Daniel: Hello, I'm Daniel Zomparelli and I'm afraid of everything and I want to know what scares you, so I've invited people to tell me what they're afraid of. Then I talk with experts to dig a little deeper and get tips on how to deal. This is, I'm Afraid That.

Daniel: I recently worked at a writing retreat at Banff this past summer and it was great. It was two weeks of writers bonding over that boring, fun, annoying, exciting things about writing. It was my first time on a retreat like this, and definitely my first time as a mentor in this capacity.

Daniel: Everything was going great on this retreat, but then a bad thought seeped into my head, "Does everyone here hate me?" There is no reason for me to have had this thought, but it's a familiar one. I pushed through it and had a great time, but it's a thought that comes back to me a lot when I meet a lot of new people.

Daniel: Tyler Coates, writer and former editor of Esquire, has a similar fear that everyone hates him. We talk with him about his fear and how it permeates through his life, and then we bring in expert Jane Marie to talk to Tyler and myself about how to break that fear down.

Daniel: We're sitting with Tyler Coates, he's written for Decider, Billboard, and more, and was the Senior Culture Editor for Esquire. Thank you so much for joining us on I'm Afraid That.

Tyler: Thank you for having me.

Daniel: We should just jump right in, but what is your fear?

Tyler: I have this fear that everyone hates me or just dislikes me in various degrees.

Daniel: Lots to unpack, I guess.

Tyler: Yeah.

Daniel: I guess, who's everyone?

Tyler: It is a very broad way of looking at it. It could be friends, close friends to strangers on the internet because I've been writing on the internet for a very long time. So, that's probably what a lot of it has to do with, just getting negative feedback from people. And then anyone in between it, people I work with, or if I've ever interviewed a celebrity, I get very anxious about it. Especially once the piece goes live and I am terrified until I get confirmation that they don't hate me or they hate the piece that they... I assumed that I got everything wrong and they are mortified by what I've said about them. That sort of thing.

Daniel: Okay. So, everyone.

Tyler: Yeah, literally everyone.

Daniel: Yeah. That's like everyone you've interacted with in some form.

Tyler: Yeah. Honestly, I would like everyone to just confirm that they don't hate me, just to take the blow out. I'll still assume that they're just being nice.

Daniel: Has this always been the case or did this develop at some point?

Tyler: I think I was thinking about it in preparation of talking about this. I think a lot of it has to do with, I grew up in a really, really small town in Virginia where everybody knows everybody. I was desperate to get out of it, and knowing that I was different than everybody else, and desperately not wanting that to be the case and also making sure that, or working really hard to make sure that no one could tell that I was different.

Tyler: Performing in front of other people and understanding what they expect from other people, I think about that a lot of how people see me, how I present to the world maybe. And so, I do recognize it as very irrational. But yeah, I think that's probably the starting point is just being very conscious of how people see me.

Daniel: Okay. How does it manifest itself now?

Tyler: I think social media plays a major role in it. As I said, I've been writing on the internet in various forms from personal blogging on blogger and Tumblr maybe 10 years ago. Then I moved to New York from Chicago in 2010 and was trying to get into media and try to be a writer and an editor, which I eventually did. And I think, about six months ago when I was having a lot of anxiety around work and I was seeing people getting dragged online just for things, stupid things.

Tyler: Every couple months like some comedian does something stupid, whether it's a legitimately bad joke or something that's read babble, a lot of bad faith reading goes into it and these mobs come before them, whether it's on the left or the right. It makes me so anxious. I've definitely had nightmares that I've tweeted something terrible that is so unlike me and not anything that I would do but that has created a real anxiety for me. It's just like how strangers on the internet will respond to something that I just tweeted offhandedly and if it will blow up into something bigger.

Tyler: What I put out into the world is probably such a fraction of who I am, but it can represent the whole of me, that terrifies me. And so for someone to make a judgment about my whole being based on one essay or one tweet, it's enough to make me not want to do any of that.

Daniel: Yeah. That part of Twitter is definitely terrifying. Like just, it is a lot of... You can easily be taken out of context. My favorite is watching people lose their mind on comedians who know how to play that. Like Cole Escola's tweet specifically about, I now can't remember the tweet because I'm on the spot, but it's the tweet about the... Who is the now defamed gay actor?

Tyler: Kevin Spacey?

Daniel: Kevin Spacey.

Tyler: Yes. I do remember this.

Daniel: His tweet saying, "You say Hollywood isn't homophobic but Kevin Spacey hasn't worked a day since he came out." And you just saw people losing their mind because he's just... And he kept doubling down as the joke to being like, "People say that they say this is a joke but I am concerned."

