

IN MOTHER WORDS

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CHAPTER ONE: NEW MOMS

FAST BIRTHS
By Michele Lowe

Three actresses, A, B, C.

A: I go into premature labor and my doctor puts me on an I.V. that makes me feel like I've just had 56 espressos...

B: I'm in the back seat of the station wagon on all fours panting like a dog...

A: After two weeks the Doctor says, "I can take you off the drugs tomorrow but if you go into labor I'm going to be out on Exit 51 on the L.I.E. for Thanksgiving so if it's OK with you, can we wait a day?"

C: This Japanese doctor has Ben's head by the forceps and he jumps on my belly to get a better grip...

B: They finally give me my epidural and a lollipop and I'm thinking, "Where the fuck is the Jack Daniels?"

A: The nurse comes in and I say, "I feel something happening." And she looks at the monitor on my belly and says, "Nope. Not yet."

C: I'm pushing like crazy but every time I stop the baby gets sucked back inside because the umbilical cord is wrapped around his neck...

A: The nurse comes in again and I say, "Look, I think I'm having contractions." She checks the monitor and says, "Nope. Not yet."

B: I don't know what's fucking happening to me, I didn't take any muthafucking baby class I think my body's gonna split in two and I start screaming...

C: This woman is screaming in the hall...

A: The nurse comes in again and I'm in agony and I say, "Look lady, I'm having contractions." Another nurse comes in behind her. Looks at my belly and says to her "You've got the monitor upside down."

B: Billions of women have done this right?

A: I'm praying.

B: I'm panting.

C: I'm pushing.

A: He's my fifth.

B: My first.

C: My third.

A: Oh my God

C: I think my third.

B: One more push

C: One more—

A: Whatever you do don't stop—

C: He's out!

All: Oh my God!

Lights shift

SQUEEZE, HOLD, RELEASE AND NOW WHAT
By Cheryl L. West

Oh, good Lord! Now what? Why won't she just get in the damn car and just go? You age ten years on one of my mother's goodbyes and she's in rare form today. After all, she's saying her first goodbye to her first grandchild, my five-day old little precious.

"You're a mother now," my mother sings, punching my dad in the arm so he'll come in on the chorus, [singing] *"You're in the motherhood club now-your life will never be the same."*

[daughter waves] "Bye- Bye, Mom. Dad. Yes, it's been great. Couldn't have done it without you. Yes, I'll miss you, too! No, miss you more."

My husband cranks the engine, and just as I think I'm finally free, she jumps out the car. Dammit, now what?

"Joey, get the scrapbooks out... Get 'em out your damn suitcase why don't you?! I want Baby Girl to see that one picture again with all the kids by the old Chevy..."

I'm wondering how the picture by the Old Chevy relates to my little bundle of joy but...

"There. That's the picture. How many kids do you see there? Four. Four children! That's right. Popped out all four of you. No drugs, no science fiction shots to my back...barely an ouch uttered from my throat. The nurses all wanted to give me an award for being the most silent mother to be."

"And you've been making up for lost time ever since."

"But my point is, honey, motherhood is suffering, sometimes in silence, and you just can't operate the same ass backwards way anymore."

"Remember, Mom, I'M the one who planned for motherhood!"

"Planning is for shit, Smartie Pants. God favors your child over you now. So plan on that! Your heart's about to get broken every which way but loose."

Watching her eyes brim with tears, I'm starting to feel maybe her staying another day wouldn't be so bad...

"Mom, is there anything that I should know, that maybe I haven't thought about?"

Wrong move.

"Close your ears, Joey. And you too, son-in law. CLOSE 'EM! Ok, honey, here goes: men like to pause at the doorway; not fall through it! So, whatever you do, get that little doorway tight again. Swaddle the little precious, but there's a bigger precious that needs swaddling, too. Tight, if you know what I mean."

It's simple, dear: squeeze, hold, release! That's what mothers do, all day long, everyday: squeeze, hold, release!"

Yep, she's certifiable.

"Four kids and forty-five years later, I can still hold a dumbbell up there for an hour if I had to... Got a bladder like a steel drum. Now that's what you call a mother that's still a woman!"

That's it! My husband decides my sanity has been held hostage long enough. He finally gets Mom to put two feet in his car and whisks her and Dad off to the airport, leaving me standing there waving...[Waves] feeling lonelier than I ever have in my life.

"Bye-bye Mom. Bye-bye." Wishing ...yes, wishing I could call her back... But I can't, so guess what I find myself doing? Squeeze, hold, release. [The baby gurgles.]

[realizing] Maybe your grandmother was right. [She gives the baby a big kiss.] Maybe that's the definition of motherhood.

You do squeeze your child, and you hold on to them tight, and yes, eventually one day you release them out into the world...But not, not today...not today.

Squeeze, hold, release. [The baby starts to cry.]

Now what, mother?

Lights shift

New In The Motherhood
By Lisa Loomer

A woman walks on with a happy looking diaper bag and addresses the audience. She's kind of an odd mom out. Not sarcastic...just wry. A bit eccentric, a bit bewildered by her new life...but trying.

ODD MOM

(to audience)
Oh hi. Is this bench taken?
(sits)
Thanks.

(She sees her son, by the swing set, smiles--)

ODD MOM

(calls out; calmly)
Put it down, Harry.... Down, babe. The tricycle is a means of transportation.
(laughs)
He's three. Everything's a penis.

(She starts looking for something in her diaper bag which is full of stuff—snacks, suntan lotion, wipes...)

ODD MOM

(sighs)
God, I hate the park... If anyone had told me I'd be sentenced to five to ten years in the park... I'd have stuck with a cat.

(She finds what she's looking for, cigarettes, and takes one out.)

ODD MOM

Oh, this is clove by the way.
(then)
All right, it's not clove, but it's the park.

(She lights up and takes a drag.)

ODD MOM

See, the park for me is like...Dante's Purgatory. Not Dante's Inferno—that'd be exciting, you'd meet interesting people--but the park is Purgatory. I mean, day after day of whose turn it is on the swing? Couldn't we just let 'em duke it out? I mean—I used to go to an office! Like—in a building? I was a type A personality! Okay, B minus, but still...

(notices; calmly)

Harry? No, honey--put the little girl down. Down. Put her down and use your words, Harry.

(beat)

Not those words--

(Mom 1 enters. She's perfect. And eight months pregnant. And she intimidates the hell out of Odd Mom.)

MOM 1

(perky)

Excuse me, is anybody sitting there?

ODD MOM

(to audience)

Oh. And the other thing about the park? It's a lot like seventh grade. You have to make new friends.

(beat; determined)

You just have to.

MOM 1

I love your diaper bag!

ODD MOM

(trying for cheery)

Oh! Lemme just—

(She moves her diaper bag. Mom 1 sits.)

ODD MOM

Yours too!

(Mom 1 coughs meaningfully from the cigarette.)

ODD MOM

(re: cigarette)
Oh, don't worry about this. It's clove.

(Mom 1 smiles and calls to her child on the swings—near Harry.)

MOM 1

Dakota! Just tell the little boy, "Go away." Do not let him do that with your Barbie!

(to Odd Mom)
Must be one of the nannies' kids. But I think it's good ours get to negotiate with all kinds, don't you?

ODD MOM

(to audience)
And because I have seven more years in the park, I say--to my horror—
(to Mom 1)
Sure!

MOM 1

So which one's yours?

ODD MOM

And because hell is not an issue for me, I reply—
(to Mom 1)
Over there. In the field. Playing...catch!

(Odd Mom points way in the opposite direction of the swings.
Mom 2 enters. Perky. She spots Mom 1.)

MOM 1

(high pitched)
Hi!

MOM 2

(high pitched)
Hi!

ODD MOM

(to audience)
The lower register is completely shot. Minute the baby drops--

MOM 2

(to Odd Mom)
I love that diaper bag!

ODD MOM

Yours too!

(Odd Mom doesn't get that she's being asked to move it.)

MOM 2

Could you just...scooch it over?

ODD MOM

Oh!

(Odd Mom moves the diaper bag to her lap, and Mom 2 sits and talks to Mom1 over Odd Mom who's now in the middle. Mom 2 notices Harry now.)

MOM 2

What is wrong with that boy?

MOM 1

(watches Harry)
ADD...? Aspergers...? He has absolutely no social skills...

MOM 2

Some people just don't know how to set limits for their kids.

MOM 1

Well, not everything's about parenting--

ODD MOM

True—

MOM 1

It could be genetic.

(Odd mom takes a drag. Mom 2 coughs.)

ODD MOM

Oh, don't worry about this, it's clove.

(Mom 2 smiles and talks over her to Mom 1.)

MOM 2

Say, can Dakota have a playdate with Orleans today?

MOM 1

Let's see.

(Mom 1 checks her I Phone Calendar.)

ODD MOM

(to audience)

My least favorite thing, after the park. The Playdate. I mean, I know they can't hop on tricycles and meet in Times Square, but—

MOM 1

(pleased)

How's twelve?

(Mom 2 checks her I Phone.)

MOM 2

Great! I can make gyrotonics!

ODD MOM

(to audience)

I can make gin and tonics...

