

Mom and the Razor Blades

A One Act Play
by
Wendy Hammond

Author's Note: The props in this play can be unrealistic, such as two-dimensional cartoon drawings. Any or all of the characters can be played by men. For example, Faith can be played by a man in a little girl skirt until he comes out at the end with the suitcase and wearing pants.

(Lights up on the living room: a couch, mirror, ironing board, music stand, violin case, trash can, a table with a birthday cake on it, and several cleaning items. Center stage is a big door. This is the door to Father's Office.)

(MOM runs on wearing heels, stockings and a slip. She places a dress on an ironing table.)

MOM

(as she irons)

Gracie? Faith? Don't you want to come help your mother?

(no answer)

Constance? Patience? Joy?

(no answer)

It's your mother's birthday. Bobbie? Doesn't anyone want to help their mother on her birthday? Isn't anyone going to help their mother clean for her own birthday party?

(No answer. As she puts on her dress--)

Jimmy? Jerry? Johnnie? Jody? Jamie? Jose? Jenny? Jannie? Joshie? Jeremy? Janie?

Jerry? Joey? George?

(no answer)

Julie? Jeffery?

(whimpers)

Tad?

(no answer)

It's awful quiet around here. Are you planning a birthday party surprise? Are my children planning a birthday surprise for their mother?

(GRACE, 11 years old, enters crawling. A pad of paper and a pen hang from a string around her neck. She crawls to the middle of the floor and begins writing furiously. Grace doesn't walk but crawls everywhere. She is played by an adult.)

MOM

(panicked)

Get up, Grace! Get up! Your father's coming out of his office any minute! Your father's coming out of his office any minute! What if he trips over you? What if he trips over you?

(Grace rips a page off her pad and drops it on the floor, then continues writing furiously on the next page.)

MOM

(points to the page on the floor)

No! No! Bad girl! We don't make messes! You know how your father feels about messes! Pick it up.

(Grace doesn't.)

Pick it UP!

(Grace doesn't. Mom reaches under the couch and pulls out a mean-looking cartoon baseball bat. She holds the bat over Grace's head.)

MOM

PICK IT UP!

(Grace picks up the paper.)

MOM

Good. Now I want you to put this letter under the door for your father.

(takes the letter out of a pocket and reads)

"Dearest Larry. If it's not too much trouble, could you please come to my birthday party? Your loving wife, Hope." Well. I think that should do it.

(Grace won't take the letter. Instead she scribbles a note on the pad hanging from her neck and hands the note to Mom.)

MOM

(reads)

"He's not going to come." You never know, Grace. He might. I think it pays to always think the best of people.

(Grace scribbles another note.)

MOM

"He hasn't come out of his office in 25 years." He had to figure out the phone bill, Grace. Phone bills take awhile to figure out.

(threatening)

Now put this under the door!

(Trembling with fear, Grace takes the letter and slides it under the office door. Immediately a piece of paper slides back out. Mom picks it up and reads.)

MOM

“Dearest Hope. I’m sick of your letters. One more letter and I’ll do something drastic.”
Oh dear.

(blinks back tears)

Well I’m sure he wouldn’t mind letters from the children. Gracie, will you write a note to your father and ask him to come to my birthday party?

(Grace writes a note and hands it to Mom. Mom reads.)

MOM

“I can’t.” Good heavens. Why not?

(Grace writes another note.)

MOM

“I’m scared.” What are you scared of, Grace?

(Grace writes another note.)

MOM

“I’ve never met the man. Who knows what he’s like.” What does it matter what he’s like, Grace. He’s your father.

(Grace crawls under the table.)

MOM

Alright. I’ll write one for you.

(writes)

“Dearest Dad. Please come to Mom’s birthday party. Signed Gracie.” I’ll have to get the bat, Grace darling, unless you PUT THIS UNDER THE DOOR.

(Trembling, Grace slides the letter under the door. Mom waits tingling with excitement. No letter returns. Instead a scraping noise starts.)

MOM

Did you hear that, Grace? He’s moving around! I think he’s coming out!

(She quickly fixes her hair then poses, ready to greet him. But the door doesn’t open. She is devastated.)

