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Ariella Goldstern I HOPE YOU DANCE

I was doing a quick spot check on my kids in the park – one in the little car, trying to climb on the roof, one going down the slide headfirst – when a friend asked me, “Do you think that you’d give your life for your children?”

The one going headfirst down the slide was going a little too fast, but emergency action wasn’t necessary. “Huh?”

“Like, a girl was saying yesterday, that she would totally jump into fire for her kids. And I’m not sure. I’m afraid I would hesitate.”

Wow. Fire. Your child’s terrified face at the window, and you dive into the flames, your child’s name on your lips and you pull her from the jaws of death. Not today, O scythe! She is mine.

But what if you hesitate? If the flames are so high and so hot and instead you scream and scream and freeze in place?

Simi was going way too fast. I ran to the slide and stopped the impact. “Slide down again!” she exclaimed, and scrambled out of my arms.

The flames are licking at the edges of the window. Her beautiful little face shadowed, reddened, screaming. “Yes, I would. I would jump into fire for them.”

But is that the point? Is that how you know you’re a good mother – that you would die for your children?

Because just today, I yelled at Libby. She can be so trying. Everything has to go her way, even to the point of being ridiculous. “Libby, let’s go to the bathroom before we go to the park.”

“No!” She answered immediately, automatically. “First, I have to – ”

“Have WHAT? Have to WHAT? We always go to the bathroom before leaving the house. Please just go to the bathroom so that we can go, before it gets too dark!”

“No!” Her will, not mine! “First I have to – to – to dance!” And the child started dancing.

As I write this, I'm smiling at the image of Libby doing a silly little flailing dance, all to avoid having my will imposed on hers. But at the time, I was furious. It was just too much. Just DO it! Just GO! So that we can GO! "Go!" I glowered. "Go to the bathroom NOW, or we are not going to the park at all!" (Not going to the park would mean three more hours before bedtime in my hot little apartment, with the two of them tearing the walls down and me tearing my hair out.)

I think flames shot from my eyes, because she went. And then we went. And then my friend asked me if I would die for them, or if I would hesitate.

I don't think it's about dying for them. It's about taking a deep breath when they tell you that first they need to dance before going to the bathroom. And laughing, because that's really funny. And pulling her into a hug and saying, yes, my love, my precious, let's dance. Let's turn on some music and dance because you're a ray of light, you are a sunbeam, you are my life.

***Ruth Lewis* THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH**

Our Third Grade class
went to the circus.
Ringley Brothers, Barnum and Bailey.
We saw a man shot from a cannon,
a high-wire artist fall, plunging
into a net,
a tiger leaping
through a blazing hoop.
I sat on the edge of my seat,
with a box of buttered popcorn that I almost forgot to eat....

The first three kids are just a three-ring circus.
After that, though, things start getting lively.

Rachel Gold YOUNG MOTHER

We're at the park. Shani on the swing. I push and push, encouraging her to pump her legs. "Bend! Now, straight! Bend! Now straight!"

"Ma, push harder! I want to go higher!"

So I push harder. And she falls, landing at an awkward angle at her neck. I run over to her, cuddling her into my arms, calming her cries. Another mother nearby asks if I want to call for help. I tell her, "No."

I've always seen Shani as a dramatic four-year-old who cries a lot. But then Shani's cries stop and she flops out of my embrace, landing onto her side. Her eyes roll backwards, her mouth opens, her tongue loose. She starts to shake. I think it's a seizure. I fall to my knees and scream. 911 in America. What's the ambulance number in Israel? I can't remember. I dial 100.

Shani's shaking subsides and her eyeballs come back into view. She starts crying and I don't know what just happened. I lift my face, trying to find Tzvi. I see he's running for the street. His one-year-old brain doesn't grasp the danger of a busy street. Kids are staring. Mothers are trying not to. Another mother runs over and catches him, taking him under her wing.

Hatzala arrives first, then *Mada*. They ask the same questions and I am sobbing. Someone brings a pink popsicle and Shani calms down, licking it on the bench. I see she's delighted with the attention.

