

ACTRESS ANNE HATHAWAY
IS NOT THE FIRST WOMAN
TO OPEN UP ABOUT
THE DARKNESS THAT IS
DEPRESSION, AND SHE WON'T
BE THE LAST. Kira Cochrane AND
Lucinda Schmidt CAST A LIGHT
ON THE ENEMY WITHIN.

In 2002, British writer Allison Pearson emerged as the chief chronicler of an ultra-modern female malady: the harried pursuit of the perfect life. Her novel *I Don't Know How She Does It* is a tale of a rare beast, the female hedge-fund manager, and her struggle to juggle two children with a very full-time job. The protagonist, Kate Reddy, may have a nanny and a husband who is both gainfully employed and nifty in the kitchen, but her life seems full of comic anxieties. (The novel opens with her attempts to "distress" supermarket mince pies that her daughter is taking to school, so they look appropriately, maternally, handmade.)

While the book depicts an aspirational bubble that floats way over most of our heads, it found an immediate audience. In fact, it became a best seller, the film rights were sold, and Oprah Winfrey — herself an essential filter of the modern female experience — described it as a "bible for the working mother".

In her worldly success, and her approach to life, it has been assumed that Pearson is similar to her protagonist. She's a high-flying journalist who has won a number of awards; her partner is *New Yorker* writer Anthony Lane; she has two children. In precis, it's a convincing, if comical, portrait of a perfect life.

But this year, her comic tone was jettisoned. Pearson had been writing a newspaper column for some years, but her column on April 28 would be her last, she said, because she had depression. She had always wanted to be "the best kind of girl", but recently she found herself in a psychiatrist's consulting room, assessing just how unhappy she was. When the psychiatrist asked if she'd had any suicidal thoughts, Pearson "didn't mention the strange allure of a nearby motorway bridge at dead of night ... Eventually, I blurted into the silence, 'Sometimes, I think it would be easier not to be. Not to be dead; I have two children, I can't leave them. But just to stop, you know. To not exist for a while.'"

Pearson went on to describe herself as a "sandwich woman", one of a generation who had children in their 30s and then, just as their offspring were

Shades of Blue

