

Saturday Afternoon

“I’m leaving now!” shouts Leo, my husband, from the hallway.

“Ok,” I moan while the baby clamps down on my nipple.

“Good luck!” he adds.

“Bye!” I shout back from the master bedroom. The door clicks, and he’s gone. I’m left with the kids. Peter, two and a half, lies on the bean bag chair in the living room with his bottle of milk. He will be quiet for a good ten minutes.

Leo, my husband, works as a veterinarian. He works weekends and nights. We live in a two bedroom condo on the 29th floor in North Toronto, next to the highway. Peter has his own room. Leo, Paul, our five month old baby, and I share the master bedroom and often the bed, too. Every Saturday and Sunday after lunch, Leo puts on his scrubs, takes his bag and leaves for his ten hour shift at Beaches Animal Hospital in the Beaches in Toronto. I stay at home with the kids. I also study full time to get my master’s degree. I dread weekends.

Peter is my first-born son. His big hazel eyes sparkle in his round face, always looking for mischief. Movement is his main element. He’s quick, witty, and stubborn.

Paul, five months old, is a chubby, hungry baby with blue eyes and perfectly shaped ears. I marvel at his features while I breastfeed him. I play with the hairs on his head, rub his back, and feel his warm body against mine. He is almost asleep, but his lips still attach to me and swallows rhythmically. I lean over as if to cover him with my upper body. I smell of oil and spices and sweat from cooking. Paul drifts off to sleep. I sit with him in my arms for a few more minutes, put him into his crib, and sneak out of the room.

It's 2 pm. Peter is at half of the bottle now. I'm going to try to put him down for a nap. I take him into his room. It's warm in there, so I take off his pants. His diaper is dry. I put him on the bed, into his gro bag sleep sack, pull the zipper, take the shoelace from the drawer, lace it through the two zipper heads at the bottom of the sack and tie not one, but two very tight knots.

"There! You can't get out of this now", I murmur. "You're gonna take a big nap." I slip out the door.

Peter can climb out of anything, even the Parents' Choice Award winner gro bag. But we're one step ahead. We've got the shoelace. Peter can't untie the knots, not yet. There's also a baby lock on his door. It locks from inside. I found him in the living room once in the middle of the night, and on the countertop, and in the sink. Anyway, he's safe now.

It's 2:30 pm. The baby babbles from the bedroom. I lift him from his crib. He smiles. I lay him on the bed, and snuggle up beside him. I try to read *The Secret Spiritual World of Children* by Tobin Hart for my book review assignment. Paul complains, so I switch back to eye contact. Will you fall asleep? I wonder. He kicks his legs, gurgles, turns on his belly, and studies me with those eyes. "Ok, mommy needs a shower. Let's go take a shower!" I put him in the bouncer and we both head off to the bathroom. When we come out, Paul's eyes look heavy. A few more drops of breast milk and he falls asleep. Peter rustles in the other room. I prepare another bottle and give it to him. I lie down in the living room, hoping that Peter will somehow fall asleep. The door rattles. I get up and rush to his room. He greets me with the most innocent smile.

"Made pee pee, made pee pee".

"What? But you have the diaper on," I say. As I take another step, I feel the wetness on my socks. I look around, baffled. A dry diaper yawns on the floor. I reach down to feel the gro

bag. It's wet. But how? How could he take off the diaper? When I unzip him, I realize that his socks are off, too. Here is a new puzzle to solve!

It's 4 pm. Paul is up and all smiles. Peter looks at his picture books. I read *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*. When I look up, Peter is nowhere in sight. I listen. Then I hear it. The dishwasher just got started.

"Damn, Peter! We agreed you can't touch it! No touching the dishwasher, ok?"

Peter runs away. Oh oh. I have to let the machine run the whole cycle now. Otherwise there is going to be water left at the bottom and mold can take hold, will take hold. We learnt this recently, too. Blood rushes through my veins, up into my face. I grab Peter. He needs to learn this lesson. I drag him back to the dishwasher.

"No touching the dishwasher, do you understand? DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" I yell. Peter howls. I push him into his room and close the door behind me.

"He has to learn, he has to learn," I clench my teeth. Peter sobs. I want to run out of the house. I cannot take it any more. I have to do something. I turn around and swing the door open. Peter is right there. The door hits him in the face.

It's 5:20 pm. Everybody chills. Peter has another bottle of milk, Paul is happy in the bouncer, and the show *Modern Family* plays on the TV. Paul swings himself by kicking his legs in the bouncer. Peter watches it from the corner of his eyes. Suddenly he pushes the bouncer with his feet and it turns over. Paul hits his head in the floor. His cries echo through the walls, pour out on the window and linger over Highway 401 and the houses below us. My ears ring. My nerves sizzle. I don't say a word or I will shout. I wait.

In this very minute the phone rings. It's Reka, my friend. She's also a vet and on her way to her nightshift at the hospital. Do all these people work weekends and nights? I wonder. I'm relieved that she called.

"You just saved Peter's ass," I laugh into the phone and put her on the speaker. *Modern Family* fades into silence. Reka and I talk for a good 40 minutes. Paul's got a big red bump on his head. I remind myself: if he vomits, we'll go to the ER. He stops crying and curls up for another feed. I talk and breastfeed until Paul falls asleep on the nursing pillow. Peter climbs up onto the sofa, wiggles himself behind my back and pulls my hair. We keep talking with Reka. On spur of the moment, Peter dives down from the sofa head first. He lands on the hardwood floor.

The bawling starts again. Paul wakes up. I put him on the floor, and rush to tend to Peter. I apologize and hang up. I bring paper towels and wipe the tears from his face.

"It's ok, everything will be fine," I whisper. "Mommy's gonna give you a healing kiss. Mmah! There!" I wrap him in my arms, hold him tight, and hum in his ear. I don't know for how long we stay like this. His sharp wails fade away. So does my splintering headache. My shirt is full of snot and tears. Silence cloaks us like a big old coat. Darkness creeps in from the outside.

It's 10 pm now. I put a sleeping Paul in his crib. Peter fell asleep an hour ago. I tiptoe into the washroom for another hot shower.

Then I sit down to write.