Until this happened, a month ago, I found being a young mother fun, busy, exhausting, and of course, gratifying. Now when we go to the park, I stare at the spot where Shani fell and had that concussion. I don't like it when she's on the swing. "Go on the slide, instead."

In this community, where we young mothers play dress-up each morning, deciding which little skirt matches which little shirt, we smile to one another at the park and smilingly complain about juggling work, studies, toddlers and pregnancies, nursing and tiredness... All is innocent, hard but fun.

Now, underlying everything in my life, something has changed.

Leta Mandelsohn THE TANTRUM TEST

He's unlovable,
like someone else's child.
With that cry,
he eggs my center,
whirling around my deepest point
of I.

He whirlwinds my thoughts.
I hold tight lest they fly,

pushes me with tantrums
and only he knows why

he wants to test
if after all

I love him to the sky.

Shifra Rut Shtein THE MOTHER IN MY MIND'S EYE

When we were growing up, we thought that mothers didn't get sick, or sad, or moody, or depleted. My mother didn't leave her bedroom in the morning until she was beautifully made-up, *besheiteled* and fully dressed.

She always made a real supper, on Corelle dishes. She considered paper goods wasteful, for lazy people. We weren't allowed to use them.

She had 13 children and did not get burned-out. She didn't complain. I have no memory of her ever being in tears, or looking worried. If she went to a doctor, it wasn't for her. If something hurt her, she was too busy to care.

My mother's tall, thin, and beautiful, with the energy of an 18-year-old. She's fifty-seven.

I can't visualize her sitting on the couch to relax or to take a nap. She's not someone who'll sit around with you and schmooze.

She's in a rush.

My mother's having problems with her vision. Her eyesight is blurred. Sometimes she can't make out the faces of people she knows well. It could be that her eyes are too dry, or too wet....No one really knows. If we ask questions, she brushes them off like pesky flies. *I'm doing just wonderfully. Everything's absolutely amazing. What's happening by you? How's the baby's rash? Is Chaim still waking you up at 5? How's Ari? Did you check his hearing yet? Did you? Did you take him to a doctor? You can't ignore it!*

I'm a teacher, and I love my job. I love blowing my students' minds with concepts and ideas they've never thought of before.

But I see in my mind's eye the stay-at-home mother that I wish I were. Nurturing, soft, patient and warm, cheerful and bright. Good morning songs and *modeh ani's*. Nutritious multi-course dinners and freshly cut-up fruit for snacks. Clean walls, clean floors. Long, cozy

shmoozing sessions with the children all around me on the couch. Not in a hurry. And of course, the park, even in the heat. Bedtime stories of Torah and *Yiddishkeit* and holy people, and patience for everyone's questions. *Where is Hashem? How do mommies get babies in their stomachs? Where does the water go when it goes in the sponja hole?*

My students graduate in June. I'll be on paid leave for two-and-a-half months.

"I can't wait for vacation," I tell my husband in the middle of the last whirlwind week of school. "I'll have time to breathe, and think, and just be."

"But Chani," my husband reminds me, "you don't like vacation. You get bored."

"Bored? Are you kidding?! Do you have any idea how much there is to *do* in this house?" I see in my mind's eye the toy closet, the winter clothes, the kids' room. "Just making breakfast lunch and supper will keep me busy!" I see myself serving fresh homemade rolls...Shopping for groceries together....I see myself on the floor with Ari, playing with him, doing his exercises with him.

And the park again. The park, in the heat.

Two out of three schools have graduated. Last Sunday, the girls left. Monday and Tuesday I slept and slept and slept until the kids came home. Wednesday, I cried because I can't handle being so fat and pregnant, and being nauseated in the summer weather.

Wednesday evening was the *mesibat sof shana* and I stayed two hours overtime, talking to the girls, answering everyone's questions.

I came home exhausted and happy. .

"You see?" said my husband, with what I think was pride. "I told you so. Teaching gives you *chiyus*."

I laugh and put my feet up on the couch, but somewhere in my heart, I feel a pinch, then I'm crying again.

"It's moving, Mummy," said my oldest child.

"But you're only six. Let me see."

She was right. Her bottom front tooth was wiggling and so were two others.

I pulled her into my arms and checked her mouth again.