

"With Love, Mom" Synopsis

With Love, Mom is a story about family, secrets, and the pain that binds us. Thea, a 21-year-old, college student must balance taking care of her family, school, work, and living a double life. Rochelle, Thea's mom, is trying everything possible to keep the small family afloat while dealing with her own demons. In Thea's eyes, Rochelle isn't doing enough, which leaves all of the families' burdens on her shoulders. Thea's relief comes in the form of her girlfriend/childhood best friend, Jocelyn. Jocelyn was thrown out of the house by her mother, Nina, who happens to be Rochelle's best friend. Seeing the strain of Nina and Jocelyn's relationship, Thea hides her sexuality out of fear of rejection. This fear puts a strain on Jocelyn's and Thea's relationship. Thea sees Nina as an ideal mother. She's levelheaded and responsible. The prejudice is just something from her mother and Nina's generation. Jocelyn sees Rochelle as caring and loving. Thea desperately wants to break free from the constraints she feels at home and live her true self, but she can't leave her family. After all, family is everything. As things shift in the family dynamic and the threat of losing their home looms in both women's minds, Thea must decide how to save her family, but not lose herself. While Rochelle struggles to keep the family home and a sense of normality. In the end, both women must learn to see each other for what they are.

With Love, Mom

Sydney Anderson

THEA, a 21-year-old black woman, enters the kitchen. The clock on the stove reads 4:43, but she is stretching and yawning. Her DINGY COLORFUL STRING BRACELET visible on her wrist, she always has it on. It is visible that she just woke up. Still in her work shirt from before, but she has pajama shorts on. She goes to open the fridge, but stops when she sees a note on the whiteboard that reads:

Thea, please take the chicken out around noon so it can thaw.
- Mom

The WHITEBOARD is old and different variations of the word 'Mom' can be seen but long erased. In between the message and 'Mom' the word 'love' can slightly be seen although it is not engrained in the whiteboard as much as 'Mom'.

She turns towards the kitchen sink and sees it is filled with dishes. Popping earbuds in, she begins cleaning.

ROCHELLE, a black woman in her mid-40s, enters from outside and goes into the kitchen. She's dressed business casual with her hair pulled back. A few flyaway curls escape her otherwise tight bun. In one arm she's juggling grocery bags. In the other, a fussy three-year-old, ANNA, rests on her hip. Anna's hand is reaching out towards Thea. SAMMI, a tall and slender 12-year-old, pushes pass Rochelle and leaves.

ROCHELLE

A little help would be nice. Sammi,
there are more bags in the car.
Teetee. Teetee. Thea.

Thea turns towards her mother. Rochelle sets Anna down who immediately runs towards Thea.

THEA

Hey, cutie. You have a fun time at
daycare?

Anna nods and dangles a toy in front of Thea. Thea kisses the toddler on the forehead and the two embrace in a hug.

ROCHELLE

Dammit, Thea. I asked you to do one
thing.

Rochelle is looking in the freezer to the still-frozen chicken.

THEA

I just woke up. You could have taken the chicken out before you left. Set it in the fridge or something.

ROCHELLE

I also work.

Thea ignores her mother and focuses on the happy toddler.

THEA

(Under her breath)

I also raise your kids.

ROCHELLE

What?

THEA

Nothing.

Thea unpacks more items from the grocery bags. She gets a glass of water and sets Anna on the counter. Reaching to the top shelf, Thea grabs a prescription bottle.

THEA

Here.

Thea hands her mother the water and medicine.

THEA

You have a doctor's appointment at the end of the week.

Rochelle takes the water and medicine.

ROCHELLE

You did the dishes.

It's not a thank you, but a statement. Thea knows this. She nods.

ROCHELLE

I got you those crackers you like. But you have to share with your sister. She likes them too.

Sammi enters carrying more bags. She sends Thea a cheeky grin.

THEA

Really? She doesn't even like them.

ROCHELLE

Jesus, Thea you're 21 years old and you still don't understand the concept of sharing.

Anna starts to cry.

ROCHELLE

Give me my child.

THEA

Whatever.

ROCHELLE

Don't whatever me. I'm your mother and that's rude. And you're gonna stop saying things under your breath. Acting like you pay bills round here.

