

I'll Love You on Sunday by Jodi Tolman

He was furious. Seething. I wouldn't let my four-year-old son have a play date that morning and at bedtime, he still wanted to kill me. Our delicious nightly ritual included my lying with him when we'd talk, cuddle and just generally adore one another. But this night, Adoration Rd. was a one-way street and the traffic was not flowing in my direction.

"I love you, Jack," I said, testing the roiling waters. "I don't love you," came the darts from the highest, reediest voice you'd ever heard. "Really???" said I. "What about all those kisses you gave me?" He said, "I was kidding." "Seriously???" I said. "I could've sworn you meant those!" "Nope." And with that he turned his bony little back to me.

In my best motherly mode I explained that I knew he was so angry at me, he couldn't feel the love. That at that moment, his anger was much bigger than his love and was in the way. I went on to calmly add that I know how he feels and that even when I'm so mad at him and can't feel the love, I know it's still there. It's just out of reach for the moment.

He insisted. "No. I just don't love you." This from the kid who some weeks before, at bedtime, was so visibly upset that I had to ask if everything was alright. Tearfully, he tried to find the unutterable words that he could barely imagine speaking but knew he must. He said "I have something horrible to tell you." I asked "What is it, sweetheart?" "It's going to hurt your feelings!" "That's OK, Jack. I'm a very strong person and I can take it. You can tell me anything." All in a gush of weeping and relief my tortured little boy confessed. "I love Daddy more than you!" "I know you do, sweet boy. But I know you love me, too. And that's just fine with me." With his burden lifted and in a torrent of emotion and empathy he said, "I love Daddy 1000 but I love you 999!"

As he continued to lie with his back to me, still fuming, I said "You can't tell right now, but you will love me again soon, Jack. It may take a while, but your big anger will get smaller and that tiny love will get bigger and bigger. You'll see."

I could feel his scrawny little body start to let go ever so slightly. I heard his breathing slow just a bit. Slumber had tiptoed into the room and was stealing closer. I whispered "Don't worry, sweetest heart. You'll love me again soon." And just as he drifted off, he said in a barely audible, sleepy voice, "I'll love you on Sunday."

"That's great, Jack. I can wait."