

MAMA: Survival Guide Required

A full-length play

By Tracy Vicory-Rosenquest

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CHARACTERS

OG - The Original Mom-Guide through the jungle

MAMA - Just trying to survive first-time motherhood

HER MOM - Mama's mom

DADA - Mama's husband

CHILDCARE PROVIDER - An idealist

CHILDCARE MANAGER - A realist

BARISTA - The one who gets Mama what she needs

THAT MOTHER (Aka Elise) - Mama's Nemesis

MOM WANNABE - Wants to be a mom so bad

FRED THE NEIGHBOR - A friendly neighbor

EYE DOCTOR - Just trying to do their job

PAREN-TIST- A therapist for parents

FRIEND - The one Mama needs most

SETTING

Current day, Mom-life where moms have to keep their shit together in public and are invaded by social media standards of motherhood.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

(Darkness.)

OG

Before one explores the jungle - or any environment never before encountered, life is only predictable, expected, the familiar. You emerge in a world, and you live in that world. You know it. You understand it. You roam in this world comfortably - even as things change, it doesn't surprise you. You adapt. Nothing, however, will ever prepare you for the moment you enter an environment completely foreign to you.

(Light begins, like a sunrise. The sound of a lullaby.)

OG

If you've ever given birth, you will understand, the encounter is like entering the jungle. You're in territory that is wild. The landscape, the weather, the animals..... At first, it's magical. You're mesmerized. There's no sense of time. You're speechless. It's poetic. There's a tiny human life in front of you that you created from nothing. Everything. Is. Possible.

(We see innocent, beautiful baby-just-born pictures on the screen. The magic, wonder, heart-felt joy of birth is here. MAMA walks across the stage, cooing to her baby wrapped in her arms.)

OG

This creature you've never met belongs to you and requires you and only you - to keep it alive. The creature believes this is your only job and focus. You will give 299% to this mission. What else are you doing? In addition, given this creature is wild, there's a sense of danger looming. What is behind that bush? Lying in the grass? Above in that tree? You're wary. And you should be.

(The sound of lullaby music being yanked off its track like a record being scratched off its player. Mama tries to breastfeed her crying baby while Dada sleeps, in fact, he snores. It seems unfathomable he is sleeping. The baby struggles.)

MAMA

Come on. Please, you can take it.

(The baby finally latches, feeds. Mama falls asleep, the baby wakes her up crying again. She soothes the baby to sleep just at the same time her alarm goes off. FUCK. The baby stirs but doesn't wake. There is no dictionary word for the kind of exhausted Mama is, but she gets up anyway, eyes everyone sleeping, and checks the clock.)

MAMA

I have.....one hour. No one move.

(She begins. Every step she takes is to do something productive while there is a quiet house: picking up laundry, doing dishes, cleaning the mess of diapers, toys, and everything scattered everywhere. What she can accomplish in 10 minutes is remarkable.)

(A short time later...the baby cries. Mama waits quietly. Just as the crying is subsiding... there's another wild noise, a lion roar or Dada stubs a toe. Mama listens and waits. A clock ticks a very slow tick. The rise of the sun.)

(Mama sees muddy toddler footprints across the floor and crawls on the floor like an animal to clean them.)

OG

You live in a jungle now. It's hot. It's obviously muddy, and you must play by the rules of the jungle.

(Mama looks up to see muddy hand prints on white walls. She is defeated by them.)

OG

You don't know the rules, no one can give them to you. You will eventually understand the rules AS you learn them. And whether you follow the rules or not - your life is perpetually in danger.

(The baby screams. Mama goes to collect her baby.)

OG

You can't unknow this life - for the rest of your life. Momspeed. Amen.

SCENE TWO

(It's pick-up time at daycare.)

MAMA

(to audience)

I love my son...like, a bear and her cub.

(MAMA fakes smile and opens the door to a Childcare Center. The sound of toddlers playing. CHILDCARE PROVIDER sees Mama.)

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

Conner, your Mommy is here!

(MAMA waves to her son.)

MAMA

(to audience)

Like a lion or at least a gazelle running to save its life from the lion. My son is my life....but also the lion.

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

He's such an amazing kid. You must miss him all day.

(The sound of toddlers screaming wildly.)

MAMA

Terribly.

MAMA

(to audience).

Nope.

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

Today he was like not acting like himself.

MAMA

Like himself?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

He had like a runny nose or something.

MAMA

So he did or did not have a runny nose?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

I mean, there was snot. Maybe he needs to stay home and rest tomorrow.

MAMA

Do you have Kleenex?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

Yes.

MAMA

So you can blow a nose?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

I mean, yeah.

MAMA

Does he have a fever?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

No, but—

MAMA

He'll be fine.

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

The parenting handbook—

MAMA

The handbook only requires them to stay home with a fever.

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

We encourage you to do what's right based on your style of parenting.

(Mama turns ever shade of "I hate you." The childcare provider is unfazed.)

OG

What you don't have to deal with in the jungle is disrespect. A tiger, means no disrespect. It just wants to eat you. It's an animal. Most people are animals who don't believe they're animals. At birth, babies know they're animals. They want the basics. Like a tiger. Eat, sleep, shit. Adult humans, are another kind of creature.

(Mama tries to manage her "you don't get it" rage without flinching. OG opens a Family Size bag of chips to watch what unfolds.)

MAMA

(to audience)

I used to believe in them--people--and giving birth to them.

MAMA

Let me just call my boss to see if I can bring Connor with me to work at the library. I'm sure he'd wait patiently and quietly for 7 hours...

(Childcare Provider nods. Mama stares at her until she catches up.)

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

So you don't have sick days? Self-care days? That's terrible!

(Mama stares at her.)

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

I'm sure you know what's best. Also, you didn't pay for last week. Don't forget your check tomorrow. And with Mother's day next week, we thought all the mothers could come in with cupcakes, and we will read you our Mother's day poems!

(OG stops time for a moment so Mama can vent.)

