

SCHEDULE MEISTERS

By Patrick Gabridge

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SCHEDULE-MEISTERS

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CHARACTERS: (2f)

MARY MEYERS: 40s, a mother of many children. Pushed to her limits.

STEPHANIE: 20s, a perky, fresh-faced employee of Schedule-Meisters.

TIME: Now.

PLACE: America.

SETTING: The living room of Mary's home. Can be representational. Need two chairs and piles of toys and laundry.

PRODUCTION HISTORY: Winner, Lakeshore Players Ten-Minute Play Festival/Competition, Minnesota, 2010

AT RISE: A living room. Toys and clutter abound. MARY, 40s, enters, carrying an overflowing laundry basket, with STEPHANIE, 20s, right behind her. MARY sets down the laundry basket and begins folding. STEPHANIE clears a place off a chair and sits. Every once in a while during this play, there might be a CRASH off stage (from high, low, all around, typically the sound of toys or something breaking), which MARY will ignore, but STEPHANIE will notice.

MARY: Thanks for coming. Bonnie said your service helped her a lot. And if there's one thing Bonnie needs, it's help. My husband is skeptical, but what does he know? He goes off to his job every day for fifteen hours, where everything is scheduled, there's a whole team of people to do the work, and he even gets paid. Not that I'm not grateful. Roof over our heads and all that. I hope you don't mind if I do this while we talk, but Jody has soccer practice this afternoon, so this is my only chance.

STEPHANIE: At Schedule-Meisters, multi-tasking is what we're all about. We encourage and promote exactly what you're doing right now.

MARY: Great. *(yelling off stage)* JONAH GET OFF YOUR SISTER. NOW! GET OFF HER! GET OFF HER! *(back to STEPHANIE)* They're a spirited bunch.

STEPHANIE: We've helped countless women learn to manage their busy lives more effectively.

MARY: *(yelling off stage)* GLADYS, GET THE MATCHES AWAY FROM YOUR BROTHER! THE MATCHES. THE... THANK YOU.

STEPHANIE: First we'll have you fill out a time log, so we can understand exactly how you spend your time.

MARY: This is how I spend my time.

STEPHANIE: Right, but if we have exact data on how much time it takes to perform each task, we'll be able to create new efficiencies. We offer this lovely journal in pink or floral. I like the wooded glen, myself.

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MARY: You want me to buy those, so I can write down what I do?

STEPHANIE: The basic journals are included with your membership, but we have a whole catalog of extras. We have some very pretty matching gel pens.

MARY: Why don't you just write it down for me?

STEPHANIE: Actually, you'll write it down, and we'll do the analysis.

MARY: I don't have time for that. Just start writing.

STEPHANIE: That's not the way we usually--

MARY: Look, I'm paying you to be helpful. So help. Write down this stuff. And try to pick up some of those legos over there, while you're at it.

STEPHANIE: I don't think you understand what--

MARY: AMANDA, GET YOUR CLEATS ON! PETER, IF YOU EAT ONE MORE OF THOSE COOKIES I'LL HAVE THE DENTIST PULL ALL YOUR TEETH OUT.

(STEPHANIE starts picking up legos, while also preparing to write on her pad.)

MARY: Okay. So I'll give you the list, and then you'll tell me how I can get it done better, right?

STEPHANIE: Normally you'd fill out the time sheets and then mail them to our lab, where we'd analyze and--

MARY: Write this down: Wake the kids up for school, get them dressed. Howard has a touch of autism, so he's a little tricky. Make breakfast for the little ones, clean up after the medium ones, convince the big ones to eat something, feed and walk the dog, scoop up after the cats, eat breakfast, shower, get dressed, meet with a gallery owner, answer e-mails, write a proposal, sweep the garden path, pick tomatoes, grocery shop, change a pull up, make lunch, do laundry, take the trash out, buy shoes for the littlest one, buy milk, pick up Samuel from kindergarten, go to the post office, the bank, get the rest from school, start dinner, walk the dog again, cat to the vet, Caitlin to soccer, Trixie to flute lessons, finish dinner, dishes, help with homework, vacuum the stairs, make lunches, say Hi to husband, bathe kids, tooth brushing, pajamas, stories, sign permission slips. Somewhere in there stretch a canvas for a new painting, and work on a sketch for the still life. *(finally breathes)* Got all that?

STEPHANIE: Yes. Just about. You lost me around lunch. That's a busy week, but--

MARY: Week? That's one day.

STEPHANIE: Oh. Of course.

MARY: You're new at this, aren't you?

STEPHANIE: Does it show? So many families are in need of our services... The business is expanding like crazy. Mrs. Morris is struggling to find enough staff. I just started.

MARY: I thought you looked a little young.

STEPHANIE: I just graduated.

MARY: Oh, good Lord. And your qualifications are that you were able to do homework in more than one class?

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STEPHANIE: I was also editor of our college paper, president of the Women for Justice League, played varsity soccer and squash, dorm floor monitor, had a weekly radio show, and helped start the craft guild.

MARY: You were a busy bee, weren't you?

STEPHANIE: And I had a 3.9 GPA.

MARY: Your parents must be so proud. When's the last time you saw a movie?

STEPHANIE: Saturday.

MARY: Concert?

STEPHANIE: Friday.

MARY: Last time you went out to eat.

STEPHANIE: Breakfast.

MARY: Out for coffee?

STEPHANIE: On my way here.

MARY: Went out with your friends?

STEPHANIE: Last night.

MARY: I hate you. You know that, right?

STEPHANIE: Um, I could see how you might resent my freedom to--

MARY: I might kill you.

STEPHANIE: Now, Mary.

MARY: The bloodier the better.

STEPHANIE: That's, ah, ah, that's just the frustration talking.

MARY: Talking? It's screaming. You wouldn't like what it's suggesting.

(STEPHANIE squirms nervously in her chair.)

STEPHANIE: I'm sure you're very tired.

MARY: Tired? What's the word for five steps past exhausted, but one step this side of dead.

STEPHANIE: When we get tired like that, it's just so easy to become--

MARY: Homicidal?

STEPHANIE: Exactly. Mrs. Morris said lots women feel like you do.

MARY: She did?

STEPHANIE: Yes. Very common.

MARY: And did she have any suggestions?

(STEPHANIE produces a little can out of her pocketbook and holds it out in front of her, pointing at MARY.)

STEPHANIE: Mace.

MARY: I'm sorry. I was just kidding. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm a kidder. I don't know what made me... You're just so perky and fresh, and it just--

STEPHANIE: Reminds you of your lost youth?

MARY: Makes me think you should suffer and die.

(STEPHANIE readies the mace, just in case.)

STEPHANIE: Now, Mary. Let's shift this away from...

MARY: Your murder?

STEPHANIE: Exactly. We're not here to talk about me. I'm here to help you.

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