

2018-06-26

When She Was Good: Challenging the Expectations of Modern Motherhood Through Drama

Taylor-Parry, Meredith

Taylor-Parry, M. (2018). When She Was Good: Challenging the Expectations of Modern Motherhood Through Drama (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada).

Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/32300

<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/107078>

Downloaded from PRISM Repository, University of Calgary

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

When She Was Good: Challenging the Expectations of Modern Motherhood Through Drama

by

Meredith Taylor-Parry

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN DRAMA

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JUNE, 2018

© Meredith Taylor-Parry 2018

Abstract

The following manuscript and accompanying artist's statement examine the process of developing the play *When She Was Good*. It explores the cultural idealization of the modern mother along with the journey to create a drama that illustrates its harmful implications.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Meredith Taylor-Parry.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Clem Martini for his superb guidance and instruction throughout this process. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their enormous support and patience during this arduous journey - especially Greg, Ella, Madeline and The Biotech's. Finally I would like to thank Jenna Rodgers, Kris Teo, Rianne Allen, Sarah Bannister, Dallas Soonias, Madeline Roberts, Allison Weninger, Abi “Scout” Hogg, Sidney Knapp, Beth Kates, Rebecca Comer, Colin Gibbings, Taylor Guidotti and the entire Alchemy production team for their hard work, invaluable feedback and creative excellence.

Table of Contents

Approval Page.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Preface.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND SETTING FORTH.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Setting Forth.....	3
 CHAPTER TWO: INITIAL RESEARCH.....	7
 CHAPTER THREE: FINDING INSPIRATION.....	18
 CHAPTER FOUR: THE EXCAVATION OF A PLAY.....	26
 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	39
 REFERENCES.....	43
 APPENDIX : <i>WHEN SHE WAS GOOD</i>	46

INTRODUCTION

Cultural ideals, like the ideal mother, are by their very nature unattainable. But the gap has never been as wide as it feels between what we expect of a good mother and who we are.

Brigid Shulte, Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time

I am a mother to two young children and the above quote resonates deeply. *When She Was Good* is the third play I have written about motherhood and I continue to return to this topic out of a desire to explore some of its darkest corners as those are the pieces that often seem to be missing when we talk about our parenting experience. It is difficult for mothers to share their reality including their disappointments, fears and failures in the face of our idealistic notion of what a good mother should be. *When She Was Good* was written to depict an unflinchingly honest story about the experience of motherhood that contemplates the danger in our unreasonable expectations and hidden truths. This thesis will review the process of creating the play from its conception through the meandering path of research and inspiration to the practice of writing, rewriting and the staged reading that led me to the final draft of the work.

As I discuss the steps in my research journey, I will examine their subsequent affect on the narrative of the play. I will also reflect upon the rich and often unexpected inspiration I found in the work of playwrights I was reading during the many months I wrote. Next I will talk about the delicate operation of shaping, refining and coaxing out

the text in response to feedback from my supervisor, my peers, the staged reading process and what the play itself wanted to tell me. In conclusion I will reflect upon my intentions for the piece, how they developed, and some of the surprises I encountered.

SETTING FORTH

Whatever happened in this tragedy, there is no evidence that Diane Schuler was a bad person. What evidence we have is that she was a very good mom and a very good person generally, maybe a bit too good, a bit of a perfectionist.

Dr. Harold Bursztajn, There's Something Wrong With Aunt Diane

A play is conceived from many different sources. Often a true story captures my attention in a way that compels me to research further. This initial interest may or may not last, but when it does, I find myself asking that inevitable question: "Could there be a play here?" In 2011 I watched the acclaimed documentary *There's Something Wrong With Aunt Diane* directed by Liz Garbus. It is the story of a young mother who was responsible for one of the most tragic accidents in New York State history and the aftermath of that event. After driving almost two miles in the wrong direction on the Taconic State Parkway, Diane Schuler caused a collision that killed seven people - four of them children - and herself. Many assumed that Diane, described as the perfect mother by all who knew her, must have experienced a medical event that afternoon. When toxicology reports were later released she was found to have the equivalent of 10 drinks as well as THC in her system. Apparently this ordinary soccer mom had a secret, and she isn't alone. Statistically speaking, it's no secret that women are drinking more. In fact they are single handedly responsible for much of the growth in the wine industry in the past decade or so. (Glaser 28)

Being a mother myself and having many friends with small children, I began to develop a theory about why modern mothers imbibe more than ever before. Parenting was never considered a task for the faint of heart, but as Shulte notes in my introduction the job has become even more difficult in modern times because of the increasingly unrealistic expectations we place upon ourselves. This evolution in our approach to parenting is a development I will explore further in Chapter Two.

A glass of wine is considered respectable, may improve heart health (Komaroff 2) and is a popular Western coping mechanism for dealing with stress. When I first undertook to explore the relationship between our current cultural notion of what it takes to be a good mother and the increased consumption of alcohol by modern mothers I didn't have to go far. The popularity of wine culture in our social circles was clearly apparent to me. Several mothers in my own neighborhood had convened a monthly book club that was more about the wine than the literature and a brief Internet search of popular Mom Blogs and social media proved we weren't alone.

In 2013 I wrote a comedy about the perils of modern motherhood and how a close knit group of female friends and a bottle or two of wine can get you through it. This led to the development of two scripts and two world premieres through Lunchbox Theatre's Stage One Festival of New Canadian Work. *Book Club* and *Book Club II: The Next Chapter* are scripts that have allowed me to fulfill a personal mandate to provide truthful and complex roles for women through my work. Yet I wanted to return to the original impetus for writing about motherhood and there was no room for Diane's tragic story in either of these comedies. I wished to challenge the idealized notion of the good mother further and illuminate its harmful affect on women's

mental health. I wanted to continue to raise questions about our unrealistic expectations of ourselves and their relationship to women's increased dependence on alcohol. Eventually it began to occur to me that I longed to give Diane Schuler a voice.

I was drawn to this seemingly normal woman who was viewed as a monster by the rest of world. I wondered what she would have to say for herself if she were able to speak about her actions and I was fascinated with the kind of a mother she had been. My research into Diane herself revealed a startlingly familiar person. She struck me as almost identical to any of the hard working mothers of small children that I had ever met. Before the accident, she had appeared to be coping better than many. She enjoyed alcohol and used it to deal with the demands of her busy life as a parent, just as I did along with the members of my book club. Her friends and family saw no indication prior to the accident that alcohol had become a problem for her. She was a picture of normalcy and that terrified me. Under the same conditions, could any one of my friends have ended up in the driver's seat that day? Could I have? I dismissed that horrifying thought convinced that no mother I know would ever allow herself to get behind the wheel inebriated. So why on earth did Diane Schuler?

As I became increasingly obsessed with the events of that particular day, I had to accept that there were many questions that we will never have answers to. The only person to provide them is deceased. This led me to the idea of incorporating the character of a medium into my play and allowing Diane to speak through her. I proposed a plot that established contact between a troubled young mother and the ghost of Diane who had come from the afterlife to speak with her.

Initial feedback from my supervisor indicated that while I had an interesting premise, there were a few inherent problems with my structure. The main character, Samantha, was missing a clear and active goal to strive for as well as a single antagonist to struggle against. The presence of the ghost also needed attention: why had she chosen to appear and what compelled her to speak with my protagonist? This was the first time I was faced with the crucial question: “What does Samantha require?” My answer at the beginning of the process was simply: “She wants to be a good mother.” I constructed an outline that created mounting struggle for her. I decided that she would be suffering from Postpartum Depression (PPD) and rendered a quite clueless husband and an overbearing mother-in-law for her to seek support from. I meditated on the explanation for Diane’s appearance trusting that sooner or later I would find a connection between the two characters that proved the inevitability of her presence.

As I began to write the first draft my research lead in several directions. I also analyzed a wide variety of plays while investigating the craft of playwriting and began to identify complications that needed attention in my own work. As well, I received regular feedback from my peers and supervisor and the play continued to transform. Throughout the writing and revising process my struggle to define Samantha’s action and externalize it remained consistent. This was the greatest dilemma I faced throughout the creation of *When She Was Good* and as the following chapters will reveal, it took many drafts for me to solve.

CHAPTER TWO: INITIAL RESEARCH

I just couldn't reconcile the kind Diane I knew with the evil Diane depicted in the tabloids.

Hance and Kaplan, I'll See You Again

As I constructed Act One, I read numerous articles about the Taconic tragedy and gathered information about Schuler herself. I explored research regarding women, specifically mothers, and their increased use of alcohol as a coping mechanism. I found many essays and books that dealt with the idealized notion of what a good mother is and the rise of intensive parenting practices in the 21st century. I also explored literature that discussed PPD particularly looking at material related to intrusive thoughts of harm. Many discoveries were quite useful to my process. They often found their way into my play, some directly influencing plot and character choices, others merely suggesting numerous possibilities for the script.

Diane Schuler's sister-in-law Jackie Hance, who lost all three of her young daughters in the crash, later wrote a memoir about her experience. Losing a child is a parent's worst nightmare, losing all of your children because of a family member's blatant disregard for their safety is unthinkable. Yet Hance indicates that when she thinks of her sister-in-law, she recalls the kind person she knew and loved and still cannot fathom that Schuler did what she did. Hance asserts that she had never seen Diane drunk and found the idea of her "chugging vodka in front of the kids" ludicrous. (64)

In fact the Garbus documentary not only painfully recounts the tragedy but also closely follows a desperate attempt on the part of Diane's husband and other family members to

find another explanation for the accident. At one point in the film, Danny Schuler speculates that maybe his wife had a stroke or other medical event that caused her to drink out of a bottle of vodka found smashed in the wreckage thinking that it was water. His denial never wavered in the aftermath. In an interview with New York Magazine months after the crash, he steadfastly asserts that Diane was the perfect wife and mother to reporter Stephen Fishman, seemingly tired of his interviewer's probing questions: ""What would you do if your daughter died and you knew for a fact that their mother was outstanding." he asks me sharply." (Fishman)

Interviews with Diane's close friends reveal a similar kind of staunch loyalty. A best friend and neighbour is certain that anyone who knew Diane simply would not believe that she could have gotten behind the wheel drunk and high. She adds "I would put my life on that." (Fishman) Yet toxicology reports are rarely wrong, leading to a more likely and the most commonly accepted theory: Diane Schuler was a high-functioning alcoholic who successfully kept her addiction hidden from those who knew her best.

According to author and journalist Susan Cheever, this explanation makes the most sense. In an article entitled *Mommy's Little Secret: The Truth About Diane Schuler*, Cheever explains that female alcoholism is more difficult to spot as our culture has a hard time believing that a "delicate creature bursting with maternal instincts" could have the same addiction issues as a man. This is complicated by the fact that women are better at hiding their dangerous drinking behaviour and are more likely to have developed strategies for doing just that as it is deemed culturally inappropriate. (Cheever)

Perhaps society does take an old-fashioned and more critical view of women who drink compared to men, yet it doesn't seem to be stopping us. One only has to take a quick look at

social media to encounter one of the many memes about Moms Who Drink Wine. You can find the term Wine Mom in the online Urban Dictionary and Toronto hosted A Very Mommy Wine Festival last fall. As I noted earlier in my personal observations, there is no denying that alcohol has become a big part of mom-culture and the statistics are sobering.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published a study last year that confirmed that women in the US are among the leaders in significant increases across the general population in categories like alcohol use and high-risk drinking. (Grant et al. 911) They scored an 83.7% increase in the prevalence of DSM-IV alcohol use disorder over a 12 month period in 2013 compared to 2002. (913) According to Gabrielle Glaser, author of *Her-Best Kept Secret*, this phenomenon is partly the result of efforts made by the wine industry to market its product to the housewives of the 1970s. (43) It looks like it worked. As of 2013 women were buying almost two thirds of the 784 million gallons of wine sold in the United States. (43) Canadian women seem to be following a similar path of consumption. A 2015 study of our drinking habits published in The National Post revealed that the greatest rise in alcohol use has occurred in women of childbearing years. (Boesveld)

The evidence leads us to the logical conclusion that Schuler was one of many modern mothers who used alcohol to unwind. She became increasingly dependent on it and eventually lost control of her ability to safely monitor the amount she was ingesting, leading to the events of that fateful day. But why the secrecy? Why did she maintain the facade that she wasn't abusing alcohol instead of seeking help? I think the answer lies with the very same reason she and many other women use alcohol in an unhealthy manner in the first place and it has to do with the current cultural perception of what makes a good mother.

More than 20 years ago, author Sharon Hays called it “intensive mothering” and defined it as having three components:

- “1. mother as central caregiver
2. appropriate child rearing practices are child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive and financially expensive.
3. child rearing is superior in its importance and therefore cannot be compared with paid work.” (8)

Almost 15 years ago, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels termed it “the new Momism” and described it as “the highly romanticized and yet demanding view of motherhood in which the standards of success are impossible to meet” that was being spoon fed to the public through Western media. (4) Dr. Fiona Green, Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Winnipeg, adds that these pressures and ideals are reinforced through social institutions and interpersonal exchanges with friends, family and strangers. “A woman’s family, friends, peers, co-workers and acquaintances also perpetuate the dominant expectations of motherhood through their attention/surveillance and unsolicited suggestions, and the good woman/mother standard is presented and normalized through their voluntary remarks, advice and/or personal judgments.” (25)

Over a decade ago, I simply called it “parenting” and blamed it for the reason I felt compelled to read numerous books by Dr. Sears and bought Baby Einstein CDs to nourish my daughter’s mathematical reasoning at the age of 9 months (expert-guided). I recognized that this was a very different kind of mothering compared to how my mother raised four children in the

1960s and 70s, yet I felt it was a normal evolution. The 21st century is the age of Google after all. We have a lot more information about how to usher our precious offspring toward a happy, successful adulthood and we simply want to do the best job possible.

Or maybe I was simply a slave to mass media. As Solveig Brown argues in her paper *Intensive Mothering as an Adaptive Response to Our Cultural Environment*, one of strongest driving forces behind this parenting style is an economic one. “Advertising images draw on intensive mothering norms to create an ideal of mothering perfection. These images simultaneously evoke insecurity and aspiration, a potent combination in creating consumer desire.” (31)

Had I, and many others like me, been absentmindedly buying into this form of perfectionist parenting without realizing that I was just a cog in a giant marketing machine? I agree with Brown that it’s more complicated than that. The many ways our culture has changed from an increasingly competitive world, to our steady diet of anxiety -inducing news media, have created a “ripple effect” on the expectations we have for ourselves as mothers. (33) If one thinks of the standards we are holding ourselves to and agrees that they are impractical, if not impossible, doesn’t this present as a recipe for enormous pressure and anxiety that could in turn lead to unhealthy coping strategies?

We should also consider the fallout for women who leave satisfying work in order to devote themselves to child care or pursue mom-track careers to allow them to spend more time with their families. What about the women like Diane who return to their jobs after a short maternity leave? I am sure some who do quickly discover that their dreams of gender equality when it comes to child care and household duties were sadly just that, dreams.

“When a couple chooses to have children, all gains women have supposedly made over the past few decades suddenly vanish, as the time machine of motherhood transports us back to the 1950s.” (5) I have to admit I chuckled (wryly) when I read those words from Rebecca Asher’s book *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality*. I am sure the above experience is not true of all couples who have children but a common complaint among my female friends who are parents is that they end up with the lion’s share of household duties and child rearing responsibilities whether they work outside the home or not.

Diane Schuler was described as one of those perfect mothers who had and did it all. She apparently excelled in her role of full-time cable executive as well as caretaker of everyone and everything in her home. (Fishman) One has to wonder what kind of toll it took. “For many women, the unfulfilling, stressful tasks of running a household, mixed with the regret of lost opportunities and the loneliness of social isolation, add up to a 750-millilitre reason to drink.” (55) I agree with Glaser that motherhood in this era whether one is working outside the home or not is an unrealistic, unpaid, unsung and highly demanding job that forces women to place their needs at the bottom of the hierarchy of importance day in and day out. Perhaps a glass or two of wine is just a civilized way to cope. Yet drinking too much alcohol certainly doesn’t fit the ideal image modern mothers wish to present nor the perfectionism they are trying to achieve. So when it becomes too much we hide it, we joke about it on social media and we ignore the signs that tell us it is becoming a problem: just like Diane did. The more I read about, observed and participated in mommy wine-culture, the more convinced I became that I was writing a play that it might initiate a useful conversation about this dangerous trend.

At this early point in the research/writing process, I was focused on developing the exchanges between my protagonist Samantha, the medium Melissa and the ghost of Diane Schuler. Diane's character was troubling and upsetting to write. As I let her emerge, I had a sense that I had become a sort of medium. In giving her a voice in my work, it seemed that I was resurrecting her and I wondered how the families of her victims would feel about my play. As I continued to write Diane began to surprise me. One of her earliest scenes revealed a very unconventional type of ghost. She was hotheaded and impatient, probably a nod to her take-charge personality I had read about and also the defensiveness I felt as I imagined her speaking for her actions.

As I began to create the world that Diane was speaking from, I became inspired by the idea that she might be followed everywhere she went by a mournful theme of music as a result of the tragedy she had caused in life. This led to the notion that I might include a cellist to play her theme every time she entered. I loved the idea of having a musician on stage. It is in every way dramatic to watch and listen to live music and I felt the musical component would differentiate her world from the rest of the play. I wanted to evoke a sense of sadness and loss for the audience, the same emotions I encountered whenever I thought about her. The cello's low rich tones have always sounded mournful to me.

Melissa's quirkiness was also unusual. It's not every day that we run into someone who can communicate with the dead and I gave her some colourful characteristics to fit the bill. I have experienced working with a medium and was able to mine that for personal details and mannerisms that stayed with me after our meeting. This left my protagonist, simply a young mother struggling with the demands of a newborn, rather lacking.

