The beginning of

**BIRTHIN’ BABY** (from **PLAYING DOCTOR**)

a comic fantasia in one act

by Rich Orloff

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**Place:** A hospital room

**Time:** The present

**Characters:**
MOM, a very, very, very, very, very expectant mother
DOCTOR, her overworked obstetrician (female or male)
GRANDMA, her opinionated mother
MINISTER, a man of the cloth, clearly childless
HUSBAND, her easily distracted husband
MIDWIFE, her dependable caregiver (well, until...)
BABY, a manipulative brat – and very skillful at it
(female or male, to be played by a puppet)

As the play begins, MOM sits in her hospital bed. She is *extremely* pregnant and already looks fatigued from labor. She looks at her pregnancy.

**MOM**
Hello?... Hello?... Hello?!...
How are you? Are you ready?...
Come out come out wherever you are...
Testing, one-two-three, testing...

Mom sighs. The DOCTOR enters. The Doctor looks like he or she has been on call for about two weeks without rest but is overcompensating.

**DOCTOR**
So how’s my favorite patient doing?

**MOM**
Oh, Doctor, I’m so glad you’re here. I feel like I’ve been here for hours, days even, and my husband hasn’t gotten here yet, and I called my mother, and she hasn’t gotten here yet, and and –

**DOCTOR**
Relax. There’s nothing to be afraid of.
MOM
I’m not afraid. Well, not too afraid.
But it’s my first baby and –

DOCTOR
Well, it’s not my first baby. I’ve delivered –
(starts a huge yawn, then stifles it:)
Sorry.

MOM
When was the last time you got
a good night’s sleep?

DOCTOR
Undergrad. But I didn’t become a doctor
to sleep. Sleeping’s for dentists. So I see
on your chart, Gladys –

MOM
That’s not my name.

DOCTOR
Of course it is. It says so on the chart.

MOM
It’s not my name.

DOCTOR
When did you change your name?

MOM
You’ve been my OB/GYN for nine months now.
Don’t you recognize me?

DOCTOR
Sure I do. You’re the pregnant lady.

MOM
Am I having a bad dream?

DOCTOR
Of course not. Open wide.

The Doctor places a red lollipop in Mom’s mouth as if it were a thermometer.

DOCTOR (cont’d)
Close.

The Doctor checks Mom’s pulse and takes out the lollipop.
DOCTOR (cont'd)
Aha! You have an overheated cherry.

MOM
I am dreaming.

DOCTOR
I had a dream once. To cure the sick and serve humankind. Then my accountant talked some sense into me.

(looking at another chart:)
So now, Ethel –

MOM
That’s not my name either.

DOCTOR
Are you sure you’re pregnant?

MOM
(highly nervous by now:)
Oh my God, oh my God, you have no idea who I am, do you?

DOCTOR
(forcefully)
Stop whining!

MOM
(cowered)
Don’t yell at me.

DOCTOR
Well I can’t reassure you; your insurance doesn’t cover it. Now then –

The Doctor gives another loud, long YAWN.

MOM
Are you going to be alert during the delivery?

DOCTOR
I’ll be fine. I just took an amphetamine with a double espresso chaser.

MOM
Why did you do that?!
DOCTOR
I didn’t want the antihistamine I took
to make me drowsy.
     (gives a hearty sneeze, then:)
Sorry.

MOM
You don’t have a cold, do you?

DOCTOR
It’s nothing; I’m just susceptible to germs
when I’m hungover. Now then, Louise –

MOM
That’s not my name either!

DOCTOR
Is this going to be a problem delivery?!

MOM
It’s just –

The Doctor is about to sneeze again but then falls asleep and SNORES.

MOM (cont’d)
Doctor? Doctor?... Doctor!

The Doctor is startled awake.

DOCTOR
Let’s order tests!

MOM
I’m beginning to have my doubts about this.

DOCTOR
About what?

MOM
I’m putting my baby’s life literally in your –

DOCTOR
Don’t worry. We always use hand sanitizer.

The Doctor sneezes.

MOM
Okay. Now I’m scared.
DOCTOR
There’s nothing to be scared of. Giving birth is as natural as passing a pumpkin through a quarter-inch pipe.
   (about to sneeze:)
Ah, ah, ah –
   (impulse controlled, then:)
Okay, now let’s do a pelvic exam.
   (sneezes)
Choo!!!!!!!

MOM
I’m not letting you sneeze between my legs!

DOCTOR
Stop worrying! I’m Board-certified!

Mom closes her legs. The Doctor tries to pry them open.

MOM
Get away from me!

DOCTOR
I’ve got a job to do!
   (suddenly woozy)
Whoa!

The Doctor’s legs turn all rubbery.

MOM
What’s wrong?

DOCTOR
The antihistamine just kicked in.

MOM
You’re definitely not delivering my baby.

