

NIGHT & DAY

by Michelle Morris

Blood curdling screams. Am I dreaming? I jerk awake with a groan, rolling off the edge of the bed. How many times tonight? Six, eight? Stumbling and weaving in a fog of fatigue, I reach two-year old Michael's bedside.

"What's wrong, honey?" I croak.

"Bad Dream!" he wails.

Little arms lock around my neck, straining to be held. Settling into the rocker, I kiss his warm cheek, and softly sing a lullaby. Arms flailing, legs kicking, his sturdy fist smacks my mouth bringing the sharp metallic taste of blood. Pulling him closer, I continue slowly rocking, quietly singing. Sobs descend to ragged breathing and I begin to feel a loosening of limbs. Gazing down at his curly golden hair, and long sweep of lashes, I wonder what in the world is going on with this child?

Michael is afraid of the dark, yet bright lights hurt his eyes. He cannot bear loud or abrupt sounds. Frequently over stuffing his mouth, Heimlich has saved him more than once. He collides into walls and corners, seeming surprised after the impact. The boy can climb anything, leaping into space with no regard for the crash at the bottom. He repeatedly zeros in on dangerous obsessions, like outlets, and darting into the street. No amount of redirection, coaxing, or sternness, has any effect. He can take apart everything, including child locks, and baby gates. Our home is bare of all objects and furniture that is not child proof, being long ago consigned to locked closets. He bangs his head in frustration, and vomits when upset. He shrieks with terror if I leave his sight. My husband and I know something is wrong, we just don't know what.

Yesterday, I was forced by need to brave a trip to the department store. I stalled through the morning trying to think of a way to avoid it. There was no getting out of it; the boy must have shoes. With a sigh of grim determination, I faced an outing that felt like a walk to the gallows. After we struggled through an uncomfortable bath, and wrestled into clothes he hates, we left our shadowy house, and entered a frightening world of sounds, lights, and unfamiliar places.

Two minutes after entering the store he began to whimper, covering his ears, and closing his eyes. We went straight for the shoes. I tried to engage him in the process,

"Look honey, dinosaur shoes! Do you like these?" I plead.

"NO!" he screamed.

A friendly woman came past, smiled at him, and said, "What a sad face! I like your new shoes."

Unfortunately she reached out and kindly patted his shoulder. Oh, no. That sent him into a paroxysm of jerking, and shrieking. I grabbed the first pair that fit him and headed straight for the registers. Heads peered around corners to see who is abusing the child. I stared directly ahead, pretending to hear nothing, because I know all I could do is get him

out of there as quickly as possible. He cried continuously through the checkout line, vomiting on me in the process.

Back home, nestled in my arms, Michael hiccuped and sighed, "Mama. Mama". I whispered, "I know, baby. Everything is all right. Shhhh". With a sinking heart, I knew everything was not all right. I wondered if it ever would be.

My husband touches my shoulder, and I realize I am still in the rocker in the middle of the night. The boy sleeps. Surges of tenderness, loves, and fear wash through me. Poor thing, what a terrifying life. Poor me, too. Tears slide down my cheeks and drip on his soft curls.

"How did it go today?" he softly asks, thumb smoothing my pale face, and shadowed eyes.

"The same. Today, yesterday, and tomorrow", I answer in despair. I believe there is no hope.

DAY

"Good Morning, Mama!"

The whisper of a soft kiss on my cheek. It is 6:30 a.m. and four and a half-year-old Michael is awake for the day. Looking up with one eye slit in the half-light of morning, I see an impudent grin. I smile.

"Good morning, love."

He jumps onto my bed with a bounce asking, "What are we doin' today?"

Wow. He woke up only once, to go potty. I feel like I actually slept. Ahhhh.

"Let's see. Today is Tuesday. We'll go to the beach-."

"To fish and swim?" Michael asks, jumping up and down.

"Yes. And then we'll-"

"Go for a bike ride?"

"If you'd like. After, we'll have lunch at a restaurant. Honey, I'm about to fall off the bed. Then we come home for quiet time." I answer as I grip the blanket, trying to hang on.

"And then we go to the store? And pick up Papa?" he asks, breathlessly. My vision is a blur. I don't think he has stopped for air.

"Tomorrow, can I go see Ms. Penny? Will we explore under the big bridge? Can I wear my helicopter shirt? I can dress myself! Finally sucking in air, he shows no sign of pausing.

"Whoa! Hold on. Yes, yes, probably, we'll see. First things first. Shower or bath? Then breakfast." I answer with a laugh, amazed at his enthusiasm for a new day.

My boy hits the ground running. Usually smiling. Michael now believes the world is a friendly place and likes most people he meets. He can clearly express his wants and needs. Meltdowns are rare. He is finally comfortable away from me, although we enjoy each other's company. His interests are many and widely varied. He rides a bike, collects bugs, helps me cook, tends his garden, catches fish, goes to movies, and plays ball with his Papa.

He doesn't run into walls, choke on food, or cry at lights and sounds. He no longer fears new places, and people. He is able now, to trust. We sing and play, learn and grow. He became...himself. He loves his therapists, especially Mrs. Penny Phares. I think he always will. They are his family, and ours. How do you say thanks for giving your child his life back? For changing a dark future to a bright one?

Our days are joyful, and we look forward to the endless possibilities the future may bring.

We live. We laugh. We love.

WE FOUND HOPE . . .

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