Tyler: I think I always grew up like wanting a lot of attention and then when I get it I'm like, "Oh no I don't like this. I don't want to be this. I don't want a party for me." Because I get so anxious about like, are the right people here? Are the right people paying attention? Why aren't they retweeting me when these other people are? I want very specific attention maybe. And when I don't get it, it's like, "Oh no." It will keep me up at night. It's crazy.

Tyler: And so limiting that face to face interaction I think has really skewed my perception of myself and how other people see me maybe because I just assume the worst. That's just in my nature. I assume the worst of how people see me. I assume the best of people, I just assume the worst in how they look at me.

Tyler: As an adult in the world I think that, when I have events to go to and it's a brand new world here and I just feel like I'm a different person than I was a year ago because I'm no longer in New York, I get very, very nervous and I notice myself stammering over myself or like tripping over words in a way that I never did before I guess, or at least I didn't acknowledge it. I was more comfortable with myself. I can go an entire day and my boyfriend's the only person I talked to interact with because-

Daniel: That's my experience.

Tyler: ... Yeah. Because you're like, I'm in my house or I'm in my car. There's just no engagement. I think without realizing it, you can truly not speak to people all day long. Especially when you have a car and you're like in your own box.

Daniel: Yeah. I sometimes go a little bit kookie, when the majority of my conversation has been with a dog who can't talk back.

Tyler: Yes. Same.

Daniel: Although she is the cutest and I do love her so much.

Tyler: That's weird because my dog's the cutest.

Daniel: Is there a time you feel this fear worse than others?

Tyler: I think right now I'm very sensitive about it because I am freelancing and trying to work myself into like pitching story ideas. I need to convince people that my ideas are great, and I'm a good writer, and I have to... I think I took that for granted for many years of just having a staff job where I could... I was an editor so I could just write whatever I wanted. I assigned myself things.

Tyler: So now I'm pitching so I feel very anxious all the time lately of just trying to figure out how to do the things that I want to do. How to convince people that I'm worth spending money on.

Daniel: Do you have examples of it? Without naming names obviously, but-

Tyler: Okay. Well, one thing is, right now I'm trying to get into television and so writing some scripts and a lot of the first step is the networking part of just emailing friends who work in TV. The idea of emailing a friend and asking for a favor terrifies me.

Daniel: ... Oh, it's so terrifying.

Tyler: And that's where it becomes irrational, I think. Because, I have really good friends who have offered their advice unsolicited. They've offered their help, but the idea of taking them up on it, the idea of them reading the first script I ever wrote and them being like, "This is trash, and you don't deserve it!" What's wrong with me? What did they see in me? Like what don't they see?

Tyler: There's a negative connotation with ambition that I have not been able to get over. I don't think ambition is a bad thing, but I think when I see ambition in myself, I am embarrassed by it, or I am ashamed by it because I feel like it's not earned. So I mean truly all of us I think is like, in my brain and my head needs to be fixed in various ways. But I think that that's how it manifests into this fear that people ~are not going to like me, and so that is the stumbling block professionally and personally maybe.

Tyler: I think I learn a lot of things from movies because I watched so many movies as a kid and I'm trying to think of what are examples of ambitious characters who were the villain? The one thing that comes in mind, which is not a great example of this, but it is Election because you see that movie through the eyes of Matthew Broderick's character, and he sees Tracy Flick as this ambitious monster. I think I really misread that as a kid. I think that I really saw it entirely through the protagonists eyes. Not recognizing that the protagonist of a movie could be the bad guy. And I think 20 years later I view that so differently and I see her as the person that you should be rooting for. Maybe that's what it is. This fear of being perceived as uncaring, or only caring about myself and my own success. I think that I have always been someone who has supported my friends and really promote them as much as possible.

Daniel: It does make me think also of now Twitter again or social media, where people who are successful do get dragged a lot. And I feel like there is that association they got there because they were ambitious therefore, we have to find out if they're problematic in any way possible.

Tyler: Right. I hate the idea of cancel culture, which I don't believe it's true. I don't think it exists. It just means that people disagree with you. If you say something that is offensive and there's a spectrum of offensiveness, but if it falls on there you have to expect that people are going to disagree with you. This is again like how I process Twitter psychologically is that, one tweet does not mean that everyone hates you. But one tweet can destroy my day for sure.