I turned to my research on PPD to help me define Samantha. My supervisor had advised me that making a character struggle is a proven way to cause them to emerge more clearly for the writer. PPD seemed a sensible choice given that the symptoms that accompany this condition, such as low self-worth and extreme self-doubt, would directly conflict with her wish to be a good mother. It wanted to present a truthful depiction of PPD, as studies show it remains a condition that although treatable is missed by patients and their doctors far too often. An article in the British Medical Journal from 2014 states that “good evidence exists that episodes of PPD are missed or misdiagnosed.” (Jones and Shakespeare 349) A study referred to in the article found that only 15% of 211 women experiencing PPD received medical help, had been prescribed drugs, or had hospital contact. (349)

I placed my main character in a difficult situation at the top of the play using the information I found in an article regarding antenatal risk factors for PPD. It was important for me that Samantha fit into the category of PPD itself, rather than postpartum blues or postpartum psychosis. The former is more common yet less severe in its symptoms and passes within weeks or days without requiring treatment. (Roberson et al. 290) The latter category is quite rare and I wanted to depict a mother that was going through something many others suffer from to raise awareness of this treatable condition. I observed the strong to moderate risk factors for PPD and worked them into my plot. Significant life events can be a strong predictor of PPD (291) so I opened the play with Samantha and Richard’s move to a new home and neighbourhood. I calculated that the move would also deprive Samantha of her immediate social support network which is another contributing factor of PPD. (292)

Later in the play I decided to make her relationship with her mother estranged as to remove emotional support even further and eventually came upon “poor relationship with one’s own mother” as a possible contributor to PPD. (Patel et al. 536) This research also led to a risk factor that surprised me: not breastfeeding one’s infant. (536) Upon further investigation I found a heartbreaking article about a mother from New Westminster B.C., Florence Leung, who suffered from PPD and committed suicide in 2016. (Schmunk) A few months later her husband posted an open letter to mothers on Facebook describing his wife’s anxiety over breastfeeding as he felt it was one of the several contributing factors to her PPD. Kim Chen wrote: “There needs to be an understanding that it is OK to supplement with formula, and that formula is a completely viable option.” (Schmunk)

This tragic story seems to me to be indicative of the intense shame a mother can feel when she struggles to live up to a standard that has been established by obstetricians for decades: “breast is best.” (Roussy) Not to mention the “moral self-righteousness of breastfeeding advocates” points out Courtney Jung, author of the book *Lactivism* . (Roussy) In an interview with CBC News in 2017, Jung referred to the bullying that mothers who don’t breastfeed exclusively receive from those who preach it: “They really believe mothers who don’t breastfeed are doing damage to their children.”(Roussy) This illustrates yet another expectation that mothers are held to, an especially harmful one for those like Florence Leung who can not meet it. It became essential that I clearly illustrate Samantha’s struggle with breastfeeding in the play and show the guilt she experiences because of it.

Another area of interest in my research into PPD was the presence of intrusive thoughts of harm in those diagnosed with the disorder. I had spoken with other mothers about our early

fears around our tiny newborns and knew first hand the anxiety caused by the thought of injuring those fragile little limbs while trying to remove a onesie. Yet when I explored the world of intrusive thoughts, I could only imagine the distress of a mother suffering from this horrible and pervasive condition. It is described as “the presence of ideas about acts of infant-harm ” (Lee and Chung 184) and it is not widely researched. In 2012, Abigail Maimon noted in her Doctoral dissertation that there was a single qualitative study on the subject. (i) These women suffer from terrifying thoughts and images of hurting their children similar to those diagnosed with Postpartum Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (PPOCD) yet fall into a subclinical category. (32) They often don’t share their symptoms for fear of judgment along with the agonizing conviction that voicing their thoughts will cause them to give into them. (i)

Maimon also cites a study conducted in 2008 by Fairbrother and Woody which conveys to the reader just how common this experience is. She wrote: “This study explored intrusive thoughts of harm in women 4 and 12 weeks postpartum and found that ego-dystonic, intrusive thoughts of harm toward one’s infant are a relatively normative experience during the early postpartum period. Nearly 99% of participants in their study reported thoughts depicting unwanted harm accidentally happening to the infants and just below half of all participants reported thoughts of intentionally harming their infants.” (34) Thoughts that were reported in the study included throwing one’s baby out the window, dropping it on purpose, drowning, burning or stabbing it either intentionally or by accident. (32) I began to realize that my main character was in a very personal and immediate hell and I needed to find a way to communicate this onstage. I tried to make her behaviour reflect her terrifying obsessions yet feedback from my peers and supervisor seemed to indicate that her journey remained internal and private. I

continued to work to open her up through her exchanges with Diane and by having her speak aloud her thoughts to her infant daughter.

I also ruminated upon Diane's journey. I still had not found a reason for her visit. Why would she contact Samantha in the first place? In addition to the information in Maimon's dissertation, I found a case report from 2016 where a patient diagnosed with PPD reported "elementary auditory hallucinations." (Latha et al. 452) This opened to me the possibility that perhaps Diane's ghost did not exist at all but instead her voice was a manifestation of Samantha's PPD.

At this point I had generated a first draft of Act One, the bulk of my play. I had also written the climatic scene of Act Two and felt confident about where I was going with the piece. As I revisited my outline and continued with my writing, I simultaneously completed the course work for my Master's degree. In this work, I found myself gathering inspiration from the plays I read during the term. I put my research aside and let myself absorb the work of the gifted writers I was studying as I laboured on with my own play, hopeful that it would help me to complete a solid first draft of *When She Was Good*.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDING INSPIRATION

The next step in my journey focussed on analyzing the work of several established playwrights. I read many plays as a component of my course work and was especially drawn to works that I felt could assist me in addressing the weaknesses in my own writing. After reading and attending plays when I could, I researched academic papers, articles, reviews and interviews written about the works that most interested me. This chapter explores a few key examples of the plays and playwrights that contributed to my learning process as I finished the first draft of *When She Was Good*.

Braidie: I woke up this morning to this sound. This sound that feels far away one second then from right inside my gut the next. Very pure with the potential to be extremely creepy. But before I've even opened my eyes this other thing worms its way in and wreaks its usual havoc: the voice of mum.

Joan MacLeod, Shape of a Girl

As I embarked on the second act, an element of my work that continued to need my attention was my main character. I often find myself struggling to find a voice for my protagonist and in my experience, the secondary characters almost write themselves complete with neat and tidy objectives while the main character remains maddeningly elusive. It would be difficult to estimate the number of times I returned to the question “What does Samantha require?” A review of the feedback I received from my peers and supervisor during this period proves that each new

scene brought forth more questions regarding Samantha's action. I set about trying to answer them by studying several works of Joan MacLeod in order to consider the extended single voice. Reading *Shape of a Girl* reacquainted me with MacLeod's formidable skill at creating rich character voices as well as her apt use of monologue. I began to experiment with monologue as a way to reveal Samantha to myself and eventually an audience.

The monologue can be a valid tool for exposing a character as it can act as a running diary of the character's thoughts, but it tends to swallow the energy on stage unless it is motivated by a strong desire. Braidie is the only character in *Shape of a Girl* and her speeches are a confession to her absent older brother as she struggles to explain and understand her part in the events of the play. (Wasserman 9.) When I tried to incorporate monologues into my play, I had difficulty finding a reason for Samantha to share her inner dialogue. Her speeches were provoked more often by my wish to reveal her than her need to divulge. For example I tried the convention of Samantha speaking to her baby in monologue when there was no one else in the room but I wasn't satisfied that it worked. The speeches seemed unnatural in scenes that were trying to convey a realistic portrait of a young mother struggling with postpartum issues.

Alternatively I began to engage Samantha with the cellist. I felt that the musician needed to be more involved in the piece beyond a dispassionate observer. Perhaps if I could imagine the cello as a representative of Samantha's inner voice, then I could reveal her through a sort of conversation between the two of them. I wanted the musician to respond to the actor spontaneously in a musical language that Samantha could understand perfectly and the audience would have to imagine. This was something I had not encountered in the plays I had read and I felt it would be engaging. It was a theatrical way to illustrate Samantha's racing inner thoughts

and I didn't have to be concerned with what was natural as it took the play out of the realm of realism during these exchanges. My comfort zone stylistically is realism so I felt that this was a good opportunity to try something new.

To facilitate these improvised responses I wrote the musician's lines as a series of question marks, exclamation marks, or ellipses and added an explanation as to what each of these punctuation marks might represent. I asked them to read the script and imagine responding in the moment to Samantha in an attempt to represent a struggle with one's own thoughts: the act of talking ourselves in and out of things. Often we choose to ignore the still, small voice inside that we know perfectly well is speaking the truth in favour of our blaring inner critic and I was interested in how a musician would show this. In this same spirit of collaboration, I did not choose the score for Diane's theme as I preferred that the musician compose their own theme or at least be free to choose a piece of music that resonated with them.

And I just sat there, looking at an empty fireplace. And I sat there until it got bright. I was like a boy, you know? I couldn't move in case something saw me.

Connor McPherson, The Weir

During this period of writing I read several of the celebrated Irish playwright Connor McPherson's plays including *The Weir*. I was fascinated by the powerful atmosphere he created in this story where a group of characters gather in a cozy pub to share supernatural tales while the wind howls in the darkness outside. McPherson's gift for narrative is compelling and urges

the audience to draw closer as the ghost stories grow increasingly disturbing and tension builds to a breaking point. (Kerrane 108) Reading the play, one can imagine sitting quite still in a darkened theatre anticipating the moment that would make the audience jump, just as the character Finbar sits motionless throughout the night in fear of a ghostly encounter in the above quote. I wanted to create this eerie mood in my own play and also give the audience the sense of being on the brink of some terrible occurrence, like Samantha was. I wanted them anticipating the thing that would make them jump in the dark. I felt I had structured a strong climactic scene in the bathroom that would build tension but I realized that having live music on stage was also extremely useful in creating a haunting atmosphere.

This led me to imagine that adding another instrument would contribute a richer musical element and might also be used for the voice of the baby. I had been pondering how to manage a crying effect with the right edge to make my audience uncomfortable without causing them to withdraw from the world of the play (or their seats.) So I began to write parts for another musician, a violin, which I imagined could produce notes in a higher range than the cello making it suitable for a crying baby but also slightly different. I also liked the possibility of the two instruments joining together to produce more complicated pieces of music. I wanted Diane's theme to be the tragic sound of the afterworld as she experienced it, a place of great loss and loneliness, a ghostly hint of the sorrow she had created in life. In the scenes with the medium I imagined a tune of anticipation, foreboding, and mystery. I knew a sound designer could produce this kind of musical cue for the piece but it was important for me to experiment with the idea of live musicians. I had fallen for the image of one or two of these otherworldly, possibly

omniscient characters that responded to the story unfolding in front of them: existing in Samantha's mind and Diane's place of limbo as well.

GALLIMARD: Look at me: the life of every social function in Paris. Paris? Why be modest? My fame has spread to Amsterdam, London, New York. Listen to them! In the world's smartest parlours. I'm the one who lifts their spirits!

With a flourish, Gallimard directs our attention to another part of the stage.

David Henry Hwang, M. Butterfly

M. Butterfly was another play I was drawn to as I wrote Act Two. I was struck by the way the main character speaks to the audience not only from a desire to explain himself and confess his sins from his jail cell, but also as a sort of guide who leads us through his story. In constructing his drama as a memory play with Gallimard as our escort, Hwang manages to deal with a story that takes place over several years, depict the action in many settings and reveal character through the lens of his protagonist's memory and perception. (Street 43)

I decided to imagine Samantha as a sort of guide as well, revealing to us the moments of the story that were most important to her and directing us to watch the events unfold on stage in whatever order she saw fit. This would reveal character and also allow the action to move seamlessly onstage with minimal set changes. In my experience as an audience member, pauses to change the setting of a play can take me out of the story. I prefer to be engaged mentally in keeping up with the events unfolding on the stage and to save my reflection for after the curtain

call. I began to play with the idea of having Samantha address the audience directly after reading *M. Butterfly* and although this convention did not appear until a later draft, the idea was brewing.

This is a work of imagination. My intention is not to exploit the events that took place on 6 December 1989 in the Ecole Polytechnique where fourteen women were murdered, or to feed off the pain of families and friends who have been devastated, but to use the public event as a point of departure.

Colleen Murphy, The December Man

Colleen Murphy's Author's Notes at the beginning of her Governor General Award winning play *The December Man* brought with them a question for my own work. How was I handling the fact that my play also dealt with an event that was public and tragic? Murphy chose to depict the action of her play in reverse order to avoid exploiting the character's grief and letting the audience feel safe because this sad story was not happening to them (Farfan 15). She asserted that going backward offered something quite different: "You start to put it together, you see? This family and the family dynamics and class." said Murphy in an interview with Penny Farfan published recently in the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (14). It was concerning to read her logic as it caused me to question my own motives. Was I in fact offering a story that would make the audience feel safe because Diane's Schuler's tragic story was not their experience? That was not my intention of course. I wished to ask questions and stimulate a dialogue about many things, from women's addiction issues to the insanity of our society's current ideals around modern

motherhood. I certainly didn't want to hurt anyone who had been personally affected by this tragedy. Murphy's work urged me to consider more deeply what I wished my play to achieve, what I did not want it to do and how it could reach the outcomes I desired.

I also read that Murphy was quick to clarify that the characters in her play were fictional when a review in the Toronto Star noted that they bore a strong resemblance to the members of a real-life family who was also devastated by the events of December 6. ("It's Okay") I was actually using Diane's full name and locating the accident on the Taconic State Parkway in New York where it took place. How would the family and friends of the innocent victims react if they happened to stumble upon my play at some point? I realized this was another question to meditate on as I continued to prepare my work to share with an audience whomever and wherever that might be.

These were the works that resonated with me as I completed the first draft of *When She Was Good*. I submitted it knowing it was nowhere near finished, yet satisfied that I had found a shape for the play that I could now go back to fine tune. After receiving feedback, I put the play aside to rest. I strongly believe we need to go away from our pieces for a time to be able to return with the gifts of fresh eyes and renewed enthusiasm. If the work is resting, it doesn't mean that the writer is. Daily writing is crucial to nurture one's creative habits and routine and this is probably the most important insight I gained in the process of writing this play. As the work rests, just for the night or for a longer period, it never fully leaves one's mind as long as you continue to engage in the act of writing.

Physical activity is also an important element in channelling creativity. In my experience, exercise allows one to be more fully present in the body and frees the mind to address questions and issues that have arisen while writing. Some of these questions came to me quite consciously as I worked on other projects and made time for regular walking that spring, other ideas that had formed in my second term continued to percolate on a subconscious level. In the next chapter I will explore the many revisions I undertook over the next year that led me to the final draft of the work, the experience of the public reading in the Alchemy Festival of 2018, and my final analysis of the play itself.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EXCAVATION OF A PLAY

After the work had rested briefly but sufficiently enough to renew my passion for the project, I began to work on revisions. The note that resonated most deeply from my last round of feedback was the familiar question, “Why does Diane appear to Samantha?” I had trusted that an answer would come to me and the answer came from my main character. Samantha needed to be more active in the play, her struggle less internal. I decided that Samantha would pursue the spirit of Diane, asking the medium to summon the ghost rather than the ghost simply choosing to appear. This would reveal character, render a protagonist who was pursuing a desire in a more active way and bring us to the first supernatural exchange more quickly.

I decided at this point that Samantha wanted to speak with Diane because she already knew who she was. Rather than discovering her history during the course of the play, Samantha would already know about the crash and her wish to hear Diane speak would come from a place of both fear and hope. She feared that she and Diane were similar, that they were both ordinary women who used alcohol as a coping strategy in the face of the enormous pressure they felt to be good mothers. Yet they were flawed humans, unable to meet the expectations they had set for themselves and alternatively, quite capable of horrendous action. She was hopeful that Diane would give her some other explanation for the tragedy. That she might reveal an undiscovered event from the day the accident occurred that explained her actions and somehow released her from blame. If Samantha could exonerate Diane’s spirit, perhaps she could imagine a happy ending to her own story. If Diane wasn’t capable of hurting a child, then maybe she wasn’t either.

Like the protagonist Gallimard, I also desired to have Samantha in charge of her own story, guiding the audience through the unfolding of events. I questioned whether or not direct address was warranted given that she could already talk to the cellist as a way to bare her soul yet the idea of Samantha as a chaperone had its hooks in me. I felt it grounded the play in a style and structure that would make sense to an audience. She was not only telling her story, she was the master of ceremonies. She was responsible for organizing the action on stage in a space that had few set pieces and required the story to move swiftly from one space and time to the next.

I realized that Samantha needed a convention to speak to the audience and I was struck by the idea that she could be speaking from beyond the grave as well. If Diane was doomed to wander eternity telling her story, couldn't the same fate befall Samantha? Of course she would have to die but that only raised the stakes, always a good thing in drama. So I chose for Samantha to commit suicide at the end of the play by drowning. It was an end that her daughter escaped and a choice that she felt necessary to protect her baby from harm.

I worried that the new ending would be far too dark, leaving my audience hopeless, yet I felt it paid tribute to all the mothers struggling with PPD who had eventually taken their own lives. If I had done my job well enough to engage the audience with Samantha to the point that they cared what happened to her, then the ending should be affecting. Powerful plays get people talking and perhaps my work could raise awareness around the issues I had undertaken to explore. My mind drifted to Florence Leung, the young mother from British Columbia whom I talked about in Chapter Two. If a play could provoke a conversation around an issue like breastfeeding then I would feel it worthy. If it could actually encourage our unwilling culture to

consider the harmful effects of an inflexible attitude towards it, then I wanted to be the one to write it.

Another significant change I made was in Diane's name. Reading Colleen Murphy made me realize that while I felt it was reasonable to be inspired by Diane's story, I needed to protect those more personally involved by changing names and locations. I decided to base the story in Canada. I also changed the name Diane to Mary as a nod to the Virgin Mary, another long suffering figure and iconic image of motherly perfection. This religious reference came to mind as I already had wine in the play that could be thought to represent the blood of Christ, along with the image of baptism. These references to birth, purity and sacrifice fit very well with my exploration of societal expectations of the ideal mother. Changing Diane's name to Mary now left me with two character with names beginning with M and I felt that could become confusing. I solved this problem by changing the name of the medium to Christine.

Lastly I added the element of the Victorian seance by writing an additional scene in which Christine reluctantly summons Mary for a second time using a table to communicate with her. This would be an easier avenue for Christine if she wished to give Samantha another supernatural experience without actually summoning a ghost. I felt the reference to the Victorian era along with the thumping of the table and the haunting sounds of the cello would help to create the unearthly atmosphere that Connor McPherson inspired me to search for. The second seance would also give more evidence that Christine was in over her head, revealing her character more fully and allowing for more comedic moments.

The notes I received from my supervisor in response to Draft Two were very encouraging. It seemed the new elements worked well, but there were some areas that still needed attention. Richard had been neglected in revisions and my supervisor directed me again to his character as well as his relationship with Samantha. Both of these aspects had become one-note and needed texture to make them live more comfortably in the drama. Richard seemed so emotionally incompetent that one might wonder why they were together, or why Samantha was seeking support from her husband at all. I needed to work on making Richard more available if I wanted Samantha to open up to him (and the audience) about what she was experiencing.

Although the direct address and the use of the cello as a sounding board were both working to illuminate what was driving my main character, the reasons that led to her final decision still were not clear. Other questions about Samantha also remained but I noticed they were becoming more specific. Instead of hearing “What does she want?” I was asked why she did not seek help from professional avenues rather than pursue a ghost. This told me that I was getting closer to understanding what my protagonist required and that if I continued to write, digging more deeply and demanding that she explain herself, eventually she would comply.

I was also advised to consider how I released information to the audience. It was prudent to maintain the audience’s attention by revealing a bit of Mary’s story every few pages rather than divulging too much at the top of the play. Now that Samantha knew about the tragedy from the beginning it became a more delicate maneuver to let the audience enjoy the mystery as they made their own assumptions about Mary’s back-story.

