

THE NANNY AFFAIR
PROD. BY GEORGIA WRIGHT

[DRAMATIC PIANO]

Soap operas are known for their plot twists: a villain whipping off his mask, a lover turning on a dime. We glue ourselves to our television screens, waiting for the next chapter of the spectacle.

[AS THE WORLD TURNS theme]

Soaps are campy and over-the-top. For audience members, that's the whole point. Melodramatics are fun, when there's a screen between us and the drama. No harm, no foul. We munch our popcorn, we get the dirt, we click off the TV. It's not like the characters are people we actually know.

...But what if they were?

To see something that you think is okay crumble in front of your eyes in the matter of I think it was like ten hours, ya know, from beginning to end, and I don't think... you know, the point at which it crumbled was probably five minutes, you know what I mean? Those five minutes can just change an entire family.

This is my friend Maia. For a year and a half, she worked as a nanny for a three-person family in southern Rhode Island. It was a typical babysitting gig--nice suburban husband and wife, one young son, a couple of dogs. Typical, that is, until one day this past July, when something kind of unusual happened. The kid was about two at the time, and he and Maia were having a pretty average morning.

4:50 I was making him scrambled eggs, everything was normal, we played, we did the usual one and a half year old things.

playing outside, blowing bubbles... it was summer, so we, I think we filled up his pool, splashing around, all that stuff.

[MUSIC BREAK]

At about noon, a car pulls into the driveway. It's the husband. Sometimes he'd swing home on his lunch break, but typically the wife would let Maia know ahead of time, in case the baby was going down for a nap or anything. It was a little unusual for him to turn up without warning.

He asked me, if oh, did my wife tell you I was coming, and I said no, but it's okay, you know it's his house, I'm not gonna be mad at him for showing up.

Then he said he was going to grab a few things and just get out of there basically, it'll just be a quick stop, don't worry, like I'll be out of your hair. So then he goes down to the basement and brings up a suitcase. And that was again a little surprising because I didn't know there was a business trip planned or anything like that, but you know he's a businessman so he does things like that, so nothing out of the ordinary, but then he brings out two more suitcases. I was like oh this is a long trip, I wonder if they're going on a family vacation, but he wasn't talking to me, so I just kind of kept to myself, and was playing with his child. He then starts to take things down the stairs from their bedroom on coat hangers. And he's like putting them into the car.

Maia's getting edgy. This is weird behavior. She's trying not to be too obvious that she's watching, but it's hard not to stare.

So at this point it's like, oh my gosh, e's taking a lot of stuff. And so I start paying a little bit more attention to what he's doing. And he's bringing business clothes, play clothes, shoes, ties, belts, it's not like oh you're going to a specific location, you're going to Florida, like it was all kinds of stuff.

So at this point, the alarm bells are ringing, and I have basically figured out that he's moving out.

And this is kind of where I got into a moral dilemma about what a nanny's role really is, because it was extremely uncomfortable for me to even think about, uh, confronting him and asking are you moving out, or are you leaving her? So I just kind of let him do it, he didn't say a word to me, um, and right before he's finishing up, he says "okay, I'm going to do a final sweep."

The dad goes through the house one last time, grabs the remainder of his stuff, packs it into the car. Then he comes back inside and, ignoring Maia, leans down to his kid. Maia does her best to be very still, pretending that nothing is wrong and she can't hear what he says next. But she does.

And he leans down to the baby and he says: "Daddy messed up, I hope I'm going to see you soon, goodbye." And he turns without even looking at me and leaves.

[DRAMATIC SOUND EFFECT]

At at this point I was freaking out because I think anyone could tell that... to say goodbye to your child in front of somebody else, especially with the words "daddy messed up"...

Something's going down in this house. And I did not know what to do.

It's just the two of them now--Maia and this two year old kid, who is oblivious to the fact that his family structure has changed forever. Maia, horrified, tries to hold herself together until she gets him down for a nap.

He says bye to daddy every day when he goes to work. He was not realizing, oh I'm not going to see you for a long time, it was just like Daddy goes bye bye. And I was basically just like... yes. Daddy is going bye bye.

[ORGAN]

Finally, the baby's asleep. Maia launches into panic mode. At this point she calls her long-term boyfriend for advice on what, if anything, she can do without overstepping her boundaries. She and the wife have been close, considering their employer-nanny relationship, but it's a prickly situation.

Do I call her? Do I tell her that her husband just moved out? Do I just let it be their issues? Is she going to be embarrassed if I tell her that he came? Do I stay out of it? Like all this stuff.

Eventually they come up with a plan. Maia decides to send the mom a casual text, something along the lines of “hey, just wanted to let you know that your husband stopped by.” For over an hour, she hears nothing back. Then, finally, the wife responds.

12:12 “My life has turned upside down, can you stay late, I’ll fill you in when I get home.”

When she came home she had walked through the door and and she had you know bags under her eyes, looked like she had been crying, she looked quite emotional, and I kind of waited for her to approach me and say something first and she just kind of did a deep sigh, like it kind of seemed like she had been waiting in the car to try to pull it together, but the second she had come in she had lost it again, I think we’ve all been there [laughter] and she just cried and I just hugged her for a while cuz she was crying so she couldn’t really get the words out, she was just kind of devastated...

I think her first words were 6:26 “he’s been cheating on me.”

[ORGAN STING]

The wife starts to tell Maia the story. She’d left for the gym in the morning as per usual--nothing astray, everything fine, a normal morning. But when she got out of the gym, a mysterious packet had appeared on her car, two inches thick, loaded with paper documents.

