

MOTHER

by fig lefevre

CHARACTERS

MAMA - cis woman. any race.

ABBY - cis woman. any race.

BRIA - trans woman. any race.

ENSEMBLE 1 - woman, loosely defined. any race.
plays - Ancestor 1, MealPlan™ Rep, Mum

ENSEMBLE 2 - any gender/race.
plays - Ancestor 2, Neighbor, Customers

SETTING

the recent future / the near past

a family home / the ancestral plane

NOTES

Bold text indicates singing

Ancestors may appear throughout, unnoticed

*All bread is made of wood,
cow dung, packed brown moss,
the bodies of dead animals, the teeth
and backbones, what is left
after the ravens. This dirt
flows through the stems into the grain,
into the arm, nine strokes
of the axe, skin from a tree,
good water which is the first
gift, four hours.*

*Live burial under a moist cloth,
a silver dish, the row
of white famine bellies
swollen and taut in the oven,
lungfuls of warm breath stopped
in the heat from an old sun.*

*Good bread has the salt taste
of your hands after nine
strokes of the axe, the salt
taste of your mouth, it smells
of its own small death, of the deaths
before and after.*

*Lift these ashes
into your mouth, your blood;
to know what you devour
is to consecrate it,
almost. All bread must be broken
so it can be shared. Together
we eat this earth.*

“All Bread” by Margaret Atwood

ACT I · SCENE 1

Lights up on a big table, full of extravagant dishes. Tall foods, colorful foods, shining, steaming, sparkling piles. In the center, a giant golden clamshell. BRIA enters from one side, ABBY from the other. They see the food.

They are each drawn to the ends of the table, cautious but ravenous. ABBY takes a long sniff and buries her face close to the food to smell everything closer. BRIA sticks one finger into a dish, testing the waters, bringing it to her lips.

It cracks her open and she starts to devour everything.

ABBY sees, watches.

BRIA's consumption is wild, animalistic. She climbs on the table, shoves food into her mouth, moans.

ABBY is overcome and succumbs to her desire to eat as well, now rushing to get to catch up with BRIA.

They get louder, more aggressive as they near the clamshell in the center. Once they reach it, they use their whole bodies to rip it open, revealing the pearl, a naked MAMA.

BRIA and ABBY tug and pull at MAMA, unfurling her and consuming her in a renewed frenzy.

A bloodied Birth of Venus.

Lights out.

ACT I · SCENE 2

(*unseen*) Mama!

BRIA

(*half asleep*) Baby?

MAMA

(*unseen*) Mama?!

ABBY

Abby!

MAMA

Mama, are you there?

BRIA

MAMA clicks on her bedside lamp. She is in her bedroom, under the covers.

I'm right here!

MAMA

No one is there.

She is alone.

She breathes hard.

A phone rings.

BRIA appears in a pool of light.

Hey! I was just thinking about you!

BRIA

Another pool of light reveals ABBY.

ABBY

Hey, uh. That's sweet. I was thinking about you too. But, um. You need to come home, B.

...is she?

BRIA

No, but.

ABBY

They may not be able to see each other, but they know each other well enough to read this silence.

Right. I can be there by the morning.

BRIA

Oh, and B?

ABBY

Yea Abs?

BRIA

She's— she's not *right* anymore.

ABBY

Like she can't remember us?

BRIA

No, not like that, she—umm, she's having some disconcerting thoughts is all.

ABBY

Stop with the WASPy tact thing and tell me what she said.

BRIA

I am not a WASP and you know that—

ABBY

ABBY.

BRIA

Right. Ok. She said

ABBY

I know what I want you to do with my body when I die

MAMA

And that's disconcerting? Abs, we knew this was coming.

BRIA

That's not it, let me finish!

ABBY

MAMA

I think I've always known, it's always been there, I just finally found the language

BRIA

I don't need the whole speech

ABBY

I think you do, so that when I *finish* my story like I have been trying to do, you can help me decipher what in the world has gotten into her head this time!