MOM 1

(pats her tummy)

I just pray this one sleeps through the night so I have the energy for class.

MOM 2

Well, I hope you're going to ferberize her.

ODD MOM

(to Moms)

Ferberize? Is that the book that says don't pick her up? Like—let her scream while you watch Bill Maher?

MOM 1

(smiles)

Not exactly.

(to Mom 2)

I wish we'd ferberized Dakota, I can't even get her off the pacifier!

ODD MOM

(still trying to join in)

Have you tried sugar on your finger?

(They look at her, horrified.)

ODD MOM

Sorry.

MOM 2

(to Mom 1)

Let's do the playdate at our house, they can do an art project with the nanny.

MOM 1

You're so lucky. Ours is hopeless at art--

(Odd Mom makes a final try to get into the conversation...)

ODD MOM

Oh God, me too. I suck at art. Costumes... Masks... To me, paper mache is like...vomit.

(laughs)

Hey, did you guys see that parade here last week for The Day of The Dead? I mean, what ever happened to good old Halloween?

(The Moms exchange a look.)

MOM 2

(coolly)
Well, we just thought it would be nice to expose the children to another culture.

ODD MOM

(mortified)
And they looked adorable in their calavera costumes and serapes and huaraches! What a great way to introduce toddlers to...
(thinks; gives up)
death.

(The Moms smile, look at their watches, and rise.)

MOM 1

(calls out)
Dakota? Let's go, sweetie. Take back your doll and tell the little boy "Good-bye".

(panicking)
Dakota--no! DON'T USE HIS SIPPY CUP! DO NOT USE HIS SIPPY CUP!

MOM 2

DON'T TOUCH THAT SIPPY CUP!

MOM 1

HE'S PROBABLY NOT VACCINATED!

(Odd Mom can't bear it anymore.)

ODD MOM

(calls out)
Harry? Take your sippy cup and give back the Michele Obama Barbie.

(The Moms look at her.)

MOM 2

You know that boy?

ODD MOM

Oh, he's over at my house all the time...

(to audience)

And then I add, because he's fine--it's not his fault...

(to the Moms; evenly)
He's my son. And he's just...fine.

(A beat of silence. Then--)

MOM 1

(smiles)
Well--

MOM 2

(what can she say?)
I love your diaper bag!

(They hurry off. Odd Mom takes a drag of her cigarette.)

ODD MOM

(sighs)
It's not the park. It's...me. I mean, I love my kid... But sometimes I wish we'd met under different circumstances. I love my kid... But maybe I just don't belong in the Motherhood. How come the only thing I got right is the diaper bag? I mean, where was I when God gave out...

(emotional)
pep? Really, the only upside to all this is, the only part I'm any good at--
(sees Harry; smiles)
is him. He's cool.

(calls out)
Hey, Harry? Let's go get a doughnut, honey. And then we'll run through the fire hydrants. What? I don't know what that is, babe, just wipe it on your shirt. Couple of germs won't kill you.

(puts out cigarette, airs out her shirt)
Hell, I'll get the hang of this place. I'll bring Juice boxes! I'll fucking bake if I have to...

(smiles)
See you tomorrow!
Lights shift

BABY SOPHIE'S FIRST STEP

By Lisa Ramirez

(Lights come up on the sound of a teakettle whistling. Mary, an Irish nanny is in the kitchen of the house that she works in. She is making a cup of tea. In the back round we hear sounds of an eleven-month-old girl making baby talk.)

I'm about to tell a lie...a lie...a big fat lie. (Slight pause) Well...not a LIE-lie. Not exactly a lie. But...I am about to... 'OMIT THE TRUTH' as they say.

(Pause. She pours herself a cup of tea and continues)

Me mam used to say, she used to say, "Mary, you must always tell the TRUTH. It's a SIN to lie. God the Father sees everything. EVERYTHING Mary. So it's best just to tell the truth. There'll be no trouble in the long run if you just tell the truth. (Slight pause...she continues in her mother's voice) But...there are EXCEPTIONS, Mary, there are always exceptions." She'd say, "You must always tell the truth...as LONG as the truth will not INJURE the person that you are about to tell that truth to."

(She sits on the floor with her tea. She takes a sip)

Baby Sophie took her first step today. (Slight pause) There...I said it. I said it. That's no LIE. That's the absolute TRUTH. (Slight pause) She walked...WALKED! Right across the kitchen floor! From the table...all the way to her high chair, she did. The SECOND her mam left! Literally, the second after they said their goodbyes. As if she was waitin' for her mam to leave so she could get on with things. She just hoisted herself up and started walkin', just started walkin' across the kitchen floor, she did...I couldn't believe it! (Slight pause) I was right here, you know preparin' her breakfast and...Kate's gone to work you know, like any other day... And I...I want to call Kate you know on her mobile or leave a message for her at her office. I want to call her and shout, "SOPHIE'S WALKIN – SHE'S WALKIN' – IT'S A WHOLE NEW FRONTIER FROM HERE ON OUT – BABY SOPHIE IS WALKIN'!"

(Pause)

But I don't call her. I don't. I don't call her because I know for a fact that she'll take it hard. So, so HARD. Every time I've told her something that Sophie's done...for the first time ever...a MILESTONE like...she cries. She bloody CRIES! (Slight pause) And now I feel horrible too. Like I've just been the bearer of BAD NEWS like. Like I never should have mentioned it at all.

(Pause. She sips her tea)

Mary Poppins had the right idea, she did. She just didn't give a damn. She didn't. Everyone thinks she was so sweet, so full of life, so fun...but she had MAJOR issues she did. Everyone thinks they want a Mary Poppins type. But the fact of the matter is...is that Mary Poppins only worked for two weeks in that house...TWO WEEKS! She turned that household over on its side and then just LEFT like! And those kids were absolutely wrecked when she left! WRECKED they were! And then off she went to the next house. And we don't even know how many families she did that to, do we now? I think she was a bit mental really...carrying on the way she did...like a manic-depressive without her meds...I certainly wouldn't want her in my house. (Slight pause) When I first came to the states people were like, "Oh...this is great! Your accent is so GREAT! Just like MARY POPPINS! And your name is Mary too! How GREAT!" "Thanks!" I'd say, even though I have an IRISH accent- not ENGLISH. (Slight pause) Baby Sophie's mam was different though. I could see that she cared, like really CARED. And she never once mentioned the Mary Poppins thing, not once. She didn't want magic, no...she just wanted someone RESPONSIBLE like...lookin' after her Sophie. (Slight pause) And it's worked out fine you know. It's been grand. I've really grown to love her, I have...and Baby Sophie too. (Slight pause) We're like a funny little family of sorts, except that I go home at the end of the day.

(Mary brings her teacup to the kitchen counter. She picks up a notebook)

This is Baby Sophie's notebook. And every day, for the last 11 months, I've chronicled her every move. Her feeding schedule – nap schedule – park time – story time – barf time – you name it, it's in this book. (Slight pause) And Kate comes home at the end of day...and she looks through the book. She looks through the book, you know...searching for clues...searching for a connection to her daughter's day. (Slight pause) And there's always a bit

of sadness when she picks up the book. It's...it's hard for me to look at her then...

(Pause. Mary opens the notebook and says out loud as she writes)

Baby Sophie TRYING to walk...

(She closes the book, holds it close to her chest, and looks at the audience)

Any day now.

Lights shift

CHAPTER TWO: REAL PEOPLE

FIRST DAY

By Michele Lowe

C: At 5AM Alphonse wakes me and says “If you make me get on that school bus today I will hate you for the rest of my life.” I say “That’s fine” and go back to sleep.

A: I’m supposed to drop my daughter off in front and not go inside the school. They tell me this in a letter.

B: I tell Katie when you get to the front door baby, you wave and I’ll wave and I’ll catch your wave and you catch my wave.

C: The bus pulls up and he starts to cry and I say “Alphonse, pull yourself together.”

A: What do you mean I can’t go into my kid’s school? Jessica’s four years old. If I want to walk her in, that’s my prerogative. I’m her mother.

B: And she says “Momma don’t forget to catch my wave. I’m gonna wave real big to you.”

C: And I say “Alphonse you get on that bus and go to school this minute.” Now he’s crying and he won’t budge.

B: Katie gets to the door and all these kids are surging into the school and she disappears. She’s gone. No wave. Nothing.

C: The bus driver is giving me the eye and I say “Alphonse, if you get on that bus I’ll bake you the biggest cake you’ve ever seen for when you come home.”

A: I march into school past this mother who’s waving like she’s landing an airplane and the principal sees Jessica and says, “Hello Jessica. Why don’t you come with me.” And Jessica lets go of me and takes his hand and off they go sweet as pie and I want to just rip that principal’s arm off!

C: And Alphonse says “How big a cake, Momma? How big a cake?” And I say, “Huge, Alphonse—HUGE. Just get on the BUS.”

B: Five minutes later I'm still standing there outside the school, the kids have all gone in but I'm still waving, waving at the door, I swear I am, till a woman comes over to me and says, "You get over it." She's really young and I know she means well but I still tell her, "Lady, that's my fifth child who just walked in there and I will never get over it."

