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PLAYING MOTHERS
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PLAYING MOTHERS

cast: MARGARET, CECILIA, SEOK IMM, LYNN, TREVOR, TIMOTHY, AUDREY

Scene 1: My mother always said... (Margaret, Cecilia, Seok Imm)

setting: *Each woman stands in her own spotlight*

MARGARET

My mother brought up ten children on very little money. I was the seventh child and third daughter. My mother was a Christian Believer, and used to say, 'If The Lord sends us another mouth to feed, The Lord will provide a way to feed it,' I remember wishing The Lord would provide more generously. I was always hungry.

CECILIA

My mother did not look like a brave person... but she had great courage. With four young children, she left China and an abusive husband for a small patch of rented land in Malaya. The relatives who had helped her with money were rich and childless and offered to take one of her children. I was the only girl, so I was sent to Singapore to live with them. My Auntie and my Uncle were very good to me.

SEOK IMM

My mother was rich and miserable. Servants did all the housework and took care of me. But they were always getting sacked because my mother suspected them of talking about her behind her back... she believed they talked about the beauty and good fortune of my father's second wife, who had given my father three sons.

I was my mother's only child.

MARGARET

I remember my mother boiling porridge. In bad times, with more water; in better times, with more rice. She would buy two sticks of satay and bring our own bowl to get a big, big bowl of free satay gravy... and we would all eat rice porridge with

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satay gravy [*savours ecstatic memory*] Somehow, mothers manage.
All I wanted was to be as good a mother to my own children.

CECILIA

I remember my mother coming to Singapore to ask for money. Once she brought me kacang puteh that Auntie wouldn't let me eat. She said 'dirty'. My mother cried. She wanted to take me back, but Uncle said they were keeping me in exchange for all their money. I suppose she thought that would be better for me...

Mothers manage somehow... [*painful memory*]

I hoped I would never make a child feel that way.

SEOK IMM

I remember my mother telling me not to get married. Marriage was always miserable, she said. My mother was always going on about her difficult and unhappy life, but she stayed married. I don't know how my mother managed to stay consistently unhappy for so long...

A mother manages somehow... [*wry laugh*]

I didn't want to pass that on to my children!

[go into Scene 2: The baby is found]

MARGARET

My mother is gone now. She had a hard life, but in spite of that, I think that she was happy. I know that she was proud of her family. We all wanted to make her proud of us. After all, she sacrificed so much for us. I did my best to bring up my son and daughter the way my mother brought us all up... [*small laugh*] though I didn't have to feed them rice porridge all the time!

CECILIA

My mother died when I was fifteen years old. At that time the war was just starting, so I could not go up for her funeral. But I could not really miss her, because by then I could hardly remember her. She stopped coming down to Singapore a few years before she died, and you know how fast children forget... [*small laugh*] maybe I forgot on purpose, so that I wouldn't have to think that she

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abandoned me.

When I married a man who already had a daughter, I was very careful not to let her think that I was trying to take over her mother's place.

SEOK IMM

My mother is still going strong! I think it is because she is determined to outlive my father's second wife who is almost twenty years younger than she is! My mother went to China last year and tells everybody how she walked on the Great Wall even though she is almost ninety. Actually, she is seventy-seven years old. For the first half of her life, my mother was always telling people that she was younger than she was. Now she goes around telling people that she is older than she is. I really don't see the point. I am fifty-two years old and I'm very comfortable with my age. People have stopped asking me about children and haven't started asking me about grandchildren yet. I've been thinking about getting a dog, but that seems like such a big step...

Scene 2: The baby is found

setting: living room.

CECILIA

And I am sure that somebody has been helping herself to my Pepto-Bismal! Look! I know that there was much more inside the bottle the last time I put it away. Now just look at it!

SEOK IMM

Cecilia, you're always imagining things like that. Who would want to take your Pepto-Bismal? You keep that one bottle around you for so long, it's probably long past its expiry date!

CECILIA

Do you think so? Oh dear. Then I better not take it... but then such a waste. After all there's still quite a lot left. Maybe I should buy myself another bottle and give this one to Maria.

SEOK IMM

Don't be mad. How can you give somebody something that's already expired! Cecilia, sometimes you make me so irritated!

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CECILIA

But Maria won't mind. That woman is always taking old things. Remember your old blue skirt, the one with an uneven hem...?

SEOK IMM

I wonder where Margaret is? She's usually up by now.

CECILIA

Maria hasn't brought the newspapers up yet. Here I am, with an upset stomach, no unexpired Pepto-Bismal, and no newspapers to take my mind off my problems!

SEOK IMM

I'll go downstairs and see if the newspapers are here yet.

CECILIA

Maria is supposed to bring the newspapers upstairs. First thing in the morning, as soon as the newspapers arrive, she's supposed to bring them up. My poor late husband always said, 'The secret is to make it clear what you want done and make it worth people's while to do it...'

Seok Imm! You can't go downstairs like that in broad daylight! How dare you go out [*hisses the following words*] Without A Bra!

[*but before SEOK IMM can go out, MARGARET enters, holding the note which she unfolds and reads absent-mindedly*]

CECILIA

Margaret! Finally! We were getting So worried about you!

MARGARET

[*turning note over to look for signature and finding none*] Worried? About me?

SEOK IMM

Cecilia was afraid you might have died in your sleep! Maybe OD'd on expired Pepto-Bismal.

MARGARET

Sorry? Pepto-what?

CECILIA

Seok Imm! That's a terrible thing to say! I didn't mean that at all! We were Both just wondering where you were, Margaret. That's all. Did you hear from your

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daughter and son-in-law last night? Was everything all right with their flight? Are they coming over? When do we get to meet your new son-in-law? Aren't you excited? Do you think you're going to like him?

MARGARET

Lynn called me from York Hotel last night. Quite late...

CECILIA

[*to SEOK IMM*] You see? I told you I heard the telephone! I heard the phone ring. Almost midnight, wasn't it? I knew it was either Margaret's daughter or that crank caller!