Daniel: I had somebody in bad faith trying to turn something I said into something more than it. In my head when I'm tweeting, I'm like, "I'm an idiot. I am the stupidest idiot in the world. Here's my stupid idea." And then whenever people respond to it in sincerity, I'm like, "Oh no, no. I also think I'm stupid, so don't worry about that." Yeah, I think-

Tyler: Every tweet, I try to expect what the reaction will be and this is when I get so crazy. Late at night, if I've smoked pot and I've looked it, I will look at my own Instagram feed and my own Twitter feed and I'll just be like, "Oh no, that picture is so stupid. What would people read into this picture that I posted?" And I'll go back and delete things from months ago as if anyone is looking at my profile and going back months. I always say I'm the narcissist that just assumes people don't... Everyone's talking about me and making fun of me because that's what it is.

Tyler: I think a lot about myself and assume everyone else does and everyone else is thinking negatively about me as much as I am. Whereas, at the end of the day, no one cares about me at all. And that is something that I try to remember. No one cares, no one's looking at my tweets. I'm not a celebrity. I'm not a truly famous person, or even a medium famous person.

Daniel: ... And everyone is usually thinking about themselves. So it's a cruel joke that life plays on all of us.

Tyler: Yeah.

Daniel: I do worry about how social media creates. It shows the world, and it shows everyone's opinions, and everyone's thoughts and then we internalize that in a way that is a little bit terrifying where we've become essentially politicians who whatever you post becomes a part of your persona. There's a possibility that you're going to make people mad for your opinions. And I think just having that, carrying all those thoughts and the weight of that is terrifying. No matter who you are on Twitter, it is an open public space.

Tyler: Yes. And some people truly don't give a shit about it. Some people thrive on, again, like they thrive on any reaction.

Daniel: Whereas, I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings ever.

Tyler: Exactly. If I ever heard that something that I wrote or said was hurtful, I would feel miserable.

Daniel: When do you feel validated or liked?

Tyler: Whenever anyone hits that heart button on Twitter, whenever I get those retweets. This is it and something I was actually thinking of while we were talking about this, when we talked about how we both agree we hate promoting ourselves or asking for help, the few times that I've written something that I want people to see, that I've sent out an email to people and being like, "Hey I wrote this thing. I spent a lot of time on it, or I really liked it. I would love for you to read it if you feel so inclined to share it." I've probably done that like three times in five years. And seeing people respond immediately by sharing it and say saying something nice about me, is so extremely validating. It makes me laugh about how ridiculous I was being by never asking people to look at stuff. To always feeling like self promotion is the worst possible thing. I think you can obviously ... I mean I'm not going to email every person I know every time I read an article because that's unhinged and that really devalues the validation.

Tyler: But I think it's people saying they like what I do, means a lot to me. It also makes me extremely embarrassed, especially if it happens in real life. I've been recognized at a party and someone... First of all I get recognized at Jesse Tyler Ferguson then that is incredibly unvalidating. But when people recognize me for me and they say, "Oh I really like this piece you wrote." It's a combination of just incredible joy and then embarrassment because I'm just like, "Oh God, I don't know what..." Again, it's like having the attention that I constantly crave being given to me and then realizing I don't like being the center of attention. That's what it looks like a combination of happiness and cringing.

Daniel: No, that's good. I have a magical skill set to not accept any compliment ever. If I ever get that, the way I can deal with not being embarrassed, is I find a way in my head to still not take it as a compliment.

Tyler: Oh how?

Daniel: I think my favorite one was, I was walking down the street and somebody yelled out, "I love your podcast." And I got home and told Gabe and then Gabe's like, "Oh, congratulations!" And I was like, "It's LA. He could be thinking of anyone. Everyone has a podcast here." He literally was just like, "I'm going to make this guy's day by saying I love your podcast." And have no idea who I am.

Tyler: Yeah. I mean, honestly, the first couple of years of Modern Family were very difficult for me because people would come up to me and just be like, "Hey, I love your work." And I'd be like, "Oh, I'm not on television. I'm not who you think I am. But I was accepting your compliment for a second there and that makes me feel like such a jerk."

Daniel: Thank you so much-

Tyler: Thank you for having me.

Daniel: ... For joining us. And I just wanted to say after all this, I still like you.

Tyler: Oh, thank you. I like you too.

Daniel: That was Tyler Coates, and his fear that everyone hates him. Before we get to our expert Jane Marie, let's listen to another voicemail from our fear line.

Sarah: Hi, my name is Sarah. I have a fear of getting hit by a truck or a subway car, but I specifically have this fear when things are going well for me. So I guess this fear is that, one day I'll meet my soulmate, or I'll write something that I really like and that other people like, and then I will meet my demise that very day. Thanks. Bye.

Daniel: Welcome, Jane Marie-

Jane: Thank you.