MAMA

(to audience)

I'm supposed to take off work, bake, and see my child during the time I pay for childcare? That's my present? AND if I don't go, I already know the look Elise will give me. She's the mom who carries fresh baked goods in her pockets, has an age appropriate craft project prepared for her 3 kids after-school, and a three-course healthy meal on the table by 5:30pm. Her evil eye is unmatched. She just looks at you, and you do it.

(Time resumes.)

MAMA

Whose idea was this?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

Elise. Isn't she like, so creative?

(Mama stares blankly.)

MAMA

How long have you been here?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

A few weeks.

MAMA

Do you have children?

CHILDCARE PROVIDER

Oh, no. I don't believe in bringing another child into an overpopulated planet where the icecaps are melting at an alarming rate. We'll all be underwater by the time these children are 18.

MAMA opens her mouth but mentally shoves words back in her mouth—and then OG hands her the bag of chips. Mama shoves them in her mouth.

MAMA
(to audience)

Murder is mostly a terrible idea.

(OG and Mama continue eating chips.)

OG

In the jungle, it's just the circle of life.

MAMA

CONNER, LET'S GO HONEY.

MAMA
(to audience)

I was once this same naive young woman. With a passion for idealism, self-righteous with distaste for complacency. With dreams. A vision. A purpose. And now...I'm a mother. I don't care about dreams. I care if I make it to the pillow without killing anyone. I mean, I have a purpose. If I saw a lion chasing a gazelle, and

if my son was the gazelle, I'd throw my body in front of the lion.

(She considers. She reconsiders.)

MAMA

Obviously, on a good day.

But if this lady was the gazelle. I'd watch the lion eat it.

I might need a nap.

(Childcare Manager walks by to see Mama staring blankly at the Childcare Provider. Mama gives the Manager a look. She looks to the provider, she looks to the manager. The Provider goes to find Conner.)

MAMA

Why did you hire—

CHILDCARE MANAGER

We had to. Staffing is tight.

MAMA

Just tell me that some of this will get better.

CHILDCARE MANAGER

This?

MAMA

Life. As a Mother. You know, trying to raise a small animal on a bag of goldfish, hot dogs, and hope.

CHILDCARE MANAGER

It doesn't.

(Mama struggles between urges to scream, cry, throw a fit on the ground or disappear into thin air.)

MAMA

Ever?

CHILDCARE MANAGER

Nope. Just enjoy the fact that you've got a year-round 9 hour daycare for another year. Next year, you lose 4 hours of childcare. They get out of school at 2:30pm. And there's no school in session for a week at every holiday, plus snow days, sick days, half days and the random Wednesday no school days. And then spring break and summer break.

(Childcare Manager pats Mama on the back and leaves.)

OG

The jungle is relentless. Just when you think you've got one part of it figured it out. A snake descends from the trees and a cheetah jumps out from the bushes. You're never going to be prepared. So stop preparing. What you need are weapons, a comfortable outfit, and snacks. A lot of snacks. Also, a change of socks & pockets. You are walking around with a 30lbs on your back, you're going to burn a lot of

calories. You're going to be hungry and yet you can't stop to eat because you better get your butt to a safe place to sleep at night. You don't know where that's going to be or when you'll find it. So keep moving.

SCENE THREE

(Mama is outside the coffee shop in her car.)

MAMA

I just spent two hours chasing a toddler to put on one sock. One red sock. Not even a matching sock. My husband, of course, rushes to leave for a meeting at the exact minute Connor goes ape-shit about this sock. 5 minutes later the dog pees in the middle of the living room. There I am. I think I'm done, but the universe isn't done. It's just getting started. Some poor guy rings the doorbell; he's here to give me a quote on the roof. I have dog piss on my socks. The child has now taken off his pants. And All I want is to grab the guy's hammer out of his tool belt and smash the fucking doorbell, take the cigarette out of his mouth, smoke it and then burn the goddamn red sock that's still in my hand. I didn't. But I really wanted to be the one going ape-shit this morning.

It's 8:17am and I'd like to be wasted. But the only thing I can fucking drink right now while driving is a goddamn latte. Except today, it's not a latte day. I'm going to have to tell my barista, I need the fucking hard stuff. Lucky for me, she already knows. She's seen me sitting in this car for 10 minutes talking to myself. She's already preparing me a Nitro cold brew with a quad shot of espresso and zero cream. Because my heart today, it's dark. There is no space for cream. There is no flavor. No room for a dash of cinnamon. I've got nothing left. And now I have to go to the fucking dentist. I'm not even going to brush my teeth first.

(Mom zips up her hoodie, get out of the car, and walks in with her slippers. She stand in front of the barista with money in her hand. The barista nods, hands her the drink she's already prepared and gives her change. Mama walk back to her car.)

MAMA

That barista. She's the closest thing I have to someone who gets me.

(Mom gulps half her drink. Wipes her face with her sleeve. Revvs her car engine and peels out.)

SCENE FOUR

(It's Saturday morning at home. Everything is quiet in the house. Mama listens, looks, and confirms that the child is playing quietly. Although, she finds a pile of markers in the bathroom. One of the great mysteries of toddlerhood. Luckily, she

caught this early. She removes all markers from the premises and sets them on a shelf.)

OG

At this stage in the jungle, you're alone. I don't mean physically alone. You're surrounded by animals, birds, insects, and plants - alone in that no one can communicate with each other. You can make the attempt to tell the cheetah to leave you alone, but it's never going to understand, and it doesn't care anyway. Not only does every species speak its own language - within a species, there are different styles of communicating. Did you know there are over 200 kinds of monkeys in the world? Some of them can change their accent to talk to each other, but mostly they take care of their own kind. They don't fully understand each other - even though, they're all monkeys.

(Mama pulls out her phone. We watch social media Mom influencers on screen...the ones that make you feel like you're failing as a mother. "Pack your lunch like this: Cut the sandwich like a heart, carve roses in the strawberries..." The sound of a creaking old chair wobbles in the other room. Mama looks up, debates if she's going to do anything about it.)

