

**Traumarama**

 **When is your hand not your hand?**

Answer: when it’s attached to your terrified daughter. Why is she so scared, walking through the car park into Waitrose? Because before she came to us, aged four, she had moments of wandering around the streets on her own.

So, yeah, I get it. I understand why Rosie needs to grip my hand like a vice, utterly determined as if her life depended on it (in her mind, it does) that she will not be separated from me.

It hurts.

Rosie is extraordinarily strong for a young girl. She has an amazing ability (honed during those desperate early years) to remove a lid tightly screwed onto a jar. Frankly, it’s a skill that sometimes now comes in handy. But she also applies all that physical resolve to squeezing my hand until it feels like a screwed-up dishcloth.

Because she is so strong it often means that she can literally drag me to whatever shelf of goodies she wants me to pick from. This does not bring out the best in me. I have heard of some incredible adopters who are able to take punches and still radiate empathy and offer cuddles straightaway. It’s a skill I’m yet to develop. It’s tough to be tolerant and empathic when someone is hurting and controlling you. All your brain cells are quite reasonably signalling fight or flight, which you have to actively work against because obviously neither is an option.

There is also something very triggering about having a part of your body effectively appropriated for another’s use. I remember back to before I became a mother and holding a little girl’s hand as we amble around the shops was one of my parenting fantasies. It’s fair to say that having your hand angrily gripped didn’t feature in this dreamy scene.

Sometimes I need that hand too, for essential things like getting my car keys out of my bag, picking something up in the shop, opening a door. Sometimes she’ll let me do these things, but then grabs it back.

Like a domestic abuse victim, I’ve found cunning ways around it. If I head for the biscuit aisle first, I know she’ll drop my hand quickly in favour of hovering hopefully over a few packets. And this is when I drop the basket and spend a minute shaking my hand out.