Maybe he recognizes it's my handwriting. Grace? Please write him a note, please? All you have to say is "Daddy, when you coming out?"

(Grace writes one word then throws the note on the floor. She continues writing one word notes and throwing them on the floor as--)

MOM

No! No! Bad girl! You want me to get the baseball bat?... Oh well.

(picks up one note and runs across the living room to the trash can)

I guess I don't have the heart to discipline you kids. I just let you run wild. Wild!

(She runs back, picks up another note and races back to the trash can. Grace continues dropping notes and Mom continues running to and from the trash can. As she runs she says loudly to Father's Office door.)

If your father came out of his office we'd have some discipline around here. If your father came out of his office he'd put some order into the house.

(FAITH, 10 years old, enters carrying an enormous stack of books. Faith is also played by an adult.)

FAITH

(urgently)

Mom! Guess what?!

MOM

(still running back and forth)

What, dear?

FAITH

I think there's something wrong with the family!

MOM

(running)

There's nothing wrong with our family. We have a lovely, lovely family. We're well-educated, upper-middle class. We believe in God and Jesus Christ. We go to church four times a week—

FAITH

You don't go to church, Mom. Dad hasn't let you out of the house for 1,463 days.

MOM

(still running)

Well I would go to church if I could. We have 37 beautiful children, a brilliant, successful father, and a mother who loves you so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so very very much much much much much much much much much much—

FAITH

What about Henry, David, Scott, Cindy and Pat?

MOM

What about them?

FAITH

They all committed suicide. Suicide's a phase one can never grow out of.

MOM

(weeping)

Oh the grief! The grief! I keep asking myself why? Why did they do it! They had everything. Money. Education. A brilliant, successful father and another who loved them so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so so so so very very much much much much much much much much—

FAITH

I know you loved them!

MOM

I don't think you do. I don't think children really understand about love. They haven't the capacity.

(gestures and accidentally slaps Grace)

It takes being a mother to really learn about—

FAITH

Mom! Look at Grace!

(Grace has imitated Mom's slap and is now slapping herself over and over.)

FAITH

That's what Joey was doing last night before he hung himself!

MOM

Oh no! Not Joey too!

(heart wrenching sobs)

FAITH

We gotta do something fast before the whole family is killed!

MOM

But what can we do?

FAITH

Therapy.

MOM

(panicked)

Therapy?

FAITH

(checking her notes)

Freudian, Jungian, Reichian, Adlerian, Lowian, Piagetian, Masserian, Frankian, Millerian, Horneyian, Laingian, Rogerian, Jonesian, Johnsonian, Ericksonian as in Milton and Eriksonian as in Erik, Gestalt, Transactional, RET, NET, CBT, DBT, EFT and TFP! We'll do them all if that's what it takes!

MOM

Grace! You're not wearing shoes! You'll get grease spots on the carpet! Go put your shoes on this minute!

(Grace is writing furiously and ignores Mom.)

FAITH

First individual and then family therapy.

MOM

THIS MINUTE!

FAITH

We'll start with you, Mom, since according to my family therapy books "the parents are responsible for behavioral dynamics within the family."

MOM

But why would I need therapy? I have my faults, I know, but I am certainly not CRAZY. PUT YOUR SHOES ON THIS MINUTE, GRACE, OR I'LL GET THE BAT!!!!

FAITH

She doesn't wear shoes, Mom. She doesn't walk.

MOM

If you don't put your shoes on right now you'll get cancer. I read about this in *Better Homes and Gardens*. Going barefoot on carpet causes cancer of the feet.

(points at Grace's feet)

Look! It's started already!!!!

(Terrified, Grace quickly crawls off.)

FAITH

(picks up Grace's writing pad)

Mom, listen to this. “Dark knives stabbing. Black blood warm in my eye sockets. Intestines slide across red-slimed floors.”

MOM

I don't think writing should depress people, do you? I think writing should cheer people up.

FAITH

But Mom. You don't understand. Johnnie was writing stuff like this yesterday before he threw himself under a car.