DOCTOR
Well, I’m not driving home in this condition!
Okay, now spread those legs.

MOM
No.

DOCTOR
Spread ’em!
By now, the Doctor is trying with full effort to spread Mom’s legs. Mom is resisting with all of her strength.

DOCTOR
Spread ‘em!

MOM
No!

DOCTOR
You want a C-section?!

Mom grabs a bed pan and conks the Doctor on the head. The Doctor wobbles all over the room, ending up by the door.

DOCTOR (cont’d)
I knew I should’ve become a dermatologist. Ah-ah-ahh……. choo!

The force of the sneeze pushes the Doctor out of the room. From the hallway, we hear a crash. Mom leans back and sighs.

From under the sheets by Mom’s legs, the BABY (to be played by a puppet) emerges, looks around for a moment to make sure the coast is clear, and then springs out to surprise Mom with:

BABY
I’m gonna get you! I’m gonna get you! (to us, with mischievous glee, a kind of machine gun rat-a-tatta:)
Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh.

The Baby quickly disappears back into the womb.

MOM
What the –?

GRANDMA enters.

GRANDMA
Oh, there you are! Hello, precious.

MOM
Mom! I’m so glad you’re finally –
GRANDMA
I wasn’t talking to you.
(to Mom’s belly:)
You’re so cute, you’re so cute, you’re so cute.
I love you already! And if there’s anything
Mommy does which you don’t like, just come
to Grandma and complain! Complain all you
want! I remember when I took your mommy
home from the hospital, I told her, “One day,
you’ll be a mommy, too, and I’m going to
have to second-guess every thing you do.”
You’re so cute, you’re so cute, you’re so cute.
(to Mom:)
You look awful. How many times have
I told you: When you leave the house –

GRANDMA and MOM
Wear makeup.

MOM
Why do I need to wear makeup?

GRANDMA
What if one of the doctors is single?

MOM
I’m married. Happily married.

GRANDMA
You’re in a hospital. Here’s your chance to trade up.

MOM
Mom, I know you weren’t thrilled when I married –

GRANDMA
I have nothing against him as your husband,
just as a person.

MOM
Mom, enough. I need your help.

GRANDMA
And that’s what mothers are for – to let
their children know they need help.

MOM
I’m going to be a mom soon and
I’m not sure I’m really ready –
GRANDMA
Don’t worry. Billions of women have raised children, and you’re just as competent as half of them.

MOM
It’s not just mothering. It’s giving birth.

GRANDMA
There’s nothing to be afraid of. Giving birth is as natural as passing a small pig through a garden hose. I remember when I carried you. I used to call you my little –

MOM and GRANDMA
tumor of love.

GRANDMA
Your father had impregnated me on New Year’s Eve, which is why I throw up now whenever I see champagne. It also meant I was forced to have my last trimester during –

MOM and GRANDMA
the hottest summer on record.

GRANDMA
But did I complain?

MOM and GRANDMA
Never.

GRANDMA
Because I knew that the first lesson of motherhood is that you have to sacrifice everything for the child, so that when the child grows up, it knows how to be miserable.

MOM
You succeeded completely.

GRANDMA
But when my water broke in the kitchen and I thought, “Oh my God, the cleaning woman just waxed this floor”, and your dad drove me to the hospital, accelerating and braking, accelerating and braking, till I thought my baby was going to ricochet onto the dashboard –
MOM
Mom –

GRANDMA
– and they wheeled me into the operating room and insisted I stay awake during the delivery, I thought, “Just kill me now.” But, but when you finally emerged out of my “female area”, I took one look at you and you were so… messy. Covered with slime, head to toe, like you’d been shrink-wrapped in gunk. I’m surprised they didn’t kick you out of the hospital for being unsterile.

MOM
All children are –

GRANDMA
At least when they sell you a new car, they wash it first. And then more gunk came out. It was like afterbirth of a nation. And more and more. Who knew women had that much polenta?

MOM
Placenta.

GRANDMA
To this day I can’t eat Tex-Mex food.

MOM
It’s European.

GRANDMA
Then I read that in Austria, children ate placenta for breakfast. And I finally understood World War II.

MOM
Mom, I really could use –

GRANDMA
And after you were born, my “female area” was never as tight again as it used to be.

MOM
I really don’t need to hear this.

GRANDMA
I could tell your father wasn’t happy. Sex began taking him longer and longer.
MOM
Can we change –

GRANDMA
And nobody knew then that you could tone up that area with kugel exercises.

MOM
Kegel!

GRANDMA
It’s not kugel?

MOM
No!

GRANDMA
So the Jewish woman who offered me kugel at a dinner party wasn’t a lesbian?

MOM
Mom!

GRANDMA
I just hope your baby isn’t born dead, or horribly deformed, or with that gene that makes some kids go “you know” all the time.

MOM
I, I –

GRANDMA
Or retarded, or with extreme artism.

MOM
You mean “autism”?