In the initial conversation about my second draft we also spoke at length about escalation. I had a strong cliffhanger at the end of Act One and a satisfying climax in the bathroom scene,

but there was a question as to whether the action escalated incrementally throughout the play, especially with regard to Act Two. It was logical that Samantha should be at her most desperate by this point, her strategies more creative and her willingness to risk far greater. In some ways it seemed she had stalled. She continued to talk to Mary, eventually getting to the point in a roundabout way, and she persisted in her attempts to communicate her situation to Richard and Phyllis. I felt there was more she needed to do but I was uninspired and frankly discouraged.

I had reached the point in my process where the story seemed to be firmly on a path and I was at a loss at how to steer it into new territory. It isn't unusual for me to be somewhat torn by the sense that the play I am creating wants to emerge in a certain way and I am attempting to wrestle it into a structure that I believe will work better dramatically given the feedback I have received and the knowledge I have of playwriting. I spent some time waffling between the conviction that I should remain true to my original vision for the work and the sense that there were so many things wrong with the piece that it had become impossible to fix.

When I reflect on that part of the process now, I see it as a necessary step in creating a play. The writer must allow the story to emerge; just as an archeologist scrapes carefully at the ground to expose ancient bones or ruins. At the same time the playwright must strive to develop the analytical tools and sound dramatic instincts that show her where to dig. This is a practice that takes time to evolve and one must accept that uncertainty will be part of that journey. Self-doubt can be debilitating to a writer and I find it takes away my ability to generate new and exciting solutions to problems. My attempts to rewrite a path of escalating action for Samantha felt dull and ineffectual: akin to trying to dig up Pompeii with a teaspoon. Yet there is nothing to do but keep writing. I focused my energy at this point on addressing the other notes

I had been given, the ones I felt able to fix, and decided to live with the problem of weak escalation in the second act of the play. I wrote three more drafts that fall as I prepared the play for a reading in the Alchemy Festival. Richard took shape but the question of what Samantha required continued to haunt me.

I approached the Alchemy Festival with a script that wasn't fully complete yet it was sufficiently prepared for a rehearsal draft. In previous workshop experiences I have brought scripts that were in much earlier stages of development and they changed dramatically once I was able to hear them read, answer questions and participate in the discussions around the table. I anticipated that this play would not undergo such a transformation as I had developed it much more fully before bringing it to the actors and director. Of course, I was wrong.

In our first rehearsal I was reminded of an elementary rule of playwriting: plays must be read aloud to understand their potential. Hearing the play read in its entirety led me to immediately cut the first scene. I had received a note three drafts earlier that the play seemed to authentically begin the first time Christine and Samantha summoned Mary but I wasn't convinced until I heard it read. It was obvious while I listened that the play kept the audience waiting as I set up a story that would be served better by diving in. My director Jenna Rodgers, also a talented dramaturg, agreed and imparted a very useful piece of advice: "The first scene is usually for the writer." That phrase will stay with me while I move forward in my playwriting career as I recognize that dynamic beginnings can be a challenge for me. The cut worked beautifully and now the play began with a newfound energy that had the audience working to catch up with the unfolding events.

Another eureka moment came much later in the rehearsal process. I had spent most of the process listening, answering questions to clarify character intention and scrambling to cast a cellist. The rehearsal draft only required one musician as I had cut the violinist not long before. I had anticipated that it might be difficult to find two musicians and that it would be easier to produce the play if one musician could make all the sounds required. I had toyed with the idea of searching for someone who could play both instruments but finally settled on the cello as the most important and reasoned that a cello could probably provide the sound of a baby. As fate would have it, we could not find a cellist available to perform. Eventually we found a violinist who was comfortable with the element of improvising and willing to join us so that I was able to turn my attention back to the script. I had been making small changes here and there in the dialogue to smooth conversation, I cut a few unnecessary lines to improve pacing and worked to clarify intention where actors were unclear. The only addition of any major significance came when the last week of rehearsal arrived.

As I returned to earlier drafts of the play for the purpose of composing my Artist Statement, I discovered a monologue of Samantha's from the very first draft that had been cut. I could only surmise that I did it when I was employing a strategy from my course work where one goes through the piece and trims the last one or two lines from every speech to quicken the pace and let the audience fill in information in areas that may have been overwritten. Somehow I had cut a speech entirely in the final scene where Samantha tries to explain what she is experiencing to Richard. It was motivated, deeply visceral, revealed her character more fully and I put it back in. Upon hearing it aloud, I realized that it was effective in opening Samantha up to the audience in a way she hadn't before. It answered questions about the severity of her

mental struggle that I had planted earlier and its placement close to the end of the play seemed natural as a final cry for help. It also helped the actor playing Richard to find authenticity in his response to her. Samantha's brutal honesty provoked the fear, anger and pain that he had been searching for. The action escalated and the scene worked. Workshops are powerful avenues for trying out a hunch or an instinct when a moment isn't working no matter how many different ways an actor tries to attack it. The ease with which their performance lands after the fact is a good indication that your changes have worked.

Thinking I was done revising, I sat down to listen to the actors one more time and was astonished to realize I suddenly knew what Samantha required. She needed Mary to tell her what had happened the day she drove a van full of innocent children head on into traffic. She needed to know the truth. Samantha had been fantasizing that the results of the toxicology reports were wrong, that Mary was not a flawed human, just like her, who made a terrible decision that led to tragic results, but that in fact the accident was no fault of her own. Samantha required a miracle. I changed a single line in the play, but to me it was a line of monumental significance. In the climatic bathroom scene, Samantha simply says to Mary, "Just tell me what happened." This was the question she always had for Mary. Sadly she doesn't get the answer she wants. Once she realizes that Mary is in fact fully responsible for the deaths of all those innocents, Samantha realizes she is capable of visiting the same tragedy upon her own daughter. Suicide seems the only option left.

This new understanding sent me into the Festival with a great sense of accomplishment. I had brought the play as far as I could and now I was thirsty for feedback. I sat in the back row of

the theatre for each of the three performances, watching the audience and listening to them carefully. My sense as I observed the audience was that the play captured and held interest and moved at a pleasing pace. The audience seemed engaged, laughed throughout and I didn't detect a lot of restless movement. I could feel a shift after the climactic bathroom scene when the baby is in danger. It was an audible expression of relief when the scene was over, indicating to me that the tension had a strong build. At the end of the play there was a sense of heaviness that I was unsure of. I had wanted the audience to be affected yet I wondered if I needed to offer a glimmer of hope to the piece. It felt uncomfortable sending my audience off with nary a smile in sight, yet I had been striving to write a play that had significant weight and this was nothing like the comedies I had written before. It came to me in a discussion with a peer after the reading that my distress could be a result of a need or wish to please people, an annoying personality trait that I admit I suffer from. Upon further reflection I also think it could mean that I haven't quite found the ending to the work.

The comments I received were positive for the most part and I am sure some of these exchanges were simply expressions of support. Yet when I heard "it was very powerful" and "I thought about it long afterwards" I was encouraged that I had created a work that was affecting. Some longer conversations were very helpful in that they inspired revisions. I also received a few anonymous comments in a notebook that I placed on a table in the theatre and invited audience members to respond in after the performance. The following are a few observations and questions that resonated.

First of all, the audience enjoyed the musical element. Again and again I heard about how the sound of the violin affected the mood of the play and especially how well it depicted a crying

baby. One of the several written comments described it as “effective, haunting and humorous” Another said: “the music and sideways glances were fantastic.” I had a sense that the relationship between the violin and Samantha was appreciated because it generated a lot of laughter and I welcomed the lightness it brought to such a heavy topic.

There was also a note that indicated confusion as to why Mary could hear her musical theme and Samantha could not. I had received this note before and I was satisfied with the notion that the musician in my play has the ability to live in more than one time and space: providing music and sound to augment the action of a scene while representing Mary’s eternal theme, the inner workings of Samantha’s troubled mind and the sound of a crying baby. In fact I was beginning to view the music as a spiritual element in the piece, able to transform into many things. I realize that audience members will form different opinions as to what the music actually symbolizes to them and that is fine with me: it could provoke interesting discourse. I didn’t feel the need to clarify until a conversation with my supervisor inspired me to meditate more deeply on this aspect of the work. Questions such as: “Why does Samantha converse with the musician while Mary does not?” or “What function does the musical theme serve in the afterlife?” are extremely intriguing to me and provoke more questions about deeper themes in the work. What do I perceive to be the function of the afterlife itself? Is Mary doomed to wander forever listening to her musical theme or is there a way she can find peace? These are all valid and exciting questions that will take time and care to address but I fully intend to explore them in the future.

The fact that the musical element of the piece was so well-received did leave me sure of one thing: it simply worked. It worked so well that I entertained the idea of adding a violin again

in my final draft feeling perhaps it was necessary for the sound of the crying baby. Yet I felt that the sound of two instruments would obscure the actor's voices, a problem that we had to address in the staged reading. I observed that the actors had to work much harder to project when the violin played under their dialogue and was not convinced it would work to force them compete with the sound of two instruments. I was certain that my instincts about the tone of the cello were right for the piece over all, enough that I chose to leave it as the primary instrument.

There were also several encouraging comments about the topic of the play. More than one person wanted to tell me a traumatic breastfeeding story and was pleased to see the subject tackled onstage. I was applauded in the written comments for writing something "real and relatable" and my willingness to "unfold this social taboo." A mother shared that she "saw moments of truth that will speak to all new moms." Someone else thanked me for having photocopied materials available at the door that gave information about local mental health resources and supports for mothers experiencing postpartum difficulty. These comments indicate to me that the work is successful in its ability to provoke discussion about some of the darkest aspects of the experience of modern motherhood and that audiences are willing to engage with the subject matter.

There were a few character notes that proved useful as well. A professor who was fascinated by the role of the medium confessed that she found the character confusing. There was some question in her mind as to whether or not Christine's intention was to scam Samantha. Why had she decided to warn her near the end of the play if she was simply a charlatan looking for an opportunity to make some quick cash? Another comment intimated that the

medium was almost unnecessary in the play. While I didn't agree, I felt that particular comment was indicative of a lack of clarity surrounding her intent. I went back to Christine in my final draft and rendered a character more affected by her supernatural experience and wishing to repent in her final scene for years of deceit as a con-artist. I also saw this scene as an opportunity for escalation in my second act. It was a good moment to reveal Samantha's growing desperation.

In addition, I received a few interesting comments and questions about Mary. At least three people wanted to hear more from her and there was a written comment that simply said "Clarify or elaborate on why Mary also wanted to talk to Sam." These comments brought me to the realization that I never had addressed Mary's reason for speaking to Sam beyond the fact that she was summoned and I wondered if that was enough. It didn't feel like enough after hearing the play read. I also noted that Mary remained strangely quiet in the final scene. She watched Samantha take her own life rather dispassionately, only attempting to interfere for good at the very end. Why didn't she speak? I felt there was more for her to say and in the final draft I let her speak. It wasn't much, just a few lines. I didn't want to prolong the ending too much after my climax as that didn't feel right structurally, but I did want Mary to clarify how she felt about Samantha's actions.

I also found myself questioning whether or not Mary's interference should save Samantha. I had a strong desire to exonerate Mary, perhaps because I empathized with her. It is my belief that we are all broken in some way and she is simply a broken human who acted badly, something we are all capable of. That her behaviour, combined with the perfect storm of events, inflicted so much pain and suffering is still almost incomprehensible to me. Yet in my feeble attempt to grasp the events of Diane Schuler's last day on earth, I cannot

reconcile a belief that her actions were purposeful. I must believe that if she were able to go back and change the outcome she would. So perhaps in resurrecting her I was trying to forgive her.

In the staged reading, Mary warned Richard of Samantha's impending death by knocking over a mug of tea. He rushed to the bathroom to save his wife but he was too late. If I changed the ending and let Samantha live, Mary would have shown an act of kindness therefore encouraging the audience to look upon her more kindly and perhaps afford her some degree of forgiveness. If Samantha lived, it would give the ending the small sense of hope that I was searching for, yet that action would ruin my original convention that established Samantha was speaking to us from beyond the grave. I tried this new ending but was ultimately dissatisfied.

The conversation with my supervisor that had encouraged me to reflect upon the deeper meaning of the music and the afterlife gave me the inspiration I was looking for. I decided that if I had created Mary to be able to forgive her terrible transgressions, then it was in my power as a playwright to do so. Perhaps on some level, changing her ending helps me forgive my own sins, and encourages other mothers and struggling imperfect humans to forgive themselves as well. I released Mary into the light indicating that her earlier confession to Samantha and the musician had finally allowed her to escape a dreary limbo and move to a new place of peace. I remain undecided as to whether I have truly found my ending and intend to reflect further, but for now I have a great sense of satisfaction with Mary's final act.

CONCLUSION

For tragedy is a mimesis not of men (simply) but of actions - that is, of life.

Aristotle, Poetics

I learned many things about my craft in the process of writing *When She Was Good*. Taking the time to properly excavate a story is both painful and beautiful, often at the same time. A story is emerging, and it is just as important to listen to what it is trying to tell you as it is to follow the principles of dramatic writing. Along the way, the story will take twists and turns leaving you uncertain of the next step. A strong instinct for sniffing out useful feedback is paramount. This was easy for me as I had an accomplished dramaturg in my supervisor, yet I feel I further developed the inner compass that tells me which notes need attention immediately and those that will prove less fruitful to my process. The practice of reading, attending and critiquing plays allowed me to strengthen my analytical skills and these are so necessary for viewing my own work with an eye for its strengths and weaknesses. It is a practice I will continue to follow when my degree is finished. A daily writing habit that fosters a close relationship with the piece, making time for physical activity, letting the work rest but not the writing, were also crucial lessons learned and I feel that my final draft reflects this.

I have also learned the importance of rigour when planning a play. Looking back on the journey, I wish that I had put more careful thought into that first simple question “What does Samantha require?” before sitting down to my laptop. A well-developed outline with strong structural elements and a clear line of action for each character is a beacon in the

darkness as a writer tries to capture a story on the page. If I had noticed how general my answer to that central question was before beginning to write the play, I may have been able to refine my response into something more specific. Rather I set myself up to tell the story of a young mother's gradual and internal struggle, a difficult task for a play that I have now learned firsthand. I was reading Aristotle at the time and I should have known better. Yet it was a valuable learning experience for me as a writer as struggle and failure are excellent teachers.

I have now experienced a workshop with a play that has undergone many drafts, differing from my former forays that always involved works at a much more raw stage of their development. This led me to conclude how vital the workshop process is to new play development. Even at a later stage in the work, until I could hear the play read aloud and watch the actors and directors struggle with a particular moment that wasn't working, it was difficult for me to see what those moments were. I also feel I reached a level of clarity with my protagonist's action that I would not have found without watching the actress search for her intention in the most pivotal scenes of the play. The actors and directors approached my play with fresh individual perspectives and new questions that opened up the work and helped me achieve a deeper understanding of how I could accomplish what I wanted to say.

The play itself is successful on many levels. It has satisfied my wish to use the story of Diane Schuler as a starting point to explore the idealistic perception of modern motherhood and its harmful affect on women's mental health. Samantha just wants to be a good mother. But in our culture a good mother means a perfect one and she drives herself over the edge scrambling to fill a role that is unachievable. She dares not share what she really feels because only a bad mother would think such awful thoughts. Meanwhile a glass of wine is

never far away, yet no one comments on her drinking. Mary is the tragic example of what can happen when denial escalates into out of control alcohol abuse. I have created a drama that can bring awareness to the pervasive use of alcohol as a coping mechanism for mothers, an issue that our society is sadly both undereducated about and reluctant to speak of candidly.

I have created a work that brings more awareness specifically to postpartum mental health issues. I had never heard of PPOCD nor did I understand the prevalence of postpartum intrusive thoughts of harm before researching for this play. The very week that it was produced in the Alchemy festival one of the actors sent me a Huffington Post article entitled *Mothers Who Think About Hurting Their Babies Need Help, Not Judgment*. It relates the story of a woman in California who was forcibly committed to a hospital psychiatric ward after describing her violent thoughts to a doctor during a routine postpartum check up. (Wong and Letourneau) “If you think this can’t happen in Canada, think again” relates one of the article’s co-authors, Dr. Gina Wong, who is currently working on a National Strategy on Maternal Mental Health. As a medical professional, she has been witness to many similar occurrences right here in our own country. This to me is a clear indication that PPOCD and the experience of intrusive thoughts of harm are conditions that we need to learn about as a society to quell the shame for sufferers so that they may speak up and obtain proper support when they do. I did not originally intend to tackle this issue, it was simply one of the many twists that the play took, and as a result I think it could start another much needed conversation.

Finally, I am certain that in the process of writing this play, especially in the act of forgiving the character of Mary, I have found a way to say goodbye to the ghost of Diane Schuler. Now I will be able to let her story rest with her, satisfied that I have

addressed it in a way that may help others that are presently struggling with similar issues. In giving her a voice, I have tried to encouraged mothers to speak truthfully about the darkness in their own journeys as an alternative to pouring another glass of wine. In my quest for artistic self-expression and growth, I am hopeful that I have created a well-crafted, engaging drama that will be of interest to other artists wishing to bring stories about authentic, complicated women and their honest experience of motherhood to life on stage.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. Baxter, John and Atherton. *Aristotle's Poetics: Translated and with a commentary by George Whalley*. Montreal: MQUP, 1997. *ProQuest*. Web. 15 September 2016.
- Asher, Rebecca. *Shattered: Modern Motherhood and the Illusion of Equality*. London: Harvill Secker, 2011. Print.
- Boesveld, Sarah. "How we drink: Here's everything you need to know about Canadian's overall boozy habits." *NationalPost.com*. National Post, 15 May 2015. Web. 3 Mar. 2018.
- Brown, Solveig. "Intensive Mothering as an Adaptive Response to Our Cultural Environment." *Intensive Mothering: The Cultural Contradictions of Modern Motherhood*. Ed. Linda Rose Ennis. Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2014. 27-46. Print.
- Cheever, Susan. "Mommy's Little Secret: The Truth About Diane Schuler." *TheFix.com*. N.p., 27 Sept. 2011. Web. 17 Jan. 2018.
- Douglas, Susan J., and Meredith W. Michaels. *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. New York: Free Press, 2004. Print.
- Farfan, Penny. "Women Playwrights and the News: Colleen Murphy and Judith Thompson on "Fact-Inspired" Drama." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 31.2 (2017): 73-98. *Project Muse*. Web. 4 May 2018.
- Fishman, Steve. "I Dream of Diane." *NYMag.com*. New York Magazine, 15 Nov. 2009. Web. 10 Oct. 2016.
- Glaser, Gabrielle. *Her Best Kept Secret: Why Women Drink - And How They Can Regain Control*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013. Print.
- Grant, Bridget F., S. Patricia Chou, Tulshi D. Saha, Roger P. Pickering, Bradley T. Kerridge, June Ruan, Boji Huang, Jeesun Jung, Haitao Zhang, Amy Fan, and Debora S. Hasin. "Prevalence of 12-Month Alcohol Use, High Risk Drinking, and DSM-IV Alcohol Use Disorder in the United States: Results From the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions." *JAMA Psychiatry*. 74.9 (2017): 911-923. Web. 8 March 2018.
- Green, Fiona Joy. "Moms Under Surveillance: Noticing and Challenging the Idea of the "Good" Mother." *What Do Mothers Need? Motherhood Activist and Scholars Speak Out on Maternal Empowerment for the 21st Century*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly. Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012. 21-34. Print.

