

crazy

memoir of a mom gone mad

Charise Jewell



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Crazy: Memoir of a Mom Gone Mad

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Proofreading: Andrea Bailey

Designer: Rosa Llano Ferro

1st Edition: October 2021

ISBN: 978-1-913680-24-4

1. Narrative Non-Fiction 2. Memoir 3. Mental Health 4. Family Life
5. Mood Disorder 6. Bipolar Disorder

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The Voice of the New Age

Dedicated to E, A, J, and S.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is based on my experiences, memories, observations, opinions, and perspective. During some of these events I was sleep-deprived, heavily medicated, and /or experiencing psychotic delusions. My recollections and interpretations may differ from those of others. I have confirmed facts as much as possible, using medical records and by speaking with other people (mainly my husband). Most names and personal details were changed to protect privacy. Some of the conversations have been shortened or abridged, however the meaning has been preserved. This is my story, the way I remember it, and from my point of view.

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PROLOGUE: The Feast

“Dinner’s ready,” I announce excitedly, to no one in particular. I look down into the pot as I call out, and this amplifies my voice, although it doesn’t need it. I’m usually soft-spoken but over the past few days I’ve developed the ability to project loudly without even trying. It’s only one of many newly discovered talents, like culinary skills that are all coming together from years of knowledge combined with previously hidden natural abilities. Out of the blue it seems that I have an instinctive ability to blend flavours and to time each step perfectly. The resulting meals could be served in gourmet restaurants. I don’t usually cook on a Friday night, but this weekend is Mother’s Day, and I’m in the mood to celebrate. I don’t know exactly why I have so much energy and enthusiasm when I’ve hardly been sleeping lately, but I’m just going to enjoy it. Eric and the children always make Mother’s Day special for me, so this dinner tonight is my way of pre-emptively expressing my gratitude. I’ve spent hours in the kitchen, tapping into my creativity and the joy of cooking. I can’t wait to enjoy my family’s praise.

I hear Suzie clamber up the stairs from the basement playroom with Alex close behind her. At ages four and ten, they have boundless energy but they don’t always come right away when they’re called. As they burst into the kitchen, my excitement grows. They’re hungry, and they are in for a treat. This might be the best meal I’ve ever made.

“What’s for dinner, Mommy?” they ask.

"It's a surprise!" I say with a big smile as I stir the pot one more time. It's full of bright colours, which please my eyes, but the aroma makes my nose think something is missing. It smells delicious, but there is something I could add to make it just that much better. One more thing to give it that extra oomph.

"Rosemary," I say to Suzie, snapping my fingers.

"What, Mommy?" she asks, eyebrows up and slight confusion in her voice.

"This dish needs rosemary," I say, grabbing a twig hanging from the stove's fan hood with one hand and the nearby kitchen scissors with the other. I start snipping away above the pot. "Good thing we dried this out earlier, hey Suze?"

She nods in agreement. My daughter loves doing just about anything with me, which I think is mainly because she's the youngest of three and the only girl. But I've been so focused on my writing and my art lately that I haven't had a lot of time to play with her, and when we do play I'm usually too irritable from lack of sleep. When I suggested that we dry out some of the herbs from our indoor garden this morning, her eyes lit up. She beamed with pride to be trusted with the "adult" scissors, captivated by how I attached each branch to the fan hood with only a magnet and a binder clip and explained the properties and flavours of each plant from our garden. Properties and flavours that I never realized I knew. She was in awe of me. I was in awe of myself.

My kids love it when I have new ideas—they're often amazed. Lately I've had endless ideas, so they've been in a constant state of amazement. Because of me. Because I'm amazing. I've never felt better. This will be my eleventh Mother's Day and I've finally got this motherhood thing down.

"I have a joke for you." I smile at the two little faces staring up at me with their big, curious eyes. "What do you get when you cross an INFJ engineer with a mom?"

They stare at me, confused. They have no idea what Myers-Briggs personality typing is. I don't give them time to guess before I blurt out the punchline.

"A logical, emotional, multi-tasking, hyper-efficient, superstar!"

My joke falls flat. Maybe I should explain the Myers-Briggs

theory to them. They probably don't remember when I was a mechanical engineer because I haven't worked since we moved to Calgary for Eric's job. It might be too confusing. This suggests they're not ready to learn that I can sometimes predict the future.

Our neighbour's dog barks in their yard, snapping me out of my reverie and waking up my senses again. I'd been distracted by my lovely children, and the bark reminded me to be on alert. The universe is looking out for me. I glance around for signs of imminent danger as the smell of dinner permeates into my nostrils. It smells sublime. Wait—it smells done. Like one more minute and it will burn! What happened to the timer I set to tell me when everything is cooked? Did I forget to set it?

DING.

I heave a sigh of relief and satisfaction. Just when I think I couldn't be any more on my game the universe confirms that I've got this. Impressive.

"Can you guys set the table, please?" I ask. "And use the cloth napkins. I wonder where your brother is?" I turn the stove off, remove the pot from the burner, and dump its ingredients into the Crockpot in one smooth motion. The Crockpot contains a chicken, the meat, the protein, the highlight of the feast. I retrieve the ladle from its spot beside the stove and begin to blend everything together. The colours are stunning. The smell is perfect. It's going to be delicious.