MARGARET

I'm sorry it disturbed you. Lynn's so sweet. She just wanted me to know they arrived safely and that Timmy's taking today off to drive them over. They should be here—

CECILIA

Margaret, you are so lucky... your children are so good to you... I will never have that kind of love and concern... I have no children of my own... I will never have this kind of concern...

SEOK IMM

Oh Cecilia! Come on, at least wait until we've finished breakfast before you have a breakdown...

MARGARET

At least you have Audrey? Audrey seems like a very nice girl.

CECILIA

Audrey is a good girl but—

SEOK IMM, MARGARET & CECILIA

A step-daughter can never be the same as a real daughter!

CECILIA

Are you two making fun of me?

SEOK IMM

Us? [*exaggerated denial*] Would we dare to do such a thing? We're just trying to show you that we understand how you feel. After all, you've told us often enough.

MARGARET

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And Audrey is always very helpful every time you call on her. [to SEOK IMM] I found this strange—

CECILIA

Making fun of an old woman alone in the world except for a step-daughter. If you two generous souls hadn't taken pity on an old woman and asked me here to share this apartment with you, I would have had to pack my little bag and move into an old folks home...

SEOK IMM

Ridiculous.

CECILIA

Or I would have ended up destitute on the pavement, pushing one of those trolleys with old cardboard...

SEOK IMM

That woman has more money and more barang-barang than both of us put together and she can talk about one little bag and old folks homes! What nonsense! Pull yourself together, Cecilia! [MARGARET hands her the note] What's this?

MARGARET

I found it just now. Slipped under my door...

SEOK IMM

[reads] 'Please look after my baby'

What... [turns note over, nothing on other side] What nonsense is this?

Where did you get it?

Who wrote it?

What nonsense is it talking about? What baby? Whose baby?

MARGARET

I don't know. I told you, I just found it. Underneath my door.

CECILIA

You call everything nonsense, you. Let me see that, let me see, let me see...!

[reading] 'Please look after my baby'

Baby! What baby! There's no baby here! What's this all about! Nonsense!

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SEOK IMM

Cecilia, Maria was your maid before we all moved here. Could this note have been written by Maria?

CECILIA

Maria never writes anything except for letters back to her family. Why would Maria write something like that! What a ridiculous thing to suggest! Why would Maria write this?

MARGARET

[*to SEOK IMM*] That's what I was wondering, actually. Does Maria have any children? Do you know anything about her family back in the Philippines?

SEOK IMM

Husband and two or maybe even three children. I think she said her mother is helping to look after her children while she is here. Right? Cecilia?

CECILIA

Even supposing this note is really from Maria, why would she give it to Margaret? Why should she put it under Margaret's door instead of putting it under my door? After all, I'm the one Maria's been working for for the past five years! Maria's known me longer than she's known either of you! Actually it does look like Maria's handwriting. Maria always prints everything. Even when she's just writing down a message from the telephone she prints it out... letter by letter... sometimes she takes so long that if I am standing beside the phone pretending to be Out it almost makes me want to Snatch the phone from her and take the message myself.

SEOK IMM

Did you look in Maria's room?

MARGARET

[*shakes head*] I wanted to check with you first. I thought that one of you might have seen her.

SEOK IMM

I haven't seen her. She didn't boil the water or bring up the newspapers this morning. Maybe we should see if she's in her room.

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[MARGARET nods. SEOK IMM and MARGARET leave the room. CECILIA does not notice]

CECILIA

I don't know why some people insist on printing instead of writing. But I don't complain. I never complain about anything. The way that I see it, as long as you can read the message that's the main thing, isn't it? My poor late husband's writing was such a challenge to read. Most doctors have terrible handwriting, have you ever noticed? I know that my poor late husband wanted his daughter Audrey to be a doctor too, but she decided to be a lawyer instead even though her handwriting is quite bad enough for her to have become a doctor...

[SEOK IMM re-enters there is blood on her dress. She does not stop to talk to CECILIA but is busy looking for things, looking up phone numbers etc]

[CECILIA stares. Gropes for spectacles, puts them on and stares again]

CECILIA

Blood. That's blood isn't it? Where did it come from?

SEOK IMM

There's a baby in Maria's room. Newborn. There's blood on everything. Such a mess on the sheets! Margaret is looking after it...

CECILIA

That's impossible!

SEOK IMM

Looks not more than a few hours old.

CECILIA

You don't know what you're talking about. How can there be a baby in Maria's room? People don't just find babies in their maid's rooms. Don't be ridiculous!

SEOK IMM

I wonder if this is clean enough... *[considers a towel... rejects it]* We're trying to get it cleaned up. Cotton wool and antiseptic... I'll need some warm water... Cecilia, please fill up the kettle and switch it on. Then go and bring me the big blue basin from the wash area.

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CECILIA

Where did you get a real live baby from? Whose is it? What is it doing here?

SEOK IMM

Cecilia, please! Water! Warm water! Basin!

Oh, wait till I get my hands on that Maria of yours!

[exit SEOK IMM]

CECILIA

You're not saying—that you think this baby is Maria's—you don't mean that this baby could be Maria's...

[SEOK IMM reappears almost immediately, minus cotton wool and antiseptic and walks briskly over to the telephone]

CECILIA

Seok Imm! I don't understand what's happening! Who are you calling! Why won't you tell me where this baby came from! Have you both gone mad?

[to herself] Either I'm going mad or they are filming an episode of Gotcha! right here.

Seok Imm! Who are you phoning!

SEOK IMM

[phone] Hello? Yes, I want to report a runaway maid who has left behind a newborn baby. Can you tell me who I should speak to?

The name of the maid is Maria Dolores Gatan. Yes. I'll hold on.

[SEOK IMM turns away and we do not hear the rest of her phone conversation]

CECILIA

But if the police think that this is Maria's baby they'll make me give up my deposit! Do you know how much money that is!

SEOK IMM

Shhh! Stop it, Cecilia!