MOM

(weeping)

Oh no! Not Johnnie too!

FAITH

And it looks like Grace is next! Mom, we gotta do therapy fast!

MOM

But can't I have my birthday party? I promise I'll do anything to keep my children alive. But first may I please have my birthday party?

(Grace crawls in wearing socks. She holds her feet up to show Mom, but Mom doesn't notice.)

MOM

It's the one day of the year when the party's for ME. When I get appreciated. When I'm not cleaning or cooking or comforting or changing diapers or weeding the lawn or going without food so my children can eat or going without clothes so I can keep m children warm or going without sleep staying up all night washing orange crayon scribbles off the wall.

(Grace is now trying to choke herself.)

FAITH

(runs to her)

Grace! Stop!

MOM

For a few moments each year my family sings to ME, gives ME presents, tells ME they love ME so much, so very much, so so so very very much, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so very very much much much much much much much much—

FAITH

Mom, we'll have a birthday party!

(finally gets Grace's hands away from her throat)

Grace, do you think you can keep from killing yourself long enough for a birthday party?

(Grace writes furiously.)

OK, Mom, we'll try it. But if Grace starts displaying suicidal tendencies again, we'll have to stop.

MOM

(suddenly cheerful)

Good! Constance? Patience? Joy? It's time for my birthday party?

(to Faith)

Why don't they answer?

(to Father's Office door)

Sweetheart? It's time to come out! It's time for my birthday party! Jimmy? Jerry?

Johnnie? Jody? Jamie? Jose? Jenny? Jannie? Joshie? Jeremy? Janie? Jerry? Joey?

George?

(no answer)

Julie? Jeffery?

(whimpers)

Tad?

(but then excited)

It's awful quiet around here. I wonder why it's so quiet? Do you think it's a birthday surprise?

(Grace hands Mom an envelope. Mom smiles with delight and opens it.)

MOM

"If you think it's a little quiet around here..."

(turns page)

"that's because we've run away. All of us except Grace and Faith. Oh yeah, Joy didn't run away either. She stuck his head in the lawn mower so he couldn't.

(weeping)

Oh no! Not Joy too!

FAITH

Mom. I'm sorry.

MOM

35 children either dead or gone.

FAITH

I'm really sorry.

MOM

What about you? Are you going to run away too?

FAITH

'Course not, Mom.

MOM

Why not? It seems to be the going thing around here. I must be a terrible mother!

FAITH

You're a good mother, Mom.

MOM

I must be terrible. Why else would 35 children either kill themselves or run away.

FAITH

I don't know. But all the psychologists agree: it's not the mother's fault. We're all just victims of victims.

MOM

Is that what you think?

FAITH

Yes I do.

MOM

Then you don't hate me for failing you in some terrible way?

FAITH

No Mom. I love you very much.

MOM

(prompting)

You do?

FAITH

(reluctantly)

So much. So very much.

MOM

So so so very very much? So so so so so so so so so so so—

FAITH

(enough already)

All that!

MOM

Oh thank you. Thank you for being my beautiful daughter.

(Embraces her. Scraping sounds again.)

There's that noise again. I wonder what he's doing.

(Grace is trying to strangle herself by putting a plastic bag over her head.)

FAITH

(struggling)

There had to be some anger. Everyone experiences anger at some point.

MOM

(even more murderously)

NO ANGER!

(rising off the couch)

Not one little BIT!

FAITH

(struggling harder)

All the psychologists agree, Mom. You can't do therapy without talking about anger.

MOM

We were a GOOD family! WELL-EDUCATED! UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS! WE BELIEVED IN GOD AND JESUS CHRIST. WE LOVED EACH OTHER SO MUCH, SO VERY MUCH, SO SO SO VERY VERY MUCH, SO SO SO SO SO SO SO—

FAITH

(desperately struggling)

I KNOW YOU LOVED EACH OTHER!

MOM

(desperate)

Every day after school I sat waiting by Daddy's office door. I would dress up in my prettiest pink dress and my sweetest pink bow. My hands were folded so nicely in my lap and my knees were pressed so tightly together and every day I waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited but Daddy never came out of his office. He never even peeped just to see what I looked like. It wasn't his fault. I guess he didn't know I was there.

