



# MOTHERHOOD OUT LOUD

WRITTEN BY  
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CONCEIVED BY  
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★  
DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



**PRODUCTION NOTE:**

*MOTHERHOOD OUT LOUD* can be presented as a reading, with scripts on music stands, or it can be fully staged. The play can involve as many actors as you choose, and as few as four — three women and one man. If the production is presented with four actors, these are the role assignments for each:

- ACTOR A: New in the Motherhood; Baby Bird (Woman); Michael’s Date; Bridal Shop; My Baby
- ACTOR B: Squeeze, Hold, Release; Baby Bird (Stranger/Strange Kid); Nooha’s List; Bridal Shop; Stars and Stripes; Report on Motherhood (Great—Granddaughter)
- ACTOR C: Next to the Crib; Queen Esther; My Almost Family; Threesome; Report on Motherhood (Great-Grandmother)
- ACTOR D: If We’re Using a Surrogate ...; Threesome; Elizabeth

**PROPERTY LIST:**

Bed sheet  
Blanket  
“Happy looking” diaper bag  
Diaper bags  
Cigarette, lighter  
Shopping bag with gifts  
List  
Kotex with “Wings

**SOUND EFFECTS:**

Baby gurgle  
Baby Cry  
Holiday Muzak  
Rock Music  
Bell

**CUE 1 MFX:** OPENING THEME

DIRECTOR: Tonight’s presentation of *Motherhood Out Loud*...

Cast Intro...

And now without further ado... *Motherhood Out Loud*

**Part One**

**CUE 2 MFX:** *Musical Bridge*

**NARRATOR:** *NEXT TO THE CRIB* by Brooke Berman

*A woman spreads a sheet on the floor, lies down on it and attempts to get comfortable. It's hard. The floor is not comfortable. She tries again. She sits up.*

**WOMAN:** This is me. On the floor. Next to my baby's crib. My baby is a sleep terrorist, waking every two hours to feed. All day and all night long. Tonight, I'm horizontal on shitty carpeting, nestled between the crib and changing table, because my husband has a cold. A cold!

"Don't do any night-feedings." I said. "Rest." This made me look like a very loving wife. But I am saving my own neck. I am not getting sick. My baby is not getting sick. And I am not getting sick. Stay the fuck away from us.

**NARRATOR:** *She spreads her blankets out on the floor; creating a nest. She tries to lie down and sleep. She cannot. She gets back up and talks to us again.)*

**WOMAN:** I used to be an insomniac. I spent a great portion of the last decade not sleeping. So I thought the "sleep deprivation" part of motherhood would be easy.

I love 2 A.M.! I'd stumble into some all night diner from some dance club and eat French fries. Or sit awake at home enjoying the quiet. "I am a 2 A.M. kind of girl! I won't mind four-hour nights! I can totally function on four hours of sleep!" Fuck that. Sleep deprivation is killing me.

Sometimes, when I'm leaving the house, I turn to my husband and ask, "Do I look okay? Or like a crazy person?" And sometimes he doesn't answer.

In "Mommy and Me" class, I learned about something called "The Four Month Sleep Regression." (Technically, they'd have to be "sleeping" in order to "regress" — but whatever.) Apparently, at four months, any progress you've made teaching them to sleep goes out the window. And then TEETHING! Followed by crawling and then separation anxiety. All of which keep them awake. When do they sleep!? When do I!?!?

**NARRATOR:** *She tries to lie down and sleep. It doesn't work. And she's up, addressing the audience again.*

WOMAN: I saw this play about Romania just before the revolution. I bet those characters could sleep on the floor. Those characters, hungry and clad in gray, would know how to fall asleep on this carpeting without creature comforts. Creature comforts do not exist when you're overthrowing a Communist regime! Or, maybe we're escaping Nazi Germany, hiding on all sorts of floors as we make our way to the border, like the pianist in *The Pianist*.

Or, camping! I've gone camping. In a dense forest. And the tents are inadequate and the ground is cold, and there is nothing resembling a coffee shop anywhere. Oh my God, what if we get eaten by bears!

CUE 3 SFX: *Sound of a male very loud sneeze or nose-blowing; sounds of a bad cold.*

NARRATOR: *Giving up as the fantasy collapses. From the other room, we hear her husband's sounds of a bad cold.*

WOMAN: If I get sick I will kill him with these very hands. And if my baby gets sick, I will kill him and then myself.

Maybe I'm not cut out for this. I have spent the last 20 years as an adult doing whatever I wanted to do whenever I wanted to do it and that's over. FOREVER. Never again will I move through the world without care. FOREVER, and I mean forever, there will be this tie, the thought, "Where's my kid? Is my kid okay?"