Lights shift

QUEEN ESTHER**By Michele Lowe**

I pick up Sammy at Lois Baum's house—he plays with her daughter Amy on Thursdays when I work late—and as he's putting on his boots, Lois pulls me aside and says You know Purim's in a few weeks and the kids want to get dressed up in costumes for the Megillah reading at temple.

And I say Oh great, we'll have to get something, and she says, Listen I don't know how to tell you this but your son already has something in mind. He wants to go as Queen Esther. He told me he wants to wear a wedding dress. Look, she says, we don't know each other that well, but I love my pediatrician and he might be very good for you right now. He's very empathic. She hands me a piece of paper with the doctor's telephone number on it and Sammy and I leave.

When Sammy was three, he wanted a Cinderella dress from the Disney Store. It was two shades of blue with a little cap sleeve. We told the salesclerk it was a birthday gift for a little girl in his class, but when we got home, he put it on. He wore it every night for three weeks and then I shredded it in the washing machine. He never mentioned the dress again and neither did I.

When he was five my mother bought him a Buzz Lightyear costume for Halloween. He begged me to take it back and buy him a Sleeping Beauty dress. I couldn't.

All this time Sammy's father is trying to find Sammy a sport. Every other weekend he's all over Sammy: this is how you throw a football, this is how you hit a forehand, this is how you dribble a basketball. Sammy's coming home with a broken finger, a twisted ankle, a bloody nose, but he never complains.

I call Sammy's father and ask if he could tone down the ESPN lessons but he laughs at me. He likes it, he says. He's gonna be the next Derek Jeter. And I think, sure—if Derek Jeter likes to wear a little black dress and pearls.

So after my conversation with Lois I decide to skip Purim this year. I tell Sammy, We'll bake hamantaschen and go visit Gramma. Sammy loves to bake and he says Fine. So the costume thing goes away. Or so I think.

A few days later, Sammy comes home with a huge black and blue mark on his arm. He tells me he walked into the art cabinet.

I get a phone call from his teacher—Sammy isn't participating in class anymore. Sammy's getting into fights. Sammy's sitting by himself at recess.

Then I get a call from Sammy's father. Sammy won't eat. Sammy looks miserable. Sammy's not happy. Then the son of a bitch says maybe we should revisit our custody agreement because it's obvious something's not right and I hang up on him which is a bad move because he can use that in court against me.

That night as Sammy's getting into bed I say, Hey buddy, I got a call from Mrs. McCarthy. She says you're not really being yourself.

And he asks What's being myself?

And I say—Being the way you are deep down—a good kid, a confident kid, a happy kid. And he says:

Mommy, I just don't feel like myself right now.

And I say You don't feel like yourself?

He says No, I don't feel like me.

Now the kid is seven years old and I'm listening to what I think is psychobabble he's heard on the radio but he continues—

You know what would help?

What, Sam?

A barrette in my hair.

A barrette?

Yes. That and a pair of high heels. I want to dress up as Queen Esther for Purim.

Why Esther? Why do you want to go as Esther?

Because the King was going to kill all the Jews and Esther told him if he did that he'd have to kill her too. And the King loved Esther more than anybody.

Can't you go as Mordecai, Esther's cousin? He was there.

But she was the one willing to sacrifice everything to change the King's mind. Mama she did the right thing.

I don't sleep all night.

My kid really wants this and if I pass judgment on him, what's everybody else going to do?

So I go to the Disney Store and I buy him the Sleeping Beauty dress—pink sparkle fake organza—and I have it waiting for him when he gets home from school.

He runs upstairs and puts it on and calls me to come look at him and—and—he looks great. It looks like him. The way he was supposed to be—like a girl.

That night we walk into temple and there are three, maybe four hundred people looking for seats. All the girls are dressed like Sammy and all the boys are dressed as Mordecai with ninja swords and headbands. Right away, anyone who recognizes Sammy stares. I look straight ahead I don't make eye contact with any of them. Meanwhile Sammy's having the time of his life: he's spinning in his dress; he's comparing heel heights with a little girl.

There are no seats left so we have to sit in the front pew. I start praying: Dear God give me a sign. Tell me I haven't totally screwed him up by letting him come here like this.

I hear people behind us whispering and I think, maybe Sammy can take it, but I can't. We have to get out of here.

But the service starts and we're trapped. The woman next to me gets a good look at Sammy and I hear her whisper to her husband: Look at that little boy: he's wearing a dress. A dress!

I look over at Sammy and the barrette has slipped and fallen in his lap. He's pulling the elastic on the sleeves because it's too tight on his arms.

Do I look all right, Mama? He asks. Tell me the truth.

I can feel him shaking. He heard what that woman next to us said. He hears them whispering behind us.

I pick up his barrette and clip it back into his hair and then I put my arm around him and I feel him relax into me. He fits right inside my waist near my hip. We are one again him and me. We are Esther and the King and we are invincible.

Lights shift

BABY BIRD

By Theresa Rebeck

(A woman.)

WOMAN

Sometimes when they meet my daughter people say

(Light on stranger)

STRANGER

Why hello! What's your name?

WOMAN

And my daughter tells her name, Cleo, that's her name Cleo. Then sometimes these people say to me

STRANGER

She's so beautiful

WOMAN

And I say thank you

STRANGER

Where is she from?

WOMAN

China I say

STRANGER

Are you teaching her Chinese?

WOMAN

Somehow this is a big concern to everyone, that I teach my daughter Chinese. No, I say.

STRANGER

Oh.

WOMAN

Not yet!

STRANGER

feeling a little better

Oh.

WOMAN

Sometimes if this person has adopted a daughter from China herself, she says

STRANGER

(judgmental)

Do you teach her *anything* about China?

WOMAN

And I say yes of course! We have thousands of books about China and Chinese art on the walls and we watch Mulan like all the time. Alllll the time. And then because I still feel bad, what kind of a bad mother would adopt a kid from China and then not teach her Chinese, Mandarin is actually the appropriate response, MANDARIN, I sometimes say, “My son is, I have a son, Cooper, who is twelve and he’s biological, and you know, if we taught my daughter Chinese but didn’t have Cooper learn Chinese as well it would be like, he’s our biological kid, and she’s our Chinese kid and we don’t want to do that.”

(Pause.)

This answer invariably gives people allllll sorts of permission.

STRANGER

Your son is biological?

WOMAN

Yes.

STRANGER

If you have a biological child, why did you adopt?

WOMAN

Okay I hate this question, and by this point I hate this person but oh well what can you do. Everyone is always so polite.

(to stranger)

It was just something we wanted to do.

STRANGER

Do they get along?

WOMAN

What?

STRANGER

Your son and your daughter, do they get along?

WOMAN

Okay. "Do your son and daughter get along?" Would you say this to anyone with a normal family? Wait a minute. My family is a normal family.

(then)

Yes they get along! Most of the time.

STRANGER

(a little too patronizing)

Isn't that great. Did you go to China to get her?

WOMAN

Where else would we get her. She's Chinese.

(then)

Yes we did!

STRANGER

Did your son go with you?

WOMAN

Yes he did.

STRANGER

That must have been a wonderful experience for him!

WOMAN

Actually he got kind of sick of it. There was one point when Cooper actually refused to get off the bus, we went to a famous Chinese museum where they had cool dioramas of Lord Bao who was a famous court advisor

to some Emperor and Cooper was so sick of being dragged all over China in a bus with twenty stressed out parents and ten freaked out Chinese babies that he actually just said no I REFUSE to get off the bus. Those were his words, "I REFUSE." I had to get back on the bus and tell him if he didn't get off the damn bus I would not buy him Yugioh cards when we got to Guangjho, a city where, we had been told, the streets are PAVED with Yugioh cards. This threat actually got my sweet son to get off the stupid bus.

(to stranger)

Yes, he loved it!

STRANGER

Well, isn't that interesting. A biological child AND an adopted Chinese daughter. Good for you. Good for you!

WOMAN

Thank you?

(then)

This is what kids say.

STRANGE KID

He can't be her brother.

WOMAN

Of course he's her brother.

STRANGE KID

They don't look alike. How can he be her brother?

WOMAN

(pissed)

She's adopted.

STRANGE KID

Adopted? What does that mean?

WOMAN

Okay, who are the parents out there who have not explained ADOPTION to their kids at this point? Could I have a word with you? Could you please explain to them that families come together in different ways and not all babies come out of the tummies of the mommies who are their real

mommies? Could I not be expected to explain this to strange children on the playground, in front of my own child, who gets a little confused and freaked out when kids say this in front of her?

(to strange kid)

You know what? Maybe you could go ask your mommy about adoption.

STRANGE KID

I know what adoption is. It means you're not her real mom.

WOMAN

Go away. Go away!!!

(strange kid goes away)

STRANGER

Your daughter is from China but your son is biological? So it's not that you're infertile.

WOMAN

I don't want to talk about my fertility with NEAR STRANGERS.

STRANGER

Your daughter is Chinese but your son is biological? How is that working out for you?

WOMAN

We're the same as every other family.

STRANGER

Well, you know, actually—no. You're not.

(Beat.)