OG

Also, there are a lot of flies. Always in the way interrupting a perfectly peaceful moment. The tiger, the giraffe, the elephant - none of them can get rid of the flies. Their tails were likely invented just to swat them. Mothers were unfortunately not born with tails. We can't even use fly swatters in these situations.

(Mama watches a Mom-influencer video... "Here's what NOT to do: Raise your voice to the octave of a yell. To avoid giving your child a traumatic childhood, say to your beautiful babe: What if you tried..." Mama smites her phone. She huffs and puffs. She adjusts her hair, her shirt - it's hopeless to look decent - and she gives up. She prepares her phone and clicks the video record. We see her on screen.)

MAMA

(to audience) I don't do these social media posts. Especially about being a mom. Because I don't usually have nice things to say about it. I'm not saying it's all terrible, but like 85% terrible. Then, I'm watching all these moms do things like cut sandwiches into hearts, and I just don't get it. They make it seem easy. Perfect. Even, delightful. I don't understand. Do you? I can't keep up. Can you? So to the rest of those mothers who know what I'm talking about. What am I supposed to do?

(The sound of a creaking old chair wobbles in the other room...louder.)

MAMA

Conner, what are you doing?

(Silence. Mama returns.)

MAMA

And to those who aren't a mother, but you HAVE a mother. Do you have ANY idea what it's like to be YOUR Mother? Consider, you don't. So this is my impromptu-and-you-didn't-know-you-were-invited social media TED TALK. You're welcome. I love being a mother like I love a good campfire.

(A creaking old chair wobbles again.)

MAMA

Conner, please get down from there.

(Silence. Mama returns again.)

MAMA

It keeps you warm on a cold night and is the perfect climate for turning anything to ash. Your brain cells. A marriage. Your life. Your career. You remember the one - you dreamed it up with your career counselor 12 years ago and created a whole path, a solid plan. You were going to be 30-something with published books, book tours, and a calendar of interviews set up to talk about your latest novel. The career is now indefinitely on hold. I hold other people's books now and shelve them 3 days a week. My career now is a quiet place where people are forbidden from talking above a certain decibel.

(More unidentifiable but concerning noises from the other room.)

MAMA

(to child)

What did I just tell you?

(Silence.)

MAMA

(to audience)

I will repeat. I love my son. More than anyone, anything - on this planet. But this isn't one of those blogs or om shanti meditations or top 10 tips for how to get your life together as a Mother. This isn't a pep talk. Parenthood is kind of a flesh-eating, internal organ failure kind of deal. Whether or not you have a spouse or partner to raise the flesh-eater with - you will go from the miracle of birth and life - to being alone with a two-year-old who can barely speak and expects you to understand and comply...and will torment the respectable person you thought you were.

(The sound of something breaking.)

MAMA
(to child)

CHILD, WHAT THE---

(She physically restrains herself from swearing.)

MAMA
(to child)

GET DOWN IMMEDIATELY IF YOU WANT TO WAKE UP ALIVE AND BREATHING TOMORROW.

(The sound of a child laughing trails off. Mama walks into the next room to see a chair next to the shelf where she put the markers. And a marker mural all over the wall. She stops breathing. She tries to breathe again. She can't figure out how to breathe. She gives the wall The Finger. She realizes her phone has been recoding everything. She deletes the video entirely.)

(Mama leaves to where DADA sits in a perfectly peaceful moment, reading the newspaper, and drinking a steaming cup of coffee. He luxuriates. She grimaces. She eyes the bottle of wine on top of the refrigerator. She touches it. She looks at her watch. She dramatically leaves it alone.)

MAMA

It's your turn. I'm getting ready for work.

(Dada reads. The sounds of a toddler throwing things.)

DADA

Who were you talking to in there?

MAMA

No one.

DADA

Are you making some kind of motherly advice podcast?

MAMA

Motherly?

(Dada laughs. Mama exits. Dada looks up and eyes the recycling bin.)

DADA

Did you take out recycling?

(No answer.)

DADA

DID YOU TAKE OUT THE--

(The sound of a shower turning on. The sound of a Child crash landing and then bursting into tears.)

DADA

I'm coming, honey.

SCENE FIVE

(At the local library, Mama walks into work. She is light as a feather....as if she's a new person entirely.)

OG

There's always an oasis somewhere in the jungle. A waterfall, a quiet patch of moss, a watering hole, a tree to play on. At the oasis, the pack is safe. Lions lay to rest, baboons swing, hippos swim, koalas cuddle. Every mother needs an oasis. Without one, she will not survive.

(Mama is giddy walking through the silent aisles of the library pushing the cart of books. Restocking books. Library patrons are reading quietly. It's like a dream. It's like a dance sequence where Cinderella meets Prince Charming, but Prince Charming doesn't talk because he's a book. She dances until a Grandmother walks in with two screaming children. Like a record scratch. Her dance stops.)

OG

Unfortunately, the oasis is sometimes short-lived. Predators intrude. A storm begins. A booby trap catches you.

(Mama races away with her book cart.)

SCENE SIX

(It's Sunday at Noon. Mama tip toes out to her front porch with a bottle of wine, glass, and book. She pours herself a giant glass. She opens her book.)

MAMA

It's Sunday. I won the Noon lottery with a surprise naptime. I might have helped him with some melatonin. I mean just like a gram ok. So let's be honest...I'm well on my way to being that quintessential wine-drinking-suburban-white-soccer-mom you all love to hate.

(OG enters with her own wine glass. She helps herself to wine. Mama does some mental math.)

MAMA

In roughly 6.5 years, I'll have finished 907 bottles of wine. Motherhood Fact: In 10 B.C. (Before Child) I drank beer. The real thing, as in: Belgian orange peel and citrus brewed by monks. A six-pack in a week or all of it on a wild Friday night. Now, it turns my stomach. Wine is the only thing that gets me a buzz in half a bottle without waking up a yeast infection. I feel 10,000 times less cool than any other time since I turned 21.

(Mama looks up to see her nemesis, That Mother, jogging. She's perfectly perfect. Her hair is perfect, her outfit: perfect. Her butt in that outfit: perfect. And she's fucking jogging perfectly.)

