

THE PERFECT DAY

I woke up at 6:40 after sleeping soundly for an unheard-of nine hours. I looked over to see if Mark was awake. He was, and he smiled at me.

Just then, Connor and Brannon came running into the bedroom and jumped on our bed. Mark rolled over and held me in his arms while the boys pulled open the covers and snuck in. They began to tease Mark to play with them and let go of me. He didn't.

I relaxed into his arms and enjoyed the sensation of my husband, my boys, and me, snuggled together: intimate, comfortable, a family. I wanted the moment to last forever.

Later in the day, Mark and I went out to lunch. While we were ordering our food I said, "I'm so excited for our trip to Cozumel next month."

Mark said, "I know! Can you believe we will be swimming in the ocean in five weeks?"

I laughed and said, "I hope it isn't like our honeymoon!"

Mark laughed too while we both remembered that escapade.

Then Mark said, "We need to get the boy's passports."

I'd forgotten about that. I said, "Did you find out what we need to do?"

He said, "Yes, we both have to take them to the counter at the

passport place and bring all four of our birth certificates. Then they will put a rush on them and we'll get them in time for our trip."

I said, "Should we do that tomorrow after we pick them up from school?"

He said, "That's exactly what I was thinking."

After lunch, Mark went to work downstairs, while I went upstairs to my office to check on a few things. But I couldn't concentrate. I went down to Mark's office. I wanted to talk with him about the changes in our marriage and how happy I was since we had started counseling, but when I saw the look on his face, I simply walked over and sat on his lap.

He held me in his arms for a couple of minutes and then took my hand and, without a word, led me upstairs to our bedroom. After working in the house together for five years, this was a first.

When the boys got home from school, we took them on a bike ride around the neighborhood and then cooked dinner together. Before we started eating we did our "five seconds": We hold hands and are quiet for five seconds and then each of us says what we are thankful for.

The boys were thankful for their food, as usual. Mark said he was thankful for his family, as usual. I said I was thankful for Mark.

While I was doing the dishes Mark took the boys upstairs and gave them their baths. Later, I walked in to brush my teeth, and Brannon looked up at me from the tub with a face full of bubbles and made a big "smack" with his lips as if he were kissing me. I just laughed.

Mark read to the boys and put them in bed. He told them stories about his grandparents, Big Granny and Big Poppy and their dogs, Elmo and Mandy, who were up in Heaven, playing.

After he finished, Mark came downstairs and we cuddled on the couch and watched a couple of episodes of *Friday Night Lights*. Typically we would go to bed around ten o'clock but tonight, at ten-thirty, Mark asked if I wanted to watch just one more show.

I said, “No, I’m pretty tired.” He seemed kind of sad but let it go.

When I got up to our bathroom I looked at the mirror and started laughing. Mark had taped a note there and written it as if it were from Brannon to me. It said, “Smack! I love you, Brannon.” It even had a set of lips drawn on the note.

As we were lying in bed, a fulfilling sense of peace and warmth came over me. I realized that I felt similarly to the day we had gotten married. Everything felt right. I remembered that day and how the night before, a storm had come rolling through the hills. The excitement of our wedding had been as thick in the air as the smell of the rain. Now the joyful anticipation of our future life together rolled through me like a strong, sure current. Mark scooted over, held me for a while, gave me a kiss, and said, “I love you.”

“I love you too, sweetie.”

But then he added, “No, I *really, really* love you.”

This was the first time he had ever said it quite that way, and it felt delicious.

I looked up at him and said, “I really, really love you too.”

The last thing I remember thinking before I drifted off to sleep was, “I am so excited for the next years of our lives. I can’t wait to spend it together with this amazing man and our family.”

DAY 2

When I woke up I could see the light starting to come through the window but decided to close my eyes and enjoy the silence and peace that only comes before the first words of the day are spoken.

After a few moments I heard Connor through the monitor, singing in his room. His gentle young voice made me grin and I thought, “How am I so lucky, to wake up this way?”

I slowly opened my eyes and turned to glance over my shoulder. I noticed that Mark was still sleeping, so I gently got up out of bed and looked at the clock: it was 6:28. I tiptoed over and turned off the monitors, then sneaked out of our room, quietly closing the door so Mark could get a few more precious minutes of shut-eye.

I walked down the hall, and when I opened the door to Connor’s room I saw his hair—so blond it was almost white—poking out from under the covers. Then he pushed the comforter aside, looked up at me with his angelic, sky-blue eyes, smiled, and said, “Hi Mom. Is today a school day?”

“Yes it is.”

I watched as a huge smile spread across his bright face.

Then he said, “You know, I told my friend Isabella that when she chases me around the playground that if she catches me and

grabs me hard I will keep running. But if she grabs me softly, I'll stop."

My eyes widened at the thought of our five-year-old being softly hugged by a very sweet, beautiful girl in his class. I was curious to find out if the hug actually occurred, so I asked, "So, what did she do?"

Connor said with a sly but slightly shy look on his face, "She grabbed me softly."

My heart melted a little with his fragile and truly honest expression of love.

About that time I heard Brannon push open Connor's door. His fingers came in first, then tufts of his slept-on, crumpled, brownish-red hair, just like Mark's, appeared. Finally he peeked around the door with his chocolate-brown eyes.

He looked at Connor and me with a twinkle in his eye. Then he casually walked over to the window, put his fingers in the shutters, pushed them open, and exclaimed, "It's already morning!" with the enthusiasm only a three-year-old can muster before seven am.

I mirrored his delighted attitude. "Yes it is!"

He turned around, strolled over, and hopped up on the bed with Connor and me. The three of us cuddled and giggled while I read them a couple of their favorite stories.

Pretty soon I realized it was almost seven and we needed to start getting ready for school. I said excitedly, "Let's go see if Daddy is up!"

Both boys looked at me excitedly, flashed grins, and then took off in a sprint down the hall toward our bedroom.

When they got to our room it took them a few moments to open the door, and during that time I almost caught up to them. I was about three steps from the room when I heard both boys jump up on the bed and Brannon say, "Daddy, Daddy!" Then there was silence.

For a split second I thought it was strange for Mark to be so quiet. Usually he would get very excited when the boys ran into the room and jumped up on the bed. Then as I walked into the room I heard Connor worriedly say, “Mommy, Daddy isn’t moving.”