Hance, Jackie and Janice Kaplan. *I'll See You Again*. New York: Gallery Books, 2013. Print.

Hays, Sharon. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale U P, 1996. Print.

Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly*. New York: Plume. 1988. Print

"It's Okay for Art to Imitate Life." *Canadian Newsstream*. Toronto Star, 14 Apr. 2008. Proquest. Web. 24 March 2017.

Jones, Ian, and Judy Shakespeare. "Postnatal Depression." *BMJ* 349 (2014): n. pag. Web. 26 September 2016.

Kerrane, Kevin. "The Stuctural Elegance of Conor McPherson's *The Weir*." *New Hibernia Review* 10.4 (2006):105-121. Project Muse. Web 16 January 2017.

Komaroff, Dr. Anthony L.. "Ask The Doctor." *Harvard Health Letter*. Harvard Health Publications, Jan. 2014. Web. 3 Mar. 2018.

Latha, S. Swarna, Gayatri Bellamkonda and Uma Sankar Viriti. "Case Report: Postpartum Depression." *Pharmaceutical and Biological Evaluations* 3.4 (2016): 450-455. Web. 26 September 2016.

MacLeod, Joan. *The Shape of a Girl/Jewel*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2002. Print.

McPherson, Conor. *The Weir and Other Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999. Print.

Maimon, Abigail L. Sobel. *Ego-Dystonic, Obsessive Thoughts of Harm in Postpartum Women: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*. Diss. The Wright Institute, 2012. Berkeley: UMI, 2012. Web. 1 Oct. 2016.

Murphy, Colleen. *The December Man*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2007. Print.

Patel, Milapkumar, Rahn K. Bailey, Shagufta Jabeen, Shahid Ali, Narviar C. Barker, and Kenneth Osiezagha. "Postpartum Depression: A Review." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. 23.2 (2012): 534-542. Project Muse. Web. 26 Feb. 2018.

Robertson, Emma, Sherry Grace, Tamara Wallington and Donna E. Stewart. "Antenatal Risk Factors for Postpartum Depression: A Synthesis of Recent Literature." *General Hospital Psychiatry* 26 (2004): 289-295. Elsevier. Web. 1 October 2016.

Roussy, Kas. “” Breastfeeding bullies” keep up the campaign that “breast is best”.” *CBC.ca*. CBC News, 28 Feb. 2017. Web. 26 Feb. 2018.

Schmunk, Rhianna. ““You are not a bad mother’: Husband pens letter to moms with postpartum depression after losing wife”. *CBC.ca*. CBC News, 17 Jan. 2017. Web. 26 Feb. 2018.

Schulte, Brigid. *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has The Time*. New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2014. Print.

Street, Douglas. *David Henry Hwang*. Boise: Boise State U P, 1989. Print. Boise State University Western Writers Ser. 90. Print.

There’s Something Wrong With Aunt Diane. Dir. Liz Garbus. Perf. Jesse Temple, Brad Katinas, Diane Schuler and Jay Schuler. Moxie Firecracker Films, 2011. *Youtube*. Web. 25 September 2016.

Wasserman, Jerry. Introduction. *The Shape of a Girl/Jewel*. By Joan MacLeod. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2002. Print.

Wong, Gina, and Nicole Letourneau. “Mothers Who Think About Hurting Their Babies Need Help Not Judgment.” *HuffingtonPost.ca*. The Huffington Post, 28 Mar. 2018. Web. 29 Mar. 2018.

APPENDIX A: WHEN SHE WAS GOOD

by Meredith Taylor-Parry

Characters

SAMANTHA (30) desires more than anything to be a good mother but her deepest fear, the one she cannot share, is that she has the capacity to be a horrible one.

MARY (34) is a fictional character inspired by the driver responsible for one of the most tragic accidents in New York State history. After driving almost 2 miles in the wrong direction on the Taconic Parkway in July 2009, Diane Schuler caused a collision that killed seven people and herself; four of them young children. Many assumed that Diane, described as the perfect mother by all who knew her, must have experienced a medical event that afternoon. When toxicology reports were later released she was found to have the equivalent of 10 drinks as well as THC in her system. Her husband remains in denial and asserts that Diane did not drink.

RICHARD (31) is on top of the world. He has a beautiful wife, a new job, a new baby and they've just moved into the neighbourhood of his choice. Of course the added responsibilities will take some adjusting to but he is sure Samantha will get back to her old self once the baby blues pass.

CHRISTINE (39) is a psychic. She didn't set out to be a con artist but her supernatural skills aren't always reliable and the job requires her to give answers whether she is receiving them or not. She is quite unprepared to meet Mary.

PHYLLIS (54) is looking forward to spending time with her son's new baby and is determined not to be a meddling mother in law. She just wants to be helpful.

CELLO/BABY The Cellist will represent SAMANTHA'S inner voice and the BABY with improvised sounds. The Cellist is also responsible for MARY'S theme and provides music in response to the action of the scene, as they tell the story alongside SAMANTHA. There is no score for the individual pieces, the musician is asked to provide their own music.

Synopsis

Samantha, a formerly gifted musician, is determined to be a good mother but life with a newborn is nothing like how she imagined. Ashamed at intrusive thoughts of harming her baby she seeks help from a medium. Perhaps the answers she is looking for lie with the worst mother of all.

Setting

The play takes place in 2011 over several weeks in Samantha's and Richard's new home in a lovely neighbourhood in the suburbs of Toronto, a nearby cafe and Christine's apartment.

ACT I

Scene 1

Light reveals a CELLO and a chair on a small platform USL. A musician enters, acknowledges the audience and bows. They sit down, pick up the CELLO and begin to play something pretty. SAMANTHA enters carrying a glass of wine and sits in a light DSR. The light spreads to reveal a bathtub that she leans against to listen. She is in her bathroom at home, a place of refuge. There is a portable baby bassinet and a bottle of wine at her feet, along with a few candles and a lighter. The musician brings the tune neatly to an end and SAMANTHA lifts her glass to the musician then the audience.

SAMANTHA

Bottoms up. Most expensive thing about motherhood, all the wine you have to drink.

CELLO

...

The CELLO represents the sound of SAMANTHA's inner critic; her thoughts. All artists have one and SAMANTHA is an artist, even if she considers herself a failed one. This inner voice is not another version of herself, it has its own personality. SAMANTHA and the CELLIST should look at each other occasionally when they have a "conversation", just enough to help the audience understand that they are addressing each other.

(Note to the Musician: ? - denotes a question, ! - an expression of alarm or maybe anger, ... - could be anything, use the text to help you and improvise.)

SAMANTHA

It is so funny.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

Well I think it's funny and that's all that matters because I'm the one telling this story not you.

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

No need to get pissy.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

Yes you are. You're pissy because I don't listen to you anymore.

CELLO

!

*MARY enters in her work blazer, DSL. The CELLO plays a different tune this time. A mournful one, like a funeral march. It is a short "theme" that is played **every time** MARY enters. She sits at a table DSL that doubles for her work desk in its own spotlight. She takes a laptop out of her briefcase and places it on the table. She opens it and begins to work.*

SAMANTHA

It's hard to comprehend that something awful could be happening in the same moment that you are just, going about your day, isn't it? Your world remains completely ordinary and someone else's just changed forever. You have no consciousness of the pain and suffering that people you don't know and have never met are experiencing in this very moment. Thousands of tragedies, countless tears, all the horrific sounds of grief ... but you aren't aware.

CELLO

?

SAMANTHA

The story needs some background. I'm showing her at work.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

This is how I imagined her.

(to the audience)

She was VP of sales, for a company you never heard of, but she was very competent. She worked full-time and had 2 little kids!

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

Okay, OKAY. I just wanted to point out that she was good at what she did.

(she watches Mary)

But what really took hold of me, was the fact that she was such a good mother.

BABY

!

The CELLO is also used to create the sound of the baby. It does not have to sound exactly like a baby, rather it should embody the the various noises a baby makes: crying, fussing, burping etc. It should not be a pleasant sound; higher pitched.

(!!! - denotes crying, ! - might be a fussy noise ... - just a sound.)

SAMANTHA

Right on cue. Can't tell this story without you.

Lights down on MARY. She exits as SAMANTHA awkwardly picks up a baby from the bassinet and puts it in a sling she is wearing.

SAMANTHA

This is Rachel, she is probably the most important character but she never says a word.

BABY

!

SAMANTHA

Shhhh. Shhhh. A tiny little girl with a great big voice.

CHRISTINE enters DSL. She brings a chair with her and sits at the DSL table with her coffee and a deck of cards, the space is now the outdoor patio of a small cafe. She sits to play solitaire. Lights dim on her living room as SAMANTHA walks slowly towards CHRISTINE then stands a few feet away and sways her body in the familiar dance that all Mommies do to soothe their babies.

SAMANTHA

(singing softly)

*There was a little girl and she had a little curl,
right in the middle of her forehead....*

CHRISTINE

(smiles)

How old?

SAMANTHA

Four weeks yesterday.

CHRISTINE

What? You look fantastic!

SAMANTHA

Not really but thank you!

(she hums then sings again)

She was very, very good... and when she was bad...

CHRISTINE looks up.

SAMANTHA

Sorry, I'm a terrible singer. It calms her.

CHRISTINE

That's because it relaxes you.

SAMANTHA

If I get anymore relaxed I'll fall asleep right here.

CHRISTINE

I remember those days. Lots a sleepless nights.

SAMANTHA

Oh yeah.

Silence.

SAMANTHA

I wish I could think of a better song. It was playing in the waiting room yesterday when we went for our check-up. Talk about the soundtrack to hell: crying babies and Mother Goose.

CHRISTINE laughs.

SAMANTHA

Do you know if there's a drugstore around here?

CHRISTINE

There's a Shoppers about 4 blocks that way. That's the closest one.

SAMANTHA

Thanks. We just moved here so I don't know my way around yet.

CHRISTINE

Welcome! It's a great neighbourhood! I've been here for 2 years. Just a few blocks over.

SAMANTHA

Oh really? It's great.

CHRISTINE

It is you're going to love it.

SAMANTHA

(starts to move on)

Well, I should get moving, she's going to want to eat soon.

CHRISTINE

I'm Christine.
Nice meeting you.

SAMANTHA

Samantha, thanks again!

SAMANTHA walks across the stage and CHRISTINE watches her. Just as SAMANTHA is about to exit, CHRISTINE jumps up abruptly and hurries to catch up with her.

CHRISTINE

Samantha?

SAMANTHA turns back and smiles.

CHRISTINE

Look I don't want to be like too pushy or come off as some kind of a crazy person, but I'm a medium.

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

Oh.

CHRISTINE

That's not all I do. I'm psychic too so I read tea leaves, tarot cards that kind of stuff.

CELLO

!!

CHRISTINE

I can see things that most people can't. Like that kid in the movie... (funny voice) "I see dead people."

CHRISTINE chuckles. SAMANTHA doesn't respond.

CHRISTINE

Anyways, I don't want to bug you so if you aren't interested that's okay, but you have like A TON of spirits around you.

CHRISTINE pauses to take in the number of spirits around SAMANTHA. The CELLO plays a creepy theme. SAMANTHA takes a step back.

Just thought you should know.

SAMANTHA

Okay.

CHRISTINE

Here's my card. If you're interested in making contact with someone who's passed.

Anyway, see ya around! And welcome to the hood!

SAMANTHA

Thanks.

CHRISTINE exits. SAMANTHA looks at the business card in her hand.

SAMANTHA

I'm not thinking what you think I am. I didn't think she was crazy, I liked her right away.

CELLO

?

SAMANTHA

And I wondered if one of those spirits around me might be Mary.

Lights dim. We can hear the sound of running water for a moment.

Scene 2

Lights up on SAMANTHA in the living room of her house USC. There is comfortable reading chair CS with a side table near by. Joining the chair are a few piles of boxes that are placed on the stage with no visible organization to them. These things have not yet found their place in what is to be the main living area of Samantha and Richard's new home. Yet the space has a kind of coziness to it, an echo of what their happy family

life could have been. She is pacing with the baby who fusses steadily. RICHARD enters.

BABY

(continue until SAMANTHA is seated)

!!

SAMANTHA

It's about time.

RICHARD

Hi honey, I'm home.

SAMANTHA

Take her, I've been doing this for hours.

SAMANTHA hands the baby off to Richard and exits to the kitchen.

RICHARD

(cuddling Rachel)

Hello there. What's wrong?

(called out to SAMANTHA offstage)

Is she hungry?

SAMANTHA

(off)

Well if she is she has a funny way of showing it. I've been trying to feed her for 2 hours.

RICHARD

Is she wet?

(to baby)

Are you wet?

Richard feels in the baby's diaper, then cuddles and bounces her. The baby begins to quiet. SAMANTHA enters with a glass of wine. She collapses in the chair. RICHARD walks the baby who gradually becomes silent.

SAMANTHA

What are you a wizard?

RICHARD

I'm the baby whisperer.

SAMANTHA bursts into tears.

RICHARD

Aw shit, I was kidding.

Honey? Are you okay?

He tries to comfort her while holding the baby at the same time.

SAMANTHA

Nooooo.

RICHARD

What can I do?

SAMANTHA

I don't knooooow.

RICHARD

Have you eaten anything?

SAMANTHA

(wipes her eyes and nose on her sleeve)

Okay, I'm okay I'm okay. Just breathe.

RICHARD

You're exhausted.

SAMANTHA

Stop it. Don't be nice, it makes me cry.

Starts to cry again.

RICHARD

Awww...maybe it's the baby blues.

SAMANTHA

I don't know what she wants Richard! She seems hungry and then I try to latch her on and she gets angry.

Baby starts to fuss, right on cue.

BABY

!!

SAMANTHA

She MUST be hungry.

RICHARD

Should we try a bottle?

SAMANTHA

NO.

She stands and takes the baby from him.

RICHARD

Why not?

SAMANTHA

It interferes with breast feeding. Remember what the La Leche lady said? Nipple confusion!

RICHARD

Sounds more like something an 8th grade boy would suffer from than a baby.

SAMANTHA

How is this funny Richard?

RICHARD

That was a little funny...wasn't it?

SAMANTHA

Hand me that pillow.

He does. She tries again to nurse the baby.

RICHARD hovers.

RICHARD

(tentative)

I think if you can just bring her chin up a tiny bit-

SAMANTHA

SERIOUSLY?

RICHARD

I'm trying to help!

SAMANTHA

It's annoying when you lurk around and tell me what I'm doing wrong. If you want to help me, grow a pair of TITS and feed her yourself!!

Beat.

RICHARD

Okay, I'll leave you to it.

He exits to the kitchen.

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

And you are NOT my marriage counsellor.

SAMANTHA switches the baby to the burping position and pats her back. RICHARD comes back after a minute with a glass of wine.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

Sorry.

RICHARD

It's okay.

SAMANTHA

Maybe she doesn't like the taste of my milk.

RICHARD

No way.

Is that possible?

SAMANTHA

I don't know.

Maybe there's not enough of it.

RICHARD

How do you know? What did Jane say?

SAMANTHA

She said it's hard to tell sometimes if she's swallowing or just sucking.

And look.

She pulls out her shirt and looks down the front.
Do these look big enough to you?

RICHARD takes a glance down her shirt.

RICHARD

What's big enough?

SAMANTHA

Remember when they looked like footballs? They don't look that big to me anymore.

RICHARD

They aren't exactly small.

SAMANTHA

Maybe I should start pumping...

RICHARD

Why don't you call Jane?

SAMANTHA

I don't want to call her. I've called her three times already. Could you get the pump?

RICHARD

Now?

SAMANTHA

You can hold her while I pump.

RICHARD

Where is it?

SAMANTHA

God knows. One of the boxes in the spare room?

RICHARD

Are you serious?

SAMANTHA

Haven't exactly had time to unpack!

RICHARD

Okay, okay ... I'll go look.

He exits. SAMANTHA gets up and walks and jiggles the baby. MARY enters in pjs with a bowl of popcorn and a remote control. The CELLO plays her theme. She curls up in the chair she has pulled DS and points the remote out to the audience. Cool blue lights flicker on her face.

SAMANTHA

How long did you breastfeed Mary? You had to go back to work didn't you. I bet you pumped and brought the little bottles home to your babies. I don't even have to work and I still can't feed my baby. It is my sole responsibility and I'm completely incompetent.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

(angrily)

She was a GOOD MOTHER. I don't care what anyone says.

CELLO

!!

SAMANTHA

Does that erase everything she ever did before? If you put everything she ever did in her life that was good on a giant scale...like the ancient Egyptians

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)
did...if you balanced all that good against a single
mistake?

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA
But maybe it was just that ... a horrible mistake!

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA
Oh shut up.

BABY

!

SAMANTHA sits and tries to latch the baby on.

SAMANTHA
Come on, it's right here. You can do it.

BABY

!!

SAMANTHA
JESUS!

*RICHARD enters carrying a box. Lights down on
MARY.*

RICHARD

It was right on top.

He sets a box on the floor and takes the baby.
Come on sweet pea. Let's go for a walk.

RICHARD exits

*SAMANTHA pulls a breast pump out of the box. As
soon as she switches it on we can hear the
annoying hum of the suction rhythm and the bottle
falls off the bottom. She attaches it again and
holds the suction part up to her breast. She
watches and waits.*

SAMANTHA

Richard?

She digs for the directions, sits on the floor and reads them while holding the suction to her breast.

It doesn't work. It's brand new and it's broken.

RICHARD!

RICHARD

(entering quickly)

SHHHHHHHH! I got her down in her crib.

SAMANTHA

(hushed)

How did you do it?

RICHARD

I just, put her down. What is it?

SAMANTHA

Just put her down?

RICHARD

She was tired.

SAMANTHA

How did you learn how to do this shit?

RICHARD

She was tired. Is it working?

SAMANTHA

No, am I doing it right?

RICHARD

(chuckles)

You're asking me like I should know.

SAMANTHA

Well you know how to do everything else.

RICHARD comes over and sits down near her. He looks at the pump and then reads the directions.

RICHARD

It looks right to me.

SAMANTHA

There's nothing coming out!

RICHARD

Nothing?

They both watch the pump for a moment more. With focused concentration...willing the milk to come out.

SAMANTHA

Look! LOOK!