(Mama grabs her wine glass, drinks like a pirate, pours more in the glass, and slumps lower in her chair, nose deep in her book. OG grabs a bowl of popcorn to enjoy whatever is about to happen. That Mother, stops.)

THAT MOTHER

Is that you...

MAMA

(to audience)

She never remembers my name.

THAT MOTHER

Oh my god! I didn't know you lived here.

MAMA

Hello, Elise.

MAMA

(to audience)

Before my boy was born, I had a name. That name was Grace. A name I should've never been named. But no one knows my name anymore. They only know my body and what was born from it.

THAT MOTHER

How is—

MAMA
(to audience)

The only name they know is—

THAT MOTHER

Connor?

(Mama conjures her polite self.)

MAMA

Oh, he's great.

THAT MOTHER

I would've given anything to have experienced the miracle of birth. I remember when you were sooo pregnant.

(That Mother makes an inappropriate gesture of a fat pregnant woman.)

THAT MOTHER

It must have been magical. But I'm so lucky I could adopt Margaret, Matthew, and Moses. They are truly a gift from you know who!

(She points up.)

THAT MOTHER

Is he teething yet?

MAMA

Yeah he's got all his teeth, in fact, he bit me this morning. This one drew a little blood.

(She shows the marks. That Mother doesn't care.)

THAT MOTHER

Oh my, time goes so fast, doesn't it?

MAMA

Does it?

THAT MOTHER

They'll be graduating from high school before we know it!

MAMA

(to audience)

Motherhood fun fact: The minute you're pregnant, you'll hear this exact phrase more than 3,999,999 times before your child turns 3. The truth is. NO. Time doesn't GO FAST. And have you ever watched a 3 year old put on a shoe. It's 12 minutes of: NO SHOES. 13 minutes of: I want different shoes! 10 minutes looking for new shoes, and I have no shoes that I like, and I can't decide. 12 more minutes of I'm not ready to put them on. 5 minutes of just one shoe on while you're chasing them.

(That Mother eyes Mama's wine glass.)

THAT MOTHER

A bit early?

MAMA

Is it?

THAT MOTHER

Well, enjoy your quiet time.

(Child screams from inside the house.)

THAT MOTHER

Oh, guess not anymore.

MAMA

Yup.

(Mama doesn't move.)

THAT MOTHER

I'll let you go get him.

(Mama smiles and looks down at her book.)

THAT MOTHER

Do you need me to....

(Mama grabs her glass of wine and escapes inside. OG shoos That Mother.)

OG

There are a fair number of predators that you don't expect in the jungle. The Harpy Eagle. The Giant River Otter. You're expecting a jaguar...except when you get something else, it's hard to know how to react. You've got to be on the watch. They fly. They crawl. They attack in unsuspecting places.

SCENE SEVEN

(In the grocery store, Mama races through the aisles with her shopping cart chasing her son.)

MAMA

My first mistake of the day...bringing a toddler to the grocery store right before dinner and right after he's eaten a handful of Valentine's day candy. Yes, from 3 month ago.

(Mom Wannabe walks leisurely sipping her latte and pushes her grocery cart around. She stops and giggles as Mama continues her chase.)

MOM WANNABE

Oh isn't he darling. The sweetest.

(Mama ignores her. Mom Wannabe watches Mama breathlessly chase her son.)

MOM WANNABE

We've been trying for a year.

(CHILD begins whining. Mama stops to catch her breath.)

MAMA

We tried for nine.

MOM WANNABE

Nine? Oh my god. He's your miracle baby.

(CHILD throws a fit.)

MAMA

Uh-huh.

CONNER, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD. DON'T @%!#* TOUCH IT.

(The sound of a large grocery display falling. Mom Wannabe is horrified and just as she's about to judgingly open her mouth to Mama, the Child knocks into Mom Wannabe; she spills her latte all over herself. Mama smiles widely, vindicated.)

(Just Then: MOM OF FOUR walks in with four kids under 6. It's the green sky before a tornado, when the wind stops, it's eerily quiet. Time moves in slow motion. Mama and Mom Wannabe watch their every move. The kids are calm at first. Polite even.)

MAMA

(to audience)

I can't even handle the one. I'm a terrible person.

(Then, something happens: a toy is stolen, a ball is thrown, a kid-fight breaks out. Mama goes to retrieve the ball from across the store. Mom Wannabe can't stop staring. Mama hands the ball back to the Mom of Four and gives her a hug. Mama turns to Mom Wannabe.)

MAMA

Go help that woman. What I've got is nothing compared to the act of god that woman is about to undertake just to get one damn thing in her cart. Then decide if motherhood is for you.

SCENE EIGHT

(It's Monday. Mama walks into the living room, in her bare feet, and steps on a series of toys that break her & she's on the floor. She is injured, maybe bleeding. As she lays on the floor, something sticky gets caught in her hair. Probably a sucker. Now on the floor, she see everything she didn't want to see. A bill she didn't pay. A broken pair of reading glasses. Rotting cheese under the table. She doesn't move. She's lost the battle.)

(Dirty clothes fall on her like a rain storm. She's completely covered. She doesn't care. She waves a white flag. Then, the smoke detector goes off. She rips herself from the floor and hurries to the kitchen. Smoke billows from the oven. She pulls out the fucking cupcakes she's supposed to bring for the Mother's day party. She opens the back door and tosses the whole thing outside.)

(She stands alone in the kitchen in the smog of smoke. The oven timer goes off waking her from her Zombie-land. Enter, rage. She grabs a roll of trash bags and begin shoving everything on the floor in the bags. A shoe, a spoon, a sandwich, a toy she hates, a toaster, a chair. Whatever she can find.)

(Mama opens the back door and places a bag of trash on the porch. She opens it again, aggressively sets another bag of trash on the porch. She opens the door again and hurdles a bag of trash that hasn't been tied/secured while screaming to the gods.)

MAMA

(to audience)

Sometimes, you lose your capacity to pretend that you're okay.

