

the garden party

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Death Likes to Party Too

By: Ayana Hampton



I love questions. A question can be the gateway to understanding, to treasure, to hell, to another question. Sometimes asking a question can be expensive. It can cost us time or money or both. A question can help us gauge where we should put our effort and focus. Should I stay or should I go? A question led me to write this piece. A question led me to create my new comedy event PARTYTUNNEL. A question saved my life.

One day, I was going along with the regularly scheduled programming of being a pregnant actress, writer, singer, comic, wife, etc. and something felt not quite right. I shared this feeling with several health professionals: “Swelling of the lower limbs is normal in pregnancy,” “aches and pains are common,” “nothing looks abnormal to me.” But I knew this was not normal. My doctors’ insurances that it was made me start to question my own sanity. This was a form of gaslighting. And it continued for a week. But I persisted. I saved my own life by asking countless times, “Can you figure out what is wrong with me?”

The oddity I felt was a potential killer, filing her nails, and blowing clouds of bone dust to pass the time: a blood clot, the severity of which happens in less than 1 out of 1000 people. I was just trying to get to the bottom of the pain and misery. But Death was waving at me from across the room, smiling and saying she scored us a table.

Death, wow. I didn’t think you’d show up. What are you doing here? Do you have anything to say for yourself? Save it, Death. Pregnant ladies get mortality. Trust me. From the moment I peed myself while vomiting from food poisoning in the 10th week of pregnancy to being told I might die at 19 weeks of gestation, I got it. My driving question became: how can I live to tell this story?

I would commit to denial. I would keep it light. I would crumble and surrender to deep sadness. I would have to ask for help.

“Dear Gods and Goddesses, can you please not kill me?” Every day that the heavens conspired to keep me alive, I made notes. I took video. I used a selfie stick when I should have had both hands on the walker. I asked myself if I had the will to learn to walk again. Bed rest is a real thing. Maybe bed rest was my thing? Being pregnant is hard enough. Could I rehab after I unloaded my cargo? Would the only passenger on Air Utero be ok with her in-flight cocktail of opiates? The captain needed the chemicals to keep the plane in the air, and air traffic control was trustworthy enough to navigate the remainder of the flight. There was only one seat on the plane, so that qualified as first class treatment.

And how did the turbulence get so bad? Where was my right to be heard and taken seriously when I said, “There is something wrong with my body”? There are times when no matter what you say, or how smart your audience is, your words will be met with “Yeah, uh-huh, ok, maybe. Let’s wait and see.” What am I? Am I an applicant at for job I may not be right for? Apparently. Potentially. Infinitely.

The good news is I got the gig. I’m contracted as full-time Mama. And I lived to tell the story. But this raises other questions: How do keep this position and balance my other jobs as actress, writer, comic, singer, wife, friend, daughter, big sister? What will I do when Lady Death comes around? She follows me and sees what I post. She’ll come even if I don’t invite her. How could I forget about those terms of living?

My only living grandparent has always told me and anyone listening, “You learn something every day. If you don’t you’re dead.” My hope is that the lessons are long and that I keep prying into my lady business and making it your business. Is that show business?

Ayana Hampton’s **PARTYTunnel** (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/partytunnel-tickets-27427448236?aff=es2>) premieres Oct 21-22 at Moving Arts Theater. Tickets are on sale now, at **Eventbrite** (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/partytunnel-tickets-27427448236?aff=es2>).