I belong to him now. With my husband I can at least pretend some kind of emotional autonomy, like that Rilkean sort of "two solitudes that border each other" bullshit. But with my baby? Uh-uh, no way, it's full-on. He depends on me. And I better be up to the task ... Or else.

CUE 4 LTG: *Lights out.*

## Part Two

**CUE 5 MFX:** *Musical Bridge*

**NARRATOR:** *NEW IN THE MOTHERHOOD* by Lisa Loomer

*A woman walks on with a happy looking diaper bag. She's a kind of an odd mom out. Not sarcastic ... a bit bewildered and wry. She's fine with the kid, easy ... The rest of her new life she's still trying to figure out.*

**ODD MOM:** *(To audience.) Oh, hi. This bench taken? (Sits.) Cool. (Sees son, calls out; lightly.) Put it down, Harry. Down, babe. The tricycle is a means of transportation. (Laughs.)*

*He's three. Everything's a penis. (She takes out a cigarette.)*

*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. (Re: cigarette.) Oh, this is clove by the way. (Takes a drag.) All right, it's not clove, but it's the park.*

*See, the park for me is like ... Dante's Purgatory. Not Dante's Inferno--that'd be exciting, you'd meet interesting people ... But, I mean, day after day of whose turn is it 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 ... (Takes a drag; smiles.)*

*Look, I know he's a boy, you gotta take 'em outside. They will not play Scrabble. They'll throw the pieces at the cat. And they won't miss, 'cause they're boys. (Lightly.)*

*And you can't just let his dad take him to the park, 'cause, hey — "Where was Mom? Working?" He'll be in therapy the rest of his life.*

*(Notices; matter of fact. ) Harry? No, honey — put the little girl down. Put her down, babe. (Waits; easy.) Put her down and use your words, Harry. (Beat.) Not those words — (Laughs.)*

*Hey, remind me to cancel Showtime — !*

*(Mom 1 enters, startling her. She's perfect. And eight months pregnant.)*

**MOM 1:** *(Perky.) Excuse me, is anybody sitting there?*

ODD MOM:           *(Trying for cheery.)* Oh no! *(Odd Mom moves over.)*

MOM 1:             I love your diaper bag!

ODD MOM:           Yours, too!

*(Mom 1 looks at the cigarette and coughs meaningfully.)*

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

MOM 1:             *(Mom 1 calls to her child on the swings--near Harry. 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 hell's not an issue for me, I say -- *(To Mom 1.)* Sure!

*(Mom 2 enters. Perky. She spots Mom 1.)*

MOM 2:             *(High-pitched.)* Hi!

MOM 1:             *(High,-pitched.)* Hi!

ODD MOM:           *(To audience.)* Lower registers completely shot. Minute the baby drops —

MOM 2:             *(To Odd Mom.)* I love your diaper bag!

ODD MOM:           *(Trying for high-pitched.)* Yours, too!

MOM 2:             *(Sits; to Mom 1.)* Say, can Dakota have a playdate with Orleans today?

ODD MOM:           *(To audience; doesn't get it.)* The playdate. Don't they have enough fun in the park? The playdate is like the park — only in your house. The playdate, for a boy, is like, "I've already broken all my stuff now I get to break yours!" Still, I kinda hope they invite us ...

MOM 1:             *(To Mom 2.)* How's twelve?

MOM 2:             Great! I can make gyrotomics!

ODD MOM:           *(Trying to join in.)* I can make gin and tonics —

*(The Moms smile or ignore her and continue to each other ... )*

MOM 1: *(Pats her tummy.)* I just pray these two sleep through the night so I have the energy for class.

MOM 2: Well, I hope you're going to Ferberize them!

ODD MOM: *(Trying to follow.)* Ferberize ... Now is that the sleep book that says if she cries don't pick her up? Ever? Like — just let her scream while you watch *The Colbert Report*?

MOM 2: It's about letting them self-soothe.

MOM 1: I wish we'd Ferberized Dakota, I can't even get her off the pacifier!

ODD MOM: Have you tried sugar on your finger?

*(The other mothers gasp audibly.)*

MOM 2: *(To Mom 1.)* Let's do the playdate at our house; they can do an art project with the nanny.

MOM 1: Great. Ours is hopeless at art --

ODD MOM: Oh God, me too. I suck at art. Costumes ... masks ... to me, papier-mâché is like vomit.

*(That's? it. The Moms look at their watches and rise.)*

MOM 1: Well, will you look at the time?! *(Calls out.)* Dakota! 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: Dakota — !