(Her Mom, having seen the whole thing, walks in holding a collection of books.)

HER MOM

I think you have anger issues.

MAMA

Save it, Mom.

(Her Mom pulls out a book and hands it to Mama.)

HER MOM

It's time for that Eat, Pray, Love book. Am I right?

(Mama shoves a bag of trash in HER MOM's arms.)

HER MOM

When was the last time you slept.

MAMA

I lay IN a bed every night.

HER MOM

When did you fall asleep and wake up, and it was morning. You know, Sunshine. Birds.

MAMA

3 years, 9 months ago.

HER MOM

Honey, take a spa day. I'm going next week.

MAMA

I don't spa.

HER MOM

We'll get our nails done.

MAMA

I don't have nails.

HER MOM

Get your claws done or get a foot massage.

MAMA

I don't even have time to wash my feet so someone can touch my feet.

HER MOM

You've got to make time honey, or you'll really lose it. I never had time either, and I had 3 kids under 5. There's always time.

MAMA

Why don't you babysit, and I'll go to your spa day.

HER MOM

Well, that wouldn't be as fun going all by yourself. Get Martin to do it.

MAMA

He's not a babysitter.

HER MOM

Exactly.

MAMA

He's working.

HER MOM

Always working.

MAMA

Someone has to pay bills. And someone has to clean the house, drive the kid around, get the grocer—

HER MOM

You're very tense.

MAMA

Thanks Mom.

HER MOM

Sex, that's what you need.

MAMA

Martin and I aren't–

HER MOM

I don't mean him. You have that cute neighbor two doors down. The one always riding his lawnmower, all tan and shirtless.

MAMA

Great advice.

(Her Mom grabs the bottle of wine off the top of the fridge and pours the last of it in the sink. Mama panics, drops everything, and holds her palms under the wine to save some.)

HER MOM

Every mother needs an outlet, and I don't need another daughter who drinks all day.

(Her Mom gives a look. Mama empties her hands, now stained red.)

HER MOM

There wasn't even a full glass left in there.

MAMA

I want a fucking night off.

HER MOM

Sex would really be good for your mental health.

(Mama points to the door. Her Mom shrugs and leaves.)

OG

When it comes to navigating the jungle, there's always a question about what sources to trust. Sometimes, you get unsolicited advice. The monkey is eating those berries. But if it hands you a berry, should you eat it? Is it a cute idea? Is it a bad idea? You're also tired, hungry, and your head is in a fog. I mean, the plant book says: don't eat those berries. But that monkey is offering.

SCENE NINE

(Mama is at the Eye Doctor's office. She tries on several new frames. She looks closely at herself in the mirror. She looks old. She looks boring. The Eye Doctor enters.)

EYE DOCTOR

Is it time for a new prescription?

MAMA

Yes.

EYE DOCTOR

Have you decided on frames? We also have a new collection you might be--

(Mama mindlessly spins the countertop glass case like a top. The Eye Doctor raises an eyebrow or two.)

EYE DOCTOR

Can I suggest--

MAMA

Do you have frames that scream Mama is so bored with her life she's considering identity theft?

EYE DOCTOR

So you need a new look?

(He eyes her current frames.)

MAMA

Sure.

EYE DOCTOR

What's the most exciting thing you've done in the last week?

MAMA

Take a shower.

EYE DOCTOR

I see.

(Mama holds a pair, puts them on, pulls them to the tip of her nose. Eyes the doctor. Something takes over her.)

MAMA

When do you go on break?

EYE DOCTOR

I...Well, I'm not due for--

(He looks at her wedding ring. Takes a thin breath to conserve oxygen. She takes off the ring and puts it in her pocket.)

MAMA

It's no big deal.

(He winces.)

MAMA

Do you need a reference?

EYE DOCTOR

No, no. I--

MAMA

Have you ever wanted to do something else in the dark other than an eye exam?

EYE DOCTOR

I'm not qualified to answer that--

MAMA

Do you have children?

EYE DOCTOR

No.

MAMA

You're right. Not qualified.

(The Eye Doctor looks around to make sure no one hears him.)

EYE DOCTOR

But if your husband is interested...

(Mama smites him and shoves her ring back on.)

MAMA

Honestly. Go for it.

(Mama grabs the ugliest set of frames from the rack and sets them on the counter.)

EYE DOCTOR

Very nice choice.

(She is again, defeated.)

OG

Sometimes in the jungle, you do stupid shit. Sometimes, it's harmless. Besides, you've been walking for days in the heat, you haven't really slept, and you've just eaten a handful of berries that might be poisonous. You don't have your head screwed on straight. You make mistakes. It's bound to happen. The question is - are they life-threatening?

SCENE TEN

(Mama, carrying four bags of groceries, wobbles to her door when Fred the Neighbor approaches.)

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

Can I help you?

MAMA

Oh! Yeah, No. I mean, I've totally got it.

(A bag slips and he catches it.)

MAMA

Thanks.

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

Of course.

MAMA

I don't think we've met yet. You're?

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

Fred. Two doors down.

MAMA

Did my mother--you didn't have anyone named Evelyne knock on your door recently?

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

Who?

MAMA

Nevermind.

(He holds out his gorgeous hand to shake. She melts a little.)

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

Fred Rogers.

MAMA

Mr. Rogers.

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

Not related. My parents had a good laugh when they finally bought a television in 1969.

MAMA

Everyone can use a Fred Rogers in their neighborhood.

(His smiles nearly hypnotizes her.)

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

You know, I don't mean to intrude, but I noticed your lawn was getting pretty wild.

MAMA

I keep telling my 3-year-old to get out there and mow, but...

(Awkward Silence.)

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

I'm sure your hands are full.

MAMA

They are.

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

I'll stop by tomorrow with the mower.

MAMA

You would do that?

FRED THE NEIGHBOR

It would be my pleasure.

(Mama blushes and in her trance, watches Fred walk home. She wipes drool from her face.)

SCENE ELEVEN

(In the bathroom, Mama primps and curls her hair. Dada walks in to get ready. They do the dance in the small space...the dance starts in sync and then quickly turns to a fight for the mirror, the sink, and the hand towel.)

