

# one of those days

As Kate Rotherham, a shortlisted entrant in our My Child/Parenting Express writing competition, quells her daughter's fears, she reflects on scarier things in life and how blessed she really is

**i**t had been – cue deep breath and big, tired sigh – one of those days. Those days. Where normally cheerful children are decidedly less so and normally wholesome mothers are thinking about alcohol by morning-tea time.

But instead of surrendering to the chaos and starting again tomorrow, we – three grumpy children under school age and their increasingly grumpy, heavily pregnant mother – struggled ever onwards through an insane obstacle course called Wednesday...

Each task is a small ordeal in itself; each one somehow more disastrous than the last. Getting dressed. Breakfast. Tidying up. Washing out. Kindy drop-off. Post office. Bank. Morning tea. Groceries. Lunch. Swimming lessons. Kindy pick-up. Afternoon tea. Washing in. Bath. Dinner. Teeth. Stories. And bed. Hallelujah!

I fall into bed exhausted, seeking the blissful oblivion that follows a day of extreme parenting.

A wild storm lashes the house. Mad flashes of lightning scissor across the sky, answered by great booms of thunder.

From my comatose state I become vaguely aware of a little hand urgently patting my face, 'Mumma, it too noisy. I come in the big bed pwease, the big bed.'

I force open one eye and see Annie's little face next to mine – her eyes wide and her bottom lip trembling. I scoop her up and her arms grip fast around my neck. She claps her chubby fingers over her ears and buries her face in my neck. 'Mumma, I scared. I scared of the funder!'

In all of her two and a half years, I have never seen Annie frightened. She matches her elder brothers step for step and challenge for challenge. She zooms down tall slippery dips, jumps off her dad's shoulders into deep water and squeals

with delight from the bike seat during steep descents. 'Annie do it by myself – no helping!' is her mantra. Now my brave, spunky little girl is clinging to me, crumpled with fear and shuddering. 'I very scared, Mumma.'

I say, 'It's just thunder, sweetie. The clouds are bumping into each other. That's all it is. It's just a noise in the sky.'

'No! Not in the sky, in the house! It's in the house! I scared! I hiding!'

I hold her warm, soft body next to mine and sing to her. *Puff the magic dragon lived by the sea. She stops whimpering. And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honalee.* Her half sobs fall into an even rhythm of deep breaths and her eyelids droop and flicker and finally close. *Little Jackie Paper loved that rascal Puff.* She loosens her grip and her busy little limbs are once again still. *And brought him strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff.* Becalmed, she snores lightly. Milliseconds of white electricity flash through the window and light up her face. She looks like a Botticelli angel. I am unexpectedly awash with pure, heart-thudding love.

Snuggled between her dad and I on this wild, stormy night, my little girl is safe. I twist my finger through her silky curls and wonder about the other storms she will weather in her lifetime. The ones I won't be able to quell with a cuddle and a song. The ones she may not even share with me.

Inevitably she will know the ache of grief and the pain that life can bring. She will learn that storms come in different strengths. Short, fierce ones and prolonged, tumultuous ones. Scary ones and lonely ones. I remind myself to teach her the Buddhist phrase: *This too shall pass.*

I think about mothers the world over trying to keep their little ones safe from the monsters of war, hunger and disease; mothers who also hold

their babies tight and sing to them, but can't make the world even remotely fair for them; mothers who would give anything for a glass of clean water to keep their child alive another day.

I reflect back over our day. The inexplicable meltdown in aisle three, the poo in the bath and the smashed jam jar right on dinnertime. Yes, it was one of *those days* by my incredibly spoilt western standards but all it really needed was more patience and some good humour. I forgot to breathe through my exasperation and to remind myself that this too shall pass.

I cringe now remembering my daydream of another life faraway, with more freedoms and a lot less washing, cooking, cleaning and lunch boxes. But as I watch my baby girl sleep, all I wish for is a million more of *those days*: any kind of days, in fact, just days and nights of being her mum. Just to swim with her and her brothers and her unborn sibling in this giant ocean of love.

I wake to a world washed clean by life-giving rain. The morning sun creeps softly in on us and it is almost impossible to recall the fury of the night sky. Annie wakes slowly, stretches and looks at me: 'I scared of the funder. I in the big bed. I hiding.' Her face crumples slightly at the memory and she blinks it away.

Then she smiles: 'I just a widdle bit scared, Mumma.' She pats my cheek and looks at me with her big, trusting eyes. 'It OK now. The clouds bumping into each other, that's all.' ●

## WRITING COMPETITION

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35  
my life