Daniel: ... To the podcast. I'm still-

Jane: In my own office?

Daniel: ...In your own office.

Jane: Welcome Jane, to work.

Daniel: Welcome to your work. So we had Tyler Coates come in and talked about his fear that everyone hates him. And you're here as the expert. I would say you're the expert of not giving a shit what other people think of them. Is that?

Jane: Yeah. Before you told me it was Tyler, we were just discussing in a more general sense around the office you said, "Oh I'm looking for an expert for this particular fear." I think I said, "Oh, I hate that one." It's just that, that is arrogance dressed up as insecurity or something. And that, I have a lot of thoughts about it. But then you told me that it's somebody I know.

Jane: So I thought maybe we should do this one differently where I'm not just making the problem worse. Their worst fear come true. This one I was like, "I so want to talk about this stuff because it's one of my favorite things to talk about." But because doing so feeds directly into his fear and I like him and consider him a pal, I just didn't want to talk behind his back and then have him go, "Oh no, add her to the list."

Daniel: Yeah. Welcome Tyler, back to the podcast.

Tyler: Thank you for having me back, already.

Daniel: I know. This is obviously new. We talked about this with Jane. I actually hope this goes badly because I love a train wreck.

Jane: Do you?

Daniel: A little bit. Not listening no. I would not as a listener, I would log out.

Jane: Would you?

Daniel: Yeah.

Jane: Oh, I was going to say I love a train wreck too.

Daniel: Okay.

Tyler: You like being in one Daniel?

Daniel: I like reading about one.

Tyler: Okay. And you like creating-

Jane: Creating.

Tyler: ... Watching it happen.

Jane: You know what? So this is actually a thing of mine it turns out. So let's just do this.

Tyler: Okay. Read me.

Jane: Well, there two really strong, possibly conflicting feelings about this, so you have to just be okay with cognitive dissonance. Holding two truths that are in conflict. One is, I think this fear is a form of arrogance.

Tyler: Oh, I agree.

Jane: Great.

Tyler: Yes. I'm the kind of narcissist who'd truly believe that everyone's talking shit about him but not good things. That's how I feel.

Jane: Amazing. Actually, the moment I decided to do this, I was leaving here to go to therapy. I asked her permission essentially, "Can I do this?-

Tyler: Can I be [crosstalk 00:23:27] therapy? Yeah.

Jane: ... Can I be the expert?" And she said, "Well, what did you think about it?" And I told her that and she was like, "Oh yeah, sure. You'll be fine. Yes. That's what it is. Yeah. That's exactly what it is." And it's crippling and you will maybe never leave your house if you don't stop. But the other strong opinion is, you're right. So, definitely people hate you.

Tyler: Oh, for sure.

Jane: You're a human being, and you're not boring.

Tyler: Right. Oh, thank you. I appreciate someone pointing out the arrogance aspect of it because I truly believe. I feel like most people wouldn't say that because they're like, "Oh, you don't want to hear that." I'm like, "No, I do. I want a confirmation of my problems."

Jane: Okay, good.

Daniel: Do you think the right people are hating you? Is that part of a fear? Like assholes?

Tyler: Yeah. I mean they probably are not actively, again, they're not actively thinking about me and being... It's usually the same way that I approached the world and hating it and people in it, is when they appear in my, I would say presence, but I'll just say Twitter feed, and I'm like, "Oh right. They still exist." I don't like that. That's probably if I'm someone's nemesis or enemy.

Daniel: I want to talk about nemesis for a second. Do either of you feel like you have nemeses?

Tyler: Yes.

Jane: I wish I knew. That would delight me.

Daniel: So you don't feel that way to towards anyone?

Jane: No.

Daniel: Okay.

Tyler: Yeah. But I have categories of this enemy which, it's like a pyramid. Enemies at top, they're truly terrible people that you don't wish well. Whereas nemesis, I feel like they are people that you are competing against but you're not friends with, that their success fuels you in a way. In a friendly competition way. And then the third category are the people who are doormat, who've become inoffensive to you over time, but they're like volcanoes you don't know. They might blow one day. They're never dead.

Jane: Edith Zimmerman would tell me all the time if I've had a feeling of spite or envy about anyone doing what we were doing in the lady blogging world, she'd be like, "Oh, well you just need to do better work than them."

Tyler: If you don't [inaudible 00:25:50].

Jane: If I don't like them, or if I feel threatened, she'd be like, "Be funnier. Write better. Get smarter. Be more popular." And she said it enough times that I was like, "Man, she's so right." Yeah.

Tyler: I mean that truly is it. It is just a way to drive yourself to be better, to be best.

