

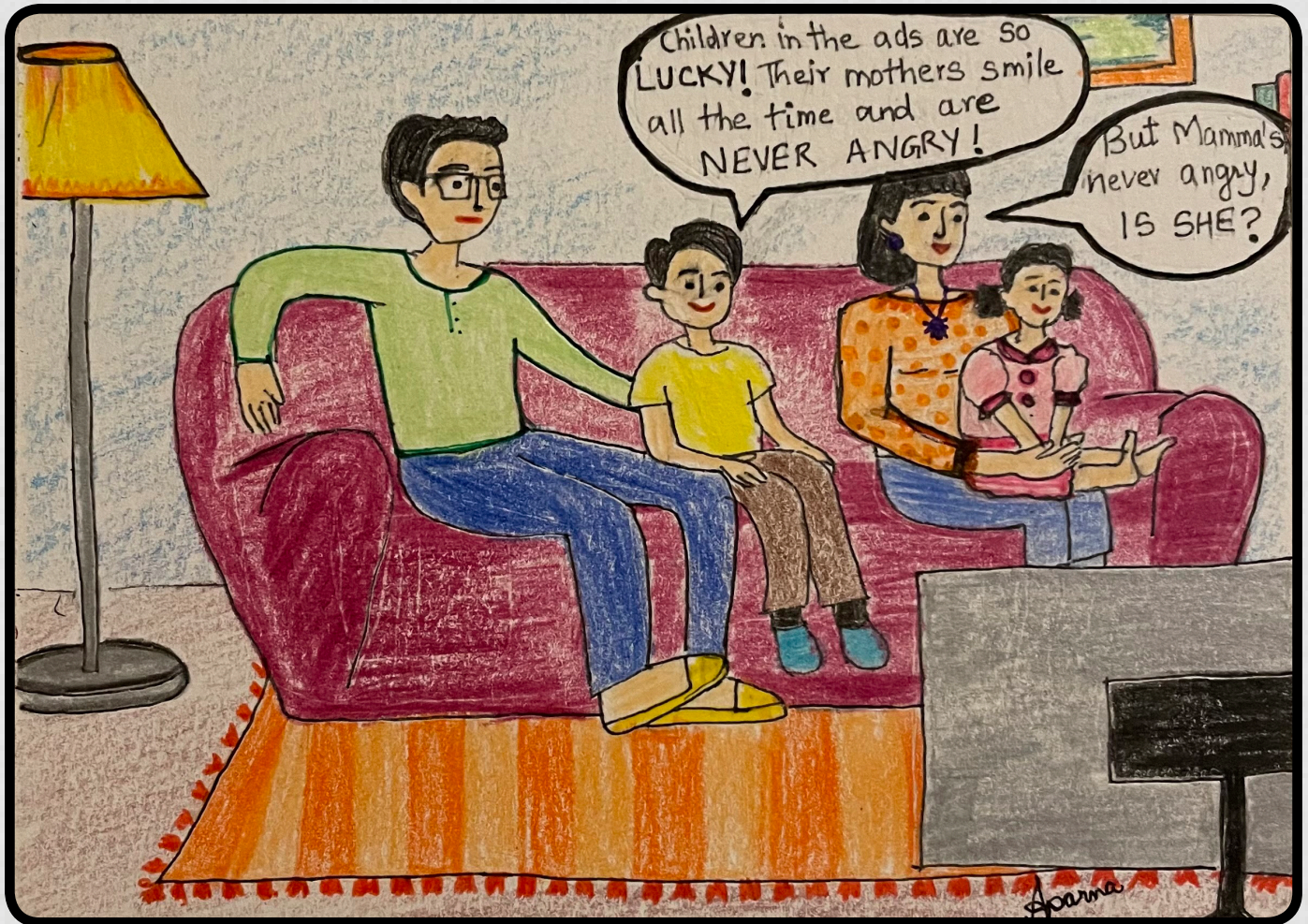
LIFE'S LIKE THAT



Kalyani Gokhale*

It all began on a Monday evening when the family was immersed in watching a show on television, and, needless to say, the advertisements that are generously interspersed within it and foisted on the hapless viewer.

And so it was that after watching some of the happiest families in the world in advertisements for refined oil, bathing soap, and baby food, my son – all of eight years, commented wistfully, “The children in the ads are so lucky! Their mothers smile all the time and are never angry.”



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“But Mamma’s never angry, is she?” I asked him on a rising note, eyes blazing.

“No, no, never,” he said hurriedly – a trifle too hurriedly I thought.

This little episode set me thinking. Would my children grow up craving for a mother who smiled and cuddled and always kept her cool? Would they grow up suspecting that I was actually Cruella in disguise? What use was it reading books on child care and mindful parenting if I couldn’t develop a little more maternal patience? Right there, a revolutionary decision was taken. I would turn over a new leaf. This Mamma was going to be an ideal mother – like the one in the advertisement.



What better way to seal my fledgling determination than to stand before the mirror and repeat, “I won’t lose my temper ever again” (modified to “I won’t lose my temper”) ten times. It was while I was making the declaration for the seventh time that I saw my husband staring at me rather incredulously, looking for other signs of instability. He sensibly (of course!!) advised me to try out my resolution one day at a time and see if I could withstand the strain of being good humoured.

The next day dawned bright and clear. My older offspring dawdled over his milk as usual, but not a frown creased my forehead. My better half wondered if it was possible to get a decent cup of tea at exactly the temperature he wanted, but instead of frowning darkly at him and telling

him to make the tea himself, as I was wont to do, I asked him cheerfully if he would like a fresh cup. So far, so good, I thought. By ten in the morning, I let myself indulge in a little harmless self-admiration.



Absorbed in cooking a fantastic meal like the mother in the ad, I failed to see my four-year-old pick up my talcum powder from the dresser. By the time I entered the bedroom, the floor had received a generous dousing of the powder that made everything so ‘smooth and silky’. Realization came a little late though as I skated

with aplomb all over the room before finally prostrating myself on the floor, most unfittingly for the Super Mom I hoped to be. Junior was by this time, whooping with unrestrained joy and demanding an encore. My hands itched to give him a shake; they checked instead for broken bones.

A loud knock – my Prince of Wales was back from school. With a smile, aching body notwithstanding, I opened the door.

“No water bottle,” he announced.

“Where is it?” I asked him.

“Lost,” shrugged the master of cryptic clues.

An angry “How?” trembled on my lips but died down at the memory of the previous night’s resolution.

“It doesn’t matter,” I told him, “We’ll buy you another.”

Six hours to go, I told myself – victory will be thine.

Rustling up dinner for the evening, I could hear my kids brawling over the Superheroes in their collection. The shouting match soon transformed itself into a wrestling bout, and I strode in to see all hell breaking loose. Calmly, oblivious of the pandemonium, my husband was sitting with the remote control in his hands, switching channels in the quest of instant Moksha.

That did it. I went back to the kitchen muttering to myself and banged two or three pans for special effects. This simple, benign act of self-expression made me feel so much

better that I carefully chose a sturdy pot and banged it a couple of more times. My family gathered in the kitchen to watch me with great interest. I scolded my kids and frowned at my husband and did what is known in polite terms as ‘venting spleen’.

Having thus lightened myself, I felt as if a great strain had vanished. As if the sun instead of setting, was on its way up once again. Eyes shining, with pure relief and unadulterated joy, I smiled brightly at everyone.

“Wow, Mamma!” exclaimed my son, “you smiled just like the mother in the ad.”



Illustrations by Aparna Das