CECILIA

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Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, I can feel one of my headaches coming on. And I haven't even had my morning tea yet... there isn't any hot water for my tea, is there? Maria!

[SEOK IMM puts down the phone and goes to doorway to speak to MARGARET, who is unseen]

SEOK IMM

They want us to bring the baby in... to SGH. I gather they want to check it over. I told them that it's small and weak but otherwise seems to be all right...

CECILIA

I need my pills! I can feel a headache coming! Can't one of you put the kettle on for me? I'm not well and I need my hot tea! Where has Maria gone! I'm going to get a migraine attack...

SEOK IMM

I've already phoned for a taxi. They're calling back.

Cecilia, I'll need Maria's papers. I suppose they're in the desk drawer with all your other papers?

CECILIA

I don't know what you're talking about! Where are you going? Where is Maria? Where is my hot tea!

Scene 3: Phone Mother (Lynn, Trevor, Audrey)

setting: LYNN and TREVOR in hotel room.

[TREVOR holding telephone receiver]

LYNN

So, darling... you can't say I haven't warned you about my mother...

TREVOR

I can't understand why she doesn't answer the phone!

LYNN

However much food you manage to eat, she'll produce more and she'll be hurt if

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you don't eat it...

TREVOR

It must be... ten pm at home. I don't understand why she doesn't answer!

LYNN

You said that you couldn't imagine me as a fat child. Well, after a few days of my mother's cooking, you may not have to imagine. You may be looking at physical evidence!

TREVOR

[*phone*] Still no answer? You're sure you're trying the right number? Yes, yes—yes—yes—yes, yes, yes—yes—yes—yes... that's correct. Well, would you mind trying again? What? When exactly do you go off duty? Well, when does the next person on duty come on? You can't just leave the switchboard without anybody to take calls! Yes, please. Put me through.

LYNN

It's not that she's obsessive or anything, you know. She just likes looking after people. I suppose you could call her more eccentric than weird...

Do I look all right?

TREVOR

Sexy! Ummm-Hmmm! [*wolf-whistles*]

[*phone*] No—no—not you! No! I am not an obscene caller! I only want to talk to my mother in Toronto, Canada!

[*TREVOR looks blankly at the receiver in his hand. Obviously he's been hung up on. LYNN pulls something else out of the suitcase and starts to change*]

TREVOR

They hung up on me.

LYNN

What do you think of this?

TREVOR

That woman said she was going to call Hotel Security... what does Hotel Security do?

LYNN

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Don't worry. She won't. You probably gave her the thrill of her boring little life.
What do you think of this? [*holding another garment up for him to appraise*]

TREVOR

Do you think Hotel Security might have some way of checking if my mother is all right?

LYNN

I know you like the other one better, but I'm not going to wear something 'sexy' the first time I meet my mother with my new husband...

TREVOR

I know it's way out of their jurisdiction, but maybe they have contacts over there or something.

LYNN

I hope you'll like her. My mother's not a bad sort, really. She has very good intentions, it's just that she's been 'playing mother' for so many years, I don't know if she's got another other life of her own.

TREVOR

She's probably gone off on a jaunt. I told her that I would call her when we got in to Singapore, but she's probably forgotten all about that and gone off for a weekend somewhere!

LYNN

I wish my Mum would go out more, get a life of her own... all this time she's been worrying at both of us, Tim and me, to settle down and get married. But you know what she started saying once I phoned her and told her that I'd married you? Once she got over the shock, I mean? She started phoning once a month and asking if I'd 'missed' yet.

TREVOR

Right after my Dad passed on, I was glad that she was going out instead of staying at home on her own, moping. But then she just got carried away! She's been taking modern art classes! I think that the people she meets there are a bad influence on her. I mean, I don't want her to go into a depression or anything, but I wouldn't mind her slowing down a little!

LYNN

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She's been hinting that we should settle down here because you could so easily get a job with one of the consultancy firms here, and because she's so longing to do a bit of 'grandmothering' before she's beyond it...

I mean, I love my mother, and some day maybe we will have children... but I'm not going to worry about having a baby now just so that she can indulge herself... mothers!

TREVOR

I don't want to worry about her, but what else can I do when she behaves so irresponsibly? I wouldn't worry about her if she didn't give me so much to worry about! She's the one who used to wait up till two and three in the morning if I wasn't in—so she should know better! Mothers are really...

LYNN & TREVOR

Mothers!

LYNN

I'm so glad we feel the same way about these things...

TREVOR

I'm glad too...

[phone rings]

LYNN & TREVOR

It's Mum!

[TREVOR makes a leap across the bed and snatches up the receiver]

TREVOR

[phone] Mother!?! It's about time you got home! Where were you! Do you know what time it is in your part of the world!?! It's not safe for a woman your age to go out on your own in the middle of the night!

[TREVOR finally stops for breath]

[Lights up on AUDREY standing in a spotlight elsewhere, holding a handphone]

AUDREY

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[*phone*] I'm sorry—Is this Room 821, York Hotel?

TREVOR

[*phone*] Yes! Yes! Something terrible has happened to her, hasn't it?

AUDREY

Well, it may not be all that terrible... it's just that there's no sign of her, and no indication whatsoever of where she may have gone...

LYNN

What is it? Who is it? What's happened? What's wrong?

TREVOR

[*half to phone, half to the world at large*] Oh God! I know that I should never have left home to go to University, that's where it all started, and I know I should have gone home after that, but oh no, I had to try for a big time career... oh no, I wanted the experience of working overseas! Oh no, I wanted to visit Singapore with my new wife instead of going home to spend time with my old mother!

LYNN

Trevor, what's happened to her?

AUDREY

[*phone*] You know this Maria Gatan, passport number 22202754?

TREVOR

What are you talking about?

Wait—what room did you want?

AUDREY

York Hotel Room 821. I'm trying to reach Lynn and Trevor Mitchell.

TREVOR

This is Trevor Mitchell, but I don't know what the hell you're talking about.

