

Merve - *An assistant professor of English at the University of Toronto. Merve's a radical, a feminist, a brilliant writer who is by her own admission perpetually angry. She is also a mother, occupied by all of that role's concomitant vulnerability, tenderness, and love. Merve's struggle to balance these two spheres of her life really makes up this play's underlying feminist backbone.*

My parents told me not to do anything out of anger. None of this was particularly meaningful to someone with my temperament. I liked doing things out of anger. I did things well when I was angry. I was angry when I got engaged and when I got married. I was angry when I got pregnant, when I gave birth, thrashing against the medical marvel of an epidural, flailing into the contractions, like Lila. I was angry when I wanted to be a government major, but then go for a PhD in English, become an assistant professor, when I conducted research, wrote my manuscript, prostrated myself before the Holy Tenure Committee the first time around. Everything I can call mine in life I got because I was angry. And everything I've lost, too.

(Beat.)

Holy Tenure Committee: Round Two. Last time, I was inexperienced, my writing needed to improve, fine. But this time around, the only thing The Committee was concerned about was my recently acquired role of "mother". They didn't say it explicitly, more questions like "At what point in your career did you decide to have children?" They weren't interested in the feminist counter-history of psychoanalysis. "

How prominent of a role does your child play in your life?" "Do you often prioritize your child over your writing?" And I looked at these people with this incredulous expression-- your mothers prioritized you so you could be sitting at this table, I wanted to scream, wanted. And in the middle of this meeting, all I could think about was Elena Ferrante, and Lenù and Lila, and how they act as mothers, and as writers. There exists, in fiction and reality alike, an unequal division of labor between those who leave in the morning--usually men--and those who stay at home during the day--usually women. What's weird is that as I responded to question after question, I wasn't angry. I simply thought, I am not going to be a tenured professor of English at McGill University. Finally, I can tell we're drawing to a close, when the only woman on the committee asks me, "What's The Slow Burn?" And I turned to her. And I turned to her and I was looking only at her and I wanted to say how can YOU sit here and perpetuate this nonsense, have you ever wanted kids, do you have one, do you, like me, live in the middle of the emotional bookends of anger and sentimentality, did you feel a crushing sense of inadequacy last night this morning when you put on your suit when you walked into this seminar room when you saw me enter with a pacifier falling out of my bag? But instead I looked at her. And calmly, very calmly, I said, "it's a blog series I'm working on with a few friends of mine about Elena Ferrante's novels. It's about taking your brilliance and using it to get out of hell." I walked out. I wasn't angry. I went home. And I saw my little boy... My little boy. And is loving him a womanly thing to do, like worrying? And I held him like he was a promotion. And I didn't feel guilty, or selfish about doing so. And he started to cry, so I held him until I started to cry myself. I cried until I was furious.