THEA

I do what I can. What - do you want me to drop out? Is that what you want?

A GUNSHOT goes off outside. Thea flinches. Rochelle stands stone-faced. Anna cries harder.

Rochelle sees Sammi near a window.

THEA

Girl. You know better. Get away from that window.

Thea hands Anna over to Rochelle. When doing so Thea kisses Rochelle on the cheek as well. Rochelle stands there motionless, the years of work weighing on her. She exhales a deep sigh as Anna fusses on her hip. Thea and Sammi unpack groceries around her.

ROCHELLE

These are gonna have to last us all month.

Thea surveys all of the groceries. Enough for maybe two weeks. Two and a half if she ate some of her meals at work.

THEA

Can't you go to Tracy?

ROCHELLE

I did. This is from her food stamp card. She couldn't sell as much this

month.

THEA

And we're not on stamps because...?

ROCHELLE

We don't need handouts.

(beat)

Besides I'd have to work fewer hours
at the hospital to really qualify.

THEA

I guess? Feels like we check off all
the boxes though.

Another GUNSHOT goes off outside. Thea and Rochelle look
towards the kitchen window.

CUT TO: BLACK

"WITH LOVE, MOM" APPEARS IN WHITE HANDWRITING ON SCREEN.

2 INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

2

Thea's hair is tied back. She's dressed in all black with an
apron around waist. She's pouring water to a guest while
looking at another table.

Five people around Thea's age are laughing around a table.
Thea watches them. She puts the water back at the server
station and takes a breath before walking over to the table.
She approaches as the table erupts into a new round of
laughter.

CLASSMATE #1

If we're gonna walk then I'd rather be
outside somewhere.

(gesturing to Thea)

Have y'all thought about what you
wanted to eat?

THEA

Oh, take your time. I can come back.

CLASSMATE #1

Nah, I think we're good.

CLASSMATE #2

I need more time. I didn't look at the
menu properly.

THEA

Okay, I'll come back.

CLASSMATE #1

Settle something for us. You go to Port Ridge?

THEA

Yeah, I'm actually in y'all's Calculus 3 class.

CLASSMATE #2

Yeah! Professor Brimwall!

THEA

Yup. Well, I'll let you look over the menu some more.

(beat)

If you're looking for a good hiking place there's a really pretty trail by Easton park.

CLASSMATE #2

Cool, do you hike a lot?

THEA

No.

Thea abruptly turns and leaves.

3 INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

3

Thea's in a busy kitchen with people running around. She sets a tray down in front of AARON, mid-20s, chef.

THEA

Table 6 wanted their steak well done. This is medium.

AARON

That's how you eat a steak. Well done is for uncultured swines.

THEA

Well, those uncultured swines want to chew leather. Please reheat this. For me?

Aaron takes back the plate and puts the steak back on the grill. JOCELYN, a dark-skinned cook in her mid-20s, comes over to help. She smiles at Thea.

AARON

For you. When are we gonna go on that date?

THEA

When you learn how to read directions and cook something right the first time.

AARON

Ouch, you wound me.

Thea laughs and turns around, almost bumping into CHRIS, mid-40s, and her manager.

CHRIS

Thea! Just the person I was looking for. I need you to work for me tomorrow.

THEA

Chris. Tomorrow is my first day off in three weeks.

CHRIS

Please? Lainey just called off, Randy's wife went into labor so he can't work and we got three parties. Plus, you're always asking for more hours.

THEA

Yeah, but --

CHRIS

School is expensive.

Chris gives her a puppy dog look.

CHRIS

Please?

THEA

Chris, I'm tired.

CHRIS

You can handle it. You're superwoman.

Thea looks down and sighs. She knows she's going to say yes and Chris does too.

CHRIS

Thanks. You're the best. Table 8 needs more bread.

THEA

Yeah, okay. I'm going to run to the bathroom real quick.

CHRIS

Five minutes.

Chris disappears into the madness of the kitchen.

4 INT. BATHROOM STALL - NIGHT

4

Thea is standing in the stall. She's breathing heavily and silently screaming into her hands. A knock on the stall from EMILY, another waitress, interrupts her shaking.

THEA

Occupied.

EMILY

Thea? Chris told me to come get you.

THEA

He said I had five.

EMILY

Franny needs help with a ten-top that just showed up.