RICHARD

I saw it.

SAMANTHA

Did you see that?

RICHARD

I saw it.

SAMANTHA

It was a drop!

RICHARD

There you go.

SAMANTHA

It's definitely dripping.

RICHARD

See?

You just need to be patient with yourself.

Longer pause.

SAMANTHA

Oh my GOD, it's so slow!

RICHARD

It's steady though, it's a steady drip.

SAMANTHA

This is going to take forever. What time is it?

RICHARD

8:30. Did you eat anything? I could get you something.

SAMANTHA

I had toast. You?

RICHARD

I had a bite with Pete after work.

SAMANTHA

Asshole.

RICHARD

It was a working dinner! And the calamari was chewy.

Silence.

SAMANTHA

This is not how I pictured it would be.

RICHARD

I know.

SAMANTHA

She won't go to sleep like that for me. I can't make it to the door of her room and she's already crying again.

RICHARD

She does that to me too.

SAMANTHA

But she's like that *all day*. I feed her and she barfs it up. So I keep trying to feed her cause I think she's still got to be hungry and she gets mad at me.

RICHARD

That's ridiculous. She's not mad at you.

SAMANTHA

I piss her off because I don't know what I'm doing.

RICHARD

Sure you do.

SAMANTHA

Look.

She turns off the plug and unfastens the pump from her breast, holding up the bottle so that RICHARD can see the negligible amount inside.

I suck.

RICHARD

You suck a little at pumping.

SAMANTHA

Thanks.

RICHARD

I'm joking. It was a *pun*.

SAMANTHA

Ha ha.

RICHARD

You are a fantastic mom.

SAMANTHA

Right. The apple never falls far from the tree.

RICHARD

You are NOT your mother. You aren't anything like your mother.

SAMANTHA

I don't know about that. She used to tell me how colicky *I* was. How I wouldn't settle until Dad came home, sound familiar?

RICHARD

She was probably pissed that she couldn't rehearse for 12 hours a day and it was all your fault.

SAMANTHA

At least there's no fear of that.

RICHARD

Come on. You would never be that self-absorbed. Even if you were playing right now. I KNOW you wouldn't. You're sweet and kind and loving. And you are going to be a boss at this.

Beat.

SAMANTHA begins to laugh.

RICHARD

What?

SAMANTHA

(laughs harder)

I thought I was going to be an earth mother...all curled up with the baby in a fluffy bed-cocoon for months. Snuggling the days away and then preparing beautiful organic meals for us with her strapped to my chest.

RICHARD

(laughing)

Jesus, you're losing it.

They laugh for a moment. When they are through SAMANTHA looks at RICHARD.

SAMANTHA

Do I look the same to you?

RICHARD

What?

SAMANTHA

Look at me.

He does.

Well?

RICHARD

You look...fine! You look tired.

SAMANTHA

Is my face the same?

RICHARD

Yes. You have the same face.

SAMANTHA

I think I look different.

RICHARD

You're just tired.

SAMANTHA

Maybe.

RICHARD

I can't keep my eyes open.

(yawns)

Why don't you come to bed?

SAMANTHA

I will.

RICHARD yawns again.

SAMANTHA

Go.

RICHARD

No way!

SAMANTHA

I'll pump better if you aren't watching me. Just give me ten minutes and pass me my phone.

He hands her the phone. Beat.

RICHARD

Please come to bed, I don't want to be an asshole.

SAMANTHA

I assure you, you are not being an asshole. Except when you go for dinner with Pete you're not an asshole. I'm right behind you.

RICHARD

Okay. I'm going. I'll bring her to you when she wakes up.

SAMANTHA

That would be lovely. Now go.

RICHARD exits. Lights up on MARY who has fallen asleep in front of the TV. SAMANTHA watches her thoughtfully.

SAMANTHA

Richard tries.

Mary barely saw her husband. She worked full-time and did everything else. I think he was a bit of a prick actually.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

No, I *don't* tell him everything. He's a problem solver, Christ he's a man! He'll insist I see someone.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

Look I am barely hanging on here! I have no desire to open old wounds, let alone new shit. Besides we can't afford it right now...even if we could when would I have the time to find a therapist? They'd probably want to pump me full of anti-depressants and that would be the end of breast feeding.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

I do have a plan.

She pulls Christine's card out and dials a number on the phone.

Oh hi. It's Samantha here, from the coffee shop?

I am interested. When can we meet?

Scene 3

Lights dim. When they rise, MARY is gone. Cafe table and chairs DSL are now part of CHRISTINE'S kitchen and an additional piece of furniture and/or decor denotes this new space as CHRISTINE'S apartment. Perhaps a side table with assorted knick knacks or a simple floor lamp and a rug. The space needs to contain an old radio and some candles. CHRISTINE sits at the table, listening to music and playing solitaire with a deck of cards.

We hear a knock at the door. She gets up and ushers SAMANTHA in.

CHRISTINE

Come on in!

SAMANTHA

Hi.

CHRISTINE

I'm so happy you called.

SAMANTHA

Thanks for inviting me. You have NO idea how good it is to get out of the house.

CHRISTINE

This your first one?

SAMANTHA

Yes.

CHRISTINE

Thought so. Bet you could use a drink.

SAMANTHA

Oh, maybe. Are you having anything?

CHRISTINE

It depends on how the night goes, I like to wait and see.

SAMANTHA

That sounds promising.

CHRISTINE

I never make any promises, try not to anyway. Have a seat.

CHRISTINE lights the candles.

SAMANTHA

Do you have kids?

CHRISTINE

One, he's all grown up now. Time flies. These are the best years so enjoy them.

SAMANTHA

That's what everyone says.

CHRISTINE

So you just moved here?

SAMANTHA

We did. For Rich's new job.

CHRISTINE

You're married?

SAMANTHA

Five years.

CHRISTINE

What does he do?

SAMANTHA

Advertising. It's a promotion.

I decided to stay home with the baby.

CHRISTINE

What do you do?

SAMANTHA

I'm a musician. Used to be.

CHRISTINE

What do you play?

SAMANTHA

The cello.

CHRISTINE

Oh, that's nice.

SAMANTHA

I used to play the cello, but I got injured. It's a long story. Anyway with the move and the baby - this is a new beginning for us. We love the neighbourhood.

CHRISTINE

That's a lot on your plate.

SAMANTHA

Yes well, it's okay. We love the neighbourhood.

Christine smiles. Beat.

SAMANTHA

So how does this work?

CHRISTINE

Are you nervous?

SAMANTHA

A little.

CHRISTINE

Well first we have make the sacrificial offering...

CELLO

!

Silence.

CHRISTINE

(laughing)

I'm kidding, bad joke! Look these things are usually a lot more boring than you could imagine. You would think if someone was going to come all the way from the other side to say their piece that they'd have something important to say! Usually they just talk about what they see you doing in your life. They tell you things you already know. Like, they mention you went on vacation or tell you that the rose bush in your yard looks nice.

SAMANTHA

Why make the effort then?

CHRISTINE

Maybe to remember. Maybe they miss being alive.

SAMANTHA

Do you ever get bad news?

CHRISTINE

Not usually. Don't worry.

SAMANTHA

I'm not having much luck with that lately.

CHRISTINE

Oh did I mention my fee? I think I forgot.

SAMANTHA

Oh...

CHRISTINE

Sorry.

SAMANTHA

That's okay. What do you-

CHRISTINE

Seventy-five.

The first session is always discounted...just for new clients.

SAMANTHA

I didn't bring cash.

CHRISTINE

That's okay, you can pay me next time I see you.

But now, let's just take a minute. Close your eyes.

She closes her eyes and breathes deeply, in and ouuuuuut.

CHRISTINE

Feel the chair supporting your weight and the floor supporting your feet. Let mother earth hold you.

SAMANTHA suppresses an awful urge to giggle.

Pause. The radio turns to static, then cuts out.

MARY enters and stands near SAMANTHA. The CELLO begins to play the mournful tune, after a moment they change to something decidedly creepy sounding that can intensify as the scene continues.

Another moment goes by. CHRISTINE takes a slow breath, in and out.

CHRISTINE

Hello.

MARY

Hello yourself.

CHRISTINE

(hissed)

Do you know someone named Mary who passed?

SAMANTHA

Do I *know* her?

CHRISTINE

Think hard. This isn't the time to hold back.

SAMANTHA

I...I'm...

CHRISTINE

There must be a connection, there always is.

MARY

I'd like to talk to her in private. Without your meddling.

CHRISTINE

I'm just a conduit.

MARY

You're a crook.

CHRISTINE

Excuse me?

SAMANTHA

I am really freaking out right now.

MARY

You used to scam people.

CHRISTINE

I used to read tarot-

MARY

You made it up.

CHRISTINE

It isn't an exact science. Sometimes you have to improvise.

SAMANTHA

What's happening?

MARY

Bullshit. You took their money.

CHRISTINE

Look, sometimes people need someone to listen and help them figure things out.

(hissed)

Who are you?

MARY

None of your business.

CHRISTINE takes a moment to compose herself.

CHRISTINE

Mary, thank you for coming. Is there something we can do for you?

MARY

You guys summoned me. What does she want?

CHRISTINE

What do you want me to ask her?

Pause.

CHRISTINE

Samantha?

SAMANTHA

Me?

CHRISTINE

She wants to know if you have anything to say to her.

SAMANTHA

I don't know.../

MARY

Why did she want to talk to me?

CHRISTINE

Okay! One at a time! Samantha, why did you come here tonight?

SAMANTHA

I was ... curious.

MARY

That is a load of shit, and she knows it.

CHRISTINE

Interesting, so Mary thinks you may have had other reasons.

MARY

She has a question for me.

CHRISTINE

Do you have a question for Mary?

SAMANTHA

I....

MARY

Tell her I see her talking to herself.

CHRISTINE

She saw you talking to your yourself -

MARY

I know all her secrets.

CHRISTINE

She says she knows all your secrets.

Musician stops playing. MARY blows out the candles, she exits. SAMANTHA stands up abruptly knocking her chair to the floor. CHRISTINE climbs under the table.

CHRISTINE

(tentative)

Mary?

Are you there? Mary?

I think she left.

SAMANTHA

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

CHRISTINE

Calm down.

SAMANTHA

Is this some kind of joke?

CHRISTINE

Really? You have just had a supernatural experience! It can be overwhelming... just breathe. You're okay. We're okay.

Christine breathes deeply to calm herself down.

SAMANTHA

I don't know if I believe you.

CHRISTINE

Come on. I'm not that good an actor. Did you see the candles for Christ sake?

SAMANTHA

Yes.

CHRISTINE

My hands are shaking!

I need a drink. You?

SAMANTHA

Yes.

CHRISTINE crawls out from under the table carefully. She is still spooked. She produces a bottle of scotch.

CHRISTINE

Hope this is okay, it's all I keep in the house.

The radio comes on by itself making them both jump. It is not static anymore but rather a piano: playing MARY'S mournful tune. CHRISTINE pours a drink for each of them with difficulty and turns off the radio. They drink.

SAMANTHA

How long have you been doing this?

CHRISTINE pours another shot for each of them and they pound it back.

CHRISTINE

For a while.

Lights dim. Samantha rises, moves back to her spotlight DSR and pours more wine. CHRISTINE exits.

CELLO

?

SAMANTHA

Of course I knew who she was. I lied. Christine was obviously full of shit too. Mary was the only one being honest.

She wanders into the living area. Lights up as she sits in the chair, exhausted.

I was always a big fat fucking chicken.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

(defensive)

Let me tell you something, it is one thing to want to meet a ghost and another thing ENTIRELY to actually sit in the same room with one. I remember thinking *I'm never doing that again.*

The musician sets the instrument down and gets up as if to leave.

SAMANTHA

Oh here we go.

The musician continues to exit.

SAMANTHA

I'm telling the truth! I was going to try to let it go!

The musician is almost offstage and SAMANTHA is on her feet.

SAMANTHA

ALRIGHT!

The musician halts.

SAMANTHA

You're right. I wasn't letting anything go.

The musician turns to look at her.

SAMANTHA

I told myself that I was, then I blamed it on the dream. But it wasn't the dream it was me. I didn't want to let Mary go.

Beat. The musician returns to the platform, sits and picks up the CELLO. They play under SAM's telling of the dream.

RICHARD enters and stands behind SAMANTHA listening.

SAMANTHA

The Dream. The beginning was so ... peaceful. I was standing on the top of a mountain peak but it wasn't cold at all, it was beautiful. Like a spring day with just a hint of breeze, smell of rain in the air. It was lovely.

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

I had Rachel in my arms and I looked down at her sweet little face.... then I lifted her up over my head and hurled her into the blue.

RICHARD

Jesus Sam.

SAMANTHA

I can't stop thinking about it.

RICHARD

It was just a dream

SAMANTHA

I was smiling.

RICHARD

Come on it was just a dream!

BABY

!

RICHARD

I'll get her.

RICHARD exits.

SAMANTHA

I shouldn't be dreaming at all because I don't sleep.

He sleeps and I listen. That's my job.

RICHARD

(off)

Sam! She smiled at me Sam! You should see this she's so cute!!

SAMANTHA

I listen to the monitor to make sure the baby is breathing because if I don't listen, she'll stop.

RICHARD returns with the baby. Lights down on Mary.

RICHARD

Aww she stopped. Come on, smile for mommy!

He passes her to SAMANTHA to breastfeed.

RICHARD

I was just changing her and she looked right at me and smiled.

SAMANTHA

Sometimes you make it hurt so much Rich.

RICHARD

What?

SAMANTHA

Nothing. I just loved you.

RICHARD

I love you too.

*Silence. SAMANTHA tries to get the baby to latch.
RICHARD watches lovingly over her shoulder.*

RICHARD

You going to bathe her today?

SAMANTHA

I can't find the baby bath.

RICHARD

Use the tub.

SAMANTHA

No. She gets too slippery.

RICHARD

Just don't put too much water in.

SAMANTHA

She's fine.

RICHARD

She smells like cheese.

SAMANTHA

No she does not!

RICHARD

Couldn't you put her in the kitchen sink?

SAMANTHA

She gets slippery! I might drop her.

RICHARD

You aren't going to drop her.

SAMANTHA

You give her a bath. When you get home? Please Rich?

RICHARD

I might be late tonight.

SAMANTHA

WHAT?

RICHARD

I told you yesterday, we're meeting with a new client and I-

SAMANTHA

I NEED you home by five. Do you realize how hard it is to be alone until then?

RICHARD

I told you yesterday!

SAMANTHA

Why did we have a baby if you didn't want to take care of one? Tell me that.

Pause. He is stung.

RICHARD

That was really shitty.

SAMANTHA

I'm sorry. Just - go to work.

He puts on a coat and begins to exit then stops.

RICHARD

Why don't you look for a baby group? There's probably one at the library. Ask at the library.

SAMANTHA

Maybe.

RICHARD

Call Jennifer.

SAMANTHA

Why don't you go to work and stop telling me what to do?

Silence.

RICHARD

I'll try for five. I really will.

RICHARD exits. SAM puts the sleeping baby in the bassinet. There is a soft knocking. SAM ushers CHRISTINE into the living room from the other side.

CHRISTINE

I didn't expect to hear from you so soon.

SAMANTHA

I want to do it again.

CHRISTINE

What? Really?

SAMANTHA

I think maybe she has a message for me. Isn't that possible? Maybe that's why she got in touch.

CHRISTINE

(she digs in her bag)

Look why don't we do some Tarot, I brought my-

SAMANTHA

I don't want to do Tarot, I want to talk to Mary.

CHRISTINE

(eyes Samantha coolly)

Why, do you know her?

Silence.

SAMANTHA

No...not personally.

CHRISTINE

Who is she?

SAMANTHA

I don't know.

CHRISTINE

Look if I'm going to do this, I need to know what is going on!

Silence.

CHRISTINE

(starts to exit)

Okay, see ya around.

SAMANTHA

No! Please don't go.

*SAMANTHA motions for CHRISTINE to sit in the chair
SAM sits on a box.*

SAMANTHA

There was a woman...an ordinary mom. A few years ago she was involved in a terrible car accident and a lot of people died. Children died. She did too.

CHRISTINE

What happened?

SAMANTHA

She was driving the wrong way on the highway. It was a head on collision. I think the spirit we contacted is her.

Silence. Christine pulls an e-cigarette out of her purse and puts it back.

CHRISTINE

Why do you think that?

SAMANTHA

It's hard to explain. I think about her a lot. I've always wondered what happened to her that day, *why* she was driving the wrong way.

CHRISTINE looks her over for a minute.

CHRISTINE

Do you mind if I vape?

SAMANTHA

I have a baby! YES I mind.

CHRISTINE

Fair enough.

(pops a piece of gum out of a blister pack and chews it, thinking)

Don't take this the wrong way, but I can't figure you out.

SAMANTHA

Look, I know it sounds unusual.

CHRISTINE

Unusual? Most people I meet want to talk to their dead grandparents, parents...or God forbid their dead children. That's the kind of people I get. Then this one lady calls me up wants me to try and talk to her dead cat. That was unusual, this is really weird.

SAMANTHA

I just have a feeling that it's her.

CHRISTINE
Mary.

SAMANTHA
Yes.

CHRISTINE
And you don't know her and you've never met her.

SAMANTHA
No, but she's on my mind...often.

CHRISTINE
Why?

Beat.

SAMANTHA
It was a such a horrible accident. I want to know what happened to her.

She was my age. She had two little kids!

CHRISTINE just looks at her.

SAMANTHA
And I think she's trying to warn me.

CHRISTINE
Warn you?

SAMANTHA
What if something bad is going to happen and she is trying to tell me?

CHRISTINE
Why?

SAMANTHA
I don't know. Maybe she's looking for forgiveness.

CHRISTINE
I guess, but why you?

SAMANTHA
Would you do it for me if I paid you extra?

CHRISTINE
Like how much extra?

SAMANTHA
Double what you charged me last time.

CHRISTINE looks at her.

SAMANTHA

Triple. You name the price.

CHRISTINE

I'll have to go away and think about it.

SAMANTHA

Why? I want to do it now.

CHRISTINE

I have to think. I can't do it in the daytime anyway.

SAMANTHA

No you have to do it now! I can't get away tonight, my husband is working late.

CHRISTINE

What does he think about this?

SAMANTHA

He's fine with it.

*Christine gets up to
leave.*

CHRISTINE

Look I have to go, but I'll call you.

SAMANTHA

(pleading)

I have to talk to her Christine. Something awful is going to happen if I don't. I have a bad feeling.

CHRISTINE

Me too.

CHRISTINE exits. Lights dim.

Scene 4

When lights come up they are on SAMANTHA. She walks with the baby. There is a wine glass nearby.

SAMANTHA

(beaming)

Today I walked with Rachel on the overpass.

Ta da!

I was just an ordinary mom pushing my baby in her stroller along the handy pedestrian bridge to go to the park. Usually I get to the edge of the bridge and I

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

have to turn back, because I imagine letting the stroller dangle over the edge with my baby in it.