WOMAN

You know I was, actually, there was one day when Cleo told me she was worried about all the other babies in China. She was four at the time and she was worried that their parents would not find them, the way we had found her. So I told her that the Chinese government was very good, very efficient, and that they knew how to get the right babies to the right parents. Which made her feel better, but I did realize that she thought that that was where all babies came from—orphans in China. I worried about this for weeks.

My husband finally said: What are you so worried about? And I said, I am going to have to tell her that some babies come out of their mother's stomachs. And that in fact her brother came out of my stomach, and she did not, she came out of another woman's stomach, in China. Don't you think that will upset her? And my husband said: Well, no babies come out of my stomach, so I never actually thought about it.

(then)

I did tell her. That sometimes babies came out of their mommy's stomachs. She thought this was hilarious; she laughed and laughed. So I said, yes that is funny but you know, your brother came out of my stomach. Which gave her pause. And then she said, "I wish *I* came out of your stomach." So we talked about it for a little, and she went off to play. Then that night, when I was putting her to bed, she said to me: You know what I wish? I wish Cooper came from China. And I said, yes, that would be the other way to level the playing field. But whether or not you came out of my stomach, you are my baby bird, and I am your mother.

(then)

Which somehow seems to work for her, and me, and her brother, and her father. It really does.

Lights shift.

IF WE'RE USING A SURROGATE, HOW COME I'M THE ONE WITH MORNING SICKNESS?

By Marco Pennette

A muzak version of "Jingle Bell Rock" plays in the darkness. A department store. Lights up on a MAN holding shopping bags filled with presents. Santa Claus is in the distance. He suddenly turns to us, frustrated.

MAN

Un-fucking-believable. First words out of his mouth -- "Have you been a good girl for Mommy?"

(shakes his head)

Why am I surprised? They all say it -- Waitresses, salespeople. "Where's your Mommy?" "Is Daddy giving Mommy a break?" Why should Santa be any different? But instead of pretending I didn't hear it, I turn to him and yell, "Hey, Fat Boy, she doesn't have a Mother!"

(back to us)

Okay, actually, I say nothing. I've got this thing with confrontation. I once had to see a therapist to help me break up with my other therapist. Besides, is it really my job to educate them all? I never asked to be the poster boy for gay parenting. I just wanted a child. Growing up, it was never a question I'd get married and have a family. It wasn't till I was twelve and my father couldn't get us tickets to "Annie" and I started hyperventilating on the kitchen floor that it became clear that I probably wouldn't be marrying a *woman*. When my partner, Steve, and I decided to take the leap into parenthood, we'd been together eight years. That's like fifty-six in hetero-time. Our gay friends reacted in their typical low-key demeanor.

(mock terrified)

"A baby?! What are you thinking? You own a suede sofa from Armani Casa!" The straight folks were also supportive in... their way. One of them actually said, "Isn't it hard enough to raise a child in a normal family?" We crossed her off the godmother list. The first thing we had to do was find an egg donor and a surrogate. It's preferred if these are two different people. The agency we were working with soon matched us with a potential surrogate -- Donna. A perky lesbian from Simi Valley. Healthy, a mother of two. Her profile said she wanted to help gay people become a family so she can show her kids the brave new world they live in.

So, we have this very bizarre "first date" at Starbucks with Donna and her girlfriend and basically try to cover everything in two hours -- "Where'd you

go to school?” “Would you abort in the event of Down Syndrome?” “Oh, we love Xena Warrior Princess, too!” Six lattes later we’re all jittery and love each other and agree to move forward. Next it’s time to begin our egg hunt. Every night Steve and I look at photos and read profiles. I fight for looks, he fights for brains -- I remind him we live in Los Angeles. When our child isn’t asked to her senior prom, he can sit in her room with her and do calculus. And just when we’re convinced there isn’t a candidate with the genetic make-up good enough for us, we find her. Donor 6247. A month later, sixteen eggs are extracted from this angel and as per the agreement we never see or hear from her again.

Steve and I are then called to the fertility center to do our part. We are escorted to separate “deposit closets...” or “masterbatoriums”... you get the idea... and this nurse hands me a specimen cup that resembles a Big Gulp and tells me no water, no spit, no lube. Go! I start sweating. Two minutes later Steve knocks on the door to tell me he’s finished and I tell him I’m freaking out and I need a little support. He tells me to hurry the fuck up ‘cause our meter’s almost out. What a good father he’ll be. But the threat of a parking ticket does the trick and I quickly finish up. Seventy-two hours later we pick one lucky egg to transplant into Donna’s womb. And then we hold our breath... for ten very long days. I’m at work when Steve calls. He’s crying. Now Steve cries when he watches a “Little House On The Prairie” re-run so I’m not sure if we’re pregnant or if Pa burnt down the barn. But then he gets it out – he says we did it -- we’re having a “gaby.” We swear to each other we won’t tell anyone for three months. We tell everyone that afternoon.

We talk to Donna at least two times a day. She is the most amazingly responsible person I know, yet every night, visions of her doing bumps of crystal meth at some rave party dance in my head. When we visit her I sneak into her kitchen and go through her garbage to make sure there aren’t any empty cans of mercury tainted tuna fish. I read on the internet that “oral sex may cause air embolisms that could result in spontaneous abortions” which I try to work into casual conversation. It’s a long nine months. But we’re in the home stretch. And my latest fear is what happens the moment this baby is born. I want to make sure the doctor knows to hand the baby to Steve and me, not to our surrogate. I become obsessed -- we need to bond with the baby instantly. The baby comes to us. So, the big day arrives. Donna, her girlfriend, Steve and I sit in this hospital room. The nurses tell us everything looks good, nothing to do but wait. Four hours later the contractions are a minute apart and Donna’s allowed to start pushing. At

this point my inner asshole comes out and I whisper again to the obstetrician -- the baby comes to us.

Now, Donna originally had wanted us to stay up at her head while the baby was being born -- which was fine with me. Saw one of those things in the nineties, never need to see it again. But when the baby starts crowning she yells, "Get down there! You can't miss this!" And as always, she's right. Steve actually helps catch our daughter as she's being delivered. Then the nurse wraps her in a blanket and I hold my daughter for the first time. I look up and see Donna watching us -- sweaty, snotty, tears running down her cheeks -- And once again, all plans out the window. I instantly hand the baby over for her to hold -- as it should be. She wanted to make us a family. And she did.

(smiles)

Brave new world.

Lights shift

CHAPTER THREE: TEENAGE YEARS

SEXTALK

By Michele Lowe

C: Charlene missed three days of middle school last week on account of the flu. She comes home after her first day back and I say “So what’d you miss?” and she says “Daphne put a condom on a banana.”

B: I hear Landon listening to Eminem on his computer and as I walk in the room, I hear the word “clitoris.”

C: So I say: Was this at lunch?

B: So I think: Is this a teachable moment?

C: She says Ma, don’t be stupid. It was Sex Ed – and I heard the condom broke.

B: I ask him, Do you know what a clitoris is? And he says Um. Maybe.

A: I take my daughter Serena for her first bra fitting and the woman says we should come back when Serena has something “to offer” those are her words “*to offer.*”

C: So I ask: “Did they give her another condom? Did they let her try it again? Just because it broke doesn’t mean she shouldn’t use one.” And Charlene says Ma relax it was a banana not a cock.” A COCK she says.

B: How do you explain the source of a woman’s sexual pleasure to a twelve year old boy?

A: So I pull this jerk saleswoman aside and I say, “Honey I know they’re small but she’s only 11. Can you show a little enthusiasm?”

C: So I go buy a bunch of bananas and a pack of Trojan Ultra Glides.

A: I tell the saleswoman “I’ll pay you whatever you want just make her feel good about her breasts. They’re little, they’re perky, they’re great. Say it. Say they’re great.”

B: So I do five minutes on clitorises, making sure to mention all 8,000 nerve endings, and he says “OK thanks you can leave.”

A: Finally, this woman digs out of the back of a drawer this little padded bra the size of a postage stamp and gives it to Serena and her face lights up like a lightbulb.

C: While Charlene’s in the shower I leave one banana and two condoms on her desk.

B: As I leave the room I hear him call his friend Andy and say, Hey don’t play any Eminem at home. Never. *Ever.*

C: Charlene is still in the shower when Amanda, my ten year old comes out of Charlene’s bedroom eating the banana. She hands me the condoms and says “I think these are dad’s.”

Lights shift

NOOHA'S LIST
By Lameece Issaq

(Lights up on a woman of about 45. She reads from a paper in her hand.)

Aneesi: I find this today in Nooha's room. "Brushes, soap, four remote controls." Tsk, four? No.

(Reading)

"Chicken drumsticks...drinking glass." The cat???

(She shakes her head.)

Lies! List of lies!

Nooha (OS): No it isn't!

Aneesi: "Victims of Velocity: Things Mom Threw At Us While In A Fit of Rage, A Catalog of Madness."

Nooha: Someone has to keep track! (beat) Ugh. This is gross.

Aneesi: Don't be scared, *habibti*. It's easy. Peel off the paper on the back, then put it on your underwears, then fold the wings down over the sides--

Nooha (OS): I know, Mom! I saw Rula do it a hundred times. (beat) My God, I could float down a river on this thing! It's a friggin' raft!

