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KELLY MAGEE

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## 10 THINGS ONLY SINGLE MOMS WHO WERE IN MY LIVING ROOM WILL UNDERSTAND

WHEN YOU ARE a single mom, it can be hard to find people who understand you. Harder still when you're a queer single mom to two kids under ten who has recently filed for divorce and who was in my living room last night when, fed up with feeling misunderstood, you decided to record every bizarre thing you found yourself saying in one three-hour stretch. Fear not, Single Moms Who Were In My Living Room! This list has got you covered.

### 1. *Where did you put the dog? How did the bee get back in?*

Having an identity means different things to different people, but we can all agree that it means you are incomprehensible to people who don't share that identity. Being a single mom can be lonely and isolating. Being in the presence of small creatures who look a little like you but act like nonsensical bizarro humans for 24 hours a day can cause you to do things like make nonsensical pronouncements, blurt out questions for which there are no reasonable answers, and talk to yourself. To lessen these disturbing effects, it's important to find community, especially with other single moms. That said, like-minded individuals can be hard to come by, and when you're

a single mom in my living room last night, finding someone like you is literally impossible! This list is for you! That bee, am I right? Childless and/or partnered people who were not in my living room last night will definitely not know where the dog is.

*2. I didn't ask what he did. Leave her stuff alone.*

Many of us in my living room last night can't help but feel like the rest of society doesn't get certain things, like who cut all the ukulele strings with toenail clippers, or why this shin guard looks chewed, or what he did to your other mannequin, and wait, you have more than one mannequin?

*3. Who left cheese out? What is this crumb situation?*

Pro-tip, single moms: don't sit. Just don't. Sitting is no longer part of your vision board. Don't rest against the counter, don't put your head down on the foot pillow that is for some reason on the coffee table, and definitely don't say you'll only lie down for five minutes because when you wake up the children will have hot-glued a glitter path into the carpet, "disappeared" all the chargers, and group-texted two colleagues, a stranger, and your mother an unflattering photo of you asleep. Sitting is frivolous, anyway, like immersion blenders or "down time." You already eat upright. You work upright. Once, at the playground, you fell asleep upright, like a damn horse, and your daughter said, Mom, were you sleeping? And—perhaps because you'd just woken up—you chose the unfortunate response, Dude, I am fully erect! which you meant in the hominid sense, but which got you alarmed looks from the smugly alert, smugly coupled couple sitting on a nearby bench.

*4. Can you stop kicking? Don't hang on that. It's been leaking for, like, ever.*

You know, because you were in my living room last night, that the number

of fully-functioning items I own is my coffee machine. What people who were not there don't understand is that if you open the microwave too fast it will make a sound like a car backfiring, and you have to find the sweet spot on the handle to entice hot water from the tap, and just because the dryer rattles and steams and carries on doesn't mean it's making anything drier, and probably the holes appearing in the yard aren't evidence of a sinkhole, but when you joked about this to the realtor selling your neighbor's house, he definitely didn't laugh.

*5. I don't get paid until Friday. I have to. So we can afford this shitty house. Yes, it's a grown-up word. Well, I am a grown up.*

They say parenting is a tough job, and some people say that's because the pay is terrible, and a study once "proved" that motherhood is the equivalent of 2.5 jobs, so if you're a single mom that's like five jobs, plus the one that pays the bills, or if you are like the single moms in my living room, two jobs that pay the bills, which makes for a shocking seven jobs, but since they also say marriage is work maybe you should subtract one job, and maybe another since some say motherhood is a calling or a non-professional pursuit, but then there's all the emotional labor you do, and since you don't even have a spouse to resent, you resent the articles about emotional labor that blame the husbands, since you've never had a husband and yet no woman you've ever dated has known which day was trash day or when the kids need to be picked up or what the pediatrician's name is, so in short, you work a lot, and you make enough to get by, but if the moms in my living room last night did their math correctly, what is certain is that no, I'm sorry, we cannot afford that life-sized Storm Trooper.

*6. I'm making dinner. I'm packing lunches. Then eat something. Did you wash that? What did you just put in your mouth?*

You might think "Find Something to Eat In This House" would be a fun

game, or if not fun at least productive, or if not productive at least not actively harmful, and you would be correct right up until somebody snacks on their green-apple-scented thinking putty, and then you'll realize what a rookie mistake this game is, leading as it always does to Phase II, "Find Out If What You Just Ate Is Poisonous."

*7. You're not dying. I try not to think about it.*

There's not, like, a maximum number of times you can call poison control before they flag your number, right? Single moms in my living room definitely aren't worried about things like that! But since the kids are now terrified that they're going to die and you're going to go to jail for killing them, affect the kind of nonchalance that's served many a bad mom in the interrogation room, and tell them what they need to hear. They'll be fine. Even though the truth is you don't know if they'll be fine, or if you will, despite the fact that you've been consumed with these kids' survival since your first bleary look at them. After all, you practiced attachment parenting only to have shared custody wrench them away for half their lives, and if you obsess over their safety when you can't see them, can't touch them, you will wreck yourself. Which you are doing anyway by trying not to worry. Single moms in my living room, I feel you. There's nothing about this that isn't hard.

*8. Time for bed. I know you're scared, but you're okay.*

Kids these days! Always worried about the damndest things, like being hurt by things they thought were safe, or people they thought were safe, or places—and this is what outsiders don't understand, the record scratch of how quickly the conversation can turn—like how the number of school shootings, statistically speaking but also literally, tonight, will have increased by the time we go to bed. Sometimes the news hits like a power outage. Suddenly we're alone, more alone than before, and in the dark, which is

more terrifying than before. We wonder how to survive this world with its terrible refrain of atrocity. But also, you know...surviving. You remember what we did, single moms? We did the kind of quick thinking we're known for, and we made a game out of being scared. Finally, we reassured them: your school is safe. Maybe sheltering them is doing them a disservice, but why is "shelter" a negative thing, anyway? We believe, because we have to, that this living room can contain all the words we'll need to find our way, if only we can put them in the right order.

*9. I guess technically it's an addiction. Why do you want to be a bodybuilder? I never said I didn't like your bowl. What sound does the first letter make?*

You know what, single moms? I take it back. Sit. The microwave will backfire, and the dog will materialize, inexplicably covered in glitter. Your list will disappear into the pile of unpaid bills and drawings of kids in chains—note to self: ask about the chained kids—and spelling tests. You'll feel like a secondhand appliance someone has barely coaxed to life, but it's one that works for now. Help your children with words that aren't spelled like they sound. Watch how they begin to understand. See how your pockmocked yard holds and holds, though the ground has every reason to collapse.