AUDREY

My step-mother, Mrs Cecilia Ang, is sharing an apartment with your wife's mother, Mrs Margaret Liew. Apparently there's been a bit of a mess-up. Their Filipina maid has disappeared, leaving behind a newborn child. I went over to see what was happening, and your wife's mother asked me to tell you that she's gone to the Singapore General Hospital with the baby. She tried to phone you

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herself, but your line was engaged.

[lights out on AUDREY]

LYNN

What is it?

TREVOR

Your Mum's gone to hospital with a baby she found.

LYNN

What!?

My Mother—with a... Baby!

TREVOR

You know what this means, don't you?

LYNN

[more to herself] My mother Found a baby...

TREVOR

This means she's still not home. My Mum's still not home!

Scene 4: Margaret in the hospital, looking through the glass at the baby

[enter SEOK IMM and LYNN]

SEOK IMM

There she is. She's been standing there all day, just staring at the baby.

LYNN

Oh, Mum!

SEOK IMM

I feel sorry for the child myself, but if you ask me, your mother's gone a bit...

[circles finger round her temple]

LYNN

We were supposed to go out for lunch today. She just never returned my call.

SEOK IMM

That's right, she's been here.

LYNN

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You still haven't heard any news of the baby's mother, I suppose?

[SEOK IMM shakes her head and prepares to exit]

SEOK IMM

You just wait and see. Soon the Singapore government will require all foreign workers to go for mandatory birth control before coming in, I tell you! Or they'll bring back chastity belts. That's not such a bad idea, except that it must be so unhygienic. I mean, if nothing can go in, how do you douche?

[exit SEOK IMM]

LYNN

Mum. I think you're being very unfair and unreasonable. I brought Trevor all the way to Singapore just so that you two could meet each other, and instead you spend all your time here staring at some baby.

MARGARET

For years, I looked forward to the time when I could sleep through the night without any interruptions. For the first few months, with you, it was actually quite an exciting experience. But I was so tired, my back hurt, my breasts hurt, your father was a man who could sleep through anything...

LYNN

Trevor's looking forward to meeting you so much, Mum.

MARGARET

[finally looking round] Oh. Is he here?

LYNN

No. He's still trying to reach his own mother. She's still not answering her phone.

MARGARET

[placidly] That can be quite worrying.

[back to baby through the glass] Poor little sweetheart. I hope your Mummy's all right. I hope your Mummy doesn't go and do something stupid before somebody manages to find her...

LYNN

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I hear the new apartment is quite nice. I met both Aunty Cecilia and Aunty Seok Imm just now when I went over. They seem quite happily settled in. It was Aunty Seok Imm who drove me over here.

MARGARET

She sleeps better when I'm standing here. She senses that there's somebody nearby who cares about her and she can sleep better. Babies are very good at sensing things like that, you know...

LYNN

Oh, Mum! You're totally hopeless!

[Exit LYNN]

[MARGARET turns to face audience, as though still looking at baby through glass]

MARGARET

Poor little baby. I know how you feel because I'm all alone too.

When an old woman is alone in a room, it's as though the room is empty.

My old life was full. Occupied with taking care of other people. [pause] I liked my old life. I miss my old life. I miss having people to look after.

I thought that by moving in with other women more or less my own age, in more or less the same situation, I would feel less alone. But it doesn't work. We are all alone together. You are lucky you're still young, Baby. You're just starting out on your life. But one day you will grow old too. And you'll find out that the loneliness of old women isn't divided when you try to share it with other old women... it multiplies.

Once upon a time, I thought that being a mother was fulfillment of all the dreams I could ever have. Now, my children are both grown up... even when they come to visit, I can see in their eyes their hurry to be gone...

Do you know what is the saddest thing in the world for a woman who was once an important part of a family?

A single toothbrush.

That single toothbrush that stands alone in the only mug on the sink in the bathroom.

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You know, so many years after he died, I still keep my husband's shaving brush in the bathroom cabinet. At first, I thought it might come in useful for something. But I could never bring myself to use it for anything. Because that was the toothbrush that *He* was using, right up to the end.

And now I can't bring myself to throw it away. So silly, right?

But once it's gone, there'll never be another one...

I like seeing it when I open the door of the bathroom cabinet. It looks *used*. For a moment I can pretend that it is still part of my life... I brought it with me when I moved here. It reminds me that I once had someone to share a sink with. In the morning and in the night, at our best and at our worst. I once had someone with me, even if there isn't anyone here any more. Even if I should get used to the idea that there will never be anyone here any more.

You are as alone as I am, aren't you... ? I enjoyed being a mother so much.

Maybe the problem is that I was so happy playing at being a mother that I never learnt to be anything else...

Scene 5:

scene: Spotlight on SEOK IMM on the phone

SEOK IMM

[*phone*] I don't see why you don't just find Maria and ask her to answer all these questions herself! Instead of trying to find her you are bothering us asking us things about her that we can't possibly know about! Why haven't you managed to find her yet? You don't seem to be very efficient. Singapore isn't that big!

[*puts down phone slowly, dazedly*] Maria is—dead?

INTERVAL

Scene 1: Audrey abortion scene

[*AUDREY comes on on other side of the stage*]

AUDREY

I try to make it a point to do what I can for my step-mother. After all, she Was married to my father. But this baby thing really couldn't have happened at a

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worse time.

It was like a sign from God or something, only the sign's not making it clear what I'm supposed to do.

I felt I couldn't make up my mind about Abortion until I had seen one for myself. I mean, up to now, I've heard about abortions, I've read about abortions, both the pro side and the con side, but I've never come in contact with anyone who's ever had an abortion.

Except for a friend's cat. The cat didn't seem very traumatized by the experience of having four foetal kittens *And* her reproductive organs removed; and so I thought that it couldn't be such a terrible—

[loud, angry screech from cat heard]

—but then again, maybe this cat just didn't know me well enough to confide in me.