Aneesi: *Yallah*, go lay down and rest. And stay off of the Spaceface!

Nooha (OS): Facebook, MySpace!

Aneesi: Whatever!

(Beat. Aneesi takes in the audience. She smiles.)

Aneesi: My daughter, the middle one, she just get her period. Late start, Nooha she's 15. I get mine when I am 11. Eleven! Oof. Worst day of my life. Anyway. Tonight we're gonna have 50 people to the house for *Iftar* dinner and she get her period—I say now? In the middle of Ramadan? I need help cooking! She get her period just to get out of helping. I'm serious.

My kids is very lazy. Rula, Romi, Nooha—they all sit in the same room on their laptops sending each other messages on the Tweet!

Nooha (OS): *Twitter*. We Tweet on Twitter. Jesus.

Aneesi: What Jesus have to do with it? Go lay down!

(Whispers to the audience)

Sometimes when one of them leaves the computer on the MyFace, I look at it to see what all my kids doing—we live in Las Vegas! I don't want them to turn into prostitutes and gamblers. But, they good kids and they surprise me, you know? Like, this year Nooha wants to fast for Ramadan with the older kids. So cute. I tell her, no *habibti*, never while you're bleeding. And oh My God, I never seen her so hysterical. She is crying—"I don't want this! I hate this! It makes me dirty." I say, "No! Dis don't make you dirty, maybe make you *crazy*. But dirty, no!" And she say, "Koran says!" I say, No. The Book doesn't mean that. Listen. What is the period? The egg—it is the potential for life. It is...eh, how you say...the energy of creation. So, the body, she need time to remove this energy that she doesn't need anymore. So, God give time off for the body to rest and the soul to rejuvenate. God is VERY, very smart. Ok? Once a month, a lady she get a mini-vacation. God say, "Listen, go and have a hot bath and eat an ice cream and two pounds chocolate. Don't fast, don't pray, don't do nothing but relax. I'm telling you, God, she is a woman.

(Beat. Aneesi looks at the list and shakes her head. Looks up at the audience and shakes the list.)

Aneesi: "Chicken drumstick... at Rula on September 9 because she said something rude at kitchen table. Nobody knows what. The cat... at Romi on October 9 for not picking up her poop. A remote control... at Nooha on November 9 for changing the channel to Gossip Girls while Mom was watching Al Jazeera." See, there are very good reasons!

(Beat.) September ninth, October ninth, November ninth. Oh. I see. This is no list of madness, it's just PMS!

Nooha: Oh come on!

(Aneesi inspects the list again.)

Aneesi: “Special note: Due to Mom’s terrible aim, not one of these objects ever landed on its intended victim—“ Oh really.

Aneesi: I tell you good story. One time while I am 16 years old, I go to Nazareth to stay with my uncle’s family for a few weeks. They live in an apartment on the top floor. And you know I have big, big crush on my cousin, Laith. Sounds weird, but it’s natural. Everyone fall in love with their cousin. Anyway, I am on my period, and in my uncles home there is one very tiny bathroom with one very tiny trashcan. Now, the pad is very, very big, and to wrap it in toilet paper it becomes like soccer ball. Huge! Will fill up the whole trash can! And of course, I am embarrassed by this—I don’t want Laith to see. So, I just throw them out the bathroom window. A few days later my uncle screaming “Aneesi! Come here! You throwing your garbage into the neighbors garden? Shame on you!” They landed on the neighbor’s head while he was in the garden picking mint!

Nooha (OS): Oh my God! That is hilarious!!

Aneesi: I was mortified. But my *Tayta*, my Grandmother, she pull me aside and say “Good for you, Aneesi. Sometimes you have to remind a man that without a woman’s suffering they would not exist!” She laughed for like half hour. She was like High Priestess, this lady.

Nooha (OS): Mom! Mommy...can you make me some tea?

(She looks up at the audience and smiles.)

Aneesi: Be right there, *habibti*.

(She gets up to go, but pauses.)

Aneesi: For the record, I don’t have bad aim. I miss on purpose.

Lights shift

MY ALMOST FAMILY

By Luanne Rice

A winter landscape.

I loved a man who had two daughters.

I met them one winter in a boatyard, his sailboat in a cradle on dry land. Beth, fourteen, stood behind him, so still I could barely see her. Callie, twelve, leaned over the boat's rail, called: "Anyone down there want to come up and help me?"

I climbed the ladder.

"Do you and my father kiss?" she asked. "Yes," I said. "Do you make out?"

The pattern was set: she had a lot of questions, and I had a lot to answer for. While Duncan hadn't exactly left his wife for me, we were in a certain amount of gray area. It wasn't crystal-clear they would have split up if I hadn't come along.

I wanted the girls to like me. That's a lie. I wanted them to love me. I asked my mother, "How do I do it?" She told me "don't try to be their mother. Cook them dinner, make everything they like, and let them help with the salad dressing." I made steak and mashed potatoes, salad, chocolate cake. I lit candles and put out cloth napkins. Duncan mixed oil and vinegar before I could ask the girls, but even so I thought we were doing all right.

The dinner ended early; Beth had an asthma attack, had to go home.

Callie and I took rides in my old car. I let her shift gears while I worked the clutch, and she asked me to teach her to drive. "You bet, Cal – when you get older."

We talked, and she had a million questions. Why didn't I have children of my own, why didn't I want to be a mother? (*she considers*) To be a mother, you had to be stronger than I was, know more than I knew, be forever steady in a way I couldn't trust I could be.

I told Callie: "I guess I'm just not cut out to be a mother." She said, "You'd be a good one. You're a good stepmother."

Beth called me her step-monster. She wheezed gently, constantly, a little accordion of pain. Once I wrapped her in a blanket, and she leaned into me. I held my breath, wanting everything to be better, to stay just like this. The wheezing got worse.

A summer later Duncan's cousin got married.

The whole family went to the wedding. As we walked in I saw the girls' mother. I grabbed Duncan's hand – but the girls ran toward her, pulling him with them.

They stood in a tight knot—Duncan, the girls, and their mother facing inward. I started toward them, but I couldn't see an opening. Beth stared across the tent at me—not with triumph, not with hate, just fear.

Just the look of a young girl telling me that if I walked over, everything she loved in that moment, in her whole life, would stop. I felt shut out and illuminated all at once: they were each other's family, and I was just so tired of trying to force my way in.

The next week I taught Callie to drive a stick shift.

And then I moved out.

One December Callie called from the emergency room. She'd gotten her license, had an accident, asked me to come get her. And I did. She had two black eyes and stitches on her forehead. They let her leave with me because she told them I was her stepmother.

She asked to spend the night at my house, put off telling her parents about the car. I wanted her with me. But I knew she needed to be with the people who'd been with her forever, even before the beginning. I told her she couldn't stay, and I felt it dissolve, the dream of myself as something like her mom.

I loved her. So much so, I knew I'd do anything for Callie, even send her home to her mother.

Even that.
Lights shift.

Unplanned Parenthood
By James Lecesne

JASON

This here's my seat. Been here so long now, it's near official. This is my Dad's seat. Mr. Peterman's seat. Mrs. Peterman. They're on some kind of dinner break. I can't eat. I'm about to be a Dad. And a mom.

(Calling off to someone)

Hey, Mary Ann!...Any word?... Awright, then. You let me know you hear anything...

(To the audience)

We know everybody all up and down the hallway, all the nurses, the staff, some of the doctors too. Kelly, she wants nothing to do with raising the kid. I said, fine, no problemo. I'm ready to take it on. She said what, you're gonna be the Momma too? You gonna give birth now? I told her when the time comes I'll be in there standing by and ready to help with the delivery, but she said, "No way Jose'. You caused enough trouble last time you were down there. You're dreaming if you think you're even getting close."

My dad's real pissed off. Says I'm too young for all this. But I figure if I'm old enough to enlist in the army and kill a person dead, I oughta have the right to have a kid and raise him up right. Right? And besides, my Dad wasn't more than 19 when I was born, so it's kinda like a family tradition. Hey, it's not like I planned for this. I didn't. This is what I call "Unplanned Parenthood." But don't get me wrong, I am not one of those kids who wake up one morning and say, "Geez, how'd this happen?" I know how it happened. I was there. And like every other eighteen-year-old boy, I admit

it, I got sperm for brains. Y' know, sex on my mind all the time. Anyway, all that's about to change big time. Y'know when the kid is born.

(To passerby)

Hey Dr. Carney... Yeah, I know, but it's going on close to four hours... Some kind of update? ... Anything?...