Thea looks up to the fluorescent lights and mouths, 'My God.'

THEA

Coming.

She wipes her eyes and flushes the toilet. Looking directly ahead.

5 INT. RESTAURANT LOBBY - NIGHT

5

Thea is surrounded by a few employees in an empty lobby. Some servers wearing the same uniform as Thea are sitting down counting their tips. Thea is the only server helping the bussers clean up the tables.

EMILY

Hey, Thea come sit with us. They got that.

THEA

It's cool. The faster they're done the faster they can go home too.

EMILY

We're thinking about going to Axis over the weekend. Come sit. Talk to us.

Emily gestures to the other servers seated at the table. Thea goes closer to the table but does not sit down.

THEA

Axis? It's not really my type of club and -

EMILY

But AJ knows the DJ so he can help us get in. It's ladies night.

THEA

I don't know.

EMILY

Yeah, you have to get your sisters to school or soccer or whatever.

THEA

No, it's not that. I just- I can't. Not this weekend.

AJ, mid 20s, slams some money on the table and stands.

AJ

Told you she wouldn't go. Pay up, people!

The other servers at the table put money into AJ's outstretched hand.

THEA

I really want too.

EMILY

Yeah, well whenever you have a night off you should come out with us. I'm curious what a drunk Thea looks like. So tightly wound up.

THEA
 Maybe some other time though?
 Raincheck?

Thea starts to walk away from the servers table and into the kitchen.

6 INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

6

Jocelyn is cleaning off a counter. Thea sees her and at the same time Jocelyn looks up. The two make eye contact before going back to their business. Thea grabs a rag and starts cleaning too. She slowly starts to clean in Jocelyn's direction until the two are on either side of a counter cleaning.

JOCELYN
 (whispering)
 Are we still on for tomorrow?

THEA
 (not looking at Jocelyn,
 whispering)
 Yeah. Of course. I picked up a shift
 though, so it's going to have to be
 later. If that's cool?

JOCELYN
 Yeah.
 (beat)
 Still worried about your Mom?

THEA
 I'm always worried.

JOCELYN
 No, I mean, is she doing okay? Like
 okay, okay?

THEA
 Yeah, she's fine.

Thea looks up and sees Chris talking to another cook. Aaron waves at Thea, but Thea doesn't return it. Instead, she goes back to work.

JOCELYN
 Look out, here comes Aaron.

THEA
 I can handle him.

AARON
Hey! Thea. Jocelyn. What are you two
whispering about?

THEA
(normal voice)
Periods.

AARON
Oh, uh. That's nice. I'm gonna go
finish cleaning up. Have fun.

Jocelyn giggles. Aaron leaves.

THEA
(whispering)
One day he'll figure us out.

JOCELYN
(whispering)
Oh no, and then he'll stop hitting on
you.

THEA
And then he'll tell his sister who
goes to the same salon as my mom.
She's already stressed. Why stress her
out more?

JOCELYN
And what about you?

Thea shrugs.

THEA
I'm fine. Does Carl still need help in
his shop tonight?

JOCELYN
Yeah, but I feel like I should be
telling you to rest?

THEA
Cool, I'll be there.

JOCELYN
You sure you're okay though?

THEA
Yeah, I'm fine. Everything is fine.

Thea's phone rings once and stops. She looks down at her home screen of her mom and sisters staring at her.

THEA
(whispering)
I'll meet you at our spot.

Jocelyn notices Thea's still lit up background and Thea sees this.

THEA
Do you miss her?

Jocelyn's smile falls and she looks down.

THEA
Sorry.

JOCELYN
It's cool.

THEA
I think she's changed.

JOCELYN
She hasn't.

THEA
Are you sure? Y'all were always close
and she always asks about you and -

JOCELYN
Drop it. I don't push you about your
mom.

THEA
Sorry.

Thea's phone starts ringing again.

THEA
I should take this though.

JOCELYN
Okay... see ya later?

Thea smiles, nods, and answers her phone. She walks towards the back exit. Before leaving, she looks back at Jocelyn who is quietly cleaning with a frown.

7 INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

7

Rochelle steps out from the filing room. She wipes away tears using her sleeve.

ROCHELLE

These need to go to oncology.