(Grace has gotten ahold of the razor blades.)

FAITH

Mom, help!

MOM

Momma said it would be different when I got married but it wasn't. An hour after the wedding vows my groom excused himself. "You don't mind, do you. I have some work to catch up on." I never saw him again. Sometimes at night I felt his rough hands

fumbling with my secret parts, but did he ever turn on the light? Did he ever look at my face?

FAITH

Mom, you gotta help me!

MOM

GRACE! You haven't been using your Chapstick, HAVE YOU?! You've let your lips get chapped AGAIN! Do you know what doctors do when lips get chronically chapped? THEY CUT THEM OFF!

FAITH

(desperately, desperately struggling with Grace)

Mom!

MOM

I read about this in *Better Homes and Gardens*. They don't put you to sleep. They don't give you anything to dull the pain. They cut slowly around your mouth and if you move or scream HALF YOUR FACE GETS SLICED OFF, TOO!

(Faith is now trying to keep Grace from slitting her own throat.)

FAITH

Help me, Mom! I can't control her!

(Mom reaches under the couch and pulls out the baseball bat.)

MOM

Grace? Don't you have some practicing to do? Aren't you playing music for church tomorrow?

(threatening with the bat)

I WANT YOU PRACTICING NOW!

(Grace stops trying to kill herself and begins crawling quickly over to the music stand and instruments.)

MOM

(threatening with the bat)

STOP!

(Grace stops.)

Stand up!... STAND!

(With tremendous effort, Grace stands.)

WALK!

(Tentatively, Grace takes a step, then another, then another. Mom follows her with the bat. Grace picks up the violin case.)

NOT THE VIOLIN, GRACIE! THE GUITAR!

(Grace opens the violin case.)

I SAID THE GUITAR!!!!

FAITH

Let her play the violin if she wants. We don't even have a guitar.

MOM

I SAID PLAY THE GUITAR, GRACE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

(Grace looks at her mother. She starts to put the violin down. But then suddenly she picks it up and plays it.)

(Mom goes wild. She grabs the violin and throws it across the room, throws music all over, knocks over chairs, smashes up the cake and rips cushions off the couch, all the while yelling "PLAY THE GUITAR! PLAY THE GUITAR!" Faith follows her mother around trying to find some way to stop this tirade.

FAITH

(crying)

Mommy. Mommy.

(Meanwhile, Grace has crawled to the violin and now begins playing it again. Mom smashes Grace over the head with the bat. Grace screams and crawls away. Mom follows, hitting. Faith is screaming as well. Grace crawls behind the couch; Mom follows. Over and over we see the bat smash down on Grace who is hidden by the couch.

MOM

(in a frenzy as she hits)

Hit me back! I can't stop! Hit me back! I can't stop! Hit me back! Hit me back!

(Faith slaps Mom. Mom stops swinging. Faith helps her mother up.)

MOM

(weeping bitterly)

I'm a terrible mother. I'm a terrible mother. I try to be a good mother but it never works out. I don't know what happens. It's not my fault. I guess Momma was right. I'm wicked. I soiled my bed. I got dirt on my white church gloves. The devil was in me, she

said. Every day I see it more in your face, she said. You're wicked. So very wicked, so so so very very wicked, so so so so so so so so so so so so so so so...

(With Faith's help, Grace crawls from behind the couch. She is badly beaten. Her limbs shake.)

MOM

(sinks to her knees)

Heavenly Father, take my life, please? I don't deserve to live. I love my children and look what I do. Let me die so my children can stop suffering so. Take my life before I hurt another hair—

(Grace holds a razor blade out to Mom.)

MOM

(seeing the blade)

You want me to kill myself? You want your own mother to kill herself?

(jumps up and starts running in circles)

Alright! I'll kill myself! I'll do it! If my own child wants me dead I might as well kill myself! I'll drive off a cliff and smash myself against the rocks below!

(Mom lunges for the front door. Faith throws herself in front of Mom preventing her exit.)

FAITH

You can't leave, Mom! Dad won't allow you out of the house!