MOM 2: *(Low voice; "drop that gun.") Orleans, drop the sippy cup. Now. (Screams.)* DROP THAT SIPPY CUP!

MOM 1: *(To Mom 2.)* HE'S PROBABLY NOT EVEN VACCINATED!

ODD MOM: *(Simply.)* Dammit, Harry, just take your sippy cup and give back the Michelle Obama Barbie. *(The Moms look at her. She looks at them. Unrepentant.)*

MOM 2: *(Smiles.)* Well.

MOM 1: *(What can she say?)* Great diaper bag! *(They hurry off.)*

ODD MOM: *(Looks after them.)* Bite me.

*(To audience.)* Man, I love my kid But sometimes I wish we'd met under different circumstances. Really, the only upside to all this is ... *(Sees Harry; smiles.)* Him.

So here's what they don't tell you in *What To Expect When You're Expecting ...* *(Looks after Moms.)* Expect to hope that people you don't like will invite you to reptile birthday parties.

*(Puts out cigarette.)* Expect to give up smoking — eventually — because you can't bear to breathe secondary smoke on him.

Expect to be unable to not open letters from UNICEF, and Greenpeace, and even Smile Train — because it's his world now.

Expect to cry in the aisles of Rite Aid when he's sick and pray to a God you don't believe in to make him well. Just make him a happy, healthy kid!

*(Cant resist.)* And a Democrat. A real one.

Hey, Harry? Let's go get a doughnut, babe.

Above all, expect to come back to the park tomorrow with juice boxes and cookies, and fucking bake 'em if you have to —

*(To audience.)* See you tomorrow!

**CUE 6 LTG:** *Lights shift.*

**Part Three****CUE 7 MFX:** *Musical Bridge*

NARRATOR: *FIRST DAY FUGUE* by Michele Lowe

ACTRESS B: First day of school.

ACTRESS A: Six hours to myself for the first time in a decade. Somebody pinch me.

ACTRESS C: I'm supposed to drop off my daughter in front of school and not go inside. They tell me this in a letter.

ACTRESS 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."

ACTRESS C: 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.

ACTRESS B: And she says, "Momma, don't forget to catch my wave. I'm gonna wave real big to you."

ACTRESS A: My son Peter sneezes. I wonder if he's catching a cold. I make him get on the bus anyway.

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

ACTRESS A: Then I go running up to my bedroom and I take off all my clothes. I text my husband. "Darling, there's a naked woman in our bed. What're you gonna do about it?"

ACTRESS C: I march into school past this mother who's waving like crazy, like she's landing an airplane, and the principal says to Jessica, "Hello, my dear. Why don't you come with me?" My dear my Aunt Fanny! She's not going with him. But Jessica lets go of me and takes his hand.

ACTRESS A: My father-in-law texts me back: "Sounds good to me."

ACTRESS 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, 'til 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 walked in there, and I will never get over it."

**CUE 8 LTG:** *Lights shift*

**Part Four**

CUE 9 MFX: *Musical Bridge*

NARRATOR: *QUEEN ESTHER* by Michele Lowe

WOMAN: 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 week-end 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.

WOMAN (Cont'd): 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

WOMAN (Cont'd): 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.

CUE 10 LTG: *Lights shift*

**Part Five****CUE 11 MFX:** *Musical Bridge***NARRATOR:** *MICHAEL' S DATE* by Claire LaZebnik

**WOMAN:** My son tells me that a girl in his English class agreed to go to the movies with him on Friday night, and I manage to say, “Oh? Cool,” in the most relaxed, unconcerned, hey—it’s—your-life—not—mine kind of way. I get her name out of him but not much more, so I check out her picture on his Facebook page. She’s actually kind of cute. And, look — she commented on one of his statuses! “Ha-ha. LOL.” What a doll! I love her already.

At bedtime, I pop a Xanax along with my calcium and wonder if Michael’s as nervous about this date as I am. God only knows. I seriously doubt he’d talk to me about his feelings. He’s male, he’s a teenager and he’s autistic. The perfect trifecta for emotionally shutting our your mother.

Friday night, Michael puts on a button-down shirt. I blow my hair dry, dust on a little make-up, add a shpritz of perfume and spend an hour trying to find something to wear that doesn’t make me look fat. I beam at Chloe when we pick her up. “Hey, there! How you? It’s SO great to meet you!” “Uh, yeah, that’s my mom,” Michael mutters. They sit side by side in the back seat. I can’t stop glancing at them in the rearview mirror: Talk about cute — it’s like having two puppy dogs back there.