CELLO

?

SAMANTHA

BUT, today was different. I got to the other side! It felt like I was starting over. A fresh start. I walked home and everything looked shiny, brand new...and I'm thinking *maybe you can do this Sam. Maybe Rich is right.*

RICHARD enters and SAMANTHA immediately puts the baby in his arms and kisses him hard.

RICHARD

Hi there.

They kiss again.

RICHARD

I'm sorry I'm late, but don't be mad because I brought you a surprise.

SAMANTHA

(smiling)

I hope it's wine, we're out.

PHYLLIS enters and goes straight to SAMANTHA. She is dressed well, expensive but comfortable for travelling. Phyllis has impeccable taste but she is quite practical. She pulls a streamlined carry-on bag behind her.

PHYLLIS

(hugs her)

SURPRISE!

SAMANTHA

Phyllis! You're...here.

PHYLLIS

I took a week off. When Rich called I knew my conscience wouldn't be clear if I didn't drop everything. So I made a couple of calls and booked a flight.

SAMANTHA

You didn't have to-

PHYLLIS

Look it's end of term next week, my report cards are finished and I don't want to hear another word about it! I'm here now and that's all that matters. Now let me at that angel!

She goes to Richard and deftly scoops the baby out of his arms.

PHYLLIS

Oh my goodness. Look at you. Oh Rich look, she has your mouth. She is absolutely adorable. Oh I wish your father was here.

SAMANTHA

The bed in the spare room's not made up.

RICHARD

You sit, I'll do it.

RICHARD exits with PHYLLIS suitcase.

SAMANTHA

(drops into the chair)

Phyllis the house is such a mess. We haven't even started unpacking.

PHYLLIS

Stop it, stop it right now. I will not have you worrying about me, I'll get right back on that plane.

But now that I have you in my arms how could I ever leave you huh? You little angel straight from heaven!

Oh Samantha she's so cute, her pictures don't do her justice. She's such a good baby too, not a peep out of her.

SAMANTHA

She's exhausted, she didn't nap today. I couldn't settle her.

PHYLLIS

I don't believe it. You are just perfect aren't you? Are you breast feeding her? Does she get fussy after she eats?

SAMANTHA

Seems to...it's hard to get her to latch on.

PHYLLIS

It might be something in your milk. What did you eat today?

SAMANTHA

I had some toast...

PHYLLIS

That's all? You're not taking care of yourself! You should be drinking water with that wine. And don't eat spicy things, you want as plain as plain can be with a baby. They don't like spicy and they don't like caffeine. I know it's cruel but you have to watch your coffee intake.

SAMANTHA

I try to, I have tea instead.

PHYLLIS

Even with tea you have to be careful.

The baby starts to fuss. PHYLLIS switches her to her shoulder and pats her.

BABY

(Continue until she gets the bottle in her mouth.)

!!

PHYLLIS

There there there. Sweet little angel. What's wrong?

SAMANTHA

She might be hungry.

PHYLLIS

When did you feed her last?

SAMANTHA

I'm not sure, maybe...45 minutes an hour?

PHYLLIS

Forty-five minutes! She can't be hungry already Sam!

SAMANTHA

Maybe it was a little longer, I don't remember.

PHYLLIS

That's what I'm here for, I can help you keep track of things and we'll get her on a schedule.

SAMANTHA

We aren't feeding her on a schedule. The doctor told us to feed on demand.

PHYLLIS

You know what you get when you feed on demand? A demanding baby.

Shhh, shhhhh, shhhh. You're okay little one, Grandma's got you now.

RICHARD enters and goes to PHYLLIS and the baby.

RICHARD

What's wrong sweet pea? Grandma's here to spoil you rotten!

Did you tell Sam about the chariot?

Mom bought us a chariot. Top of the line.

SAMANTHA

Phyllis!! You didn't have-

PHYLLIS

Not a another word. It'll be delivered by the end of the week AND they are going to put it together for you.

SAMANTHA

Thank you very much.

PHYLLIS

It's my hostess gift for you letting me come stay with you and see my little angel. Shhh shhhh shhhh.

SAMANTHA

She didn't eat very much the last time I fed her.

RICHARD

Here mom, we'll see if she needs a top up.

RICHARD takes the baby from PHYLLIS and brings her to SAMANTHA. SAMANTHA lifts her shirt and struggles to latch the baby on while RICHARD and PHYLLIS stand on either side of her and watch.

SAMANTHA

You can do it. Come on, it's right here.

RICHARD

Maybe she's not hungry. Aren't you hungry sweet pea?

SAMANTHA

She seems hungry...but she just can't latch on.

PHYLLIS

Have you tried giving her a bottle?

RICHARD

Not yet.

PHYLLIS

Why not?! I used to bottle feed you! You slept like a dream from 2 weeks!!

SAMANTHA

We're worried that it might...confuse her.

PHYLLIS

What do you mean?

SAMANTHA

The Le Leche lady said she might stop breastfeeding.

PHYLLIS

Oh they are so militant about breast feeding these days. In my day it was the opposite, you didn't breast feed unless you were poor. And look at all the choice they have now! I picked up some formula last night that is good for sensitive tummies, let me get it.

SAMANTHA

That's okay-

PHYLLIS

I've got it in my bag. Where's my room Rich?

RICHARD

I'll show you.

They exit.

SAMANTHA

It's not necessary! She's fine!

BABY

!!!

SAMANTHA

Are you going to gang up on me too?

After a moment RICHARD and PHYLLIS enter. They both have a bottle of formula, she is carrying the rubber nipples.

PHYLLIS

See? You just put this right on the little bottle! Isn't that smart? I made sure to get the ones for

(MORE)

PHYLLIS (cont'd)
newborns...I'll just go wash these and warm this up. Is
the kitchen through here?

She exits.

RICHARD
Yup, thanks mom!

Look! This is awesome, you don't even need to mix it!

SAMANTHA
Rich.

RICHARD
No, just look at the label. Look! It says "Sensitive:
Specially formulated for gassy babies, bloating and
colic."

SAMANTHA
Richard, when did we decide we were going to do this?

RICHARD
What if she's hungry! Maybe she's not getting enough!

SAMANTHA
(faltering)
What if she stops breastfeeding?

RICHARD
You're catastrophizing! Here, give her to me and go lie
down! Mom and I can handle it. If she likes the bottle
I can get up with her tonight. (takes the baby)

Can you imagine what it would feel like to sleep
through the night?

SAMANTHA
(weakly)
But I don't want her not to breastfeed.

RICHARD
(sniffs baby)
Did she get a bath today?

PHYLLIS
(entering with a bottle of formula that
has a nipple on it)
All ready to go!

SAMANTHA
She might not take it.

PHYLLIS

You'll see, once she tastes that good stuff coming out, she'll know what to do. Here Richard, can I do it?

RICHARD passes the baby to PHYLLIS. She settles herself in the chair with the baby, shakes the bottle and tests the formula on her wrist.

PHYLLIS

Perfect! Now lets try this sweet angel.

RICHARD stands behind the chair so he can watch. SAMANTHA stands off to the side, marvelling at how efficiently they have taken over.

They are all quiet for a moment. The baby takes the bottle easily.

PHYLLIS

See! What did I tell you. Now I'll let her have about a third of it and then burp her. And you have to get them up high on your shoulder, don't be afraid to really smack that little back! That's the secret. Get those bubbles out and they sleep like angels. Filled right up to the top!

RICHARD

That was easy. Look Sam, she loves it.

SAMANTHA

I can see that.

RICHARD

This is fantastic. Now you can get some sleep hon.

PHYLLIS

Yes dear, why don't you go lie down. She's in good hands and now you can get some rest. That's what I'm here for.

(sniffs the baby)

She needs a bath Richard!

RICHARD

We can't find the little tub-

PHYLLIS

Nonsense, I'll use the kitchen sink. You go get it ready, she'll sleep like a lamb after her nice warm bath, won't you darling. Get it nice and warm Richard!

He exits.

SAMANTHA

I guess I'll-

PHYLLIS

Go to bed dear! Sleep well.

We'll take good care of her.

SAMANTHA trails out of the room defeatedly. Lights dim on PHYLLIS and RICHARD, they exit.

Scene 5

Lights up on CHRISTINE laying out Tarot cards on the table DSL and listening to country music on the radio. SAMANTHA enters and sits at the table with her. She watches for a moment, she shivers.

SAMANTHA

That wind is something else, I'm frozen.

CHRISTINE

Terrible.

See this card? You have a strong female figure in your past.

SAMANTHA

And my present.

CHRISTINE

Mother?

SAMANTHA

Mother in law.

CHRISTINE

Uh huh.

SAMANTHA

She loves to be "helpful."

CHRISTINE

I'm sure she does.

Did you say you were a musician?

SAMANTHA

I used to play the cello.

CHRISTINE

Right.

SAMANTHA

Phyllis isn't a witch or anything, she's just doing what Phyllis does...supervising.

I thought Rich had a little more faith in me.

CHRISTINE

It's here in this card, music. You don't play anymore?

SAMANTHA

I can't play anymore.

CHRISTINE

Why?

SAMANTHA

I fell off my bike and shattered my hand. I had surgery but it wasn't successful. I can't feel some of my fingers, so now I can't play. Not well enough to perform anyway.

CHRISTINE

Did you sue him?

SAMANTHA

Who?

CHRISTINE

The surgeon!

SAMANTHA

I couldn't. Permanent numbness was one of the possible outcomes. I thought it was worth the risk.

CHRISTINE

That's awful.

SAMANTHA

Well its not cancer. It's just my career.

CHRISTINE

I guess so....

SAMANTHA

How much longer do we have to do this?

CHRISTINE

I need some more information, before I decide whether I'm going to do this or not.

SAMANTHA

Is this good enough?

She digs in her purse and takes out a roll of bills, putting them in front of CHRISTINE who picks them up, slides off the elastic and counts them.

SAMANTHA
Well?

CHRISTINE
(pocketing the money)
Okay, listen up. I need you to do what I say here, alright? Complete cooperation or I call the whole thing off.

SAMANTHA
Fine. Just tell me what to do.

CHRISTINE rises and begins lighting the candles on the side table. She turns the radio down but not off and sits.

CHRISTINE
Okay, hands flat on the table like this.

SAMANTHA
Like this?

CHRISTINE
Just lightly. Now breathe deep, in through the nose out through the mouth. And keep your hands on the table. You might feel it move, but don't freak...keep at least your fingertips in contact with it.

SAMANTHA
Okay.

CHRISTINE
It might shake or tip or it could vibrate from the inside.

SAMANTHA
Why are we doing it this way?

CHRISTINE
They like it if you do things different. Ghosts get bored.

SAMANTHA
But if you can talk to her-

CHRISTINE
Shhhhhh. Just breathe. Put your energy *into* the table.

Silence.

CHRISTINE

Is there anyone there? If there is, you can move the table to let us know.

They sit quietly for a moment. CHRISTINE breathes deeply and gives SAMANTHA a look to tell her to do the same.

The table bumps. SAMANTHA jumps.

CHRISTINE

Mary? Is that you?

The table bumps twice.

CHRISTINE

Hello Mary. Samantha asked me to summon you here, she has some questions for you.

The tables bumps three times.

CHRISTINE

Does that bother you Mary?

The table bumps twice.

CHRISTINE

I told you this was a bad idea.

SAMANTHA

Why can't we do it the other way?

CHRISTINE

Look, it's not up to me how a spirit chooses to communicate.

SAMANTHA

But you picked the table! And how am I supposed to understand her answers?

CHRISTINE

It's usually one bump for no and two for yes.

SAMANTHA

But what if the questions I have aren't-

CHRISTINE

Why are you being such a pain in the ass? I didn't want to do this in the first place, so if you want to stop-

SAMANTHA

No, don't stop.

I can ask yes or no questions.

CHRISTINE

Then go ahead.

SAMANTHA

Mary, when you were alive did you have children?

The table bumps twice.

SAMANTHA

Did you have 2 children? A boy and a girl?

The table bumps twice.

SAMANTHA

And did both your children die in the same accident that you died in.

The table bumps once.

SAMANTHA

Mary, did you have a fight with your husband that day?

The table remains still.

CHRISTINE

Are you still here Mary? Are you here?

Silence.

CHRISTINE

Looks like she's gone.

SAMANTHA

Gone?

CHRISTINE

I think she's done talking to you.

They wait.

See? She's gone.

The radio makes a sound of loud static as the station fades out. CHRISTINE jumps out of her skin. She gets up to turn off the radio and pours herself a glass of scotch.

CHRISTINE

Do you want one?

SAMANTHA

How about my money back instead.

CHRISTINE

It's not my fault she didn't want to talk.

SAMANTHA

You must think I am a real idiot.

CHRISTINE

What?

SAMANTHA

This whole thing was a scam. I knew it. Anyone can make a table-

The table begins rattling madly. It is loud and erratic.

CHRISTINE

STOP IT!

SAMANTHA

I'm not doing anything!!

She pushes her chair away from the bumping, rattling table abruptly. Slowly the table begins to settle down, the bumping becomes more intermittent. Eventually, it is still.

CHRISTINE

(throwing the bills across the table)

Take it then. Just take it! I never wanted to do this anyway.

SAMANTHA backs away from the table.

CHRISTINE

You think I'm scamming you? Then take your money. Take all of it!

SAMANTHA

I don't want it, I want your help!

CHRISTINE

You don't know what you're playing with. I think you should leave now.

SAMANTHA walks slowly across the stage. Lights dim on CHRISTINE as she exits.

AS SAMANTHA enters the living room lights rise on PHYLLIS wearing the baby in the sling, humming and whispering to her.

PHYLLIS

(surprised whisper)
Sam! I didn't know you were back.

SAMANTHA

Is she sleeping?

PHYLLIS

Yes. Now, I know you like me to put her in her crib when she's asleep, but she is so comfortable. Look at her.

SAMANTHA comes closer.

PHYLLIS

I always let my babies sleep on me. They were so content. They like the movement.

SAMANTHA

I-

PHYLLIS

I know I know, you're the mom. Here, do you want to take her?

PHYLLIS takes a step toward SAMANTHA and SAMANTHA takes a step away from her.

PHYLLIS

Don't you want to put her in the crib?

SAMANTHA

No. She's asleep now.

PHYLLIS

Are you sure?

SAMANTHA

It's fine.

PHYLLIS

Okey dokey. Mommy's the boss.

PHYLLIS begins to exit.

SAMANTHA

Phyllis?

PHYLLIS

Yes dear?

SAMANTHA

What were you singing? To Rachel just now?

PHYLLIS

Oh that! It's a silly little nursery rhyme that's stuck in my head. You know that one (sings) "When she was good she was very very good and when she was bad she was horrid."

SAMANTHA

I know that one.

PHYLLIS

It's an awful rhyme, I don't know what possesses me to sing it. My mother used to sing it to me every single morning when she braided my hair. She pulled so hard it made my eyes water, but I wasn't allowed to say a word, believe me. She was a very severe woman.

Rachel you're so lucky to have such a nice Mommy. You have no idea. Now off to bed. Night night Mommy.

SAMANTHA

Good night.

Phyllis exits humming softly. SAMANTHA watches her and then stands alone on stage for a moment. Lights up on MARY as she enters and goes to her "desk" again. She takes her laptop out and sets it up, she is dressed for work. SAMANTHA watches her as the CELLO plays her theme.

After a moment she turns and walks swiftly to the bassinet and the candles where we first saw her, DSR. Her own light rises again as she lights the candles scattered around on the floor. She sits amidst them in a meditative pose and takes a deep breath. She closes her eyes and tries to concentrate.

SAMANTHA

Mary?

MARY

Yes.

SAMANTHA jumps. She turns to look at MARY who is already looking at her.

MARY

Now what do you want?

Lights down.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Lights up on SAMANTHA and MARY sitting in the same positions we left them in at the conclusion of Act One. The musician plays MARY's theme.

SAMANTHA

Is it really you?

MARY

What do you think.

SAMANTHA

I think I'm going insane.

MARY

Could be.

SAMANTHA

I can't believe you're here!

MARY

You *summoned* me.

SAMANTHA

But I have no idea what I'm doing!

MARY

The candles were a nice touch.

SAMANTHA

Thank you.

MARY

Incense would have been...elegant.

SAMANTHA

How does this work?

MARY

How the hell should I know?

SAMANTHA

I would think you should know more than I do. You're the one who's dead.

MARY

Well I don't. Dying doesn't give you any answers obviously.

SAMANTHA

That's disappointing.

MARY

Maybe for you. I could care less.

SAMANTHA

What is it like ... Where you are?

MARY

Repetitive.

She stands and addresses the musician as she removes her jacket.

MARY

HEY!

SAMANTHA

(frightened)

Aah!

MARY

Do you think we could maybe have something a little....livelier?

The MUSICIAN stops. They begin to play something livelier. MARY dances a few steps.

SAMANTHA

You scared me!

MARY

I used to love to dance. Dad said I used to dance everywhere I went. I danced from room to room. I danced down the aisles in the grocery store.

Then I grew up and stopped. Such a sad story. Every little girl's story is sad don't you think?

SAMANTHA

I'm not sure I-

MARY

Sure you do. Little girls grow up and get their periods. First the cramps then the blood then childbirth if you aren't careful. We got a raw deal don't you think?

SAMANTHA

I guess.

MARY

You have a little girl, what's her name?

SAMANTHA

Rachel Elizabeth.

MARY

Pretty. You gonna put her in dance lessons?

SAMANTHA

I don't know.

MARY

Bet you will. Bet you'll buy her the little pink tights and the tutu and the leotard. So damn cute.

SAMANTHA

Mary?

MARY

What?

SAMANTHA

Do you want to talk about...when you were alive?

MARY

No. I don't.

Now shut up for a minute. I need to concentrate.

MARY attempts a pirouette or equally difficult manouver.

Shit. I used to be able to do that. Did you take dance lessons?

SAMANTHA

No.

MARY

Well make sure your little girl does. Every little girl loves to dance.

The MUSICIAN stops and changes the music back to the mournful tune.

MARY

I'm so SICK of that MUSIC.

She exits. The MUSICIAN stops playing.

SAMANTHA

What music? Mary?

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)
Mary?

Lights dim.

Scene 2

Lights up on SAMANTHA's living room.

SAMANTHA enters carrying several sharp kitchen utensils and some dishtowels that she sets down one by one as she kneels on the floor. The unpacked boxes are gone save one that is sitting open near her marked NURSERY. There is a pail nearby. She speaks to the audience.

SAMANTHA
It was that easy. Who knew? I guess Christine isn't the only one who can talk to dead people.

She scrolls through her phone and chooses a playlist. Loud punk music plays through a speaker. The musician looks on disapprovingly.

CELLO
?

SAMANTHA
No. I don't really like this music but it expresses the darkness in my soul

CELLO
!

SAMANTHA
Well, deal with it.

