

Act One

## Scene 1

## Present

*Lights up on home of PATRICIA. She is sitting, she is still, and she is staring out in her rocking chair. A letter is in her hand. In her room hang 3-5 colorful bird cages with their doors opened. The window behind her is also open. We hear the rustling of AMANDA entering the home, dropping keys and other things on a counter offstage.*

AMANDA

*(from off)*

Hey Mom, it's me. *(beat)* They had asparagus on sale again today so I got you some more. *(beat)* I could whip you up another pasta dish for lunch if you want, but then I have to run today... Jessie's soccer practice. Hey, Mom, do you hear me? *(A little panic)* Mom?

*(Enter AMANDA)*

Jesus, Mom, you scared me half to death! You have vocal cords don't you?

PATRICIA

Sorry, dear.

AMANDA

Jesus. *(Notices the window is open)*. Jesus, Mom it's freezing in here. *(Closes the window and grabs a blanket. Covers MOM's shoulders)*

PATRICIA

Language, dear.

AMANDA

Well, mom, what do you expect?

*(Notices the bird cages. Beat)*

How...are you today?

PATRICIA

Oh, I'm fine, I suppose.

AMANDA

I see. Don't ask, Amanda, don't even ask. *(beat. Sighs)* Where the hell are your birds?!

PATRICIA

I set them free.

AMANDA

Yeah, I gather. Look, I can't stay today, so if you need me to call the doctor, which, it's starting to seem like you do..

PATRICIA

I'm fine, Amanda. It was just time to set them free, that's all.

AMANDA

Don't ask, Amanda. Do not ask. She's done this all of your life. Little cliffhangers. Ask about pasta. *(beat)* Does that sound good? Pasta with asparagus why was it time to set your birds free? Dammit!

PATRICIA

Would you help me to bed, dear?

*(AMANDA helps her to bed)*

AMANDA

Mom?  
Mother?!

PATRICIA

Ah, thank you. Now sit down.

AMANDA

Mom, I can't really hang out today. I'm happy to call in a nurse or whoever you need.

PATRICIA

Whomever/

AMANDA

But, Jessie's got soccer practice and apparently her dad's stuck at the office again, for the third time this week, because,

well, why would my needs matter...so it's all on me again tonight to get dinner ready and homework and make sure no boys look at her, ever, no matter how old she gets...

PATRICIA

This won't take long. I need to tell you about your father.

AMANDA

*(Stands and stares motionless for a moment)*

Yeah, Mom, that's the kind of thing that sounds like it actually *will* take long!

PATRICIA

And I need you to write it down/

AMANDA

What?

PATRICIA

I'm ready to talk about your father and I want you to write it down.

AMANDA

Umm...

PATRICIA

I thought you'd be happy. You've been asking about him all of your life.

AMANDA

Yeah, no kidding, Mom!

PATRICIA

So, I'm ready to tell you about him now.

AMANDA

This is unbelievable. Hey, Mom. You wait my entire life until this very moment and spring this shit on me? Okay?! Not today, lady! I just told you.

PATRICIA

I need to tell you today.

AMANDA

Well, I don't want to hear it! How about that?

PATRICIA

That doesn't matter.

AMANDA

Like hell it doesn't. You know what? No. I can't take this shit right now. My kid needs me, my marriage is ready to be flushed down the toilet, and between taking care of you and all of that, I have no time for myself. And, really, I don't care. Really. He's never once shown interest in us and you've refused to tell me any time I've asked growing up. Just that he's off somewhere, in some other country or something..

PATRICIA

Oklahoma.

AMANDA

Oklahoma?

PATRICIA

Yes/

AMANDA

You told me he was overseas/

PATRICIA

Oklahoma.

*(beat)*

AMANDA

No! You can't just say things like, "Oklahoma," and make me feel sorry for the guy!

PATRICIA

He's dead/

AMANDA

What?

PATRICIA

He died, dear.

AMANDA

Oh. Well, I mean, he's in his late 70s right? No offense.

PATRICIA

He died last month. Heart failure. I just received this letter.

*(Beat)*

AMANDA

*(Takes the letter from PATRICIA)*

It's from him. That's strange. How does he even know where you live? Hmm. I wonder who this Abby is. Probably his illegitimate, nope that's me...

PATRICIA

Abby is his care taker.

AMANDA

*(searching the letter)*

It doesn't say that. How do you know that? *(Reads the letter more)* What? Why is he saying...Okay it is weird that he wrote you himself...All these years. Did he know he was going to die or something?

PATRICIA

We all know we're going to die...

AMANDA

You know what I mean. *(Reads the letter)* Why is he saying...  
*(pause. Reads the whole letter. Looks up)* Holy shit/

PATRICIA

Language, dear.

AMANDA

*(Reads out loud)*

"Ever trapped. Ever yours. James." *(beat)* Mom? What...the...

PATRICIA

I will take pasta for lunch. You go get Jessie, she'll need to skip her soccer practice, and tell Frank to make his own dinner tonight. I need to tell you a story.