Rochelle drops a stack of papers into the NEW ASSISTANT's lap. She watches as the young assistant fidgets before scattering off. NINA, an older nurse and Rochelle's life long friend is dressed in scrubs, chuckles. Nina's hair is pulled into a tight bun with a few grey hairs flowing through. Laugh lines long etched into an otherwise flawless face.

NINA

You're gonna give that girl a heart attack the way you scold.

ROCHELLE

What? I just asked her to do one thing. Besides, it's my job to make sure everything is filed properly.

NINA

You've let that Office Lead position go to your head. She's terrified of you. You're so hard on her.

ROCHELLE

All I said was to do one thing. It wouldn't kill her to get off her butt and actually work.

Nina chuckles.

NINA

How's Thea doing in school?

ROCHELLE

Probably good. She's always fine in school. But she's stubborn as always. Smartmouth. Thinks she knows everything.

NINA

Are you surprised?

ROCHELLE

What?

NINA
Look who her mother is.

ROCHELLE
Oh, please. I'm not -

NINA
Yeah, sure whatever. Hothead.

ROCHELLE
My mother taught me to respect my
elders. So I'll hold my tongue.

Rochelle pouts a little and crosses her arms. This causes
Nina to erupt in a fit of laughter.

NINA
All I'm saying. Apple and tree, Ro,
apple and tree.

Beat.

ROCHELLE
You excited to retire?

NINA
No. I've worked the last 50 years and
I plan on working the next 50. Of
course, I'm excited to retire. What
kind of question is that?

ROCHELLE
I'm not going to miss you.

NINA
I'm not going to miss you, too.

Beat.

NINA
You apply to that school I told you
about?

ROCHELLE
Yeah. I had my entrance exam recently.
Math and science. I think that study
place you recommended helped a lot.

NINA
You tell Thea about going back to
school yet?

ROCHELLE

No, she's already stressed about her schooling. I don't need her to stress about how I'm going to afford school. Been going to the night program for prep.

NINA

So, what does she think you're doing at night?

ROCHELLE

Don't you know I'm a working girl?

Rochelle wiggles her eyebrows and both women burst into laughter. Rochelle gets up to put something in a cabinet. As she walks she sashays.

ROCHELLE

Gotta put what my mama gave me to good use.

NINA

You a mess.

ROCHELLE

Yeah, but I'm your mess.

NINA

That you are.

Rochelle sits back down in her chair. She takes a PICTURE from her desk of her smiling daughters. Her thumb goes over Thea's face.

ROCHELLE

Thea doesn't need to worry about me. Between school and everything else. She doesn't need that stress.

NINA

And how are you?

ROCHELLE

I'm good.

Nina looks Rochelle up and down waiting for her to speak more.

ROCHELLE

Really. I'm good. Hanging in there.

NINA

Well, my offer still stands. I don't have a really big place, but I do have a couch and running water. I can take y'all in if needed.

ROCHELLE

Oh, I didn't tell you? Some great aunt died and left me some money. So I should be able to keep the house through the summer.

NINA

What aunt?

ROCHELLE

An aunt on my mom's side.

NINA

What's her name?

ROCHELLE

Mabel.

NINA

Mabel?

ROCHELLE

Mabel.

Beat.

NINA

Mabel. Funny. You never told me you had a great aunt. And you tell me everything.

ROCHELLE

(snaps)

Not everything.

Rochelle looks away from Nina embarrassed.

ROCHELLE

So, yeah. We'll be fine. And I appreciate that loan. As soon as I can I'll pay you back. Don't worry about us. We'll be fine.

Nina looks at Rochelle with a displeasing look.

ROCHELLE
Anyway, can we just drop this?
Everything is fine. We're fine.

Beat.

NINA
Well, I'm sorry for your loss.

ROCHELLE
Thanks.

Rochelle picks at her nail not making eye contact with Nina.
Nina just stares at Rochelle with a worried look.

In walks Thea with Anna in her arms. A washcloth covering a
bloody gash on her forehead as blood trails down her face.
Sammi walks behind.

ROCHELLE
What the hell happened?

THEA
The babysitter called me. Anna tripped
near the corner of the table and cut
herself. Why aren't you answering your
phone?

ROCHELLE
You know we can't answer our phones.