I drive them to the cinema. Hey, look at me! I’m dropping off my son and his date. His date! Maybe this is the beginning of a whole new era for us. You see, Michael was diagnosed with autism when he was three. He couldn’t talk or make eye contact, and he flapped his arms all the time. I’d say it’s miraculous that he goes to a regular high school now, except I remember the billions of hours of speech and behavioral therapy it took to get him there. And now he’s on his first date.

I’m waiting at the movie theater forever — got there way too early — but finally they’re coming out side by side and heading toward the car, and I’m peering at them, trying to see what their expressions are, but I can’t really tell. All I can see is that they’re not actually talking to each other at the moment, and that can’t be a good sign but maybe it’s not a bad sign either, maybe it’s a companionable silence.

When they get in the car, I ask how the movie was. Chloe says she liked it. Michael says it sucked. He says that the lead actress in it

WOMAN (Cont'd): sucked and so did the music and the directing. Chloe says she thought the actress was really good. No, Michael says, that actress sucked, that actress always sucks. Chloe says no she doesn't, she's been in lots of good movies. Michael says you're wrong, they're all bad, and starts to list each and every movie the actress has ever been in, every one of which — you guessed it — sucked.

I can see the expression on Chloe's face in the rearview mirror, and my heart sinks. "To each his own!" I cut in desperately. "So, Chloe ... tell me ... What does your dad do for a living?" She says he's a lawyer. "Oh, my God!" I say. "My dad's a lawyer too. That is an amazing coincidence, isn't it?" Michael, the kid who never makes eye contact, shoots me a disgusted look in the rearview mirror.

"So who's ready for some frozen yogurt?!" I ask. "With way too many toppings? Let's make ourselves sick!" But Chloe says that she promised her parents she'd go straight home after the movies and just shakes her head when I offer to call them.

We get to her house, and she jumps out of the car and quickly [REDACTED] should have kissed her good-night," Michael says. "I'm not so sure," I say. "Why did you talk so much?" he says. "That was embarrassing."

"I was trying to help you make conversation."

"I didn't need your help. You ruined everything." "No, you ruined everything!" And instantly I try to take it away: "Oh, God, Michael, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. You did fine, it was fine, really, she probably just had to go home early, like she said."

He's silent. I grip the steering wheel hard and pretend that I have some control over Where we're going.

**CUE 12 LTG:** *Lights shift*

**Part Six****CUE 13 MFX:** *Musical Bridge*

NARRATOR: *GRADUATION DAY FUGUE* by Michele Lowe

*We are about to hear from Actresses A, B, C and C's Husband.*

ACTRESS B: Three days before graduation! Three days!

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

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

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

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

ACTRESS 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?

ACTRESS C: No. And don't bug him.

ACTRESS 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."

ACTRESS 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?

ACTRESS C: No, and don't bug him.

ACTRESS B: I've been cooking for three weeks. I've got 65 people coming.

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

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

ACTRESS A: This whole thing is driving me crazy.

ACTRESS B: This is crazy.

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

ACTRESS B: I wake her up in the middle of the night and I say, "You tell me why you won't go. Tell me! Did you do something bad?"

C'S HUSBAND: Has Eric written his ——— ?

ACTRESS C: I'm Working on it!

ACTRESS 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."

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

ACTRESS B: So we make a deal. She'll go to her graduation if Papi and I go alone. The next morning I tell everybody else not to come.

ACTRESS A: After breakfast I tell Bridget, "I'll make you a deal. You can wear a bikini under your graduation gown if I can wear a thong under my miniskirt."

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

ACTRESS A: She wore a dress.

ACTRESS 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.

**CUE 14 LTG:** *Lights shift*

## Part Seven

CUE 15 MFX: *Musical Bridge (Rock)*

NARRATOR: (Loudly over music) *THREESOME* by Leslie Ayvazian

CUE 16 MFX: *Rock music comes up. The music builds.*

CUE 17 LTG: *Lights up on a Woman listening.*

CUE 18 MFX: *When she talks to the audience, the music swells and she enjoys talking above it.*

WOMAN: 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?

WOMAN: *(She yells.)* WHAT?!

CUE 19 MFX: *Music swelling*

*(She returns to audience.)* And it wasn't a phase! *(Referring to the 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 alongside 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. And then we were home. And then we heard this ...

**CUE 20 MFX:** *Music has been fading and now has stopped.*

WOMAN: 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."

ACTOR: (*as husband.*) "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.

ACTOR: (*As husband.*) "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:

ACTOR: (*As husband.*) "You don't seem to want to do that."

WOMAN: And I say: "It's taking a while. That's all. It seems to be taking a while."

**CUE 21 LTG:** *Lights shift*

**Part Eight**

**CUE 22 MFX:** *Musical Bridge*

NARRATOR: *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: Well, there's a few things

FLORENCE: Help me. Please.