Daniel: I feel like my problem is that I'm a non-competitive person. I found out that I was somebody nemesis once and I was like, "Huh?" And I was like, "I hope nothing but success for this person." And he was thrown off by it, and I was like... Because we also got confused. Somebody thought we were the same person, and we even have the same first name. He's very sweet. So I hope if he's listening to this he knows once again, still hope his career is great. But yeah, he was like, "This is my nemesis. And he introduced to somebody and I was like, "Wah? I think you're great!" [crosstalk 00:26:49]

Jane: Was it flattering? In a way, did it feel-

Daniel: A little bit because of, his books won so many awards and I was like, "My book got nominated for A award, did not win."

Jane: ... Exciting.

Daniel: And I know it was the bottom of that award list. So it was nice.

Daniel: Have you always been this unfearful of people hating you, or did this come about at a certain time?

Jane: I thought about that last night and this morning and I have since been still thinking about it. I know there was a moment in eighth grade... So this is the other thing I don't like about this fear, is that it's pretty juvenile. We all have those childhood phases where we're not cool or we're in the uncool group. All of us. So being stuck-

Daniel: We know.

Jane: ... There emotionally it feels like, "Oh, God no! If there's anything I can do to not ever go back to that place, that'd be great." So I remember there was a moment in eighth grade, it all perfectly coincided with my parents' divorce, where I had almost the year before, almost gotten popular. I was so close. Oh man, I was so close. And then I don't know what went wrong. I really don't know how in school, maybe it was the divorce, maybe nobody did that or something, it wasn't my fault then it all got projected on me, or I can't pinpoint when I became the uncool kid. But I became like extremely the uncool kid, halfway through eighth grade, to where people were making fun of me in the hallways, that kind of bullying and picking on me. But I was also getting it from my parents at the same time.

Jane: So I made a switch. I shaved my head and then just was like, "Fuck everyone. If you guys think I'm the worst, then I'm just going to start sleeping with everyone and have no hair. Okay?" And then I just stayed the course with that too. Of like, "I'm going to get out in front of it. I'll just be... You can see through this, you know what's under here. I'll just put that out. I'll lead with it, instead. So none of your judgements will..."

Jane: So yeah, there was a time where I was not liked, but I don't know, I didn't give it a lot of credit because I was also like, "The world is very large. I'm good." I will say this. I don't

like public speaking. I'll go on the internet. But yeah, that's why I hide behind a microphone.

Daniel: Right.

Tyler: And I hide behind my laptop.

Daniel: Right. I guess when you can compartmentalize those two versions of fears, they just feel like two different beasts.

Jane: It's holding the two things at once. Like I was talking about, right? It's obnoxious and arrogant to think anybody's thinking about you, and also people hate you, for sure. And that's a normal thing to be worried about. The other tip is, don't you want to reserve the right to hate people?

Tyler: Oh yeah.

Jane: So you got to give it back.

Tyler: I know.

Daniel: [crosstalk 00:30:33] you have to give it back?

Jane: The right.

Daniel: Oh, you have to allow them to hate you in response.

Jane: Right.

Daniel: See I don't like hating people.

Jane: At all?

Daniel: Yeah. I don't care for it. I mean I like hating... No, I don't even like... It makes me-

Jane: You never shit talk anybody?

Daniel: ... I definitely shit talk to people, but it makes me feel bad.

Tyler: To an extent it makes me feel bad, but it's usually when I'm like, "Am I obsessed with this person?" It's more like, "Am I shit talking too much?"

Jane: This is great. Okay, listen to this. So it doesn't always make me feel bad. I'm not like you guys in that way, but it does sometimes make me feel bad. But you got to give that back to, right?

Tyler: Right.

Jane: So people might be hating on you, and feeling bad about it.

Tyler: I hope they feel terrible about it.

Jane: [inaudible 00:31:12]

Daniel: That's fair.

Jane: We can all be assholes.

Daniel: That's where we're going to end on. We can all be assholes.

Jane: If we want.

Daniel: Okay, well, thank you both so much for coming for this intervention.

Tyler: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Jane: And plus you're good looking, that half of it's done now. The likeability. Just like to look at him.

Daniel: Okay. Thank you so much.

Jane: You're welcome.

Daniel: I'm Afraid That is produced by me, Daniel Zomparelli, Gabe Liedman, and Little Everywhere. If you have a fear you'd like to hear on the show, please share with us that imafraidthat.com, where you can get more info on the guests and experts. That's imafraidthat.com. If you enjoyed the podcast, please subscribe, review, and share. It helps other people find the show. And thank you for listening.