MAMA

(to audience)

I used to know him, my husband. We used to know each other in the time before diapers and tantrums. We used to know each other's names and sleep in the same bed. We had dreams. Plans to travel the world. And sex. Lots of sex. Once upon a time...

DADA

Are you going somewhere?

MAMA

No.

DADA

Then, what are you doing?

MAMA

Just tired of spending my life wearing sweatpants and showering once a week.

DADA

At 4:30 in the afternoon?

MAMA

Now or never.

DADA

Uh huh. The Eye doctor called me about an appointment. Do I have one set up?

MAMA

Oh, uh-hh. I dunno.

DADA

I'll call them tomorrow. Heading to my meeting.

(Dada leaves the bathroom.)

MAMA

Wait, did you feed the dog?

DADA
(off stage)

No.

MAMA

Did you feed the child?

DADA
(off stage)

No.

(Door closes. A car drives away.)

MAMA

Did you leave dirty dishes all over the kitchen, your laundry on the floor, and the toilet seat up?
Yes, yes you did.

(Mama picks up and notices her own pile of laundry on the floor.)

MAMA
(to audience)

Blaming other people is easier.

(The sound of a lawn mower outside. Mama grabs her lipstick and applies it generously.)

SCENE TWELVE

(Fred mows the lawn while Mama sits on the front porch pretending to read a book. She eyes Fred out of the corner of her eye. The lawn mower stops. Mama flips half way through her book and looks the part of an absorbed reader. Fred steps on the front porch.)

FRED

What are you reading?

MAMA

Oh nothing.

FRED

1984?

MAMA

Honestly, I just picked it off the floor--

FRED

Dark.

MAMA

I am.

(Fred takes out a wine tumbler and takes a sip. Mama tries to breath normally.)

MAMA

Do you mind if I--

(Fred hands her the wine tumbler and sits down next to her to relax. Mama takes a sip.)

MAMA

Not at all what I was expecting.

FRED

Right?

MAMA

It's...

(Can't put her tongue on the word.)

MAMA

Tart.

FRED

Best lemonade this side of the Rockies.

(Mama considers her next move, carefully.)

MAMA

It could use a shot of vodka.

FRED

Sure could.

MAMA

I have some in the freezer.

FRED

Oh no.

MAMA

It's almost happy hour.

(Fred looks at Mama about to confess.)

FRED

I'm committed--

MAMA

I'm sorry, I didn't mean--

FRED

To my sobriety.

MAMA

Oh my god.

FRED

9 months.

(Awkward silence while Mama tries to think of some way to recover from being weird.)

FRED

I'm on step 9

MAMA

Wow, Already? I thought it took longer--

FRED

Usually does.

(Mama's embarrassment is as thick as her book. Mama opens her book.)

MAMA

I guess I'll let you get back to it.

FRED

Of course.

SCENE THIRTEEN

(Mama is passed out on the couch, half dressed, fast food wrappers scatter the floor, the television blinks. Her lipstick stained wine glass sits next to an empty bottle of red wine. Dada walks in and watches Mama sleep until he steps on a noise making toy that goes off. Mama stirs. Dada steps on another toy and wakes up Mama.)

MAMA

What time is--

DADA

10pm, I think. Has he been up yet?

MAMA

An hour ago.

(Dada is about to walk off until he notices the wine glass.)

DADA

Why are you wearing lipstick?

(Mama wipes it off her lips.)

MAMA

For fun.

DADA

Are you seeing someone?

(Mama laughs. Dada stares.)

MAMA

What?

DADA

Answer my question.

MAMA

Do you mean—

DADA

Sex. Are you having sex?

MAMA

No.

DADA

Then, what—

MAMA

I was trying to—

DADA

Trying to?

Make a friend. MAMA

With lipstick. DADA

Nothing happened. MAMA

With who? DADA

The neighbor. MAMA

What are you doing? DADA

Nothing. MAMA

(Dada is pissed.)

You're doing something. DADA

Look at me. MAMA

(He can't.)

Look at me. MAMA

(He can't.)

LOOK. MAMA

(He can't, but then he does.)

MAMA

WHO wants this?

(He stares at her.)

MAMA

NO ONE.

(She covers herself with her blanket. He leaves. She sobs until she falls asleep. Or does she? OG enters, she lights a joint and sit on the couch next to Mama.)

OG

When you need backup in the jungle, you don't have reception on a cell phone. You have maybe a match for a fire to send a smoke signal. Maybe a mirror to send a reflection to the airplane passing above. However, if someone knows you're heading to the jungle and you're probably not going to make it out alive. THIS someone, will probably make the call to send in reinforcements or someone to track your whereabouts. Just to make sure you're not bleeding out after a stampede.

(The lights flicker.)

OG

Hello Grace. This is your wake up call.

(Mama stirs and sits up. She's blurry-eyed. She's startled to see OG.)

OG

Yeah, I'm talking to you. You're dreaming. Not really, but this won't make sense if you think you're awake. It's time to travel. It's time to take a trip into your subconscious.

(OG hands her the joint. Mama takes a drag. They smoke.)

OG

It's no surprise. You're not surviving in the jungle. If you knew how to send an SOS signal, you would, but you're just not trained for jungle travel. So I'm here.

(Mama is on the edge of something. OG hands her a box of tissues.)

OG

I want you to know - I'm watching out for you. The lions, tigers, and bears of this wild place have been gnawing at your feet. The path you're heading down isn't going to lead to the Oasis. You're going to get eaten. It's time to take another path. Get out. Walk a different way today.

(The front door opens with a gust of wind. OG disappears. Mama, takes one last drag of the joint, and looks out to see someone wandering around on her lawn. The sun has barely begun to rise. She goes to investigate. Someone with head phones and a bathrobe is hunched in the corner of her yard.)

MAMA

Hey. HEY. What are you doing?

(The person is startled, but doesn't move.)

MAMA

Hey! Who are you? Are you peeing in my yard?