BRIA

Do you mean with the Ren Faire thing? Abby I told you it was role playing, she didn't actually think—

ABBY

Will you please shut up!

BRIA

Woah there, sailor, whipping out them dirty words!

ABBY

I did say please.

BRIA

As you wish.

ABBY

Thank you. Jeez. Was that so hard?

BRIA

This offer only stands if you get to the punchline like now.

ABBY

Fine! Ok! So mama said

Lights up on MAMA, standing on her bed, recreating the Birth of Venus pose with her sheets as her long hair.

MAMA

I know what I want you to do with my body when I die.

I think I've always known, it's always been there, I just finally found the language.

I want to complete the circle of life, I want to be a part of this circle, with you, and with your sister.

It's taken me all this time, all these years to figure it out.

But now I know exactly what kind of legacy I want to leave, what I want to leave of me.

Nothing.

Not one bit.

I don't want to be stuck in a box for eternity. I want to return to the universe. I want to go to the other side knowing I've juiced this orange for all it's worth.

Because most of all, I am hungry. I'm always hungry. I can't remember the last time—

I've been hungry my whole life, I think.

I never wanted that for my children.

So I finally know what I want you to do with my body.

I want you to eat it.

Lights out.

ACT I · SCENE 3

An advertisement. Could be prerecorded or live.

MEALPLAN™ REP

Welcome to your personalized MealPlan™.

We are so thrilled that you are considering being a part of the future of funerary care.

At MealPlan™, we have helped thousands of decedents provide necessary calories and sustenance for their families long after they pass. For many of us, sharing food is already sharing a piece of our hearts. Now, you can continue that act of love with the people you love when they need you the most. When you are gone.

If you are not sure if a MealPlan package is right for you, please contact one of our Undertakers today.

MealPlan™

Make your last act, a gift.

ACT I · SCENE 4

The kitchen.

*MAMA, fingers deep in the empty mother
dough jar.*

A phone rings.

Lights up on the ANCESTORS.

MAMA

Ancestors? Are you here?

I'm being silly

You're not in here, I know you're not

But I grew up watching my Mum talk to you with her fingers searching in the dough,
eyes to the heavens, doing everything by feel

She'd call you every night like clockwork, when she was cleaning up for the night

She'd invoke you like a spell, like a ritual

(an exaggeration?) "I call upon the line of mothers whose blood has fed this mother"

When I was little it used to make me giggle

She'd get all serious, flour on her brow and a frown on her cheek

It was so funny to me when I was small, because I'd *never* seen grandmother do it like
that

No-when grandmother called you it was with a "y'all see what I'm dealing with here?"
or a "she gets that attitude from your side"

Still knuckle deep in the dough, mind you, but she talked like you were everywhere

So maybe you already know all that

Maybe it's grandmother up there answering this call

Maybe you are everywhere and this jar is not some listening device like in those old spy
movies

I'm procrastinating

That's what Abigail would say

When did she get so smart? Too smart for her Mama sometimes

Can't keep up

She's always been an old soul

Even so

I can't be sure that you hear me when I'm not doing it like this

If my mother dough was a conduit, this jar's barely a step above a tin can telephone

But just in case

I need your help

Lights fade to black.

ACT I · SCENE 5

A kitchenette. It's fairly sparse, barren.

MAMA is setting the table with a simple roll on each plate. The plate setting is more elaborate than the meal. She makes two settings.

ABBY enters from somewhere inside the house.

MAMA stops what she's doing and rushes over to hug ABBY, who tries to avoid getting flour all over her.

MAMA

Abby! You're awake! I'm not even finished with our breakfast.

ABBY

You don't have to make me breakfast, Mama, I told you Jared packed me some supplements.

MAMA

Those things are *not* food.

ABBY

Half the world eats them.

MAMA

In my house, you will eat real food. Yes?

ABBY acquiesces, joins MAMA in setting the table. A silent ritual.

ABBY

I called B, she should be here this afternoon

MAMA

Good, that's good. You should both be here.