"Jack!" I call loudly, just as he saunters into the kitchen. My eight year-old rarely hears me the first time, and is seldom interested in stopping whatever he's doing to come and eat.

"Yes?" He smiles with the thrill of having one-upped me. I ignore him, too focused on the tasks at hand.

"Oh, good, you're here. Can you get your milk, please?" I turn to Alex. "Alex, pour some for you and Suzie, please."

I'm talking quickly because I don't want to miss a beat as every moment leads to the climax: the presentation of my mouthwatering creation. The kids hustle to do as I've asked. They are as eager to please me as I am to please them.

"Eric, dinner!" I call my husband of fifteen years. He is going to be floored. I lift the ceramic pot out of its electric shell, carry it to the round, glass kitchen table, and place it down gently in the

centre just as my boys return carrying drinks, Eric walks up from behind and gives me a quick hug, and Suzie finishes arranging the napkins and cutlery just-so. I lift off the lid dramatically and we watch the steam rise up. I insert the ladle into my fantastic stew and begin to scoop serving after serving into each person's bowl. I am so hungry and eager for this celebration with my darlings.

At first, no one says anything, and I take this as the highest praise. They are speechless! I feel myself beaming with pride. Eric is the first to speak.

"What's this?" He stares down at his bowl in disbelief. Then he looks up at me and it's hard to read his expression. I can't tell if he is bewildered or bemused, but neither is the reaction I expected. I look around at the rest of my adoring family. Jack looks flummoxed, Suzie looks disgusted, and Alex looks almost scared. I feel something in my heart clench as I realize that they are not impressed. I've been working for hours and they're still not impressed.

"What do you mean?" I ask, my voice sounding shrill and defensive even to my own ears. "It's dinner. It's the dinner I've been cooking all afternoon. Doesn't it smell terrific?" Alex picks up his spoon and gingerly moves my concoction around in his bowl, but he doesn't raise it to his mouth. I look down at my own serving, see the rainbow of colours and breathe in the tantalizing smell. I, for one, am salivating. I'm ready to dive in, but then I notice the bones. Why didn't I see the bones when I scooped it into my bowl? I look back to the Crockpot. Why is there a chicken carcass but no meat?

"Dinner?" Eric finally says. "I don't think so." He shakes his head. I'd lost all track of time over the last few hours—the last few days, really—minutes and hours rushing past in a blur. Now time grinds to a halt. What is he talking about? Of course it's dinner. What else would it be? Why is he criticizing me in front of the children like this? We can just take the bones out. Leaving them in is an honest mistake. I probably didn't want to waste the marrow.

"Just put the bones on the side and eat it," I instruct, trying to make light of my mistake. I reach for my spoon and dig deep to scoop up my first bite, but what I lift out of the bowl surprises me. It's a small piece of an orange peel. A blood orange peel. I

don't remember adding that. I'm taken aback, but I don't let it show. I can't let them doubt me. I can't doubt myself. It must have been stuck to the cutting board. It could happen to anyone. Lately everything has been going so well. For the past week or so everything I've touched has turned to gold. This is nothing to read into.

"Guys, just eat." I insist. I lift my spoon to my mouth and Alex follows suit, both of us tasting at the same time while everyone else continues to stare, dumbfounded. He nibbles at the last remaining bit of meat on a bone. My orange peel tastes awful—bitter, rotten, and tough—but I force myself to chew and swallow, pretending nothing's wrong.

"Don't eat it, Alex." Eric reaches to take the bone away from him. "Nobody eat anything. This is garbage."

I can't believe he would insult me this way, especially with everybody watching. In the eighteen years we've known each other my husband has never publicly humiliated me. My entire body starts to tense up, my hands begin to tremble, and my cheeks flush. I look down into my bowl while I try to figure out what to do, and that's when I see it. That's when I see that he is right. It is garbage, literally. Chicken bones, carrot peelings, strawberry tops, apple cores, pepper stems and seeds, corn silk, orange peels, kiwi skin, and tea bags. All sprinkled with rosemary. My head starts to spin.

I scramble to recover the moment—the moment I've been anticipating all day. My perfect Mother's Day weekend dinner. *Recover this, Charise, recover.* Panic rises. *Think!*

"Gotcha!" I stand up. "It was a joke!" My cheeks turn even more red. My hands shake. I fold them together so no one will notice. I wait for everyone to laugh, but they don't.

"Take your bowls to the counter, kids," Eric says calmly. "I'll order pizza."

Everybody stands and starts to bustle around the kitchen and it's all just too busy for me. There is too much noise. I retreat to the dark, quiet dining room and sit in the vintage lounge chair I inherited from my grandparents. I need comfort. I look at the evergreen tree out the window, catatonic. I hear a muffled conversation between Eric and the kids, then him on the phone placing an order for pizza. How did this happen? How did my brilliant mind let

this happen? I have to figure it out. Was my overtired mind simply suffering from lack of sleep? How could I be hitting it out of the park with everything else and suddenly have this colossal failure? What kind of woman makes her family dinner out of compost? How did I not realize that I was cooking garbage as I took it from our compost bin? Have I gone crazy?