worse than draw a line between panic-inducing and panic-allaying. The best-seller list is awash in books aimed at either inducing or reducing stress. Certainly the title of (and blurbs for) Naomi Klein's new book, "The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism" (Metropolitan Books), would seem to place it squarely in the freak-out-immediately camp rather than the light-a-scented-candle one. (John le Carré, who would know, called it "scary as hell.")

Ms. Klein understands that such blurbs sell books, but she was disappointed that her publisher didn't use her favorite, from the writer John Berger, who wrote that the book "provokes and instills a calm." That's because Ms. Klein doesn't want you to panic. This desire was born out of her research on spots like New Orleans after the hurricane and Indonesia after the tsunami. A kind of numbness, a mental and economic shock, afflicts people and places that have undergone catastrophes, she said, and makes them easy targets for exploitation. She would rather not terrorize her readers similarly.

Still, she draws enough connections — between, to name a few, the Blackwater scandal in Iraq, the Pinochet regime in Chile and the economist Milton Friedman — to push a panic button or two. And it was while she was reporting on the elusive economics of Iraq reconstruction in spring 2004 that she learned an important life lesson: remain calm.

"That was when everything went crazy," she recalled. "The

four Blackwater guards were killed, Paul Bremer had closed down Moqtada al-Sadr's newspaper, and both Falluja and Najaf were under siege." Then the Abu Ghraib photographs leaked out.

"It was scary to be a Westerner," she said. "A lot of reporters were on Valium." Around that time she noticed a friend putting droplets of some sort into a glass of water. Intrigued, she found that the potion was Bach Rescue Remedy, a homeopathic treatment developed in the 1930s and meant, the label says, "for relief of occasional stress."

She tried it. Soon enough, the little dropper-top bottle was a constant presence in her bag. She wasn't hooked exactly, but, well, let's call it charmed. "It's very, very mild, especially if you dilute it," she said. "I use it if I'm having trouble sleeping, or before a speech if I'm tense."

But the contents of the bottle (a blend of flower essences, according to a spokesman for Nelsons, the British company that makes the Bach line) are not its real charm.

"I have no real sense that it works," Ms. Klein said. "I think of it like a kind of talisman. I like the old-fashioned country-doctor packaging."

While the tough-minded Ms. Klein does not seem the type to be toting around a vial of flower essences, she said she takes an abstract view, as if the bottle is filled not with flower power, but with those elusive connections she loves, and which give her a sense of reassurance.

"Whenever I feel bombarded, my body tenses up," she said. "Shock is about severing connections. It's about losing our narrative. This is why I've been thinking about being calm. I think, if this is what shock is, what's the antidote? I think it's calm."

Like her yellow bottle, it may not be the cure for everything, but it's not a bad place to start.

