

My Downward Spiral Towards Motherhood

by Alexis McCauley

We brought you home today and I watch you lying in the bassinet and crying. I'm much too exhausted to do much more than watch you. I don't know what you want, what you need and haven't the energy to go about finding out. I thought this was the next step to being an adult, love, marriage, then a baby. What a useless little being you are, and you belong to me. Do you really belong to me? I watch you and I feel nothing, no connection, no bond. You suckle from my breast and yet it brings no emotion to me. Can I truly be your mother if I don't feel a mother's love for you? Does that mean there is something wrong with you? Or perhaps with me?

Day 2

The doctors say I am just lacking sleep, so they wrote a prescription for something to help this. I don't like how fatigued the pills make me, a zombie in the morning, empty, hollow thoughts and lacking any drive. I don't think I really need them. My energy seems to be picking up; I must not be so tired. The doctors also say that I would benefit from writing my thoughts and concerns down in a journal, but how does one benefit from writing down and reliving dark ideas you aren't even comfortable thinking? I hate these thoughts when I am alone and now I must face them down on paper, where they are permanent? Who benefits from this? Not me, the thoughts grow and connect on paper as I write them down, then become permanent. Maybe the doctors are just trying to make me to lose this battle. They don't understand how I feel, they don't know what it is to look at your new daughter and feel... nothing. A mother should love her daughter, cherish the life she gave and nurtured within her for nine months. But I don't; I resent the attention you require. I dream of packing you up and returning you like an Amazon

package. What kind of mother does that make me? A horrible one, that's what kind. I fear you every day, I fear being left alone with you and all your demands, I fear failing you as a guide through life and you turning out a little heathen of a child. I worry that you will become the victim to any number of horrible people out in the world that I can't protect you from. How do I go about teaching you to be strong, independent? How do I save you from all the horrors of the world, the only way I know how is to prevent you from existing? I can't do that, I want no harm to come to you. So instead I sit here by your crib, looking over you and writing down the thoughts as I'm told and fear more for you with each sentence I write. I consider your birth as a mistake, but how do I fix this?

Day 5

I am not to be left alone with my thoughts; they haunt me, scare me, drive me to do unthinkable things. If I sleep they will take over my actions, these dark thoughts, these ugly voices. I can't allow that. The voice of my thoughts tells me that I can't trust anyone, not the father to my baby, not the doctor he calls; no one. At times I feel helpless, feel there is nothing I can do to escape these thoughts I have. How can I believe wrong of the father to my child, my life partner, my support? He tells me I need to be stronger than this, that it's just in my mind. How do I know who to trust if I can't trust my own mind? I feel desolate and angry, scared, confused. I am losing touch with what is real and what seems to come from inside me. At times, it's almost as if I am a foreign entity looking down on my "family" and myself. I see from the outside what pain I cause them, the suffering he goes through as, yet another call is made to the doctor. These pills aren't helping and still they increase the number I "have to take". He suggests I need a calm and quiet environment, so the in-laws have come to help with the baby as I struggle through

this. They are intruders here to take over our house, our life, I just know it. His mother helps me into a relaxing bath, and as I catch a vision in the mirror I swear there is a stranger in my house...but it's only me. I don't like the person who looks back at me. I am no longer in my body; an interloper has taken over and views my life through my eyes. I scream and can't seem to stop; they need to know about the squatter. I must save them from this foreign stranger. When the mother in law leaves to get my husband, I take up the razor.... I will find the intruder myself and dig her out.

Day 6

They are going to take my daughter from me. They can read my thoughts and know they are filled with pain.

But the doctors say I will get better, one day at a time.

Day 9

They have brought me to this sterile environment where every step is a shush and the staff wear no color. The walls are all the same and I am tied to this gym mat on wheels to help me "relax". A doctor comes to visit every day and asks me the same questions every time, "If we take you out of restraints can we trust you to look after your own well-being? We don't want an accident like last time."

An accident, there was no accident. I wanted to take my suffering away from my family; I needed to save them from the interloper within me. That is how I came to be here, in Fairfax Hospital. Words like postpartum, depression, and psychosis are thrown around the room as the group decides what is best done with me. I "need a break," according to the doctors. "If we

provided her an environment of peace and tranquility, she will get better” this is what they tell my husband, and so he abandons me here; to get better. Left alone in a room where the staff check on me every few hours and smile and promise I will get better. A room where they have me injected with medications, where vital numbers are written down, and nurses ask me “what’s today’s date? Do you still feel like hurting yourself? How much do you feel like hurting yourself? Give me a number on a scale of one through ten.” Like this sensation, this need, can be given a neat little number, can be quantified easily and used to determine how many pills I take today, how often the injection is needed. How many days I must stay.

Day 12

I am no longer tied to the bed. I am “no longer a threat to myself or others” state my doctors. I despise them and fear them. But the doctors insist I will get better.

My husband comes to visit, and he talks about starting back to work. He lets me know that “things are getting back to normal.” I question what normal is to him and if it is the same normal for me. Is it normal that I don’t go home to my family every night? That everyone thinks I am a horrible mother? Is it normal that my mother in law is raising my daughter while I sit chatting with nurses about my “moods today?” He doesn’t know normal. The doctors and nurses tell him what normal is and he just believes them. That’s why they keep me here, they want me to believe in normal too, but I won’t. I know the difference; I can see it in my own eyes. But I can’t tell him this because he will just tell the doctors. I keep this secret within myself and protect it. If they don’t know I don’t believe their version, they can’t change mine. I sit quietly while my husband visits letting him believe things are better, and the doctors tell him this is so.

Day 19

I have been given the privilege of having a say in my mental well-being if I do everything the doctors and nurses say. It has come to be a game, as long as I follow all the rules, and play along as they deem appropriate, I will be able to go home. I don't know how long it will take but I know I can do this. I just have to believe their idea of normal. I smile and answer "I am feeling much better today. No, I no longer feel like hurting myself." I no longer talk about the intruder or getting her out of me. I can tell this is right; the nurses' smiles reach their eyes now. My husband comes to see me, and he too smiles and talks about my daughter now. She "is a safe subject" for me now, say the doctors. I take the pills they tell me to, and I wait. Because they will send me home soon. Because I am and will continue to get better so the doctors say. I can just wait, it can't be too long.

Meanwhile, my family is safe, and I can focus on getting used to the intruder. As long as she is with me, she can't hurt anyone else.

Day 24

I feel as though I am waking from a horrible nightmare. I look back on what I have been told is the last month and see long blocks of nothing. My husband tells me about my behavior before coming here and I am dumbstruck, this isn't me. I strain and struggle, but I can't even remember the birth of my beautiful baby girl, and I rage at the theft of these precious moments and days from my memory. The blackness takes over all that was the beginning of my daughter's life. I despair at the sadness and trauma my family has gone through while someone else seemingly took over my mind. Who was that person and how to I ensure she never returns? The doctors

tell me that these are all normal feelings and nothing to concern myself with. They tell me this is all part of my psychosis, and all temporary. How can I not worry? Will she just take over one night again, when I am not strong enough to fight her? Will she forever threaten my sanity and the safety of those I love most? Can I be a good mother with this risk constantly hanging over me? I try to ignore my fears, but they haunt me at my weakest moments. Can I really get better? As if I will just wake up one day feeling normal, with this is as a blur of my past. Will I eventually get back to my regular self? Or is she forever to be overpowered by these negative fears and doubts I carry with me?

I have to be stronger than this. I have to fight this. My daughter doesn't even know her mother and my husband carries the burden of my weaknesses for all of us. I can't fail at this, I must become myself again. I wish I would just wake up better, because that's what the doctor's promise.