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Mathematical Motherhood

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Preface. During the initial months after having my first child, in my sleep deprived state, my mind yearned for some sort of routine since my days were entirely out of sync with any “normal” schedule. My mind naturally seeks out patterns in numbers, and this experience was no different, except that I became entirely consumed by the numbers. I became my own worst enemy, fixating on the numbers of each day — how many bottles did she drink, how many ounces per bottle, how many hours has she slept? My every thought returned to this no matter how much I tried to let go. It was the routine I needed, and even when I returned to work, this monster persisted because I had new numbers to fixate on — how many ounces of milk did I pump, how many bottles should I pack? I struggled to break free, and, with time, I learned to let go and find routine elsewhere. Perhaps another mother out there may resonate with my experience or perhaps a mother-to-be will be more prepared by knowing ahead of time that she may experience the same and can combat it earlier on than I did. My second child is on its way and I like to think I will avoid finding myself in this dark place by knowing what to look for this time.

Mathematical Motherhood

Three a.m. and my ears hear the tiny whimper of the baby.
Seven minutes feeding on the left and she starts drifting to sleep.
One diaper change to wake her back up and
Six more minutes of feeding on the right for
Thirteen total minutes of milk.
Twenty minutes until she falls asleep, and
Two hours of sleep until we do it all over again.

The early months of parenthood operates on its own schedule, and
My exhausted and sleepless body clings to any routine it can find.
The mathematician in me is drawn to patterns in numbers, and
I unknowingly created a monster in me by fixating on the numbers
To get through each day.

A typical day includes **eight** diaper changes and **six** feedings.
She sleeps a total of **fifteen** hours – is that enough?
She screams after **ten** seconds of tummy time,
Though the doctor said she needs **thirty** minutes a day.
A bath **three** days ago.
A temperature of **103**, and
The doctor says it will last **five** days,
Followed by **one** rash.

She is **one** week old when the witching hour begins.
The crying commences at **five** in the evening every night on the dot,
Ceasing around **nine** o'clock when she falls asleep.
It is only **four** days later when
She begins crying **seven** of the **nine** hours she's awake.
We survived **six** weeks of colic
Until we met our **one** saving grace: probiotics.
Twenty-four hours later and my baby is soothed and calm.

After **ten** weeks at home, I return to work.
Every day, I pack **eight** bottles, **two** flanges, and **one** ice pack,
In preparation to pump **four** times a day.
Each morning, I prep **five** bottles of milk for daycare.
But is **four** ounces per bottle enough?
And how long will **one** package of diapers last before I need to run to the store?

For months, the numbers unconsciously controlled me,
Ate through me,
Consumed me,
Plagued my every thought.
They ran through my head whether I was sleeping or awake.
I could not escape adding the number of minutes she fed to make sure she was
full enough,
I would catch myself summing the hours she slept to make sure she was rested
enough.
I wrote it all down
Because I didn't trust myself to remember
On which side she fed last,
Or how long she had been awake.
And,
Slowly,
I learned to let go.

The numbers began to melt away.
It didn't matter how much she ate –
Her body knew how much she needed.
It didn't matter how long she slept,
Or how long it had been since she woke up –
Her body knew how much sleep she needed and when to sleep.
I learned to trust her and myself.

I have become the mom that just smiles when the daycare teacher tells me,
Almost in a sheepish tone, as if it is their fault,
That my little girl refused to eat the afternoon snack,
Or ate multiple helpings of oatmeal at breakfast,
Or skipped a nap,
Or even slept nearly all day,
Because I know my little girl knows how to take care of herself.
Somedays I'm more hungry or tired than others,
And it's okay for her to be that way, too.
She's going to come home with bonks and bruises,
With smiles and laughter,
With heartache and tears.
And yet we will survive another day,
Together.

I have learned to ignore the numbers now,
I don't have to count how many good days there are,
Because even the hard days are still good days.
And all it takes is that adorable little smile
To make my heart melt all over again.