(The person scurries off. Mama sits on the porch as the sun rises. She lets the sun shine on her face. She looks over to where the person was squatting and sees something on the ground. She walks over and picks up a small kids toy. She had indeed spotted a mom in the wild.)

SCENE FOURTEEN

(Her Mom opens the back door and enters. Mama is slouched over the kitchen counter with a throbbing hangover headache. Her Mom sighs, opens the fridge, pulls out her specialty hangover elixir ingredients to brew.)

MAMA

I'm okay.

HER MOM

Sit down.

(Her Mom hands her three IBuprofen and water. She continues brewing her special hangover elixir.)

MAMA

I fucked up.

HER MOM

Looks about right.

MAMA

I tried to...you know.

HER MOM

Sex?

MAMA

Yes.

HER MOM

With the cute neighbor?

MAMA

Yes.

HER MOM

And?

MAMA

He's sober.

HER MOM

So?

MAMA

I couldn't do it unless I was--

HER MOM

Sloshed.

MAMA

Yeah.

HER MOM

Ahh.

MAMA

And then I told Martin.

HER MOM

Honey, why?

MAMA

He asked.

HER MOM

About the neighbor?

MAMA

My lipstick.

HER MOM

Rule number one. No lipstick.

MAMA

You didn't give me the rules.

HER MOM

Rule number two: Don't tell anyone, except your mother.

MAMA

This is terrible advice Mom.

HER MOM

Is it? Look at you.

(Her Mom hands her the elixir. Mama turns away at the smell. Her Mom shoves it in her hands.)

HER MOM

Rule number three: Don't get sloshed if it doesn't work out.

MAMA

I don't need the rules. I can't do this again.

HER MOM

Rule number four: Never promise there won't be a next time.

(Mama takes a swig of the elixir. Her Mom rubs her back.)

SCENE FIFTEEN

(At therapy, Mama and Dada are slumped on a couch in a room with their new Paren-Tist.)

MAMA

What do you do exactly?

PAREN-TIST

I'm a Paren-tist.

MAMA

A what?

DADA

Paren-tryst?

MAMA
(to Dada)

How did you find this person?

PAREN-TIST

Parent-TIST. There is a real gap in the industry for parents. We provide therapeutic parenting for parents.

(Mama looks at Dada to communicate: What. The. Fuck.)

MAMA

We have parents.

PAREN-TIST

But are they therapeutic? Consider me your life coach of parenting.

MAMA

I don't have a life.

PAREN-TIST

You are alive.

MAMA

Technically, but I'm also a walking eulogy for an old life that I liked better.

(Dada agrees. Mama yawns.)

PAREN-TIST

Which is why I am here. How old is...

DADA

Conner.

MAMA

He's three.

PAREN-TIST

That's a tricky time.

MAMA

It's a dislocating upheaval.

PAREN-TIST

So how are you managing this together?

MAMA

I feed him, dress him, chase him, take him to daycare, pick him up, invent every game to play until he's too tired to stand.

DADA

Then, I put him to bed.

MAMA

Unless he's working late.

DADA

Someone has to pay the bills.

PAREN-TIST

It's important to be gentle with each other.

MAMA

Are you gentle parenting me right now? I am shoved, pinched, hit, clawed, bitten, and knocked over 5,921 times a day by someone a quarter of my size.

PAREN-TIST

Tenderness is—

MAMA

No longer something I'm capable of for more than 12% of the day.

PAREN-TIST

Let me reframe. We need to figure out clear roles for each of you. Do you have time together?

MAMA

Yeah, like now.

PAREN-TIST

Like going to the movies or a nice dinner out?

(They shake their heads.)

PAREN-TIST

Connor is your first?

(They nod.)

PAREN-TIST

It's a major learning curve. You'll need strategies to take care of yourselves.

DADA

As in hiding under a blanket in the garage in my pajamas on Saturday while I avoid everyone?

MAMA

Or do you mean day-drinking on a Friday while the child takes a nap?

(Mama is getting comfortable on the couch.)

PAREN-TIST

Time alone, time together, and breaks from the daily routine to get out of the house.

(Mama closes her eyes. Opens them. Closes them. Opens them.)

DADA

We don't know how to take care of ourselves or each other.

PAREN-TIST

Priority number one, get intentional about taking care of yourselves - or else...

(Mama can barely keep her eyes open.)

MAMA

Or else what?

PAREN-TIST

Age three is nothing compared to four or five. If you don't create time now both individually and together. You won't make it to five, alive or together.

(Mama closes her eyes. She can't hear anything else.)

DADA

What should we do?

PAREN-TIST

Your assignment. Get a babysitter and take the night off. Have you ever heard of a sound bath?

DADA

You know, I have!

(Mama is sleeping. No one notices.)

PAREN-TIST

It's therapeutic, it's meditative. It will really reset you.

DADA

Great!

PAREN-TIST

Let me get you the flyer.

(Dada and Paren-tist leave Mama on the couch to nap.)

SCENE SIXTEEN

(Fred the Neighbor returns with his lawnmower to Mama's front lawn.)

MAMA

Oh my gosh, you don't need to.

FRED

I know, but you look like you need it.

MAMA

I do. and...I'm sorry about the other day.

FRED

Oh, you don't need to worry about it. I get a lot of reactions to my sobriety.

MAMA

You shouldn't have to.

FRED

We all have vices.

MAMA

True.

FRED

What's yours?

MAMA

Complaining and suffering over being a mom even when my kid is healthy and generally good.

FRED

Wow.

MAMA

Yeah.

FRED

Admitting you have a problem is the first step. It takes something.

MAMA

It does.

FRED

I'm honored you told me.

MAMA

I don't have a lot of people to talk to.

FRED

Why not?

MAMA

My vice isn't exactly a magnet for people.

FRED

Sure.

MAMA

And parenting can be really lonely, even if you have someone to do it with. When I realized my parents slept in different rooms, I was dumbfounded, but now I get it. I wish it wasn't normal, but when you need to hide somewhere in the house just to sleep through the night - it's all you can do.