MOM

(suddenly calm)

That's right.

(Grace collapses. Faith runs to her, feels her pulse.)

FAITH

She's dying, Mom. What do we do?

MOM

We can't take her to a hospital. Your father won't let me out of the house.

FAITH

I'd take her myself but I can't lift her. I'm only ten. I know! Isn't Dad a doctor?

MOM

I can't exactly remember. It's been so long.

FAITH

We get mail delivered here to a Dr. Larry Love so he must be a doctor. I'm going in there and tell him to come out.

MOM

(terrified)

You're going into his office?

FAITH

It's the only way, Mom.

MOM

But you've never met the man. Who knows what he's like?!

FAITH

I've got to try it!

MOM

But that door hasn't been opened for 25 years! What if he's annoyed?

FAITH

We can settle all that in family therapy. Right now we've got to think of Grace's life!

(Faith opens Father's Office door just a crack and peeks in. Immediately she slams it shut again.)

FAITH

Oh my God.

(Terrified, Mom steps slowly up to the door, peeks in, slams it shut.)

FAITH

Mom! You know what this means? It means you're free! You can leave the house! You can take Grace to the hospital!!!

MOM

No I can't dear. I keep telling you. Your father won't let me out of the house.

FAITH

Forget about Dad, Mom. We've got to save Grace!

MOM

Oh dear. We have to clean up this mess. I'm having a birthday party.
(starts picking up as she hums the Happy Birthday song)

FAITH

Her pulse is fading! Mom, you gotta help me lift her! We gotta get her to the hospital!

MOM

Speak up, dear. I can't hear you.
(continues humming)

FAITH

You gotta help me lift her!!

MOM

I can't hear you, dear.

FAITH

(in tears)
Mom! She's dying! Please help me lift her!

MOM

There must be something wrong with my ears. I can't hear a word you're saying.

(Faith pulls with all her might on Grace's arm trying to drag Grace out of the house as--)

MOM

(as she cleans)
I can never sit down. This house is never clean. I clean and clean but it never gets clean. I never get to rest. There's no rest for the wicked the Bible says. I must be so wicked. So very wicked. So so so very very wicked. So so so so so so so so so so—

FAITH

Mom. Grace is dead.

MOM

Oh no! Not Gracie, too!

FAITH

You could have saved her, Mom.

MOM

I loved her so much.

FAITH

You could have saved her.

MOM

So very much. So so so very very much. So so so so so—

(Faith stands and crosses off.)

MOM

SO SO SO SO SO SO SO SO SO SO SO—

FAITH

(re-entering with a suitcase)

I gotta go, Mom.

MOM

SO SO SO SO—

FAITH

I don't want to. It's just...

MOM

so so so so very very—

FAITH

Goodbye, Grace.

MOM

very very very very—

FAITH

Goodbye, Mom.

MOM

very very—

FAITH

Goodbye.

MOM

Much much much much much much much—

(Faith exits out the front door.)

MOM

much much much much much.

(suddenly cheerful)

Well.

(stands, goes to Father's Office door)

Sweetheart! It's time to come out of your office! It's time for my birthday party!

(She picks up a chunk of cake and sets it on the table. She sticks candles in it and lights the candles.)

Gracie? Faith? Don't you want to come to your mother's birthday party? Constance, Patience, Joy? It's your mother's birthday party! Bobbie?... Your father's coming. The whole family's coming to my birthday party! Jimmy? Jerry? Johnnie? Jody? Jamie? Jose? Jenny? Jannie? Joshie? Jeremy? Janie? Jerry? Joey? George? Your father's coming out of his office any minute... Julie? Jeffery? Any minute... Tad?

(She looks at Father's Office door. She goes to the door. She opens it wide. Behind the door, Dad has built a brick wall, though he hasn't completed it: there's one brick missing. Dad's eyes stare at her through the missing brick. Mom smiles at him; at last he sees her! Then his hand comes up and he puts the last brick in place. She looks at the brick wall. Her tears flood.)

MOM

Doesn't anyone want to come to my birthday party?

(Lights fade out. End of play.)