

# ***Baby Blue Icing***

*There was nothing that icing couldn't fix.*

That was what she told herself as she piped baby blue swirls on top of the burnt cake. The sour sting of smoke rose from the oven like a cloud above her head. **She felt like she was in a fog<sup>1</sup>**. The piercing thunder of the babies' cries came from the nursery. The two combined in a dark maelstrom.

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The day it came she was so excited. They'd booked a private hospital suite a week in advance. Nate's hand on hers was a steady anchor. They'd told her to push so she did. Hard. Too hard. Maybe something had broken inside. It didn't come out. It was like it had taken root in there and didn't want to leave.

They had to cut her open to take it out. She was numbed up but the distinct feeling of being invaded still crept up her body. The doctor drew back the surgical curtains in an absurd form of metatheatre. Nate cut the tether loose and all of a sudden, **she couldn't connect<sup>2</sup>**. Nate held it in his arms with awe. He looked back at her and his brow furrowed. Without her anchor she felt like she was floating away into a sea of blood and water.

The epidural should have worn off days ago, but she still felt suspended in some form of **emotional anaesthesia<sup>3</sup>**. Suddenly afternoons spent pouring over baby names seemed so distant. Her mother would come over to play with it. The woman felt inept. Even as she fed it there was no intimacy, it was more like a parasite latching onto her. Nate would look over and sigh. He was such a good father. The baby must have known it too. When it got hungry Nate's chest was the one it would reach for.

Sometimes when the baby was asleep, she'd hover at the door to the nursery. Strange, how even though she had spent hours painting blue on the walls and hanging mobiles from the ceiling it still felt as if she was standing in a museum of someone else's happiness. The woman's eyes would flicker over to the black and white framed photo displayed on the dresser. How was it that she had felt more for the small, peanut shaped dot than she did for the baby lying in the crib?

The woman **suffered silently<sup>4</sup>**. She took up knitting and made a treasure trove of blue beanies and booties. But the constant click of her needles and the closet full of baby clothes did little to stop the smoke rising from the pit of her stomach.

When Nate suggested that she talk to the doctor she complied. There wasn't much fight left in her these days. However, when the woman entered the doctor's sterile room an unexpected surge of panic rose within her. What if they took the baby away? What if they realised how disappointing of a mother she was? God, she was so tired.

The doctor handed her a pamphlet, but she didn't take it. The words on the front rendered her immobile. After all, **the word depression scared a lot of people<sup>5</sup>**. The doctor kept talking but she couldn't hear him. The woman looked up at the fluorescent bulb. It flickered slightly. With each flicker, she felt each of her expectations of motherhood slowly rising and wafting away

in the artificial glow. But somehow, she didn't dissipate. A sweaty hand wrapped around hers. Nate anchored her.

Her mother came over less often now. The woman didn't mind. After all, **things weren't quite so dark**<sup>6</sup> for her anymore. She spent her afternoons speaking with other mothers who understood her. As she nursed the baby she looked down. The doctor had assured her that her prescription would most likely have no side effects on the baby, but as she stared into those half-closed blue eyes she wondered if they knew something was different. If Jack knew his mother was closer now.

The timer rang out and the cakes came out of the oven perfect and golden. She reached back to the coffee table but the icing bowl wasn't there. Instead there was Jack, frosted in a sugary sea of blue. He gurgled and tried to crawl over to her. Jack anchored himself as far up as he could reach on her legs, pulling himself upright. He gave another happy gurgle as she pulled him up and snuggled against her chest. The sugary mess rubbed off on her blouse, clearing away till there were two ruddy cheeks, a gummy smile and a pair of clear blue eyes peering back. The woman surveyed the mess and sighed. There was no salvaging the icing, but it was alright.

*She didn't need it now anyway.*

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Postpartum depression (PPD) is a serious mental illness affecting new mothers. Caused by hormonal and drastic lifestyle changes after childbirth, affected mothers often feel overwhelmed and emotionally disconnected from their babies and loved ones.

Despite 15-22% of Australian mothers experiencing PPD, symptoms are often ignored or downplayed due to societal taboo of being seen as inadequate mothers. In addition, PPD can be linked with severe conditions like postpartum psychosis with around 19.3% of women with PPD having thoughts about self-harm and 22.6% having undiagnosed bipolar disorders.

Contacting a trusted medical professional if these symptoms persist 2 weeks past delivery is advised. However, while medicine, counselling and support services such as PANDA are available, often open lines of communication between families and loved ones are the first step in alleviating PPD.

As such our society needs to increase our efforts in raising awareness for this condition, so that all those affected by PPD can overcome their isolation and seek help. Only in doing so can we help all parents and infants have the experience of parenthood they deserve.

N.B All bolded phrases are quotes from women who have previously suffered from Postpartum depression

1. Jennifer Rodgers

2. Gwyenth Paltrow

3. Bryce Dallas Howard

4. Lisa Rinna

5. Chrissy Teigan

6. Sarah, PANDA recovery stories

## Resources:

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