THEA
Never stopped you before.

ROCHELLE
Well, it's been busy here.

Thea looks around at the almost empty waiting room.

THEA
Busy. Yeah.

ROCHELLE
Well, why didn't you call the desk
phone?

THEA
I don't know. I panicked.

ROCHELLE
Come here my sweet, Anna banana.

Thea hands a crying Anna over to Rochelle who starts inspecting the cut.

THEA
She's going to be okay right?

ROCHELLE
Yeah -

THEA
Oh...I was asking Nina.

NINA
No, she's going to turn into a Chupacabra. Yes, she's going to be okay. Your mother knows what she's talking about -

ROCHELLE
Thank you.

NINA
-sometimes. She gets her brains from Mabel.

THEA
Who's Mabel?

ROCHELLE
No one.

NINA
Oh.

Rochelle and Nina make eye contact.

THEA
Well, I gotta get home and change.
Jocelyn-

Nina shifts in her chair at the sound of Jocelyn's name. Thea notices how Nina's hand goes to the LOCKET around her neck.

THEA
Um, she got me a shift stocking shelves overnight somewhere.

Thea goes to kiss Anna.

THEA
Bye, Annie.

ROCHELLE

Wait, what am I suppose to do with them?

THEA

I thought you were gonna be off soon?

ROCHELLE

There's still five more hours of my shift.

THEA

How?

ROCHELLE

I told them I'd stay a few more hours since it has been busy. This is the first break. So you have to take them after I get someone to check Anna.

THEA

I -

Thea sees Nina behind her mother. Nina is gesturing towards her heart and pointing towards her mother. Thea looks back at Rochelle.

THEA

Yeah, fine. Okay.

ROCHELLE

Thank you.

Rochelle leaves with Anna. Thea sways a little. She sits in the chair near Sammi.

NINA

Hey, Sammi. Can you get me some candy from the vending machine?

Nina waves money in the air. Sammi shrugs and walks over taking the money before disappearing down a hall. Thea leans her head against the wall to rest. Nina throws a pen at Thea.

THEA

Ouch. Why'd you do that?

NINA

You know why.

Thea twirls the friendship bracelet around her wrist. She

fidgets in her chair.

NINA

You still wear that thing?

Thea immediately stops touching her bracelet and sits straight up in her chair.

NINA

Are you okay?

THEA

Yeah. Of course.

NINA

I remember when y'all made those in my living room. Jocelyn cried for hours when she lost hers. How is she?

THEA

She's fine. Misses you.

NINA

Really? Last I heard she thought I was some bigotted bible throwing woman who kicked her out. I didn't kick her out. She chose to leave.

THEA

Do you still love her?

NINA

Yes. She's my daughter. She is just confused is all.

THEA

Aren't you happy she told you though? That she wanted you to know who she really is?

NINA

She's just acting out. I'm telling you that girl is always trying to do something to get attention. But she'll get over this phase.

THEA

Phase?

NINA

Yes. Don't get me wrong. I'm okay with

those kind people. Just not my child.

Thea looks in the direction her mom left with a worried expression.

NINA

You know your mother has high blood pressure. Why are you so hard on her?

All worry fades from Thea's face.

THEA

Me?

NINA

Yes. You. Thea Nina Robinson.

Thea rolls her eyes.

NINA

Yeah, that's right. I full named you. Come here, Missy.

Thea stands and sluggishly walks over to Nina.

NINA

You gotta be easier on her.

THEA

I am. She comes home from work. She might cook. But more often than not, she plays that game on her phone. Then goes to her room and turns on loud music and sleeps. And I say nothing. I let her.

NINA

She's tired.

THEA

Me, too.

NINA

You know she's on antidepressants.

THEA

She told you?

NINA

Nah, I found them in her bag. Don't give me that look. I wasn't snoopin'.

She asked me to grab her keys out her bag and I found the pills in a zipper. Anyway, how ya doing?

THEA
Everything is fine.

Nina shakes her head as she stares at Thea.

NINA
Apple and tree.

THEA
What?

NINA
Nothing. Go find your sister and make sure she gives me back my change instead of spending it on snacks for herself.

Thea starts to walk away.

NINA
And don't come back until you learned to respect your elders! Or you have a Snickers. Whichever comes first.