She picks up a large kitchen knife from the pile of utensils. She carefully wraps it in a dish towel and pops it into the open box. She continues, this time with a large skewer. As she speaks she wraps more items and packs them up.

CELLO
?

SAMANTHA
The thought of them are keeping me up at night and I'm tired of worrying about what I might do.

CELLO
...

SAMANTHA

And how do you propose I tell them that I don't trust myself with sharp objects around the baby?

No one will notice that they're gone. No one is cooking anyway. Phyllis has been getting Rich to bring home gourmet food daily.

CELLO

...

SAMANTHA

I know, maybe it's not so bad having the old girl around after all. She gets all the meals, feeds the baby, changes the baby, washes the baby, rocks the baby to sleep. Now if she'd just have sex with Richard everyone would be happy.

CELLO

!!

SAMANTHA

You're right, that is offensive. Apparently you become crude when you are going crazy.

PHYLLIS enters with the baby. SAMANTHA swiftly bundles the whole pile of utensils together, drops them in the box and pushes it away from her.

PHYLLIS

I thought you were finished unpacking!

SAMANTHA

I'm just puttering. Putting some things away for later that we don't really need.

PHYLLIS

I thought you'd be sick of boxes by now. It smells like bleach.

SAMANTHA

Phyllis, are those-

PHYLLIS

I just cleaned the bathroom. I hope you didn't do the bathroom. Did you? Good Lord that music. Do you mind?

PHYLLIS switches the music off.

PHYLLIS

There, that's better.

SAMANTHA

Are those flip-flops new?

PHYLLIS

I got them a few weeks ago. Aren't they cute?

SAMANTHA

Have you worn them outside?

PHYLLIS

Once or twice.

SAMANTHA

Could you please disinfect them.

Pause.

CELLO

(amused)

...

SAMANTHA

The lysol spray's under the sink in the kitchen.

PHYLLIS

They look pretty clean to me

Shows SAMANTHA the bottom of her shoe.

SAMANTHA

You can't see germs.

Pause.

PHYLLIS

No. I suppose one can't.

SAMANTHA

I like to put the baby on the floor for her tummy time.

PHYLLIS

What the hell is tummy time?

SAMANTHA

You put them on their tummies. It makes them stronger.

PHYLLIS

I see. Here, take your baby. She needs her bum changed before her "tummy time."

SAMANTHA

Will you do it? I was going to put this box downstairs.

PHYLLIS

I have to clean my shoes.

PHYLLIS plops the baby in to SAMANTHA'S arms.

SAMANTHA

She's more comfortable with you.

PHYLLIS

Nonsense! Tell her a story.

PHYLLIS EXITS to the kitchen.

BABY

... (baby fussing)

SAMANTHA holds the baby awkwardly. She smells her. She sighs. She looks around the room and spies the diaper bag. She retrieves it.

She puts the baby down in the bassinet.

SAMANTHA

Shhh shhhhh shhhh.

BABY

!

SAMANTHA

She's not stupid. She thinks I'm going to prick her with a diaper pin. Thank God they're disposable or I probably would.

BABY

!

SAMANTHA

I'm sorry that your mommy's a freak. It's not my fault really. It's probably all those bunnies I killed.

BABY

!

SAMANTHA

I was a bunny murderer and now I'm suffering the karma I have created. Your Grandfather taught me. He only did it as a hobby. His real job was at the university. He was a history professor. He met your Grandmother at the University, she taught music. She is a famous cellist. She also has a personality disorder.

She removes the diaper and bundles it up using the tape on its sides.

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

I was really good at snaring rabbits Rachel. That probably tells you all you need to know right there. An eye for detail and ... what? A cruel streak?

She uses baby wipes to clean the baby up.

We'd go into the woods and find an alder bush with branches that are about as thick as your finger...maybe a little more. Then you cut a branch off the bush and take a piece of wire, about as long as your arm, and you twist one end of it into a teeny tiny, little noose.

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

Shut up. She's not crying, is she?

She puts on a fresh diaper.

Then you take the other end of the wire and you feed it through the tiny noose and make a bigger noose, big enough for a bunny's head to fit through. Then you wind the other end around the middle of your branch many, many times. Then you have a snare. You find a rabbit path in the snow and you look for a place where the rabbits have to squeeze through an opening between two bushes and you put your snare right in the middle of it. They put their head through and pull the noose tight and ... voila.

That's how you kill a bunny.

Baby wails. PHYLLIS rushes in on SAMANTHA'S last line.

BABY

!!!

PHYLLIS

Good Lord Sam! That's how you kill a bunny?

SAMANTHA

I was telling her a story.

PHYLLIS

She wants someone to pick her up!

SAMANTHA

She doesn't like me to.

PHYLLIS

Of course she does.

SAMANTHA

(stands and picks up the box instead)

Please Phyllis? I have to put this away.

She exits.

PHYLLIS

(scooping up the baby)

There's nothing to cry about see? Grandma's here.

PHYLLIS walks with the baby for a moment soothing her.

BABY

... (baby calming)

SAMANTHA returns. She watches PHYLLIS rock the baby.

SAMANTHA

My Dad told me once that bunnies cry when they are dying. It sounds like a baby. But I don't understand how they could make a sound with that noose tight around their neck.

PHYLLIS

My goodness this is a morbid topic.

Are you feeling alright?

No response.

PHYLLIS

Sam?

SAMANTHA

Do you think I'm a good person Phyllis?

PHYLLIS

Of course I do!

SAMANTHA

But I've done bad things.

PHYLLIS

Where on earth is this coming from? You must be worn out.

SAMANTHA

I'm fine. I'm just feeling...a little guilty.

PHYLLIS

Sam, I don't want to....*offend*. It's just that you don't seem yourself.

SAMANTHA

Do you believe in ghosts Phyllis?

PHYLLIS

Did you say ghosts?

SAMANTHA

Spirits. The supernatural.

PHYLLIS

Oh I don't know. Why?

SAMANTHA

Have you ever gone to a psychic?

PHYLLIS

I went with a girlfriend once. She *loved* it. I thought it was a waste of time. And money.

Silence.

Why don't you go lie down? I just gave Rachel a bottle and she's going to go down soon. I'll just give her a rock and a cuddle.

SAMANTHA

I don't feel tired.

PHYLLIS

(to the baby)

Mommy is so silly! She knows she needs her rest. She's being a stubborn isn't she?

SAMANTHA

If I say I'm not tired Phyllis, I'm not tired so stop telling me to take a fucking nap!

Silence. PHYLLIS is at a loss for words.

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

I'm so sorry Phyllis. I...I'm-

PHYLLIS

You're not yourself.

SAMANTHA

I'm not! I keep trying to tell Rich-

PHYLLIS

I *know* dear. Remember I've done this before, it changes you.

SAMANTHA

Yes!

PHYLLIS

You become two people when you have a child. You almost forget what it was like before they arrived, when it was just you.

SAMANTHA

And I have ... awful thoughts.

PHYLLIS

Of course you do! It's all part and parcel of being a mother.

SAMANTHA

Phyllis, I'm afraid I'll do something...wrong.

PHYLLIS

Every new mother goes through it!/And we have since the dawn of time.

SAMANTHA

Did you?

PHYLLIS

Did I what dear?

SAMANTHA

Think about hurting your baby?

PHYLLIS

I poured a cup of hot coffee right on him!

SAMANTHA

No I mean-

PHYLLIS

Didn't I tell you that story? I was-

SAMANTHA

Yes! You told me. But I didn't mean by accident, I mean on purpose. Hurting a baby on purpose.

Pause.

PHYLLIS

No mother hurts her baby on purpose.

SAMANTHA

Psychopaths do.

PHYLLIS

Well, I suppose they do and that is awful, but we're not psychopaths. Look Sam, I know what you are getting at here. Your mother is a piece of work and it sounds like your childhood was simply atrocious but she obviously did something right by the way you turned out. And I know I don't say it often enough, but I think you are amazing.

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

Thank you Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

You're overtired and a little overwhelmed is all. A new baby and a new house, no wonder! But my son knows a strong girl when he sees one and I thank my lucky stars that he married you.

SAMANTHA

Did you ever feel like...you were a stranger?

PHYLLIS

(a little irritated)

Oh nonsense! All you need is a little rest and you'll be right back to normal, I promise.

The doorbell rings.

PHYLLIS

Good Lord! I meant to put a note up over that doorbell!

PHYLLIS moves to answer the door.

PHYLLIS

Hello!

CHRISTINE enters nervously.

CHRISTINE

Hi. Is Samantha here?

PHYLLIS

Sure. Come on in.

CHRISTINE

I'm Christine. I need to-

PHYLLIS

I'm Phyllis, the doting Grandma. She's such a good baby too! Not fussy at all, are you sweetheart?

CHRISTINE

I hope I'm not-

PHYLLIS

No, Samantha *refuses* to take a nap so you aren't disturbing us at all.

SAMANTHA

Hi.

CHRISTINE

Hi how are you?

SAMANTHA

I was just telling Phyllis I don't feel tired.

PHYLLIS

Samantha is the only one around here that doesn't need sleep apparently.

SAMANTHA

I'm not as tired now that you and Rich have been getting up with the baby.

PHYLLIS

And you were dead set against the bottle feeding at first! Can you believe that Christine?

SAMANTHA

I'm still breastfeeding Phyllis. Trying to.

Silence.

PHYLLIS

Do you want to sit down?

CHRISTINE

Thank you.

PHYLLIS

I'll get a chair from the kitchen.

She sits. PHYLLIS exits

SAMANTHA sits on a box.

SAMANTHA

Isn't this cozy.

CHRISTINE

I had to come, I-

PHYLLIS enters with a stool.

PHYLLIS

I hate these stools, they have no back support. You have to get some more furniture in here Samantha!

CHRISTINE

Here, take this chair.

PHYLLIS

You don't mind do you?

CHRISTINE

Not at all.

They sit. CHRISTINE perched somewhat uncomfortably on the stool.

PHYLLIS

You need to get out and do some shopping! What do you think I'm here for?

SAMANTHA

I don't know what colour to get.

PHYLLIS

That's easy, dark grey. It hides the dirt and goes with everything. Right Christine?

CHRISTINE

Sounds like a good choice.

CELLO

!

Silence.

SAMANTHA

Christine's a psychic.

PHYLLIS

Oh really! Now that's interesting.

SAMANTHA
We channelled a ghost.

PHYLLIS
Oh my.

SAMANTHA
Then we talked to it through a table.

PHYLLIS
How fascinating!

SAMANTHA
You told me you thought it was a waste of time.

PHYLLIS
I did not!
(to Christine)
I went with a girlfriend to see a psychic once. I
thought it was very interesting.

SAMANTHA
I thought you said it was a scam.

PHYLLIS
Now you are putting words in my mouth Samantha! I said
I didn't like that *particular* psychic. But that's just
my opinion. I'm sure *Christine* is very good at what she
does.

CHRISTINE
I do my best.

PHYLLIS
You must have a talent for it.

SAMANTHA
She does. We talked to a dead woman.

PHYLLIS
Who was she?

SAMANTHA
Her name is Mary.

PHYLLIS
I went to college with a girl named Mary. Pretty girl.
She died recently of congestive heart failure. I
suppose it couldn't be her.

SAMANTHA
Why would someone you went to college with want to talk
to me?

PHYLLIS

I don't know. She was a nurse, maybe she has some advice on breastfeeding.

She laughs. SAMANTHA is pissed.

PHYLLIS

Oh come on dear, I'm only joking. Don't be so sensitive.

Do you have children Christine?

CHRISTINE

I have a son.

PHYLLIS

Oh yes, now is he grown?

CHRISTINE

Just started university.

PHYLLIS

Time flies doesn't it? Well then you know all about being a new mother. Maybe you can help Samantha to get some perspective.

SAMANTHA

Perspective?

PHYLLIS

You worry far too much over a lot of nonsense.

SAMANTHA

It's not the 70's Phyllis. I'm raising Rachel in the information age. I have access to all kinds of wonderful information these days. Like the long term effects of second-hand smoke on children.

PHYLLIS

Samantha! If I didn't know better I'd think you were trying to embarrass me! I haven't had a cigarette since Richard was three years old! And let me tell you, it wasn't easy to quit back then! There was no *patch*.

CHRISTINE

My parents smoked.

PHYLLIS

Everyone did. And I ALWAYS rolled the window down in the car. Most people I knew didn't bother but I didn't like the idea of all that smoke in such a small space. I remember *telling* Frank that it wasn't good for Richard. He didn't listen to me but I always put the window down! And he's fine. He's healthy as a horse!

(MORE)

PHYLLIS (cont')

It doesn't hurt to have a vice or two, Samantha. You have your wine, I had my cigarettes.

Silence.

CHRISTINE

No one's perfect.

PHYLLIS

Look at me! I may not be perfect, but I can still settle a baby.

(to the baby)

Isn't that right Rachel? I'd like to think I'm helping out a *little* around here. What do you think?

SAMANTHA

(sheepish)

You do help Phyllis.

PHYLLIS

Well I'm glad to hear it.

(to the baby)

Now, I should get you bundled off to your crib. We'll just let these ladies chat. Here you can have your chair back.

PHYLLIS gets up.

It was lovely meeting you!

CHRISTINE

You too.

PHYLLIS

Say night night to Rachel Mommy!

CELLO

!

SAMANTHA

(not enthused)

Night night.

PHYLLIS

Night night Mommy!

PHYLLIS exits.

SAMANTHA

What do you want?

CHRISTINE

I couldn't sleep last night.

SAMANTHA
Hot flash?

CHRISTINE
I had a dream. It was about you.

SAMANTHA
Me.

The CELLO plays underneath CHRISTINE's story and throughout her exchange with SAMANTHA until CHRISTINE'S line: "She was drunk." It is a tune of darkness and foreboding.

CHRISTINE
You were in a parking lot at a rest stop. A woman pulled up in a red minivan. She got out of the van and she leaned against it. She looked like she was going to puke.

SAMANTHA
You googled her/ didn't you.

CHRISTINE
Of course I did!

There was a baby in the van, in her carseat. I knew it was your daughter because you started screaming and banging on the windows. You tried to open the passenger door and get her out but it was locked.

SAMANTHA
Oh COME on-

CHRISTINE
She got back in the van and shut the door. You almost put your fist through the window but she didn't look at you. She just drove away.

SAMANTHA
Big deal, you looked her up.

CHRISTINE
I DIDN'T LOOK HER UP LAST NIGHT. After you left I had a scotch and watched The Voice. Then I went to bed and had a dream. I never dream. You thought she might have a warning for you? *This* is a warning.

SAMANTHA
It was a dream.

CHRISTINE

This morning I got up and you're goddamn right I googled her. Mary, wrong-way crash, 401-

SAMANTHA

Well don't believe everything you read-

CHRISTINE

SHE WAS DRUNK!

Silence.

CHRISTINE

She was blind drunk with 5 kids in the car and she killed them! Her little girl was the only one who lived and what kind of a life will she have? What do they tell her? That her mommy was a drunk piece of-

SAMANTHA

STOP!

CHRISTINE

Oh my God! Look at you!/ Defending her!

SAMANTHA

Those toxicology reports could have belonged to someone else! What if the coroner made a mistake?

CHRISTINE

A mistake?

SAMANTHA

Maybe she had a stroke, or an infection that caused something to...she had an absessed tooth! I read that-

CHRISTINE

Bullshit!

SAMANTHA

(almost a scream)

WHY? WHY THAT DAY? YOU TELL ME WHY!

JESUS! SHE DIDN'T EVEN DRINK SOCIALLY, WHY THAT DAY?

Silence.

CHRISTINE

Maybe because she wanted to.

SAMANTHA

She didn't want to kill anybody. I know she didn't.

CHRISTINE

No you don't. You don't know her. You read about her on the internet! You don't know her!

SAMANTHA

I spoke to her last night!

CHRISTINE

What?!

SAMANTHA

I can light candles all by myself.

CHRISTINE

LISTEN to me!! Don't talk to her!!

I didn't have to come here. I am not a bad person.
I...I don't scam people-

SAMANTHA

Sure you don't.

CHRISTINE

I was a single mom and I needed the money! I only added in a few details here and there. I never hurt anybody!

People started asking me if I could communicate with their dead loved ones...and I figured, why not. I KNOW how it sounds, but it gives them comfort...people need something to believe in! It never did any harm!

SAMANTHA just looks at her.

CELLO

...

CHRISTINE

Shit! Okay, okay - it was wrong and maybe this is my punishment, but I'm scared. She scares me.

SAMANTHA

Well maybe you should go back to Tarot.

CHRISTINE

Her spirit is ... dark! I let something bad into your family... how can I sleep at night? Please stop.

SAMANTHA

(moving to the door)

It's time for you to go.

After a moment CHRISTINE stands and begins to leave. She stops.

CHRISTINE

Have you told your husband yet?

SAMANTHA grabs CHRISTINE by the jacket violently.

SAMANTHA

Listen to me, you stay the fuck away from me and my family, or you are going to be very, very sorry that you ever met me.

She lets go.

CHRISTINE

(shaken)

Fine. Maybe you're just a crazy bitch too.

She exits. SAMANTHA pull a rag out of the bucket, wrings it out and begins to scrub the floor vigorously.

The CELLO plays along with her as she cleans, an echo of her racing thoughts that we don't get hear. The louder the CELLO, the more frantic her actions. After a moment RICHARD enters. The CELLO stops.

RICHARD

Hey.

SAMANTHA

(continues scrubbing)

Hey.

RICHARD

Who was that?

SAMANTHA

Take off your shoes!

He does.

RICHARD

You just did that this morning.

SAMANTHA

It looks dirty.

RICHARD

No it doesn't.

SAMANTHA

You can't be too careful with a newborn.

RICHARD

Who was that?

SAMANTHA

She's no-one. She was selling something.

*SAMANTHA lets the rag drop and runs to RICHARD.
She grabs on to him tightly.*

RICHARD

Hey!

SAMANTHA

Rich. Can we go away? Can we go away from here?

RICHARD

What?

SAMANTHA

Please please please please Rich. Let's get out of here. Your mom can take care of the baby. I have to get out of here.

RICHARD

What is it?

SAMANTHA

I don't know how to tell you what this feels like!

RICHARD

Just try.

He holds her for a moment.

SAMANTHA

Something is different. I heard something shift. Like a string breaking.

My mind isn't...normal.

RICHARD

What do you mean?

SAMANTHA

Today, I had the curling iron plugged in. And I thought....it's so hot. And she's just in the other room..in her crib..and what if I...what if somehow...I burned her.

RICHARD

Sammie, it's neurotic thoughts. You're tired and your imagination gets the better of you. But think about it, she's fine! It's not like she's a toddler and she could

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

walk to the curling iron and pull it down somehow and burn herself. She's safe in her crib. Right?

SAMANTHA

But what if I ...

RICHARD

It's like the floor. Look at it! It's clean! And here you are scrubbing away and you think she's going to catch the plague or something and she's not.

