

Beyond Her:

by Paule Sheya Hewlett



Cycles of Z-z-z-z

Of all the things of which I dream, I dream of sleep the most. That's probably because I've been suffering from a severe case of sleep deprivation for, oh, 21 years. I use this date because that's the age of our older daughter – and that's when my nocturnal problems began.

Or, should I say, that's when they got worse. I have always been a light sleeper. I'm married to someone who is asleep the split second his head hits the pillow, and who can sleep soundly through all manner of crises, such as children crying, dog vomiting, and his own snoring (*sound track: "HONK– snort/ snort – whinny" repeat*). I, however, have always had difficulty both getting into a REM state and staying there.

Having children only fed my natural instinct for wakefulness. For some reason, when we had newborns, I was convinced that someone was going to grab our baby right out of the bassinet. I slept with one eye open, waiting to spring on a baby snatcher. Periodically I would rush to the crib and roll back the bed covers, to make sure someone hadn't replaced our child with a sack of potatoes. Between this routine and the normal nighttime rustling of an infant, I was awake for, I believe, four years straight. This does something to your personality.

Mind you, this was before cable television

or VCRs, so I was pretty much on my own for entertainment. Let me just say, you have no idea of the animal kingdom that roams through your back yard at night. In the end, I had to just quit looking out the window, after watching one nightmarish rodent after another flash a smile and then proceed to dig up my

rhododendrum bulbs right in front of me.

The circles under my eyes grew larger and more colorful during the

AGE-DATING PARENTS (Check the Rings)



0-4 yrs
4-8 yrs
Teens

infant phase. But, then, one day, we progressed to the next cycle of development, the one where your children *do* sleep through the night, but arise at some time like 4:06 a.m. At this point, they pad to your bedside and stand very close to your face, breathing through their mouths, until you flutter your eyes and hit your head on the headboard in terror. They learn all sorts of bad words in this stage, but it's understandable.

At this point, you forge an agreement with your children. You agree to set out the ingredients for a sugar-infused breakfast, and they agree to (a) let the dog out, and (b) watch violent, sexist and mind-numbing cartoons QUIETLY "until the big number on the clock says 7." This is your child's first lesson in negotiation.

This era of relatively fitful sleep is interrupted only by genuine mishaps, such as the time our six-year-old woke us in the wee hours with the alarming news that "the guinea pig's stuck in the Barbie car." Appropriately, you handle many of

these incidents in a sleepwalking state. But then you enter a new phase, and even though this time is long past for me, there are two words that still strike fear in my heart: *Slumber Party*.

Now, I had done my share of partying, but no hangover I ever suffered compares even slightly to a morning after spending the night with 12-year-old girls. In point of fact, the traditional slumber party ritual doesn't really even begin until a guest has gone home sobbing, spilled nail polish all over the couch cushions, or arranged for an attack of 12-year-old boys — who always end up somehow on your roof.

And the party doesn't end until you are standing at the foot of the stairs, shrieking at the top of your voice, "Girls!!!! Mr. _____ has to got to get some SLEEP!!!!!" (Of course, the real Mr. _____ is HONK-snort-whinnying away, unaware of this human drama.) After this pronouncement, not even acknowledged by the thumping, screaming, giggling mass upstairs, you fall into a heap, sobbing.

It's about that time that the group descends, stepping over your war-torn body. The next words you hear are, "Hey, are there any *chocolate donuts*?"

Even this nightmare seems mild, though, with the next phase: Children with Cars. It just so happens that soon after a teenager learns the benefits of sleeping in her own bed (less packing, more mattress) she gets a driver's

license. This was when I realized I might as well quit even buying pajamas.

Over the course of too many Friday nights, I demonstrated a unique ability to go from 0 to 60 on the panic accelerator, imagining what had gone wrong if either girl were ten minutes late. At first I would sob, imagining their lives (and their owners') as slave girls. Then I would work out a little rant-and-rave routine that generated enough adrenalin to keep me awake until Wednesday or Thursday. Again, this does something to your personality.

So — when people ask how we are doing as empty nesters, they're a little surprised at my enthusiastic response. All I can say is, I adore getting into bed when I want to — and staying there. Strangely enough, I am fully aware that our children are out until all hours in their respective and dangerous cities, participating in all sorts of college-related behaviors. I don't care.

Denial is a wonderful thing. So, except when they come home to visit and I am thrown automatically back into mother-mode, for the first time in 21 years, I'm sleeping through the night

It may sound strange. But listening to HONK, snort & whinny noises in a horizontal position is, for me, a dream come true.



"Beyond Her" is a free electronic publication produced by Paule Sheya Hewlett at irregular intervals.

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