*Lights down*

*Excerpt taken from the middle of Scene 3 PATTY and MAMA WILSON. PATTY is wearing her future wedding dress, which was once worn by MAMA WILSON. SENATOR WILSON & ROGER have just exited.*

Flashback, late 1950s

MAMA WILSON

The only difference between a man and a boy is the price of his toys. Well, don't be shy, Patricia, let us see. (*PATTY enters fully*). Well, now, don't you look lovely.

PATTY

Thank you. It's beautiful.

MAMA WILSON

That lace. That lace never goes out of style. I call the dress my Wallis Simpson, but with lace. Classic; modern. Now, I know it's not long and flow-y like you Italians like to wear, but we could jazz it up with a long veil and it will be a party in shoes!

PATTY

Thank you so much, Mrs. Wilson/

MAMA WILSON

Call me, Mama.

PATTY

Mama

MAMA WILSON

Looks divine, dear. Just lovely and divine. Now, your mother didn't already have something planned, did she?

PATTY

She was going to make me something, she said.

MAMA WILSON

Ah, well, now she won't have to bother. It's all taken care of.

PATTY

Thank you. I suppose I'll go hang it back up.

MAMA WILSON

Cigarette dear?

PATTY

Sure

*(PATTY sits and they smoke for a moment in silence)*

MAMA WILSON

How did your parents meet, dear?

PATTY

At a movie theatre. My dad was an usher/

MAMA WILSON

Well, isn't that adorable. What picture?

PATTY

I'm not sure. But he tells the funniest story about it  
*(just thinking about it makes her laugh)*  
He says that after the picture he saw her standing outside with  
her girlfriends. And when he approached her and introduced  
himself, he says she rolled her shoulder at him, batted her  
eyes, and said, "Call me some time, big boy!" *(laughing hard at  
the thought)*

MAMA WILSON

Really? What a strange story/

PATTY

Of course there's no way in heavens she would have done that,  
but my dad's silly.

MAMA WILSON

Naturally.

PATTY

It's just *(laughs)*. Sorry, it's just so funny to me.

MAMA WILSON

Have you ever been around political people, Patty?

PATTY

No, m'am I haven't/

MAMA WILSON

They're, how should I say this, more reserved than you might be used to/

PATTY

Oh/

MAMA WILSON

I know you're only 16, but whimsical anecdotes are often something we save for conversations with children, not other adults.

PATTY

Yes, m'am.

MAMA WILSON

You've got a great jawline, Patty. And an adorable figure. You're like a piece of modest jewelry, that, with the right touch, could sparkle so much that no one would suspect was costume.

PATTY

Oh. Thank you/

MAMA WILSON

I can see it now. Just sparkling like a rare diamond on Roger's arms. No one would even suspect/

*(beat)*

MAMA WILSON

Oh, I'm not worried in the least. You'll make a great wife, Patty. That's what Roger needs, you know. Both of my sons have a carefree spirit, but Roger needs a woman to keep him grounded. I think it's safe to say James'll never settle down, but Robert wants it. Does that make sense?

PATTY

I think so/

MAMA WILSON

Roger is like his father. Positions of power appeal to him, but he feels the need to lean. Is that clear?

PATTY

Actually, I'm not quite sure.

MAMA WILSON



Roger responds very well to a wife who runs things, behind the scenes. As long as he can be the big doctor for show, he needs you to keep his home running and to tell him when he can and cannot do certain things.

PATTY

Oh, I don't know/

MAMA WILSON

Men often seem to be the ones in charge, but they'd be lost without a woman steering the ship. Roger is no exception. He's always been that way. I assume you were appealing to him because it seemed a little rebellious, dating a poor girl from the other side of town, and that's fine. We are dealing with that. But, being a sweet little, demure Italian girl who fades into the background just will not do for my boy. Roger needs a woman strong enough to put her foot down. And so do my grandchildren. Do you understand dear?

PATTY

Yes, I think so/

MAMA WILSON

This buzz I'm hearing about women's liberation, yada yada yada. It's dangerous dear. Men will soon be so confused they won't even think they need to stick around. Women don't know how good they actually have it.

PATTY

What do I do?

MAMA WILSON

Be always happy when he comes home, no matter how your day has gone. This is especially important with children. Remember that he is the head of the household and make sure your children know and see that. It's in the bible. But, occasionally, if he's rough or distant, occasionally make the same meal twice in a row. Or don't greet him with a drink at the door, or don't put his slippers out. And the very first time tries to hit you, without exception, do not cry or get hysterical. He has a stressful job. Instead, act unfazed. Tell him you'll be in the bath and he can find you there when he's ready to apologize. Say those words exactly and then do it. Then, when he does, allow yourself to be a kitten, even a wildcat, dear, so he knows how feisty and strong you are when he's *good* to you.

PATTY

Okay, but I couldn't imagine Roger...

MAMA WILSON

Marriage is long dear. And we all take different forms as we age.

PATTY

Thank you, Mama Wilson.

MAMA WILSON

You're welcome. You look lovely. Hang it up and fix me a drink if you would. I'll have exactly one drink tonight to celebrate.

*(PATTY gets up and starts to exit)*

Divine dear, simply divine.

*Lights down*