FRED

I don't have kids, but I know about vices. I'm always up for a conversation.
Can I admit to something?

MAMA

Sure.

FRED

I used to pee in people's lawns a lot when I drank. Not yours, but I mow lawns now to repair the damage I caused, to the grass. I mean, to people too.

MAMA

Funny you should say that. I saw someone recently pee in my lawn one morning.

FRED

Wow, really? I guess I'm not the only one. Anyway, I'm always here to mow your lawn. It helps me.

MAMA

Thanks Fred. I appreciate it.

(He starts the lawnmower.)

SCENE SEVENTEEN

(Before the crack of dawn, Mama sleeps in her secret sleeping place, alone and sprawled out. The child finds her, snuggles up, steals all the blankets, and starts snoring. Mama tries to pull part of the blankets to cover herself. The child is made of blanket glue. She gives up and gets up. Mama shoves her feet in shoes, wraps a robe around her body, grabs her head phones, and walks out the front door. The light is just about to crack open the sky. Mama stretches and walks.)

(After a moment, Mama sees woman approaching. Mama squints and notices the woman is also wearing a robe and head phones. Mama stops and stares.)

MAMA

Hi.

FRIEND

Nice robe.

MAMA

You too.

FRIEND

Can't sleep?

MAMA

Toddler.

FRIEND

Me too.

MAMA

What are you listening to?

FRIEND

A podcast.

(Mama looks her dead in the eye.)

MAMA

What are you actually listening to?

FRIEND

Metallica.

(The Friend lets her listen. Then, the Friend points to Mama's earphones.)

MAMA

Guns N' Roses. But it's a whole soundtrack.

(Mom let's her listen. They are so relieved to be real people together in bathrobes at the crack of dawn.)

FRIEND

That's on a soundtrack?

MAMA

I call it: Morning Mom Rage

(The Friend stands in awe.)

MAMA

You're so mad, you hate everyone. Not like, you want to hurt someone. I mean, you do want to hurt someone, anyone. But you're not going to, so you have to rage because—

FRIEND

You're haven't slept, showered, you're wearing sweatpants again and there's no reason to change them. You just picked up all the toys in the house and by 8am it's trashed again. And you're just mad.

MAMA

Yeah.

FRIEND

I didn't know there was a name for it.

MAMA

I didn't know anyone else ever felt it.

(It's a moment, like meeting someone for the first time who already gets you. They almost cry. They almost laugh. They want to hug but they also smell themselves, so they don't. Mama checks her pockets for anything that will commemorate the moment. She finds a few mints and the small toy she found in her grass. She offers the mints. Her new friend points to the toy.)

FRIEND

We used to have one of those, but I lost it somewhere.

MAMA

Wait. When?

FRIEND

Sometime last week.

MAMA

Was that you peeing on my lawn?

(Friend nods. They start giggling.)

FRIEND

It was still dark.

(They laugh and laugh.)

FRIEND

I couldn't hold it anymore, and I didn't want to go home.

(They laugh uncontrollably until they are released of everything burdening them.)

MAMA

Want to walk?

FRIEND

Yeah.

(They nods, put their head phones back on, cinch their robes, and walk off as the sunrises.)

SCENE EIGHTEEN

(Her Mom walks into the kitchen. Mama flips pancakes and hums. Her Mom smiles.)

HER MOM

You did it.

MAMA

Did what?

HER MOM

The deed.

MAMA

Mom, no.

HER MOM

The neighbor?

MAMA

No. I--

HER MOM

Your eye doctor?

MAMA

How did you know about--

HER MOM

It was the eye doctor!

MAMA

It's wasn't

HER MOM

Who?

MAMA

I met someone.

HER MOM

Yes, tell me everything.

MAMA

She's--

HER MOM

SHE! I love it. A lesbian twist!

MAMA

She's a FRIEND!

HER MOM

Of course she is.

(Her mom mouths "friend" using finger quotes.)

MAMA

Shut-up Mom.

HER MOM

I want details.

MAMA

We just walk.

HER MOM

Walk?

MAMA

Early this morning. For two hours.

HER MOM

And?

MAMA

We're going to walk in the mornings together.

HER MOM

Why?

MAMA

I need a friend.

HER MOM

UGH, friends move across the country and stop calling.

MAMA

Mom!

HER MOM

What? It's good advise. I'm a mother too, you know.

MAMA

With her, I don't have to pretend. I don't even have to say anything.

(Her Mom gets it.)

HER MOM

I'm glad.

MAMA

Thank you.

HER MOM

And if you have a fling together, you'd tell me?

(Mama throws a pancake at Her Mom.)

SCENE NINETEEN

(Mama and Friend meet in the middle of the street in their bathrobes. They fist bump and put on their headphones. It's just before the crack of dawn. There is nothing to talk about. One mom after another: OG, Her Mom, Childcare Manager, Paren-tist, etc join in their robes to walk. They fist bump each other, put on their headphones and walk. Moms take over the whole street and walk together.)

OG

When you have a mom posse, a tribe, a collective - in the jungle, you're stronger. You're survival rate goes up to 99% percent. When someone's watching your back, you can relax for a minute, even take a nap or eat a snack. Your tribe has skills that you don't have: how to fight a rhinoceros, which berries are safe to eat, how to suck poison from a snake bite. Stay close to your tribe.

(OG breaks out in dance. It's contagious. Every Mom breaks out in dance. That Mother joins them, she is wearing the perfectly perfect bathrobe, but she also has cookies. She joins them in the dance and passes out cookies to everyone. They dance a dance of a motherhood tribe.)

(As the sun rise, the streets line with everyone else in their own bathrobes. The Eye doctor tosses fancy sunglasses to each mom. The barista hands out Cold brew.

Dada, Childcare Provider, and Mom Wannabe hold a bunch babies and chase toddlers. The Eye doctor sees Dada and blows a kiss. Fred the Neighbor pushes his lawn mower across each lawn. An occasional Mom pees in a yard gaurded by a wall of Moms.)

(Basically, Moms rule the world. END OF PLAY.)