



Making it all better

Sometimes, the best medicine is a dose of mommy love **by Bette-Jane Raphael**

It started on a Sunday in February, the day after some mild weather had induced my 5-year-old daughter, Rose, to unearth her languishing jump rope and take it for a workout in the park.

As I cleared our dinner plates off the kitchen table, she suddenly announced that her legs hurt.

"Where, exactly, do they hurt?" I asked, immediately on the alert, stopping halfway to the sink with a spaghetti-smearred plate in each hand. "On top, in the front," she said, rubbing her palms nonspecifically up and down her thighs. "And in back, here," she expanded, pointing to a spot behind her knees.

I suggested that she was probably achy after all that rope jumping from the day before. Maybe she should sit on Daddy's lap while I got the cream we always rubbed on for muscle cramps.

She let her dad hoist her up onto his knees, which was usually an effective remedy. But by the time I came back to the kitchen, tears were

brimming over her lower lashes. "It really hurts," she whispered through trembling lips.

"Well, let's see if this helps," I said hopefully, massaging the "muscle stuff" into her thighs and behind her knees. But when she got down to try to walk, the pain was worse, she said, and the tears were now flowing freely.

Maybe the medicine needed time to work, I suggested. If her legs still hurt in the morning, I could call the doctor. No, she wanted me to call him now.

"Well," I stalled, "he probably won't be in his office tonight. It's Sunday."

"Put a message on his voicemail," said Rose, a true child of her times.

If I'd thought for one moment that Rose's pain had been due to injury or illness, her father and I would have carried her the dozen blocks to her pediatrician's office. But I wasn't really worried. Her complaint was only the latest intermittent and ultimately negligible indisposition involving her stomach, legs, nose, eyes, throat, and/or various other body parts—

whose workings are all susceptible to mysterious, short-lived malfunctions, I've learned.

These breakdowns—along with the bloodless scrapes on the pavement and lumpless collisions with doorjamb that can prompt screams to curdle a mother's blood—are among the ailments that go unlisted in the pediatricians' encyclopedia of childhood illnesses. Nobody warns you about them, either, or tells you how to treat them. They have no telltale markings, like measles or chicken pox, and no symptoms you can calibrate, such as 102-degree fevers or swollen glands. They start not with viruses or trauma but with a need to be nurtured, which has somehow been confused with a need to be nursed. Yet they call for treatment as urgently as if they were life-threatening.

So I improvised. How about getting into her big brother's bed, I suggested to Rose, using my son's absence (he's away at college) to my advantage. "You can really stretch out there." She

mom's-eye view

nodded through her tears. "I'll carry you," I added, topping my first proposal with an even better one.

Then inspiration struck, and I made a beeline for the linen closet. I grabbed the battered cardboard box and trotted back to the kitchen, holding it aloft triumphantly: the Heating Pad.

I've discovered that the Heating Pad is, quite simply, one of mankind's marvels, able to cure ailments that are stubbornly resistant to other remedies with amazing speed.

Rose's face lit up at the sight of the blue pad with dangling cord and low, medium, and high settings that can be adjusted with the flick of a small finger. Like a child's version of the patient-regulated morphine drip, it offers power, control, and release from pain all in one. She hugged it to her chest as I carried her to her brother's

bedroom. There, I settled child and pad under the covers, turned on the bedside lamp, and proposed popping a favorite video into the TV. Rose accepted eagerly, and with dry eyes.

Some will say that the whole episode was a scam. To these scoffers I would answer that to Rose, the pain was real. And it was assuaged, which

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meant a lot to her—and to me too.

The fact is, as a parent you don't know at any given moment if you're doing the right thing. You're hardly ever 100 percent certain whether you should indulge your child instead of scold her for a small misdeed, or be

stern instead of joke about some questionable behavior. So it's truly a momentous occasion when you know without a shadow of a doubt that you've done just the right thing.

It's even more momentous when your child knows too, and somehow tells you so, as Rose did. That night, as I tucked her into her own bed, she

looped her arms around my neck and pulled my face down next to hers.

"You're the best mommy in the world," she whispered fervently into

my left ear. "You can fix anything."

I'll have to remember that the next time my car won't start. I'll have to remember that forever. ■

Bette-Jane Raphael is working on a book about parenting.

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beauty banter



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For Face

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L'Oréal Dermo-Expertise

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anti-oxidant benefits of Vitamin E with a Beta Hydroxy Complex that removes dead skin cells. It's so versatile, I use it day and night, alone and under makeup.



Winter cleansing often feels drying.

Dove's Essential Nutrients™ Cleansing

Pillows are a fun and nutrient-rich way

to keep skin smooth and healthy. When activated with water these vitamin-packed pillows clean deeply, but don't leave my skin feeling too dry.



For Body

I love body cleansers that multitask (like me!). Avon's Skin-So-Soft Age Defying Body Wash has time-released moisturizers that work all

day long. And it gently exfoliates dull, dry areas like elbows to reveal fresher skin.

Stay warm and beautiful! I'll see you next month.

Shelley