(To the audience)

Nothing... Real early on, Kelly's folks come by the farm for a sit-down. Good times. Showed 'em round a bit. I could tell they weren't all that impressed. Not exactly the kind of folks who deal in acreage. More the square-foot type. Kelly's Mom is all-polite and pulled up tight. She says, "Jason, I hope you'll excuse me for saying so, but we just don't think you're fit to be a parent, is all." Ouch. Like I said, my Dad's not in favor this whole thing but he's not about to sit by and let some total stranger slam his kid on his home turf. So he says, "Well, I hope you excuse me for saying so, M'am, but I never met a person in this world who was fit to be a parent. Most people aren't fit for nothing till life comes along and fits them to it." Go, Dad. This put the Mrs.' nose out of joint. Look, I tell them, I'm not that happy about this whole turn of events neither, but if Kelly and me set our mind to have this kid, don't you think it's best you stand by us? Mr. Peterman informs us that Kelly's mind is made up, and truth be told she's not planning to bring this baby to full term. Takes me some time to get round what's being said. Then it drops on me and I'm like, "I want to talk to Kelly." They say that's not possible. "I WANT TO TALK TO KELLY. THIS IS BETWEEN KELLY AND ME, AND I GOT A RIGHT TO TALK TO HER." My Dad steps in and says it's best we leave the girl alone to make her own decision. That's when I say stuff about how, Okay, Kelly

don't need to be a part of it cause hell, if she's not up to it, I'm willing to be the Mom to the kid. I'll do it. I'll figure it out. My big speech,

Mrs. Peterman smooths her slacks. "Kelly tells me you lost your own mother when you were quite young," she says, looking at me like I broke my leg in a 100-yard sprint. And right there, right there I can see it in her eye. That look saying everything wrong with me, everything outsized or out-of-place is due to the fact that I was raised without my Mom. And I say, "Hold on a minute. You got the wrong end of the stick, Mrs. Peterman. I'm not doing this to make up for some kind of loss in my life. I'm doing this cause I *have* a mother. Okay, she might not be around right now, but not a day goes by I don't think about her and wonder what she'd say, or think or do in certain situations. And I know for a fact if my mom was here right now she woulda showed you round, served you coffee and pie just like I did. She woulda heard you out and then made it her business to sit down with Kelly and tell her how she once came so close to giving up a baby. And then she'd point to me as proof she'd made the right decision. So if you're saying that my mom is what's behind all this, then fine, I can live with that. But it's not for the loss of her. And you ought to understand that.

(To passerby)

HEY, MARY ANN ... I KNOW, I KNOW, BUT I'M SUPPOSED TO BE KEPT INFORMED! I'M THE DAD. And the mom...

(To the audience)

Still don't know if it's boy or girl. Kelly didn't want the sonogram. Said she didn't need that picture knocking around inside her head for the rest of her life. Hard enough for her to have a person kicking around inside her belly for nine whole months and then just be expected to give him up clean. What

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she's done, what she's doing in there, it's huge. And don't think I don't see it. Even though I don't, y'know, "see it," cause here I am -- out in the waiting area -- waiting.

Lights shift

CHAPTER FOUR: ON THEIR OWN

GRADUATION DAY

By Michele Lowe

B: Three days before graduation! Three days!

C: My son's giving the valedictory speech and I know he hasn't written it yet.

B: Sonia says she's not going to graduation.

A: Bridget tells me she wants to wear a bikini under her graduation gown—a little string thing.

C: Eric spends all day at the beach. He goes out all night with his friends.

A: Does it have to be a bikini? I ask. Half the stuff you wear doesn't cover your ass anyway. Wear some of that.

C's Husband: Has Eric written his speech yet?

C: No. And don't bug him.

B: The first one on both sides to graduate high school and she won't go. I beg her. I plead with her. She says No way. You're making too big a deal.

A: I start getting phone calls from the other mothers. Am I letting Bridget wear a bikini under her gown? Whose side am I on? Jesus Christ, I gotta pick a side?

C's Husband: Has Eric written his speech yet?

C: No and don't bug him.

B: I've been cooking for three weeks. I've got 63 people coming.

A: I get an email from the principal forbidding the girls to wear bathing suits under their gowns.

C: I should've forced him to write it last week.

A: This whole thing is driving me crazy.

B: This is crazy.

C: Crazy. The night before graduation Eric comes in my room and says he has no idea what to write.

B: I wake her up in the middle of the night and I say You tell me why. Tell me! Did you do something bad?

C's Husband: Has Eric written his—?

C: *I'm working on it.*

B: Are they holding you back? She says Don't be stupid. Then What? I ask. Tell me please. She says, "You're all just too damn loud."

C: I ply him with Coca-Cola until finally around 2 AM he gets an idea and writes three completely different speeches. He reads them to me at dawn and each one is brilliant. Brilliant!

B: So we make a deal. The next morning, I and tell everybody not to come.

A: After breakfast she tells me that all her friends' mothers have forbidden them to wear bikinis and she asks me what *she* should do. I say, Did *your* mother forbid *you*?

C: Eric's speech was called "The Virtues of Procrastination."

B: Papi and I go alone to Sonia's graduation and we sit there and when they call her name I take out my cowbell and I ring it. Tough on her.

A: She wore a dress under her gown. Shocked the shit out of me.

Lights shift

THREESOME

By Leslie Ayvazian

[ROCK MUSIC COMES UP. THE MUSIC BUILDS. LIGHTS UP ON A WOMAN LISTENING. WHEN SHE TALKS TO THE AUDIENCE, THE MUSIC SWELLS AND SHE ENJOYS TALKING ABOVE IT.]

It's good, isn't it!

[LISTENS]

My Son.

[LISTENS]

This is his! ... And this is how we talked to each other!

[SHE YELLS]

WHAT?

[ACTOR AS SON YELLS BACK]

WHAT?

[SHE YELLS]

WHAT?!

[SHE RETURNS TO AUDIENCE, MUSIC SWELLING]

And it wasn't a phase!

[REFERRING TO MUSIC, SHE SAYS:]

I like this part here.

[LISTENS]

My husband and I were married for ten years before our son was born and we became parents – proud, careful, older parents. We were a threesome, a dynamic threesome. And despite all my ridiculous over protection (like my neighbor bought her son a skateboard and just let him ride it, I bought my son a skateboard and ran along side it) despite things like that -- my husband was patient and my son kept going. He created a world of his own. A musical world.

This was the sound in our house from seventh grade on. This was the backdrop for everything else: school, friends, broken hearts, summer jobs, applying to college, selecting a college and suddenly, wow, we were loading the van! ... His guitar was the last thing he packed.

The three of us drove up to school. Two parents in front, one young man in the back. We moved him in: drawers filled, bed made, posters up, his guitar and his amp next to his desk. We met his roommate: "Hello Hello." And then it was time to say goodbye.

I didn't want to cry. I had worked on that - ten months in therapy his Senior year. I wanted to hug him and give him a smile and let the tears come on the way back which they did. It was a highway of tears, which sounds like a song.

[MUSIC HAS STOPPED]

And then we were home. And then we heard this.... The quiet.

[SHE LISTENS TO THE QUIET]

I thought I was prepared. But there were his old converse sneakers by the front door. His Guitar magazines on the steps to his room. His socks on the landing. His toothbrush in the bathroom.

HIS TOOTHBRUSH! "HE LEFT HIS TOOTHBRUSH!" I yelled to my husband. "I MUST BRING IT TO HIM."

MAN: "There are Pharmacies in Rhode Island."

WOMAN: My husband said. Which is the case. I checked.

My son is now 20 years old, a Sophomore. And he's doing fine. School's good, band's good, friends are good. ... And I'm fine. ... But still sometimes I hear myself talking out loud. "How are you, sweetie?" I'll say. "Do you need anything?" Then I wait.

MAN: "What are you waiting for, honey?"

WOMAN: My husband asks, quietly.

“I’m waiting, I guess, to stop waiting.” I say. And my husband says:

MAN: “You don’t seem to want to do that.”

WOMAN: And I say: “It’s taking awhile. That’s all. ... It seems to be taking a while.”

Lights shift

BRIDAL SHOP
By Michele Lowe

FLORENCE:

Pretty bridal shop.

RISA:

Oh, yes. I think it's the nicest. We've been to all of them.

FLORENCE:

First for me. Who are you waiting for?

RISA:

My daughter. She's already picked out some dresses.

FLORENCE:

My daughter-in-law's meeting me.

RISA:

Your daughter-in-law included you? Wow.

FLORENCE:

Lorraine's a lovely girl. Best thing that's ever happened to our son. He says it all the time. Best thing ever.

RISA:

My son-in-law's a doll.

FLORENCE:

Lorraine's a baker.

RISA:

He's an attorney.

FLORENCE:

We are so lucky.

RISA:

We are.

BEAT.

FLORENCE:

I'm never going to see my son again, am I?

RISA:

Probably not.

FLORENCE:

Is there anything I can do?

RISA:

Never take sides in an argument. Never interfere in their lives. Don't go over on Sundays unless you're invited and, on their birthdays, give them cold hard cash.

FLORENCE:

She makes chocolate chip cookies with happy faces on them.

RISA:

Some people like that.

FLORENCE:

She wears knee socks with her dresses.

RISA:

Maybe that's in right now.

FLORENCE:

I don't think I like her. But I want her to LOVE me.

RISA:

Good luck.

FLORENCE:

There must be something I can do.

RISA:

Nope.

FLORENCE:

You know this?

RISA:

I know it for a fact.

FLORENCE:

How?

RISA:

How often does your husband see *his* mother?

FLORENCE:

I'm going to be different. She's going to love me a lot.

RISA:

You go girl.

FLORENCE:

You'll see.

RISA:

She did invite you here.

BEAT.

FLORENCE:

Lorraine doesn't know I'm here.