Anyway, when Dr Lien offered me a chance to watch an abortion in progress—doctors and lawyers can get themselves into all sorts of strange places—I jumped at the chance.

[AUDREY steps forward. Surgery room sounds]

AUDREY

Are you sure your patient won't mind?

DOCTOR'S VOICE

She won't mind. She's already knocked out, she won't know a thing. You're not going to mention her by name in your article, are you?

AUDREY

What article? Oh no! Of course not! I don't even know her name... why is she having an abortion, can you tell me? Is it for uhm—medical reasons?

DOCTOR'S VOICE

All right. The patient's sedated, the tools are sterilised, we're all ready to go. You stand over there and stay out of my way.

AUDREY

She's moaning. Is she in pain? She sounds like she's in pain... Do you think she

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wants to change her mind? Maybe she wants to keep the baby after all!
[unconsciously protecting her own unborn child by folding both arms over her torso]

DOCTOR'S VOICE

She's unconscious. She doesn't feel a thing!

Trust me. I'm a doctor.

You won't tell anybody you saw it here, will you?

AUDREY

So I watched the abortion of an un-named woman... and an even more un-named child.

[pause]

The abortion... a flesh coloured mass was pulled through the tight opening of the woman's cervix. The woman was still moaning. Not softly, not loudly, but non-stop. The dirty forceps were thrown into a metal basin on the metal tray next to the doctor. Blood began to flow out of the cervix, filling the metal bowl placed on the floor beneath the woman's spread apart legs.

For a moment I felt as though I could sense what the foetus was feeling. The foetus, without will or self-awareness, without any human identity, comfortable up till now in the warm, moist, dark womb, wincing at the cold metallic touch of the forceps, trying to escape with nowhere to escape to.

Once the womb rejects you there can be nowhere to escape to. There can be no escape.

In the thick, swirling dark mass of clotted blood in the metal bowl, there was something that looked like a limp slab of chicken fat. Part of the foetus, Doctor Lee told me.

DOCTOR'S VOICE

Look. See those two tiny soft dark things? They look like little sweet beans, don't they? Those are what would have become its eyes.

AUDREY

It didn't look like a child at all. It didn't look human... but I suddenly had the strongest feeling that what was inside me was...

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Excuse me... I have to [*turns away and starts to run, retching*]

Scene 2: Orchidaceae

setting: Audrey in the Botanic Gardens

[*Enter TIMOTHY*]

TIMOTHY

I saw you. From over there. I was watching you. Are you all right?

AUDREY

Yes... yes I'm fine. Thanks. What are you doing here in the middle of the day?

TIMOTHY

I work here. That's my lab over there. Behind the bougainvilleas and the heliconias.

[*AUDREY takes a few steps away from him. But TIMOTHY does not take the hint*]

TIMOTHY

Are you interested in orchids? Have you ever seen the *Trichoceros antennifera*?

AUDREY

The trichores what?

TIMOTHY

Here—the *Trichoceros antennifera*. It's really a South American orchid, but it's been doing quite well here. It's one of my favourites.

AUDREY

I don't know much about orchids. I mean, apart from the *Vanda Miss Joaquim*, of course.

TIMOTHY

The *Tribe Vandaeae* come with two to four pollinia—dorsoventrally flattened, if four—viscidium normally always present; stipe almost always present. But the evolution of similar vegetative and floral structures in different orchid groups—you know, convergent evolution—?

AUDREY

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Of course—convergent evolution...

TIMOTHY

Convergent evolution leading to the exploitation of the same types of pollinators has resulted in a situation in which many groups appear superficially similar and this can obscure the actual relationship of numerous other groups.

AUDREY

[*touched by his earnest enthusiasm, not being sarcastic*] I—really don't know what to say!

TIMOTHY

Yes, it's fascinating, isn't it?

AUDREY

You really love what you do, don't you?

TIMOTHY

Like these Australian orchids, genus *Chyptostylis*, they are pollinated by wasps.

AUDREY

Wasps!

TIMOTHY

The wasp, after backing into the stigma, attempts to copulate with the flower by bending its body into an arch, with the base of the lip of the flower held by the claspers of the wasp... see what I mean?

AUDREY

[*laughing*] Careful—don't fall over...

TIMOTHY

Because the flower gives the impression of being a female wasp of the genus *Lissopimpla*... the upper side of the apex of the abdomen comes in contact with the viscidium, and the pollinarium becomes cemented in place. Then the wasp flies to another flower and with the same behaviour, delivers the pollinia to the stigma of that flower.

AUDREY

I see. That's very interesting.

TIMOTHY

Audrey... are you having a baby?

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AUDREY

[*stunned*] What! How can you... what are you talking about! Timothy, I really don't think—

TIMOTHY

Please don't be angry, Audrey. I thought you were looking pregnant, that's all. Sorry.

AUDREY

I am not looking pregnant. [*pause*] Yet. [*pause*] Am I?

TIMOTHY

Well, your fingers and your ankles show signs of fluid retention. The colour in your cheeks and on the back of your neck is heightened. The lower muscles of your back are tightening and reinforcing themselves... all these are indications that physically and metabolically your body is preparing itself for incubation. Please don't be offended, Audrey. Plants go through the same thing, you know. From all the signs, you are a healthy specimen going to have a healthy child.

AUDREY

[*self-conscious laugh*] Is it already so obvious? I guess... Yes, Timothy. You're the first person who knows apart from my doctor... please don't say anything... you know what people can be like. But yes, I'm having it. I just can't go through with doing anything about it. People can just go ahead and think what they want. Poor baby...

TIMOTHY

Tell you what. Let's get married.

AUDREY

What! You can't just offer to marry somebody you hardly know because she's having a baby!

TIMOTHY

I like you. You have many good characteristics, which I consider well worth propagating into the next generation...

AUDREY

[*small laugh in spite of herself*] Really! Me? Like what!

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TIMOTHY

Well, physically, you have a compact build that will probably age well. Your movements are graceful, agile and energetic. From what I have observed of you, you are good-natured and intelligent, and can be assertive without descending into aggression or hostility. Your behaviour towards your step-mother shows generosity and responsibility...

and the shape of your face... has a very appealing line.

