

JULY

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Every working mother has the things she dreads, things that keep her up in the night – pink eye, an ear infection, the parent-teacher conference, the school play – all forcing her to remind the people she works with that she is not, in fact, wholly devoted to business enterprises, but has another secret life. For me, the night terror is the 5 a.m. phone call from the nanny.

A phone ringing at 5 a.m. always, always means nothing good – sweepstakes entities don't call that early, and no one ever calls at 5 o'clock to say they are on the way. So here I am, lying in bed

with a warm baby, and there is my Blackberry in its orange skin, dancing across the top of the dresser like a tiny Carmen Miranda – minus the fruit.

The baby, who is not allowed in our bed, unless she wakes up when I'm too tired to remember bringing her into our bed, sleeps on my arm. I gently slide the dead arm out from under her – she burbles and growls, but doesn't wake up, and I tiptoe over to the dresser. On the way over, I step on a Matchbox car, which brings on a fit of silent cursing.

It's the nanny. Her stomach is bothering her. Funny, my stomach is bothering me too, now that I face getting two kids out of the house and getting myself to work before my 9 a.m. meeting about the high-profile launch of a mini-line of handbags, belts and shoes for a multinational corporation. Did I mention that I'm leading the meeting?

"Nanny's sick," I call to Pete in the shower.

"I'm sorry, honey," he says. He does sound sorry.

"Any way I could have the car?" I ask.

"Long call tonight, I need it to get home."

Great. My husband is a doctor and is in his final year of training after four years of medical school, three years of residency and a three-year infectious disease fellowship. In another year, he will officially be an infectious disease specialist and will help the needy and save the world. If I were to take the car, he would have to ride his bike home through sketchy neighborhoods at midnight. He already has an awful, brutal schedule of 80-hour week

after 80-hour week and rarely complains. That means I don't get to complain either. And I don't get the car.

It doesn't help my cause that I am only a handbag designer; true it is for a multi-million dollar accessories firm that is doing a small line of accessories for Mega Stores (a massive discount chain), but a handbag designer all the same. So now I have to rush my two small people to day care and myself to work by foot, bus and subway train.

I leave the baby asleep on the bed and get myself dressed before waking Jake, our two and half-year-old.

Thank God I laid my own clothes out the night before. This meeting is a really big deal – I've tried to rein myself in a little, down playing my normal boho mama vibe for a really beautiful black and white almost batik (but not) Derek Lam dress paired with an unstructured frayed edge jacket (Dolce & Gabbana, but I got it at a resale shop last year, just for things like this). I am an accessory designer, so I did decide to go with heart stopping yellow shoes and a flat yellow patent leather shoulder bag.

And now, here I am in all my finery, kneeling next to the bunk bed, trying to wake up my little boy. As a general rule, I believe that you should never, never, never under any circumstances wake a sleeping child; however, the wheels of commerce don't stop just because my little angel is about to turn into a grouchy, groggy monster.

"Jake," I whisper, and shake his arm.

"No, it's mine, my baby can't have it," he says, still asleep.

Just in case you wondered what toddlers dream about...

I stick my head into his bunk. His dinosaur pajamas are bunched up around his arm pits and his tummy rises and falls in his deep sleep – not quite the full round belly of a baby, but not the flat washboard of a big kid – and a lock of his blond hair clings to his face. That would be because his head is soaked with sweat. For some reason, he insists on going to bed in full long-sleeved pajamas with a blanket on, 80 degrees or no.

“C’mon Jake,” I say, shaking his arm. “We’ve got to get up.”

Finally I get through.

“You staying home today?” he says in a happy groggy voice.

“No...”

“Vanessa is coming?” he says, awake now, and a little apprehensive, but still okay.

Ah, I knew we would get to that. Vanessa is the nanny, and no, Vanessa is not coming today.

“Well, no, baby, Vanessa is sick; we’re going to Sandra’s house.”

The tremor starts in his lower lip, then his mouth opens, and his chubby little face dissolves into a black hole of despair.

Do I need to add that this is accompanied by a howl of “NOOOOOOOO”?

Jake and baby Gracie have a clear hierarchy of care. Mommy (me) is Number 1, numero uno, best thing ever. Daddy is not quite mommy, but still pretty good. Vanessa is a close tie with Daddy, sometimes beating him, sometimes not, depending on how little

he's been home. Sandra, the backup day care lady, is a distant, distant fourth, comparable only with strange old lady relatives. This is funny because they always seem to have fun at her house, but it is what it is.

At this point, I resort to nature's perfect tool in dealing with children – bribery.

"If you'll stop howling and get your clothes on, Mommy will take you to Dunkin' Donuts before we go to Sandra's."

"Sniff, sniff..."

"I'm serious though, we don't have any time, people will be mad at Mommy if we don't get moving."

"I can play?"

"Nope, nope, nope – clothes on right now. There's no time to dawdle."

I pull and push him into his shorts and t-shirt for the day. We have a brief scuffle over what color socks he should wear, but the promise of Dunkin' Donuts gets us through.

"I need my shoes to be tight," he says.

"That's fine." I swear my kid is not on the spectrum, but he is obsessed with the tightness of his shoes. They're a funny little pair of brown shoes with Velcro straps. Jake requires that the straps be pulled so tight that the Velcro will barely stick. When he runs, the straps flap like little brown flags on his feet.

Now he is dressed, and I am about to grab my bags, when I remember. "Dammit. The baby!"

I run into our room, and there is baby Gracie, laying on the

bed and pulling on her toes in a pink teddy bear sleeper. Great. She has become quite expert at rolling and could easily have ended up on the floor.

A trip to the emergency room would be a perfect addition to this morning.

I pick up the baby and hustle her into the kids' room. Lickety-split, she's changed and dressed in a cute little pink gingham dress and bloomers.

I grab the diaper bag, the laptop bag, the breast pump, my patent leather yellow handbag, and the enormous, ridiculous, red Lands End beach bag that I use to carry all the other bags, and we are out the door and down the two flights of stairs that take us to the front porch of our condo building.

Awesome – 7:30. Plenty of time to run to Dunkin' Donuts, get to Sandra's house, go to the train and be to work by 8:45.

Holding the baby, I bump the stroller down the steps, then get ready to put her in.

I smell something. Something terrible.

I look down.

The arm of my jacket – my best jacket, my Dolce, I'm a fashionable hip-happenin' bad-ass mama jacket – is covered in the unmistakable green-brown sheen of baby shit. It has penetrated the fabric.

Perfect.

I look at the baby. She smiles her cutest chubby four-tooth smile.

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