RISA:

WHAT?

FLORENCE:

I overheard her telling a friend of hers about the appointment and I thought I'd surprise her and—

RISA:

Oh my God.

FLORENCE:

What should I do? She'll be here any minute.

RISA:

What do you want to do?

FLORENCE:

Stay. I want to stay.

RISA GIVES HER A LOOK.

FLORENCE:

OK, I'm going. I'm going.

RISA:

Quick before she comes.

FLORENCE:

Thank you. Thank you thank you thank you.

RISA:

Happy wedding.

FLORENCE:

You, too!

PAUSE.

But couldn't I just - -

RISA:

Go!

FLORENCE EXITS.

Lights shift.

STARS AND STRIPES**By Jessica Goldberg****WOMAN**

Day before he left for Afghanistan we got the same tattoo, a small blue star on our right shoulder. Probably seems like a weird thing for a mother and son to do together, or so my ex loves to tell me, “that’s not right, no mother and son should be getting tattoos like that”. But then he didn’t raise him so what does he know?

Last time Brian was home on leave he told me ‘mom I seen things’. And that made me really sad because, well, because you want to know the world your boy has seen, you know? You want to see it first. You know what I’m saying? Like, you want to be the one to always go first into the dark, make sure there’s nothin’ scary there, and if there is, you want to be the one to make it safe. So it’s just, it’s just frustrating that you can’t do that. ‘Cause that’s what a mother does and knowin’, knowin’ you can’t, well, that is *hard*.

But, as my ex says, Brian’s a grown man, and you should be proud.

Well I am proud! So proud. I’m proud of all my children, but he’s my soldier! Life on the line was never gonna’ be good enough for him like it is for his daddy. Brian always wanted somethin’ more. He was never gonna’ have no life of fixing windshield wipers onto trucks. After high school Brian worked EMT for a while, but that still wasn’t enough. Then one day he called me up so happy, ‘I found my calling mah’ he said, ‘I joined the Army, I’m gonna serve my Country’. Well, I just about fell off my chair, all I could think was: we are at war. You are going to have to go to war. He did three and a half months of basic training at Fort Carson and was gone.

Now working EMT in Detroit is no piece of cake. That keeps a mother up at night, but it is nothing like this. Nothing like this at all. This is like... constant. ALL THE TIME. From waking to sleeping, and sleeping too, ‘cause you’re dreaming it. Half your time you spend trying not to look at the TV, at the newspaper, other half of the time you’re like why does no one care? Where is everyone?

Then one day there's a knock on the door. I'm standing in the kitchen when it comes, I'm fixing dinner, I hear it: the doorbell, the knock. There's three of them, that's how they come, in threes--two guys in dress greens and a chaplain. They come like that and you know. My name, they're saying my name, then his, they're saying his name: Brian. What? Brian. I'm not prepared at all. I can't hear. There's water in my ears. I faint, I fall over, they tell me again: "Brian". That's when I rip their eyes out with my nails, with my teeth, I'm screaming. I want to go back in time. I want to stop time, but wait...

Wait... It hasn't happened. Wait. This isn't real. This isn't real. It hasn't happened.

I have to imagine it so that if it does happen I'm prepared.

Words tell what a thing is. But there is no word for a parent who loses a child. I guess it's so unthinkable the guy who wrote the book of words didn't even want to go there.

My ex husband laughs when I tell him, "You're being a damn fool you know? Doting, TATTOOING?! Brian is 22 years old! He laughs, laughs at me... (shakes her head)...

Well, you know what? F u. F F F U. 'Cause you see, I will do whatever it takes, whatever it takes: I will tattoo my back with stars, 22 stars, one for each year of his life. 23 stars, 24, I will tattoo and tattoo. 75 stars, 80 stars and he will live that long, and he will live and he will live. I will tattoo my back the whole night sky and nothing bad will happen, and he will live, and he will come home, hundreds of stars, and my soldier will come home!

Lights shift

CHAPTER FIVE: COMING HOME

THANKSGIVING FUGUE

By Michele Lowe

D: David drops a hint to our daughter Galina that maybe she should do Thanksgiving this year. Her dining room's bigger than ours. She says Fine she's game. She'll do it.

A: Isabel asks if she can bring her new boyfriend, Carl, home for Thanksgiving and I say of course. We're gonna meet Carl! Get out the Lenox!

B: I don't do big Thanksgivings. All that Pilgrim crap makes me itch so we do Chinese.

C: My son tells me he's not coming home for Thanksgiving this year. He's going to Cabo with a friend.

D: I decide Galina needs a little inspiration so I take all my November issues of Food and Wine starting from 1998 and my three Barefoot Contessa cookbooks and my menu cards embossed with the little gold turkey and put them in a box.

C: The twins call and say they're not coming; they're going to a yoga conference.

A: Then Isabel tells me that I've got to buy organic sheets for Carl or he can't sleep in our house.

B: I rent two extra TVs and we paint our faces and watch football and eat chicken chow mein on the snack trays and I am in heaven.

C: My daughter's also not coming home for Thanksgiving; she's going to her mother-in-law's.

D: I copy all my recipes, 23 pages and put them in the turkey box along with my mother's carving set and the antique chocolate turkey molds. I just want to be helpful.

C: Nobody asks what Mommy's doing for Turkey Day.

A: Isabel tells me Carl's a vegan. It's ok for him to see the turkey meat, but not the bones. So we have to carve it in the mudroom. Under a sheet.

B: After the last game, the kids will scatter like leaves and call me when they get home and say: "Mama that was the best Thanksgiving you ever made."

D: I'll make Thanksgiving next year. Or maybe I'll do a little one on Friday night after hers.

C: Nobody wonders if Mommy has any plans. Which I think is hilarious.

A: Carl better be gone by Christmas.

C: Because Mommy's had a plane ticket to Paris since August.

Lights shift

ELIZABETH
By David Cale

BOBBY BARNES, *a man in his early forties.*

BOBBY

After my divorce became final I moved back in with my mom.

As part of the settlement my ex-wife got the house. Mom was living alone and she'd said,

"Come and stay with me for a bit, it'll give you a little breathing space to figure out what you want to do with your life."

So I did.

She was standing on her doorstep when I pulled up in the car. The first thing she said to me was,

"I don't want to be called Betty anymore. I want to be called Elizabeth. That's my name, but everyone's always called me Betty, I don't know why. Elizabeth says something, Betty's just blah."

I said,

"Sure Mom, I'll call you Elizabeth."

And I hugged her hello.

* * * *

Shortly after, I realized my mother barely went out.

I said to her,

"Why don't you go out anymore?"

She brushed me off.

"I like staying home."

“You’re not being truthful, what’s going on?”

“I’m a homebody now.”

“Mom!”

Then she got really upset.

“I can’t remember anybody’s names! I get into a room full of people and I go blank. It’s too stressful. And I can’t remember things people have said to me from one week to the next! Oh, I don’t want to talk about it, Bobby, please, subject closed.”

In the night she tapped on my bedroom door.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart, how I shouted at you.”

I said,

“There’s no need to apologize, you’re frustrated, I understand.”

But I couldn’t get to sleep thinking about it.

* * * *

Living at home, I noticed the first thing my mother did in the morning was turn on the TV, and the last thing she did at night was turn it off, and she was now participating in it.

I walked in the house one evening and she was sitting in the armchair with her home phone in one hand and her cell phone in the other.

I said,

“What are you doing with those two phones in your hand, Mom?”

“Voting,” she said, and she had a slightly guilty look in her eyes.

“What for?”

“American Idol.”

“Why do you need two phones?”

“I’m voting for *my David*. I’ve got both the phones on re-dial. I’m voting for him over and over. He’s so talented, Bobby. And sweet. He’s *got* to win. It’s going to really upset me if he doesn’t win.”

“Mom,” I said, “Do you have a little crush?”

She got all defensive.

“Don’t be ridiculous Bobby, I’m fifty one years older than he is.”

“Oh, so you’ve done the math? When you’ve finished voting for your boyfriend, I have an idea I want to talk to you about.”

* * * *

I sat her down at the kitchen table.

“Did you have lunch today?”

“Of course I did.”

“What did you eat?”

“I had a cookie.”

“You can’t live on cookies and TV. Mom, I think you’re vegetating a little bit. No wonder you feel like you’re losing your memory, you don’t use your mind anymore. When was the last time you read?”

“I read!” she said.

“What? What was the last thing you read?”

“I read an article on whether Kirstie Alley’s weight gain might be linked to Scientology.”

“Mom, I have an idea. And don’t just say no without considering it. I think you should go to night school. They have classes at the community college.

There's one coming up on *American Short Fiction*. You used to love reading. And we have to get you on a better diet. I brought home some Ginkgo Biloba, it's good for the memory."

"Alright," she said, "Whatever you think best."

"I don't believe it," I thought, "She's going to do it."

I filled in all the forms and enrolled her as Elizabeth Barnes.

"I'm so happy I'm going to be Elizabeth again," she said, "it feels like a fresh start."

* * * *

The first day of school arrived, and I couldn't get her out of the house. We had an absurd showdown in the kitchen.

"Elizabeth, get in the car."