ABBY

Mama, why are you doing this?

MAMA

Oh too early for questions, let's wait until you're both here so I don't have to explain it twice.

ABBY

You've already explained, I just—I'm not getting it

MAMA

I know, I didn't really expect you to. It's good you called your sister. She'll understand.

ABBY

When was the last time you spoke to her?

MAMA

You know she's too busy to call these days.

ABBY

I don't know that. I don't know anything about her anymore and neither do you. You don't know that she'll understand this.

MAMA

Abigail. Can we please enjoy this food while it is warm and fresh and so are we? Soon enough both will grow cold and stale, but not yet, all right?

ABBY

Mama

No response.

ABBY gives up, eats. It's slow, ritualistic.

MAMA

Did you bring me a new picture of my granddaughter?

ABBY

What? Oh—umm, I think I have one from her birthday, I keep one in my wallet, actually—it's so hard to get things printed, now—

MAMA

That will be perfect. I have just the spot I'd like to put it.

MAMA eats. Like ABBY, she is slow, ritualistic.

ABBY

Have you—

MAMA

No questions, I'm not finished.

I wasn't

ABBY

Go ahead then

MAMA

Have you—do you, umm. Where is B sleeping?

ABBY

In her room of course!

MAMA

I thought you had cleared it out

ABBY

Well of course I gave her things away when she left, nothing to waste you know, but I'm sure she won't mind sleeping in there without her particular brand of decor.

MAMA

Right. Of course not.

ABBY

A sudden clanging disrupts them. BRIA comes in, dropping some bags and a guitar.

Speak of the devil

MAMA

Ah, Mama, you don't have to use my proper title

BRIA

Oh hush

MAMA

MAMA approaches and gives BRIA a stilted but tight hug. BRIA does not reciprocate.

Shoulda known the party was in here when no one answered the door

BRIA

We were just eating breakfast, have you eaten? I can make you a plate. Are you thirsty?

ABBY

Relax, Abs, take a breath.

BRIA

ABBY gives BRIA a quick hug. BRIA somewhat engages.

ABBY

(softly) Glad you're here, B

MAMA

So? Should Abby make you a plate or should we all talk first?

BRIA

Both?

ABBY

(apprehensive) Both?

BRIA

Cold bread is a crime

MAMA

Even so, maybe we should let you eat and settle and then we can talk.

Before ABBY can grab her a plate, BRIA snags a roll and warms her hands on it, groaning. She smells it, scratches the crust, before ripping it apart. It's an old ritual, but it's been a while.

BRIA

I'm ready, we doing this?

MAMA

Yes, yes perfect. Wonderful. Let's do this.

Girls. My darlings.

Our family, like our bread, requires three ingredients. Flour, water, yeast. Without one of these, the dough will die.

Well, soon our family will lose one of those ingredients, but I believe I have found a way to make sure you still have what you need for a perfect loaf.

MAMA retrieves pamphlets and spreads them on the table in front of the girls.

MAMA

It's called the Meal Plan.

Like one of those things we used to have in college but-but different of course
It's been around for a while, half your life almost, chickadee *(indicating BRIA)*

ABBY

Was there even a famine back then?

MAMA

Well yes, not like now, but yes, it was still—that's not the point. It wasn't there just to reduce famine. Back then, it was sort of spiritual, you could say

BRIA

Of course it was

MAMA

Girls! You will listen to me. You will listen to what I have to say because I am your mother and this is my very last request and I shouldn't have to beg for you to hear me out for one minute. One minute! And then I will leave and let you two discuss without me bothering you any more. Is that too much to ask?

ABBY

Sorry, Mama. Please, continue.

ABBY looks to BRIA for BRIA to say something similar. BRIA does not, but she gestures for MAMA to continue nonetheless.

MAMA

Thank you. All right.

The program is called the Meal Plan.

There are pamphlets in front of you describing the various choices you would have, as the recipients of my gift. All I am choosing is to be part of the program. And I'm asking you, as my daughters, to take this gift, to receive me the way I have received you.