Silence.

SAMANTHA

Can we go to the lake? We could leave tonight. Just a couple of days?

RICHARD

Okay, just let me talk to Pete. Maybe in the next couple of weeks-

SAMANTHA

(she pushes him)

I said NOW. I need to go NOW!

RICHARD

I can't! I'm sorry. I can't right now, we're in the middle of-

SAMANTHA turns away from him.

RICHARD

Why don't you go to the spa for the day? Mom's here. You could go get a massage.

SAMANTHA doesn't respond. He goes to her.

RICHARD

Just take a day and go shopping or something. Or play!! You could play Sam! Now that mom's here. I'll set up the studio for you-

SAMANTHA

No.

The CELLO begins to play again. SAMANTHA looks at the musician as they play.

RICHARD

Why not? You haven't taken it out of the case since we moved.

The lights dim. The CELLO plays on, over the transition into the next scene. RICHARD exits.

Scene 3

SAMANTHA moves DSR to her spotlight picking up a glass of wine. She sits with her back against the tub and takes out her phone. She dials and waits for the person on the other end to answer.

SAMANTHA

Hi Dad, it's me.

Nothing much, how are you?

Everyone is good. It's good to hear your voice Dad.

I haven't heard from her.

Beat.

Dad? I was thinking about us snaring those rabbits. Why did you teach me that Dad? I was only a kid.

Did we kill a lot of them? Well how many do you think?

It makes me sad. I regret it. It wasn't a very humane way to die! Poor little things! Did I even LIKE it? Did you ever ask me?

No, I guess not. I liked being with you. Just you and me. I-

Okay. Okay, well you better go then.

Okay. Okay. Talk soon.

She hangs up the phone and pours more wine. MARY appears, she is lying on her back on the floor in her own space. The CELLO takes up her mournful tune. PHYLLIS enters to listen on the other side of "the door" just beyond the edge of SAMANTHA's spotlight.

MARY

It helps doesn't it?

SAMANTHA

What?

MARY

The wine.

SAMANTHA
Yes.

MARY
Shuts up that voice. The shitty one that tells you
you aren't doing enough.

SAMANTHA
Ha, I don't do anything.

MARY
That's not true, you sterilize the shit out of those
baby bottles.

SAMANTHA
(chuckles)
I like your sense of humour.

MARY
I like yours. Maybe in another time and place, we could
have been BFF's.

SAMANTHA
Mary, could I ask you something?

MARY
My inner voice was a real bitch too. The kind of voice
that couldn't stand it if a hair on a kid's head was
out of place. If their favourite cereal wasn't in the
cupboard. If the ironing wasn't caught up or the
baseboards weren't wiped down ...

SAMANTHA
Baseboards? Jesus.

MARY
Look who's talking. I could eat off this floor.

SAMANTHA
That's the first time you've ever talked about your
kids.

MARY
I know.

SAMANTHA
Mary-

PHYLLIS
Samantha? Sam?

SAMANTHA

(freezes)

Yes?

PHYLLIS

Is Rachel in there with you?

I thought I might take her for a walk.

SAMANTHA

I thought you were lying down?

PHYLLIS

I was too restless. Were you....I thought I heard you talking? Were you on the phone?

SAMANTHA

Yes. Rich was just checking in.

PHYLLIS

Okay....well..

SAMANTHA

Maybe later?

PHYLLIS

Yes?

SAMANTHA

She's sound asleep, what about later...for the walk?

PHYLLIS

Alright.

Well, I guess I'll just go make a cup of tea. Do you want one?

SAMANTHA

No thanks.

PHYLLIS takes a few steps then comes back.

PHYLLIS

Can I get you anything else?

SAMANTHA

No.

PHYLLIS exits, her concern showing. SAMANTHA listens for a moment to be sure she is gone.

MARY

At least you have Phyllis.

SAMANTHA

Can we talk about-

MARY

Why didn't your Mom come?

SAMANTHA

We don't...we would kill each other to tell you the truth.

MARY

I didn't even tell my Mother I was having a baby.

CELLO plays more passionately, louder.

SAMANTHA

Mary, I wanted to ask you-

MARY jumps to her feet. She is angry, threatening.

MARY

Play something different!

MUSICIAN stops and look at MARY. Then they continue the same mournful tune from the beginning, quietly again.

SAMANTHA

(a little frightened)

Who are you talking to?

MARY

(pacing violently)

Can't you hear my music?

SAMANTHA

No

MARY

It follows me everywhere. The same tune over and over.

SAMANTHA

Where does it come from?

MARY

I don't know.

SAMANTHA

Does everyone have a song?

MARY

How would I know?! I've never seen anyone!

SAMANTHA

I kind of like that idea. That everyone has a song.

MARY

I'm sure you do, dumbass.

SAMANTHA chuckles.

MARY

What's so funny?

SAMANTHA

You're such a bitch.

MARY

Part of my charm.

SAMANTHA

Yeah. You're a real people person.

MARY

What can I say? Eternity makes you crusty.

SAMANTHA

I guess it's not for everyone.

MARY stops pacing and laughs out loud. PHYLLIS enters tentatively. She comes to the edge of the spotlight and listens.

SAMANTHA

What's it like?

MARY

What?

SAMANTHA

Death.

MARY

Empty. And endless.

SAMANTHA

Jesus, you're painting a bleak picture.

MARY

What did you expect?

SAMANTHA

I expected...others I guess.

MARY

I don't mind being alone.

SAMANTHA

You can see me though.

MARY

Yup.

Silence.

SAMANTHA

Can I ask you a question?/

PHYLLIS

Samantha?

SAMANTHA

Yes?

PHYLLIS

You've been in there a long time, are you alright dear?

MARY

I can't see Phyllis, but I can hear her.

SAMANTHA

I'm having a bath.

PHYLLIS

I didn't hear the water running.

MARY

She sounds like the type that dresses nice. Does she?

SAMANTHA

I didn't run the water yet. Just...going to now.

PHYLLIS

I thought I heard you talking...

SAMANTHA turns with her back to the audience and bends down to turn on the tap. We can hear the water begin to run into the tub.

SAMANTHA

Can't hear you Phyllis!

MARY

Nice sweater.....linen pants...

PHYLLIS

Do you want me to take Rachel now?

SAMANTHA

We're FINE!

PHYLLIS

Okay.

PHYLLIS exits again, uncertain.

MARY

I hate ironing.

SAMANTHA

Is that really what you want to talk about? You came all the way from the other side to talk about Phyllis's linen pants?

MARY

Ha I was right. They are linen.

SAMANTHA

Mary-

MARY

(suddenly irritated)

What?!

(mimicking her)

Mary? Mary?

Spit it out! What is it?

Beat.

SAMANTHA

I know who you are.

MARY

Good for you.

SAMANTHA

I know about the accident.

There is a deadly silence. MARY comes closer, eyes blazing. The music changes and heightens...something sharp, atonal and disturbing. Maybe an echo effect on the CELLO would be enough. Her attack is vicious.

MARY

Fuck you.

SAMANTHA

You caused an accident.

MARY

You're no *better* than me.

SAMANTHA

On the 401. Eight people died. Children-

MARY

I was TWICE the mother you are. You aren't fooling anyone. Don't you think she knows?
Babies can tell. You don't even LIKE her!

SAMANTHA

That's not true!/

MARY

You don't even want to be around her! She cries when you hold her because she knows what you're thinking! She can tell that you're going to hurt her. You're a HORRIBLE MOTHER!

SAMANTHA weeps.

MARY

YOU'RE SICK. A real SICKO.

I was a good mother. Such a good mother.

Look at my mother. Selfish bitch. I was only nine years old when she left.

I gave them *everything*. They got all of my LOVE. And that counts for something more than ONE day. There was something wrong with me that day. My head hurt.

SAMANTHA

JUST TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED!

The MUSICIAN stops at once.

MARY

Shut your mouth. I'm dancing now, I want to dance.

MARY is frantic. She runs and leaps from one side of the spotlight to the other. There is no music. She tries to pirouette, but stumbles and collapses. The baby starts to cry. SAMANTHA sobs.

BABY

!

SAMANTHA

Please tell me it was a mistake. That the toxicology reports were wrong. That you had a stroke and took the wrong exit by accident. Please tell me that's what happened.

RICHARD enters SL and crosses swiftly with PHYLLIS following.

PHYLLIS

(frantic)

She said she was on the phone with you.

RICHARD stops at the other side of the door at the edge of the spotlight. He tries the doorknob.

RICHARD

It's locked.

BABY

...

PHYLLIS

Oh my God Richard! I can hear the baby!

RICHARD

Sam? Sam honey, are you alright?

SAMANTHA picks up the baby woodenly. She turns and stands with her back to us. She bends and with one hand and adjusts the tap to turn off the water. We hear the water stop, the tap drips loudly as MARY speaks. SAMANTHA straightens and stands very still, listening to MARY struggle to tell her story between gasps for breath. Every single word costs her, it's excruciating to watch.

MARY

I ... don'tremember.

My

(MORE)

MARY (cont'd)
head

hurt.

RICHARD
Samantha?

CELLO
...

MARY turns and addresses the MUSICIAN.

MARY
I was standing at the back ... of the van.
Hiding from the kids.. looking... at the ...
licence plate.

RICHARD
Samantha open the door!

MARY
I threw up.

RICHARD
Samantha I can hear the baby crying! What's going on?

MARY
I thought I could handle it.

It wasn't that much! I really didn't think I put in too
much. I'm always an EXCELLENT driver. But my head hurt.

I could only taste the orange juice, I swear to GOD!

She writhes in agony.

RICHARD
Samantha you are scaring me open the goddamn door!!

*MARY rises slowly, she weeps. SAMANTHA does too,
she weeps for MARY.*

MARY
I was just trying to get home. I never wanted to hurt
them. Those sweet little faces. Those long dark
eyelashes, red cheeks, white baby teeth...they were
singing to me. I can see them so clearly! Like little
angels. They laughed and laughed and then they stopped.
And by then I couldn't see.

(MORE)

MARY (cont'd)
I don't remember.

CELLO
...

RICHARD
SAM!

RICHARD begins to throw his weight against the door, trying to bash his way in.

SAMANTHA
You've come here to stop me.

Silence.

MARY is completely broken. All the fire is gone. She speaks in a dull, robotic voice.

MARY
How would I stop you? No one stopped me.

SAMANTHA
But I need your help!

MARY
I can't help anyone anymore.
She's too little to go in the tub.

MARY exits. SAMANTHA, still weeping, looks at the baby in her arms as if for the first time.

SAMANTHA
Fucking alcoholic! I don't need your help!

SAMANTHA swiftly bends forward and places the baby in the water. The wail of the CELLO escalates. The baby is clearly in distress. She backs away and watches it.

CELLO
!!

RICHARD
SAMANTHA!!!

RICHARD kicks the door open and he and PHYLLIS charge in. They take in the room, the empty bassinet and SAMANTHA staring at them in surprise. RICHARD rushes to the tub and immediately scoops the baby up out of the water and holds it to him.

PHYLLIS

Oh my God. Oh my God.

RICHARD

She's okay. She's okay.

He spins and stares at SAMANTHA.
What the hell is going on?

SAMANTHA

I'm giving her a bath.

The CELLO trails off. Lights down.

Scene 3

It is the next morning. Richard and Samantha sit in the living room. It is early. Cheerful morning sunshine makes its way into the space leaving a window shape of light on the floor. A window is open and we can hear the sounds of a city waking up. The tone is fresh and hopeful.

SAMANTHA

It's a beautiful day. Your mother took Rachel out.

Silence.

I hope she remembered sun screen.

RICHARD

Sam?

SAMANTHA

We need to get some curtains up in here so that the furniture doesn't fade with the sun. There's so many windows.

We need to get furniture.

RICHARD

Why didn't you tell me what was going on?

SAMANTHA

You don't believe in ghosts.

RICHARD

Ghosts? What ghosts?

SAMANTHA

Mary.

RICHARD

Why did you put Rachel in the tub like that?

SAMANTHA

It wasn't that deep.

RICHARD

You were on the other side of the bathroom.

SAMANTHA

I didn't want to drop her.

RICHARD

You know she's too little.

SAMANTHA

That's what Mary said.

Silence. RICHARD puts his head in his hands.

RICHARD

Who the fuck is Mary?

SAMANTHA

Do you remember that big accident on the 401? Guess it was...two years ago. We saw it on TV. It ran across the bottom of the screen: "Wrong Way Crash kills 8." And you said, "How could that happen?"

RICHARD

I don't remember.

SAMANTHA

She was on TV, on the cover of every magazine, every newspaper: a big smiling picture of her. The headlines said: "HOW COULD SHE?"

I remember thinking so that's what evil looks like. She looks just like me.

RICHARD

You're scaring the hell out of me right now.

SAMANTHA

I know.

RICHARD

I don't know what any of this means.

SAMANTHA

I think I'm beginning to understand.

RICHARD

Can you explain it to me?

SAMANTHA

I don't want to hurt our baby-

RICHARD

You wouldn't/ hurt her.

SAMANTHA

I know that's what you-

RICHARD

I know you!

SAMANTHA

But I'm not me.

RICHARD

What does that mean?

SAMANTHA

Just listen!

RICHARD

I am.

SAMANTHA

Listen hard. Okay?

RICHARD

Okay.

SAMANTHA

I am in a fog right now Rich and it's so dense and so thick I could choke on it. I can't find my way out and I don't know if I'm ever going to find myself again, I'm lost. I thought Mary could lead me back. That she could break through the murk and snap me out of it. As long as I had her near, like a warning, I wouldn't do anything bad. I have bad thoughts Rich. All the time. I see the stairs and I have to grip Rachel tighter. Don't do it Sam, don't do it. You'll crush her tiny skull in. I sit with her in this chair and all I can imagine is my thumb pressing into her fontanelle. I can see that soft downy hair and the crust from her cradle cap and I think, what would happen if I pressed a little harder? My thumb sinking in all the way up to the knuckle-

RICHARD

STOP IT! That's BULLSHIT! You are my wife, you are Samantha. And this is...you're depressed! But you are going to talk to someone and we are going to figure

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
this out. There's programs and supports and medication,
if we have to. We'll find a good doctor that's the
first thing...you have to talk to someone.

Silence.

RICHARD
Okay?

SAMANTHA
Okay.

RICHARD
Mom can stay longer.

SAMANTHA
Yes.

RICHARD
There's medication for this.

SAMANTHA
Yes.

He goes to her. He touches her.

RICHARD
It's going to be okay.

SAMANTHA
Do you remember the last time we drove up to the lake?

RICHARD
(stroking her hair)
I do. That was a good trip.

SAMANTHA
It was.

RICHARD
When my project's finished. In a couple of months
Rachel will be better in the car seat. We can take a
trip back there. Our first trip as a family.

SAMANTHA
We took the 401, didn't we?

RICHARD
I don't remember.

SAMANTHA

We did. I pretend that we saw her Rich. I imagine that we stopped at a rest stop because you had to pee.

RICHARD

(he pulls his hand away)

I don't know what you're talking about.

SAMANTHA

And then I saw her. She was standing on the grass by a red minivan. She looked like any ordinary soccer mom except she was bent over with her hands on her knees. The van was running and it looked like it was full of kids. Something wasn't right, I felt it. A little boy looked at me through the window. And I got out of the car and I smiled at her and I said "Are you okay?" That's what I imagine, over and-

RICHARD

ENOUGH!

Please. This isn't helping. You aren't that woman, she was a monster. We aren't going to talk about her anymore.

We are going to get you an appointment with a really good doctor and we are going to find out what the hell is going on.

You have to trust me. Please.

Silence.

He touches her again.

RICHARD

It's going to be okay.

SAMANTHA

Can I have some tea?

RICHARD

I'll get you some. Just sit okay?

SAMANTHA

Okay. I love you.

RICHARD

I love you.

He exits. SAMANTHA sits for a moment.

CELLO
?

SAMANTHA
He's wrong.

The CELLO takes up MARY'S music as she enters.

SAMANTHA
No one stopped you. Friends, family, husband...

SAMANTHA stands. She turns in a slow circle and takes in the room. She goes back to the chair and picks up a baby's sleeper that is lying on the back of it. She smells it, then carefully folds it against her body and puts it back down.

She exits the living space, moving to the bathroom. MARY slowly comes downstage to SAMANTHA's spotlight, nearer than before.

SAMANTHA
I wish I had seen you on the road that day. Maybe I could have stopped you.

MARY
Maybe.

SAMANTHA runs water into the tub. She checks the temperature to make sure it is warm and puts in some baby soap. As the water runs she pours another large glass of wine.

SAMANTHA
Maybe if I hadn't killed all those bunnies.

MARY
Murderer.

SAMANTHA
Is that supposed to be funny?

MARY
Just trying to lighten the mood.

RICHARD returns to the living space with a mug. He sets it near the chair and exits. SAMANTHA stretches her arm behind the tub with some difficulty and fishes a pill bottle out. She holds it up for the audience and MARY to see.

SAMANTHA

Percocet. I saved them from my surgery. Convenient yes?

MARY

Really?

SAMANTHA

Funny thing: I worried I was going to stab my own baby but I don't think I could bring myself to cut into my flesh.

She opens the pill bottle and shakes most of the pills into her mouth, then follows with a big gulp of wine.

MARY

God you are such a cliché.

SAMANTHA

Look who's talking.

MARY

Don't you think if I had a chance to change my story I would? You don't get a do-over my friend. This is it. You should be thinking about your family right now ... your daughter.

SAMANTHA

I am.

She finishes off the pills with another long drink and shakes her head. The CELLIST plays a long sharp note and then stands.

CELLO

?

SAMANTHA

They can handle it.

(to audience)

You can handle it can't you? If you can't then too bad. Every little girl's story is sad at some point or another. Right Mary?

MARY

It doesn't have to be.

SAMANTHA

This one does.

SAMANTHA removes her clothes and begins to climb into the tub.

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

She is unsteady now and begins to slur. The CELLIST sits.

SAMANTHA

That'ss nice.

I'm going to smell all clean and fresh.

MARY

Like a baby.

SAMANTHA

Like a babeeeee.

Mary?

MARY

Yes.

SAMANTHA

Thank you.

MARY

I didn't do anything.

SAMANTHA

Now I'mma good mother.

*SAMANTHA slides down into the water out of sight.
RICHARD re-enters and stands looking at the mug of
tea, lost in thought.*

*A bright light illuminates the stage behind the
musician. MARY approaches it with wonder. She
looks to the musician who nods. MARY exits into
the light as the musician begins to play a new
tune of sadness. This is SAMANTHA's theme.*

*RICHARD suddenly bolts to the bathroom and scoops
SAM's head and shoulders up out of the water.*

RICHARD

NO NO NO NO NO!

RICHARD

*(the kind of scream that hangs in the
dark after the lights go down)*

MOTHER!!

Lights down.

THE END.