When she opened the packet she had found that, so when she opened the packet she found when she got back to her car 7:30 she was sitting in the car going through it. And it was from his mistress, who had decided apparently that the best way to tell his wife was to print out screenshots of every text message, gift receipts from things he had gotten her, um every card he had ever given her, valentine’s day birthday, Christmas, pictures of her wearing earrings and stuff that he got her, the bulk of it--

Basically she said that you would never want to know about your husband cheating on you was in the packet.

The husband, as it turns out, had broken an affair off with this mistress a couple weeks before. In turn, the mistress got angry, and enacted revenge--delivering to his wife the literal and figurative receipts from an eight-year, off-again on-again affair. There were some weekends when even Maia was fooled--one in particular, when the wife had left to go to Florida, and the husband had asked Maia to babysit so he could work. In fact, he’d been with the mistress.

49:51 It’s so ridiculous, but I felt betrayed by him myself, I was like, I worked late for you, to take care of your child so that you could like hang out with her

Part of my instinct was like--wait, I was used!

That was the first time I had been like “How dare he!”

Mostly, though, Maia felt really, really bad for the wife. The discovery of this affair would have been awful enough, but to top it off Maia knew the two of them had been trying for a second child. Their first was born with IVF and they’d started the process a second time, applied for a surrogate, created frozen embryos. It was all off the table now.

That night Maia went home late, numb with shock, leaving the wife poring over the packet on their living room couch. And then Maia started to work. A lot.

[DAYS OF OUR LIVES CLIP & THEME]

22:43 How did things change after this day? I became the Father of... no I'm kidding!

Maia didn't become the baby's father. What did happen is that the mom still wanted her son to be able to spend time with his dad. The Catch-22 was that she refused to spend time with him herself, and she didn't trust him to be alone with the baby. So he'd come by the house, but instead of the wife being there, she asked Maia to sit in and supervise the visit.

It was weird. It was weird. I was uncomfortable, it was awkward, and there were a few times that I would have rather run under the couch than be involved...

The first time I dreaded it with all, with every ounce of my body. Because the last time I had seen him he was moving his stuff out of the house and I was actually glad I didn't know what happened then. This time I knew everything and it's just, what do you say? Do you act like things are the same?

She did, at least for a bit. She figured if he wanted to bring it up, he would. So they pretended like everything was normal, like everything was fine. But they both knew she was babysitting both the baby... and him.

He knew why I was there, I knew why he was there, we both knew what the situation was, but neither of us wanted to address it because it's probably the most awkward situation I can even think of happening, when he came in I probably sounded ridiculously too kind, you don't want to give him the evil eye *hello* or something like that because also his kid's right there, you can't act so... and the mom actually requested that I make a big deal when dad comes, like "yay daddy here he comes!"

I said "hi, how are you" or something like that and "good," he brought a toy for the baby, he brought me a fifty dollar bill,

After he sheepishly slipped her the bill, he told her: thank you for being here during this tough time for my family.

Before all this happened, Maia had been planning on phasing out this nannying gig. She'd graduated college, and was ready to move on to a full time job. After the event, though, she started having second thoughts.

The kid had always been sweet, angelic even. But in the weeks after the incident, his behavior turned nightmarishly bad.

I never had to give him a timeout, in those two weeks I was giving him time outs. Multiple times a day. Are you sorry, NO, looking you in the eye. And you knew... I even read articles, like a mom, *Acting Out After Divorce*, something like that, and it's completely normal, but it's hard to know what to do, because they're obviously hurting, and they don't know how to tell you, like, "I miss dad."

Maia started worrying about abandonment issues. The kid was clearly affected by the sudden absence of one person in his life. What would happen if she disappeared too?

The thought of me leaving him was like too much, because he had learned how to kind of be with me, and like I would try to talk to him and be like “is this because you miss daddy” and he would sometimes say you know yes or ask me questions, it was rare, but when you had those moments your heart kind of sank. And he oddly talked about their dog who had died more, and I was wondering if he thought, like, was trying to make connections because he was close to the dog that had died and he would randomly ask me about the dog Isaac, and he’d be like, where’s Isaac?

I’d say like “Isaacs in heaven,” but then it was like, why are you asking me this, Daddy’s not in heaven, you know that right? Because he would still see him sometimes, but he was always almost trying to figure out what “gone” means? Like Daddy came back, so is Isaac?

[MUSIC]

The more questions the kid asked, the more afraid Maia became. She didn’t want to be yet another absence in his life, yet another reason for him to learn the word “gone.”

Maia works full time in Providence now, but still sets aside a night of her week to spend time with the baby. She’s even closer to the mom these days. It’s hard not to be--she bore witness to one of the most intimate moments of their family history. Like watching a soap opera, but then getting sucked right in.

As of now, the couple has applied for a divorce. Maia doesn’t see much of the dad anymore, but she knows they’re trying to work it out amicably, prioritizing the needs of their kid. Because of this, she remains optimistic.

Oh yeah I definitely do.

I think it shows, to me the biggest thing I’ve learned from them is that it’s possible as hard as it is to have a family still if the parents are getting divorced,

I don’t know. I think it used to be the scariest thing I could ever think of, was something like this happening to somebody,

You find out that your husband’s been cheating on you forever, like how do you go back to like being their friend kind of? And I think she’s trying to do that, and I think he is too. I think they’re trying the best they can to be friends, at least.

In soaps, the drama wraps up neatly at the end of the series. So-and-so gets married to so-and-so. The villain is vanquished. There’s a clear good and evil.]

Maia’s not the lead character in this storyline. She’s a bystander cameo, maybe, a supporting role at best. From our onlooker’s perspective, it’s tempting to hope that it all really does work out in the end. Maybe it will, and maybe it won’t. We’ll just have to wait for the next episode.

[MUSIC]