"Why are you calling me Elizabeth? I'm your mother, call me Mom."

"You're going to be late for school. Please get your books and your bag and get in the car. And don't make faces at me."

"I don't want to go to school today, I'll start tomorrow."

"Mom," I said, "I've had a long day at work, please get in the car."

She had three hours of classes. I was a nervous wreck. I parked outside the college, and sat in the car waiting till she came out.

At 9:30 she appeared, got in the passenger seat.

"Oh my goodness, I've got to read Sherwood Anderson's 'Winesburg, Ohio', by Thursday. I haven't made it to the end of a book in twenty years. But I'm gonna do it. I am," she said, and she patted my leg.

I asked,

"How many people are in the class?"

She said,

“I don’t know, six. Maybe eleven.”

And didn’t say anything else for the rest of the ride.

* * * *

The following evening, we were in the kitchen.

She stood at the window looking into her yard. She went quiet for a long while, and seemed to be floating out into another world.

I asked,

“What are you thinking, Mom?”

She said,

“You know what I was just thinking, Bobby? I was just thinking, I don’t want people to call me Betty anymore. My name’s Elizabeth. People called me Elizabeth when I was a girl. But as soon as I became an adult I became Betty. I want to be Elizabeth again.”

“Alright, Mom, I’ll call you Elizabeth. Now sit up at the table and do your homework.”

I thought,

“I can’t move out. I can’t leave her on her own.”

She sat there reading, gently tapping her lip with a pencil.

I made us some dinner.

When I glanced back at her she was drawing cartoon birds in the margins of her notebook.

“Oh my God,” I thought, “*I* used to do that at school.”

Lights shift

REPORT ON MOTHERHOOD

By Beth Henley

A sitting room in an old house in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

A YOUNG GIRL interviews her GREAT-GRANDMOTHER for a school report.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

(Quietly)

Great-Grandmother?

(Louder)

Great-Grandmother.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

What do you want?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I wanted to ask you about motherhood. For my report. I've spoken to Mother and Grandmother, now if I speak to you that will be three generations of mothers.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Oh, dear.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I don't need much. I only have a few questions.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

I'm very old. It doesn't allow me to be superficial.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

Yes Ma'am. That's fine. You are the mother of seven children. Four girls and three boys.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

All of them. Yes.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

Reading from paper

First of all what do you like most about being a mother?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

I don't like being a mother.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

You don't like motherhood?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

It's something I don't do well. I don't love all my children the same. People say you should. But I couldn't. Two of them I didn't like, one I despised. The one I loved the most was quiet. Never spoke. A calm person, except for the allergies and asthma attacks.

We took the train to New Orleans about those asthma attacks. The doctors scratched her back with needles and put on various serums to see what she was allergic to. It was legion. Grass, pollen, dust, the sun, the sky, her own skin. She was my favorite.

I cut her hair in a pixie cut. I cut all my children's hair in pixie cuts. The girls, not the boys. The boys' hair was even shorter. Children do not like washing their hair, that is why they need less of it. And the tangles. I worried about knots and tangles. How do you feel about having children?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I haven't given it a lot of thought.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Do you use birth control?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

No.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Why not?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I'm twelve and—

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

No sex.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

No. No. Hell, no.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

When I was your age, we didn't have the option. The option of premarital sex. Birth control was primordial and through it all I became very pregnant. I tried everything: the rhythm method, prophylactics, diaphragm, outside ejaculation, oral copulation, illegal abortion, abstinence. None of it worked. Now you have choice. Many choices. I can't tell you what a different world.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

That's good.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Not entirely. Many terrible things are in this world. Apparently, civilization will end in an unfathomable and brutal fashion. In the meantime I'm very happy for reliable birth control because we all want to be wanted.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

Yes. Of course.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

The happiest day of my childhood was when my own mother looked at me and said, "I forgive you, Cynthia." "For what?" "I asked. "Because you have come uninvited into this household. Uninvited but eventually not unloved."

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

What did she mean?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

She meant, eventually, I was loved. That's what I hope for everyone. It is not inevitable. Love. Did you know that, Helen?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

No.

(A beat)

I don't think I want children. I don't want to be a mother.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Good. You may decide as you like. Helen?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

Yes?

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

I like your hair. How long it is, without tangles.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I don't really like short hair on me.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

No. Why would you? You're young. How does it feel to be young?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I have a boyfriend.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

You do?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

But he doesn't know.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

Ah.

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

He's shorter than I am.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

That could change. Have you spoken?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I asked him what time it was he said he wasn't wearing a watch, but he smiled at me.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

He did? Did you smile back?

GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER

I guess...I did.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

You did? Good.

Lights shift

MY BABY

By Annie Weisman

I'm going to tell you this now, while it's fresh in my mind, because I know how time creeps up on you. How it's just one day becoming another, and then all of a sudden it's, 35 years. You won't believe that now, because you're not even a month old yet, but wait. So I have to tell you now, what it was like, the day, the hour, the very moment that you were born.

This is how it happens. I'm eating a brisket sandwich with your Daddy and doing my dead on impression of the hippy yoga teacher we just giggled through birth class with, and we laugh and then gush, my water breaks. And one minute it's jokes and brisket, and the next minute we are driving to the hospital, saying, but not believing, "We're gonna be parents." I look at the car seat and its government mandated five-point-harness in the back, and I try to fill it up with the idea of you, but fail. It's impossible. No way this thing inside of me is a person.

And there are hours and hours at the hospital for it to get more real. Contractions that get bigger and closer together, monitors that show your heart beating away, but still, it's impossible to believe. How will it happen?

After the epidural, there's no pain to distract me anymore from the impossible task at hand. It's 2 am, your father is asleep in a vinyl chair, and I am alone with beeping machines, ice chips, and paralyzing fear.

And this goes on for hours until at last I'm dilated 10 centimeters and they page the doctor. He breezes in just before 5AM sipping a Venti Latte and pulling a crisp white lab coat over a worn t-shirt. Just another ordinary day for him. He had time to stop at Starbucks for a Latte. I can't stop shaking.

The nurse whispers to the doctor, "she's panicking." And he takes his place on a wheeled stool at the foot of the bed, his face framed by my trembling legs. He places a hand on my leg—authoritative but gentle. "Annie, here's what you're going to do. You're going to hold your legs up like this. You're gonna take a deep breath, and let it out. Then you're gonna take another deep breath and hold it, and that's when you push. Push as hard as you can. Push exactly like you're having a bowel movement. But don't worry, you won't have a bowel movement. You'll have a baby. Ready? Deep Breath." Of course I know this is coming, this moment when they tell me it's time to push out my baby. And yet, YOU HAVE GOT TO BE FUCKING

KIDDING ME. Why don't you just tell me to SPEAK RUSSIAN, or FLY. There is no way. No WAY. And still, I do it. I hold my legs back, take a deep breath and let it out, take another breath, hold it, and push as hard as I can. Nothing happens. The doctor says, "Annie. You aren't really pushing. You need to push with everything you've got." And I want to kick out his sweet authoritative teeth. I know this is how it's done but I can't do it. I can't do it. I do it again. "That's it Annie! That's great! Now do it again."

And I can't, but I do it again, and again until the doctor says, "The baby is crowning, no more pushing, just relax and I'm going to bring the shoulders out so you don't tear, and I'm going to hand her to you but very gently because she's still connected inside you, and here she comes, here she comes," and I'm still thinking no way, there's no way, it's not a person and then "Here she is!"

and

Oh my god! You are in my arms, and you are, you are a person, warm and wet, with bones and hands, and swollen little eyes darting back and forth, and you see me and I see you and we both cry, you, a dry, rhythmic little wail, and me an overwhelming flood of love and relief, "Hello my darling. Hello my baby."

Later, they take you off for tests with your Daddy, and I have a moment by myself to relive what just happened. You landed on my chest and took your very first breath. The morning sun moves across the vinyl floor of the hospital, and the next thought comes to me. If you could begin to breathe before my very eyes, you could stop too. As sure as you were just born, someday, you are going to die. And it could happen any second.

A week later my mother visits. And it takes her less than five minutes to piss me off. She starts with passive aggressive questions, "Shouldn't she have gained more weight by now? Are you sure that swaddle isn't too tight for her to breathe?" and transitions to full blown irrational diagnoses, "She's jaundiced. She's lethargic." "Mom, she's a newborn, and she's tired." When she offers a ride to the emergency room, it gets ugly. "Mom! I saw the pediatrician this morning and he says she's small, but she's fine and we don't need the emergency room and we don't need you here undermining my confidence, and--" But before I can finish, my mother bursts into tears. "You don't understand. You're still my baby. It hasn't been 35 years, it's been 35 minutes and you just came out. I'm sorry, but...you're my baby."

Later, I hold your tiny body in my arms and rock you in the glider until long after you're fast asleep. I keep rocking, until I'm not angry at my mother anymore.

I want to tell you this story now, even though you can't possibly understand it. I want you to know why I love you so much more than you will be able to tolerate someday.

Because however old you are, 10, 20, 70...there was still a moment years ago, that I'll never forget. When one second you weren't there, and the next second you were. Life began. And I got to be there.

Lights fade to black.

End of play.