GRANDMA
I mean like that boy down the block who used to lip-sync Judy Garland songs.

MOM
I don’t care if my child is gay.

GRANDMA
Just make sure they never touch themselves, so they’ll know they need other people to feel complete.
MOM
Mom, could I have your attention – for a mo –

GRANDMA
You’re not still planning to hire a caretaker and go back to work, are you?

MOM
Yes, Mom.

GRANDMA
Great. You’re leaving your own flesh-and-blood with some illegal alien, and then you’ll never be appointed Attorney General. And when I visit, my grandchild will have an accent and ask me to cook fahitos*.

(*She probably means “fajitas” but mispronounces it.)

MOM
It’s my child, Mom.

GRANDMA
Well, you’re entitled to your opinion.

MOM
Mom, I was really hoping I could get some useful advice from you.

GRANDMA
Darling, if you want advice, just ask. What is it?

MOM
Well... well, I’ve read all the books.

GRANDMA
(dismissive)
Books, eh.

MOM
And I’ve taken classes.

GRANDMA
Classes, eh.

MOM
I’m still afraid that when the baby arrives, I won’t know what to do.
**GRANDMA**

Parenting is easy. Just remember: Whatever you do, don’t be too strict. And whatever you do, don’t be too lenient. Don’t give a baby a bottle for the first two weeks, but make sure to give them a bottle the first day, or they’ll never accept it. When you make a decision, stick to it, but always be flexible. And definitely use *cloth* diapers, because paper diapers waste trees and because your second cousin’s neighbor used paper diapers on her children, and one of them became dyslexic. But be sure to use *paper* diapers instead of cloth, because you don’t want to risk your baby’s bottom rubbing against a poorly sterilized cloth that’s already had another baby’s butt rubbed against it. Unless you want them to end up artistic.

**MOM**

Mom, that’s not how it –

**GRANDMA**

So is there anything else I can help you with?

**MOM**

Well, I certainly wish there was *some* way –

**GRANDMA**

Have you decided what to name the baby yet? I think you should name the baby “Grandma”.

**MOM**

What if it’s a boy?

**GRANDMA**

“Mr. Grandma”.

(to the belly:)

I love you so much! Yes I do, yes I do! When you visit me, I’m going to feed you chocolate and candy and cookies and ice cream – and sugar through IVs and then hand you back to Mommy!

**MOM**

(in pain from a contraction:)

_Ehhh!!!*_

(*or whatever sound the actress feels natural saying during contractions.)

Grandma immediately runs to the door.
GRANDMA  
(calling down the hall:)  
Get the drugs!  

MOM  
I don’t want drugs!  

GRANDMA  
I do!  

MOM  
I want a completely natural birth.  

GRANDMA  
Having a baby is about as natural as passing the Goodyear blimp through the Holland Tunnel! Get the drugs!  

MOM  
Ohh – ohh – I’m feeling another contraction.  
(in pain from a contraction:)  
Ehhh!!!  

GRANDMA  
(during the contraction:)  
Well, I see there’s nothing for me to do here.  

MOM  
Can’t you offer me any sort of help?!!  

GRANDMA  
(tossing a prescription vial from her purse:)  
Here, have some Vicodin.  

MOM  
I want to feel the full experience!  

GRANDMA  
I had the full experience once, and I still haven’t recovered! Call me when my grandchild has been hosed off!  

MOM  
Goodbye, Mom.  

GRANDMA  
The full experience – bleccchhh!
Grandma exits. The Baby once again emerges from between the sheets, looks around to see if it’s safe, and then approaches Mom.

BABY
Psst... Psst... Hey.

MOM
Huh?

BABY
You ready to negotiate?

MOM
Negotiate?

BABY
Here’s what I have to offer: After a couple of months, once I figure out how to use my eye muscles, occasionally I’ll look at you and smile.

MOM
Oh, good.

BABY
In return, I’m going to suck on your boobs till they become so sore you’ll stop drinking milk out of solidarity with cows. Half the milk I’ll spit up, but I’ll still poop so often you’ll swear I’m sneaking off to suck another woman’s tits. However, I do promise to sleep through the night.

MOM
I’m so glad.

BABY
I define “night” as 11:30 p.m. till midnight. Oh, and I’m going to be one of those fussy babies, too. You know what “fussy” means?

MOM
Well, I think it means –
BABY
It means when I’m crabby and crying and company comes over, they’ll look at me and say:
(in the icky sweet way
one talks to a baby:)
“Oh, he’s just being fussy.”
(letting her have it:)
And then they’ll go to their baby-free, germ-free, poop-free homes and you’re stuck with me!
(to us, with mischievous glee:)
Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh.

MOM
(beginning to feel tormented:)
What do you want from me?

BABY
Total responsibility, 24-7.

MOM
My husband plans to share the workload with me.

BABY
*Have you read the fine print?!!!*