AUDREY

Well! I—[*pause*] Thank you. Thank you very much. I think that's the nicest thing anybody has said to me in a long time. Thank you, Timothy.

TIMOTHY

You should probably know some things about me before you make a decision. I don't smoke, I don't gamble, I don't drink when driving and I don't lose my temper very often. If I do get angry, I am not violent.

Actually I believe I've asked you to marry me before... you probably don't remember. You must have been only about seven years old.

AUDREY

I remember. I had just started school and I hated it. My mother was dead and I was the only girl in Primary One without a mother to write a Mother's Day card to. And one day you and your parents came to visit my father and you said to me, 'Don't worry. When we grow up I will marry you and look after you'

TIMOTHY

Another thing about me is when I say something I keep my word.

AUDREY

I won't hold you to something that you said when you were nine or ten years old.

TIMOTHY

No. That wouldn't be fair. That's why I'm asking you again.

AUDREY

You're honest... [*pause*] ...and kind. Timothy, why? Why would you want to do something like that for me? It's so strange, to talk about getting married like that.

TIMOTHY

I like children. I like you. I've liked you for a long time. I think we'll be okay as a

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couple. When people pair up, they usually do it like... like the random dispersal of pollen. Depending on which way the wind is blowing, depending on the humidity, the number of insects, the temperature... you're expected to pair off with somebody you meet by chance. And chances are, when your situation changes and you find out more about each other, the way you feel about each other also changes. From my experience in the laboratory, it makes more sense to decide what you are after, and then try to make the match. When I'm trying to propagate a *Cephalanthera*... and even more so if I'm trying to propagate an *Oncidium*, I wouldn't just stick it out of a window or under a tree and hope. I would go through my records, I would contact other horti-biologists...

Through our families, we have known each other for a long time, Audrey.

AUDREY

And you've been 'studying' me for a long time?

[*TIMOTHY nods*]

AUDREY

[*starting to walk*] Timothy, you probably don't remember, but long ago, we used to play five stones together.

TIMOTHY

Chinese New Year. While the grown-ups were talking we would play five stones on the porch.

AUDREY

You were much better than me. I didn't even know that boys knew how to play!

TIMOTHY

My sister taught me. Lynn was very competitive even back then. She taught me to play then practiced on me so that she could beat her friends at school... but sometimes I let you win, didn't I?

AUDREY

Sometimes you let me win...

[*she takes his hand gently*] Thank you, Timothy. I would very much like to marry you. The only thing I don't understand is why I didn't realise it until now.

TIMOTHY

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[*takes a deep breath*] I didn't want to say this earlier in case I prejudiced you, but I love you Audrey. I've been in love with you for a long time. When's our baby due?

AUDREY

I love you Timothy.

Scene 3: LYNN and SEOK IMM

LYNN

And Timothy is probably Never going to get married, so the pressure is all on me, see? My mother has been hinting and hinting that Trev and me should take the baby...

SEOK IMM

I don't think—

LYNN

I don't have anything against children, you understand? But I want to get used to Trevor, to married life, to living on my own without having to report in to my mother every week or risk her calling up the Singapore Embassy in London to talk them into sending somebody round to check if I've been poisoned by a gas leak.

SEOK IMM

Lynn, I really don't think that your mother—

LYNN

I know she's been a good mother. I know she cares a lot about me. You don't have to tell me that! But I want a bit of breathing space for myself before I go straight from being the obedient daughter of a Good Mother into trying to be a Good Mother myself, do you know what I mean?

SEOK IMM

Lynn! It's fine with me if you Never have any children! You don't have to explain

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yourself to me. It would have been fine with me if you never got married. And as far as I can see, your mother's worried about the baby, Yes. Is your mother trying to bulldoze you into adopting it? No.

LYNN

Aunty Seok Imm, have you ever regretted not having had children of your own? Not having got married?

SEOK IMM

I regret not having done a lot of things.

I regret I never told my late grandmother how much I appreciated and loved her; I regret never having told good friends how much I appreciated and loved them; I regret not having dedicated my life to becoming a medical researcher or a concert pianist or an ocean explorer... and I really, really, oh God, I really regret not paying more attention to Maria these last few months. I thought I was being good to her by not asking too many questions. I thought I was respecting her privacy and giving her her dignity when she said she wasn't feeling well and wanted to lie down... I should have insisted on taking her to see a doctor even though she didn't want to.

LYNN

Aunty Seok Imm, I don't think that that was your fault.

SEOK IMM

I was here with her, every day of the past three months. I saw her looking worried and tired and I assumed it was bad news from home or menstrual cramps... I asked her, "Are you all right?" and when she said, "All right, Mam," I left it at that. I shouldn't have. I've always believe in not interfering with other people's private affairs and I've always lived by that up till now. But damn me! I should have been able to see that she was in trouble!

LYNN

She didn't want to tell anybody. Obviously.

SEOK IMM

I should have forced her to. For her own good.

If I only I had forced her to tell me what was happening, if only I had managed to dig it out of her that she was pregnant... that poor girl might be alive today.

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You know, when you are responsible for somebody's welfare... whether it is a child or a servant or a parent... and you Fail that responsibility...

[draws deep breath] As with everything else, you just have to live with it. Learn to live with it.

LYNN

But she was just a servant—

SEOK IMM

She was a human being! A young girl frightened and pregnant with no one to turn to for help! Between you and your mother, I tell you, I would choose your mother any day!

LYNN

I'm sorry. That's not what I—

SEOK IMM

You may have lived abroad for years but you are still such a filthy Singaporean. I know. So am I. But please God not any more. Never again.

[pause] As I was saying, I'm certainly not going to waste time and energy wishing I had got married and had children. I would probably have high blood pressure by now.

LYNN

I—don't really want to have children at all. But I keep thinking that I may be missing out on something and I don't even know what it is.

