

“Ma”

By Helen Lutz

It seems as though the evening news reports more and more frequently on stories of bullying as though it is some kind of new phenomena. Admittedly, bullying is much easier with the anonymity of social media; however, it's been around for decades. Unlike most other species, humans tend to prey on one another whether in large scale wars or the mean girls (and guys) in schools. Bullying goes back for generations with younger, weaker or nerdy kids losing their lunch money, or being given a wedgie, or being stuffed into a locker – it's not fun being the point of malicious ridicule (can you tell I've never ranked among the cool kids).



Octavia Spencer stars as Sue Ann in Tate Taylor's new thriller “Ma.” As the movie opens we meet high schooler Maggie (Diana Silvers) and her mother, Erica (Juliette Lewis) as they return to Erica's old home town to start life over. It's hard enough to start a new school, let alone on a Friday, but Maggie is welcomed by some of the ‘cool kids;’ wild and crazy Haley (McKaley Miller), serious Andy (Corey Fogelmanis), cutie Chaz (Gianni Paolo) and reserved Darrell (Dante Brown), and encouraged to go out with them to ride around in Chaz's van and drink plenty of alcohol. Sounds like fun, but just one little problem.

The kids attend high school and at the ripe old age of 16 are unable to purchase alcohol; they have money, but no fake ID. Camped out in front of the town's liquor store they approach several patrons but with no luck. Finally the group encourages Maggie to give it a try since she's a new face. At first she is turned down and then she approaches a middle-aged lady asking for her help. Originally the lady turns her down, and then she has a change of heart. Meet Sue Ann who encourages the kids to call her Ma. She purchases all the liquor on their list and the kids go off on their merry way to drink heavily at the old rock pile. Kids tend to think that they are smarter than adults not realizing that adults were once kids as well, the rock pile has always been a popular party place.

The merry band of partiers is visited by the local sheriff. Since he knows them and their parents they lose the booze and are highly encouraged to hurry home – and don't get caught drinking again. The next weekend, with little else to do in the small town, our group of kids hangs out at the local liquor store (sure beats the Dairy Queen). When Ma walks up, they score again; however, this time she invites them to her house to use her basement, can't get caught by the sheriff there. Ma only has two rules: do not take the Lord's name in vain and do not come upstairs into her home. She also shows concern about drinking responsibly with someone being a designated driver.

What could possibly go wrong? A group of kids with an abundance of alcohol, a party place and Ma who gets into partying as well sprucing up the place, fixing snacks and making everyone feel welcome. She ‘friends’ them on Facebook, knows their cell numbers and is just one of the gang until her friendship turns more into stalking causing the kids to begin to shut her out of their lives. This plan makes Ma less than happy.

Taylor twists the story with the use of flashbacks. We see Sue Ann as a young girl in school and how she is bullied by the parents of the kids she's befriending. Could there be ulterior motives in Ma's generosity? And just why is no one welcome upstairs – even to use the bathroom? “Ma” has all the makings of a psychological thriller even though parts are predictable, offering several twists and turns which make us twist and turn in our seats. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats I give “Ma” ♡♡ 1/2. This story will make you think twice about bullying any one ever again.