That's all.

Thank you for listening.

I'm sorry if that was longer than a minute.

MAMA exits.

BRIA

Well I'm sold

ABBY

What? You haven't even read the—

BRIA

Don't you want to gnaw on a little Mama Meat?

ABBY

That is disgusting!

BRIA shrugs dismissively.

BRIA
Kidding, kidding! Yea, no I want no part of this

ABBY
I can't look at these right now

BRIA
I'm not gonna lie, I'm a little curious, but it is kinda early in the day for visual aids

ABBY shoves the pamphlet in a drawer.

BRIA picks at the crumbs from MAMA and ABBY's plates.

ABBY
You look good, B.

BRIA
Thanks

ABBY
Did they, um

BRIA
What?

ABBY
I thought I heard they stopped manufacturing those hormones you take

BRIA
You're surprised I still look good without hormones?

ABBY
No, that's not! I meant,

BRIA
What? What did you mean?

ABBY
I was just making conversation!

BRIA
Kinda personal stuff for small talk, don't you think?

ABBY
Why do you always have to antagonize me?

BRIA
You're the one who called me ugly

ABBY
I didn't! I never— UGHHHH

ABBY stamps her foot.

BRIA laughs.

ABBY
What?

BRIA
For the resident grown up, you sure throw tantrums like a toddler

ABBY
(*resisting her rage*) You are an adult too you know

BRIA
Oh absolutely not

ABBY
Right, of course, I forgot that adulthood is another social construct that reinforces power hierarchies

BRIA
She's learning!

ABBY
Lena would say you use humor to deflect answering personal questions so you don't have to feel vulnerable

BRIA
Lena sounds like a bitch

ABBY scoffs.

ABBY
She's my therapist

BRIA

Double bitch

ABBY

B, you know I hate it when you use that word. It's really harmful to women, you know.

BRIA

Wow, that's rich

ABBY

What?

BRIA

That was messed up

ABBY

What was?

BRIA

I thought you'd gotten past this transphobic bullshit

ABBY

What did I say that you are willfully misinterpreting this time?

BRIA

"It's harmful to women"?

ABBY

It is!

BRIA

Am I not a fucking woman?

ABBY

That's not what I meant and you know it!

BRIA

Do I?

ABBY

I just mean there are some things that are different

BRIA

What things

ABBY

Like maybe you use that word because you don't know what it feels like

BRIA

What it feels like? To be called a bitch? To have it thrown in my face like it's suppose to make me shrivel and shrink and fawn? To have it scrawled on my windshield with lipstick by *another* woman?

ABBY

I'm sorry! I didn't-

BRIA

No, you never do

ABBY

That's not fair

BRIA

Nothing is fair, Abs. I thought you knew that by now.

A moment.

A look.

ABBY

I'm sorry

A moment.

BRIA

Just—try harder, ok?

ABBY nods.

BRIA

Or I'll have to start pinching you every time you do it

BRIA pinches ABBY.

ABBY squeaks.

ABBY

I don't know, I've never been good with negative reinforcement

BRIA pinches ABBY again.

BRIA

Maybe you haven't tried corporal punishment. Let the ancestors give me strength!

BRIA starts an onslaught of pinches.

ABBY

Ancestors! Ancestors! She's tickling me!

BRIA

She started it!

ABBY

They can see you, you think they'll believe that?

BRIA

They believe Mama's bullshit

ABBY

Oh hush!

BRIA

Ancestors, ancestors! How could you leave me here to raise them all by myself?

ABBY and BRIA exchange a look.

BRIA

Too close to home? I've got another one!

Ancestors, are you listening or have you forsaken me?

BRIA glances at ABBY, gestures for her to engage.

BRIA

Oh puhleeeeeease Ancestors! Hear me, please please heeeeeeaaar me! This is a tragedy of epic proportions!

ABBY

Yes my child

BRIA

We're out of baking soda

They crack up.

BRIA

Oh oh! ANCESTOOOOOORS?