SEOK IMM

[to herself] Still kiasu to the max.

[to LYNN] There is a good side and a bad side to having children as well as to not having children. Some women enjoy mothering and caring for children. If I felt that way I would have got myself a cat. Or better still, a dog. All the affection and no exams.

[pause]

But I suppose motherhood does have its special moments... like when your son or daughter tells you that he or she is getting married...

[lights sharply down on this scene]

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Scene 4

[Spotlights on two scenes simultaneously. In one, MARGARET and TIMOTHY in tableau. In the other, CECILIA and AUDREY]

MARGARET & CECILIA in concert

You're marrying Who? Since When! Why are you doing this to me!

[lights down on MARGARET and TIMOTHY. Normal lighting on AUDREY and CECILIA]

Scene 5: Audrey and Cecilia talking

AUDREY

I don't want you to do anything, I don't want you to tell anyone. I don't need you to organise anything. The only reason I'm telling you now is because I know that you'll decide to be hurt and offended if you hear it from anyone else.

CECILIA

But why that Timothy? He's such a—a—funny looking man! He can't even say one sentence through without stammering or getting stuck. And just think, in all your family photographs you'll have him standing next to that Trevor, and everybody who looks at them will think that you went and married the less handsome man.

AUDREY

Cecilia, you're being very—

I've decided to marry Timothy and I am going to. If you're worried about what people will say about family photographs, don't worry. I'll make sure you don't get any.

CECILIA

I'm only trying to see things from your point of view, Audrey. I only want what's best for you... don't get angry with me. These days, everybody is always getting

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angry with me for no reason!

AUDREY

Anyway, anybody who looks at our family photos is more likely to say how much better looking Lynn is than me!

CECILIA

Nonsense! Nobody will say that. She is fairer, that's all. But in photos she will just look pale. You look intelligent. That's why I think it's such a waste! You look intelligent, you have a degree, you should try to marry another lawyer or even a doctor, so that your children's IQs will all be higher!

AUDREY

Timothy is very intelligent, Cecilia. And he is very good to me.

CECILIA

I suppose, if your mind is made up it's no use an old woman trying to say anything...

Oh dear... I think I am getting another headache...

AUDREY

Oh, Cecilia. Won't you try to be just a little happy for me? You're the closest thing I have to a mother, you know.

But you don't want that role... you've always made That quite clear.

CECILIA

No! That's not true! I wanted to be a mother to you. I tried to be a mother to you—

AUDREY

No you didn't. You always kept me at a distance. I don't want my baby to ever have that feeling of belonging and yet not belonging, that's why—

CECILIA

What baby?

AUDREY

The baby—all the babies—that Timothy and I will have together.

CECILIA

I loved you, Audrey. I didn't want to force my way in because you had your

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memory of your own mother. You always had her photograph in your room. Even when I brought you out with me or drove you to your friends houses to play and they asked you “Is that your mother” I always heard you answer, “No, my mother is dead. She is just married to my father.”

I’m the one who never had any real family of my own. I lost my own mother. All the years my Uncle and Auntie were looking after me I was always afraid that they would have a child of their own and send me away... back to a mother I hardly knew... no matter what happened your father and you always had each other! I was the one without anybody. Nobody ever called me ‘Mother’...

AUDREY

When you married my father you told me to call you ‘Cecilia’.

CECILIA

I couldn’t ask you to forget your own mother by calling *Me* ‘mother’ could I?
[*pause*] I thought that when you got used to me being around, you might offer to, but you never did.

[*pause. AUDREY comes to a decision*]

AUDREY

Mum? Is it okay if I put you down as ‘mother of the bride’ in the wedding programme?

CECILIA

[*slowly turning. We see that she is wearing a brilliant smile through her tears*] I know Just the wedding dress that will suit you... I’ve been thinking about it for So long...

AUDREY

Oh Mum!

Scene 6: Trevor and Timothy in a bar

scene: TREVOR and TIMOTHY in a bar having a drink together. TIMOTHY is

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more sloshed than TREVOR.

TIMOTHY

There is nothing wrong with not getting married! No, sorry. That's not what what I was going to say... There is nothing wrong with Getting married!

TREVOR

She came home with her arm in plaster. She went skiing, she said. My mother! I was shocked! At her age! She said that there was a tree there that hadn't been there the last time she skied that slope with my father—but that was more than twenty years ago! She broke her arm skiing into a tree that hadn't been there twenty years ago!...

TIMOTHY

For years my mother has been trying to get me to get married. For years she has been saying, 'You should find someone to look after you when I am gone!' and 'What's wrong with Katherine? She's a nice girl!' There was nothing wrong with Katherine! Nothing wrong with Mei Lin! Nothing wrong with Vanessa! I just didn't want to marry any of them!

And then now when I finally go and tell my mother I am getting married, she says, 'What's the hurry!'

TREVOR

Mothers are like that. All the time I was growing up she was there asking 'What time are you going to be home?' And now my mother is always out. Running around. Going jogging, if you please. On roads with muggers and dogs and people driving above the speed limit.

TIMOTHY

Is there a lot of that where she lives?

TREVOR

[*shaking his head*] It just takes one, Timothy. It just takes One. Now, that's what She used to tell Me.

TIMOTHY

Mothers never remember what they say.

TREVOR

They'll say something to you a thousand and one times. Then when you turn

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around and say it to them, it's like they never heard anything so meaningless in their whole lives!

Listen; last year I sent my Mum on a Senior Citizens Group Tour to New Zealand; a nice, slow paced trip, I thought. She'll sit on an air-conditioned bus and drink coffee and buy postcards at toilet stops. Do you know what happened? My mother persuaded all these old guys to go white water rafting with her! Madness! She could have been killed! They could all have been killed!

TIMOTHY

And my mother got so upset, mind you, even before I told her that the woman I am going to marry is pregnant. Even though it's not me that made her pregnant, I have a feeling that my mother is not going to like that. I think we'll just keep quiet about that where she is concerned and talk a lot about premature births while she is around.

