

Down Days

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TW: Please note that the central theme of this book is living with depression and anxiety. There are also mentions of suicidal thoughts and medication.

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To everyone who read Down Days when it was a misspelled eBook
on a deeply buried blog.

To those who shared, and visited, and supported.

To those who didn't give up so that I didn't either.

This book exists because of you.

You've done good.

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Introduction

THIS BOOK IS an exercise in stark honesty, and so here's a list of things that you *won't* find between these pages:

- You won't find any advice of the practical sort.
- I don't think the purpose of what you're about to read is meant to be uplifting.
- I'm certainly not going to concern myself with technical terms.
- This isn't intended as a self-help book (but I hope it will help, anyway).

Now we've talked about what this book isn't, let's talk about what it is.

What you *will* find is honesty. This is me, as I am; someone who is a fully-functioning adult with aspirations and loved ones. I also have what I call "Down Days". These are days when the world seems to peel away, leaving me a shivering, naked, fruity centre. I won't be blinding you with science, but I *will* be telling you how it actually feels to have depression. At least, I'll try. Because, as I'm sure you can imagine, it's a hard thing to describe.

What I'm about to share with you is extremely personal and the reason I'm writing it down is that it's easier. Behind this

keyboard, it's easier. I'm quite happy hiding back here *thankyouverymuch*.

This book will be uneven. There will be days that I sit here, switched on and fiery with words spilling out of me. There will be Down Days. I'm going to try my damndest to still write on those days. Because maybe, just maybe, you'll see something there that I can't describe. That's my hope.

For that reason, I won't be changing anything when I edit later. If I add something, it will be in square brackets [like this] so that you can see what I've done. No secrets.

There will be swear words. Swear words are expressive, beautiful things and I intend to use them.

I envisage that, if anyone reads this book at all, there might be two kinds of readers. One of them will be a lot like me. They will be dealing with some of the issues that I deal with, albeit their reasons and experiences will vary wildly. They will be looking for something – perhaps proof that they aren't alone.

The other kind will be The Interested. The people who are striving to know more. Perhaps they have loved ones like us, or work with them, or they're just curious.

Whichever you are, person dangling over this page, I'm sorry if the words fail me. I'll type words now that, at times, have the ability to make me cry if I say them out loud: I'm trying. Partly for you and partly for me.

For Those Like Me, I'm hoping I can find some words that you can use yourself. I know how hard it is to start a conversation, or even begin to describe to those who don't understand how you're feeling. If just one sentence of this book is useful to you, I'll consider this endeavour worthwhile. Hell, just hand that special person a copy of the book and let them read it for themselves. Some things are best said silently.

For The Interested, I hope you might gain a little insight into how it feels for someone like us. You've had these feelings yourself. Everyone has. But there's something extra about people with depression, isn't there? Something that makes it all come crashing down around them in a way you can't really understand. I have no idea what that *thing* is. But, if I describe it to you just right, maybe you'll figure it out and write your own book. Please do, because I'd really want to read it.

Here goes.

PART 1:

In which some heavy shit goes down

*Buckets of anguish and teardrops on Kleenex.
Curled in a ball, try to fight off the bleakness.
Your mind has turned in the most horrid ways.
That's how it feels to have a Down Day.*

*—Lyrics from *The Sound of Misery*,
(my upcoming depression musical)*

What makes me tick?

WHAT MAKES A depressive? There are plenty of theories. My favourite is that I'm just wrapped up this way. I swore I wouldn't go into too much personal detail when I started writing this book. I'm a pretty private person and so dirty laundry will not be aired. Plus, we're all so very different that my life story will be irrelevant to you. What triggers me might not trigger someone else. And what seems perfectly normal to you will drive me up the damned wall. But there are certain things that I think are a factor in my Down Days that might be relevant.

First, I have low self-esteem. This comes primarily from a parent berating me for being over-weight as a child. Continuously. For years. The same parent was constantly disappointed in me for not expressing my gender in the straightforward blue/pink, football/dollies kind of way. I'm a reader, a thinker, a writer. I'm your one-stop imagination station. Going outside to kick an inflatable seemed like a waste of time to me when there was knowledge to be had between the covers of a book. This, of course, is only how I remember it. I'm sure that parent would disagree, but

the shape of the memories is what is important, and memory is tricky.

The other thing which sucked as a kid, was that I was bright. *Not* academic (I wasn't great in school) but bright. There are reports that I was always talking to the adults rather than playing with the kids at parties. As I look back, I remember observing other kids more than interacting with them. I never really understood them, and in turn they didn't get me. I had mastered sarcasm by the time I was six. This isn't bragging; there's nothing special going on here. If you want to even it out, I couldn't tell the time until well after every other child, and I still squint at clocks a bit funny to this day. It's just how I'm built. And it explains why I spent a lot of time outside of my expected social circles.

You see the problem there, right?

I also learnt to evade bullies at an early age by talking my way out of tense situations. That led to the development of a self-deprecating sense of humour.

Bully: Oy shithead, your trackies are missing a stripe!

Translation into English: Hello person I see as beneath me. Are you aware that Adidas tracksuit bottoms, a pair of which I am currently sporting, have three stripes and, therefore, your tracksuit bottoms with only two are of a far less expensive variety and therefore I have further proof that you're a pile of manure?

Me: That's because I'm poor and useless and fat and ugly and possibly whatever sexual orientation you find offensive.

There's no work for the bully to do if I do it for them, you see. The problem with that kind of thinking is that after a while you start to believe it yourself. I express my low self-esteem through humour, so people think I'm only joking. It still does the job of putting me out of the "threat to your masculinity" category, hence further away from the "stab him to make yourself feel better"

repercussions, but also expresses how I feel about myself in a way which tricks people into feeling less weird about it.

But back to that whole “believing it yourself” thing. The brain likes repetition. The brain believes anything you tell it as long as you tell it that thing enough times. One way or another, my brain has been told that I’m overweight and useless, over and over, for years. So, you can hardly blame me when things start to go wrong and I naturally assume it’s my fault. Or, when an attractive member of my preferred gender presents themselves and my pre-set mentality is to not bother.

Now low self-esteem is a big bag of dicks all on its own. But couple it with being brought up to always be independent (which leads to an insane amount of pridefulness (pretty sure I made that word up (Ooooh, brackets within brackets (bracket-ception!))) and a genuine belief that it would be so very easy to make the world a better place if people were just *nicer* to each other, you have:

A person who cares about the world too much, is physically angered by ignorance and arrogance, and who, when they get Down Days, won’t tell anyone because they refuse to be a burden to others.

That’s me in a nutshell. And it’s a very shitty nutshell.