RISA: Rule Number One: Give her space. Miles of it. You got advice you want to give her? Write it down and then burn it.

Rule Number Two: She knows your son better than you do. She thinks that, he thinks that. Now EVERYBODY thinks that. Get used to it.

Rule Number Three: Everything she does is fine with your I

FLORENCE: She makes chocolate chip cookies with happy faces on them. ' .

RISA: You love those cookies.

FLORENCE: She wears knee socks with her dresses.

RISA: You love those knee socks.

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. I love my son.

RISA: He's hers now.

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: I told you what to do.

FLORENCE: Now? That starts now?

RISA: Rule Number One!

FLORENCE: Torch my advice.

RISA: Rule Number Two.

FLORENCE: I don't exist

RISA: And if you don't exist

FLORENCE: I'm not here.

RISA: Right. *(Beat)*

FLORENCE: To hell with the rules! They're archaic. They perpetuate the lack of communication between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law. They're bullshit.

**CUE 23 SFX:** *A doorbell rings.*

RISA: Oh, look. A blonde wearing happy-face knee socks just walked in.

FLORENCE: Bye. *(Florence exits.)*

**CUE 24 LTG:** *Lights shift*

**Part Nine**

CUE 25 MFX: *Musical Bridge*

NARRATOR: *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, Ma," 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

WOMAN (Cont'd): 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 ... This isn't real. It hasn't happened. I have to imagine it so that if it does happen I'm prepared.

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!

CUE 26 LTG: *Lights shift*

**Part Ten**

CUE 27 MFX: *Musical Bridge*

NARRATOR: ELIZABETH by David Cole

*Now we meet Bobby Barnes, 4 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 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 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.

BOBBY (Cont'd): 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. W/hen 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."

BOBBY (Cont'd): “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. 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 ’til she came out. At nine-thirty 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?”

BOBBY (Cont'd): 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."

CUE 28 LTG: *Lights shift*

## Part Eleven

**CUE 29 MFX:** *Musical Bridge*

**NARRATOR:** 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.*

**G-G DAUGHTER:** *(Quietly)* Great-Grandmother? *(Louder. )* Great-Grandmother.

**G-G MOTHER:** What do you want?

**G-G DAUGHTER:** 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.

**G-G MOTHER:** Oh, dear.

**G-G DAUGHTER:** I don't need much. I only have a few questions.

**G-G MOTHER:** I'm very old. It doesn't allow me to be superficial.

**G-G DAUGHTER:** Yes, ma'am. That's fine. You are the mother of seven children. Four girls and three boys.

**G-G MOTHER:** All of them. Yes.

**G-G DAUGHTER:** *(Reading from paper.)* First of all, what do you like most about being a mother?

**G-G MOTHER:** I don't like being a mother.

**G-G DAUGHTER:** You don't like motherhood?

**G-G MOTHER:** 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?

G-G DAUGHTER: I haven't given it a lot of thought.

G-G MOTHER: Do you use birth control?

G-G DAUGHTER: No.

G-G MOTHER: Why not?

G-G DAUGHTER: I'm twelve and ——

G-G MOTHER: No sex.

G-G DAUGHTER: No. No. Hell, no.

G-G MOTHER: 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.

G-G DAUGHTER: That's good.

G-G MOTHER: 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.

G-G DAUGHTER: Yes. Of course.

G-G MOTHER: 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."

G-G DAUGHTER: What did she mean?

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

G-G DAUGHTER: No. *(A beat.)* I don't think I want children. I don't want to be a mother. '

G-G MOTHER: Good. You may decide as you like. I like your hair. How long it is, Without tangles.

G-G DAUGHTER: I don't really like short hair on me.

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

G-G DAUGHTER: I have a boyfriend. But he doesn't know.

G-G MOTHER: Ah. I

G-G DAUGHTER: He's shorter than I am.

G-G MOTHER: That could change. Have you spoken?

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

G-G MOTHER: Did you smile back?

G-G DAUGHTER: I guess I did.

G-G MOTHER: You did? Good.

**CUE 30 LTG:** *Lights shift*

**Part Twelve****CUE 31 MFX:** *Musical Bridge***NARRATOR:** MY BABY by Annie Weisman

**WOMAN:** 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 A.M., 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 5 A.M. sipping a large 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 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."

WOMAN (Cont'd): 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 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."

WOMAN (Cont'd): 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, ten, twenty, seventy 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.

CUE 32 LTG: *Lights fade to black*

CUE 33 MFX: *Musical Bridge to end of play*

**End of Play**