TREVOR

Generally speaking, mothers are not keen on having their only sons marrying already pregnant women. At least in Canada, they aren't very keen. Especially pregnant-by-somebody-else women.

TIMOTHY

Here they aren't very keen either. Though my mother's always wondering why Lynn isn't pregnant yet.

TREVOR

We've only been married seven months!

TIMOTHY

I heard Auntie Cecilia tell her that maybe you're wearing underwear that's too tight. I think that if you two don't manage to start a baby in 1996, you're going to be getting boxer shorts next Christmas.

TREVOR

Hmmm...

Who're you marrying?

TIMOTHY

I can't tell you. I'm sorry. I would tell you if I could but I promised Audrey I wouldn't tell anybody we're getting married until she's ready for me to tell.

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TREVOR

Good idea. I'll tell Audrey I think it's a very good idea.

TIMOTHY

Audrey is so innocent even though she is a lawyer.

TREVOR

Innocent? Lawyers aren't innocent! They're—they're—they're lawyers!

TIMOTHY

You think somebody not innocent could get pregnant like she did? It just took one night.

TREVOR

That's all it usually takes.

TIMOTHY

She said they clinched a big deal in Hong Kong and went up to her hotel room to celebrate with a drink and the next thing she knew she was on the floor wearing nothing but her earrings.

TREVOR

Clip-ons or those with little sticks going right through the skin?

TIMOTHY

Going right through, I think.

TREVOR

Those can be difficult to get off.

TIMOTHY

Never tried. Audrey is so decent. So sweet and decent. She just says she feels stupid. She won't tell me who the father of our baby is. She doesn't want him to know that she is having a baby.

TREVOR

He doesn't know, huh.

TIMOTHY

Doesn't know. A mother can't miss the fact that she's having a baby. A father...?

[drinks] Can miss the whole show.

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TREVOR

A quick gush of sperm during sex. That's all there is to fathering a child. It's the mothering that takes some doing.

TIMOTHY

Since somebody else has already fathered this baby... I will help to mother it. Mothering is just a matter of hothousing tender, vulnerable and immature humans until they are ready to face their environment on their own, isn't it? It shouldn't make a difference whether you are a man or a woman. Mothering children can be done by anybody who is willing to take the time.

TREVOR

Mothers spend a lot of time on their children. They are always making sacrifices for their children... and they are always telling children what sacrifices they are making... until one day when they kick over the traces and go white water rafting.

TIMOTHY

That's what makes motherhood so noble...

[another drink each]

TREVOR

Hey, Lynn's here, Lynn! Over here!

Scene 7: Baby seen in the arms of the couple/woman adopting her

No dialogue. Static under light.

Scene 8: SEOK IMM and MARGARET watching the couple

MARGARET

I'm glad, of course. I know it's good for her...

If only I could know how they treat her it would be easier.

SEOK IMM

What could be better? They want a child, she needs a home. Look at how she's holding her...

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MARGARET

But still—

SEOK IMM

I know. It's difficult no matter how many times you let a child go. But it's part of the joy of having a child, isn't it? Seeing it able to take its first step on its own... seeing it go to school on its own... seeing it taking the world on its own...

MARGARET

It never gets easier, does it?

SEOK IMM

Our mothers went through it. Mothers will always suffer but they will celebrate at the same time. It's the only way to mother a child. You hold it, you love it, you help it to grow... and when the time is right... you have to let it go.

Final Scene:

[LYNN and TREVOR on one side of stage]

TREVOR

My mother is really looking forward to meeting you—

LYNN

I hope my mother is going to be all right. Maybe I should stay in Singapore with her a bit longer...

TREVOR

She says that there are so many things she wants to show you, and so many places she wants to bring you, but you mustn't let her tire you out...

LYNN

She says that she'll be all right, but she might just be saying that because she doesn't want me to worry...

TREVOR

Don't worry. I think your mother is stronger than you think.

LYNN

And you don't worry. I'm looking forward to meeting your mother. I'm stronger than you think!

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[Enter TIMOTHY and AUDREY on other side of stage]

AUDREY

It's really quite wonderful, you know. I never guessed that that was how Cecilia—
'Mum'— was feeling all these years... she was so afraid of making me feel
disloyal that she ended up making both of us feel rejected!

TIMOTHY

Hmm!

AUDREY

She's really not so bad. I get the feeling that she was a very lonely child...
Timothy, this child is going to be a happy child, I can feel it...
Tim—are you listening to me? What are you thinking about!

TIMOTHY

Oh—no, it's nothing.

I am trying to decide whether it would be better to name our children after flowers
or name flowers after our children.

AUDREY

Oh, Timothy!

[Enter MARGARET, CECILIA and SEOK IMM]

MARGARET

I enjoyed being a mother. I still enjoy it. But I have to remind myself that you
don't mother an infant, a toddler, a teenager and a twenty-seven year old in the
same way... and a growing mother should change right along with a growing
child...

CECILIA

I am enjoying being a mother. And I've found out that it helps to tell your offspring
exactly what you need. They can be quite dense. If you tell your child that you
need a cup of hot Horlicks, she probably won't realise that what you are really
asking for is a little love and attention. But if you tell your child that you need a
little love and attention, then that's what you'll get... and you may get the hot
Horlicks as well!

SEOK IMM

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permission from the copyright holder.

I have discovered that 'mother' is not a noun but a verb. A mother is not a person but an action, an attitude, an availability. Mothering is supposed to be rewarding, but it can also be bloody tiring.

But it is a responsibility that cannot be ignored.

MARGARET

I know that my mother loved me. I want to pass on the strength that that has given me all my life.

CECILIA

I know that I was loved by both my mothers. And now I'm learning to enjoy being a mother.

SEOK IMM

I don't think what kind of mother you had can make such a major difference to your life—or I would be in trouble.

I think that the important thing is to take the mothering that you need from everything and everyone around you... and you will find out that what strengthens you the most is passing it on.

THE END