

SCENE: Wine Red

CHARACTER

ROMA BOURGEOIS: Late fifties/early sixties. Snarky. Slight southern drawl.

Clicking heels are the first audible sound.

LIGHTS UP

On the stage, we see a wine cellar, disheveled. Broken (theater glass) and empty bottles are scattered on the floor. We see one bottle left, untouched, on a table. Next to the table, there is a stool with some papers on it. A grand wine rack is behind the table and stool, but it is empty. The wall behind the scene is a dark, gray color with one, tiny rectangular window near the top. The lighting is somewhat dim, but very focused on the center of the stage, near the table and stool.

ROMA, a thin woman with an asymmetrical haircut walks onstage in black stiletto heels. She is wearing a white blazer with a black belt cinching her already miniscule waist, a white blouse underneath, and white pants. When she is first walking onstage, her steps are light, and airy.

ROMA

Oh darlings, I am so happy to share dinner with you! And of course a bottle of—

However, as she looks upon the mess of the cellar, the bounce in her step stops, and she stands still. Her eyes get wide in utter shock.

ROMA (con't)

Huh? What in Christ's name happened here?

She clatters to the wine rack.

SOUND: A door slamming, hard.

Roma whips her head towards stage left, and then stares right back at the audience, like a lioness backed in the corner of its cage.

ROMA (con't)

What *is* this!?! My cellar! All my wine! Thousands of dollars, all to be broken on the ground??? What on earth got into your little heads to make you do this?

And to think I raised you three. Cooked for you, cleaned up after you, Lord almighty, I even washed your little bums! And *this* is how you repay me? Kent, I thought you were happy to see me! Leon, I really thought you were more mature than this. And Miss Georgia, I haven't seen you in years, and *this* is how you say "How-dee-doo?"

Sure isn't how I brought you all up.

She glances at the lone bottle left on the table and back out at the audience

ROMA (con't)

So, what do my little darlings want? Obviously you don't just want to eat dinner with your dear mother. What? Ha! Like I need your help. Remember that part when I said I raised you three? Right well I did just that. Three. Precious. Angels. The kind of angels that trap their mother in her dismantled wine cellar to "talk".

(beat)

Well at least you didn't destroy this one.

She picks up the standing bottle and fondles it gingerly in her bony fingers. Roma reads the label.

ROMA (con't)

Château Pétrus, bottled in 1902. Glorious, glorious, red wine! This one was from our honeymoon in Paris. Classy, right?

(beat)

What did you want to talk about, again? Help? For me? Psh, I already told you, I don't need your help! I have lived through a whole mess of troubles, and I didn't need your help then, did I?

Roma notices the papers on the chair.

ROMA (con't)

Well, what is this mess of rubbish?

She fingers through the papers, she pulls out a brochure.

ROMA (con't)

"Paradise Meadows, a place of comfort and renewal for recovering alcoholics."
(sarcastically)

Oh! Well grand, children, simply grand! I will take my happy little ass down to the pleasant Paradise Meadow, and be "comforted and renewed!" Grand! You have got to be kidding me.

What, y'all really think I am an alcoholic? That's ridiculous! Honeys, I love my wine, but I am not a raging drunk! Now your father, *he* was the drunk, not me. I was the only one who could manage to take care of you all!

Sure, I've always drunk, but I never hurt anybody. Or lost my job over it.
(beat)

Kent, Kent! You remember when you were little? And daddy was a doctor? (pause) Come on, sure you do! Daddy Doctor Roger Bourgeois! And mommy was pregnant with Georgia and stayed home doing interior design? We were so happy then!

She begins peeling the wrapper around the top of the bottle.

ROMA (con't)

But just one surgery with vodka as his nurse, and BAM daddy wasn't bigwig "Doctor Bourgeois" anymore. I was the one keeping up with you three darlings, and the bills. *He* had the drinking problem. He had to *beg* his father to give him a job at the furniture company. I am not the drunkard, he was.

(with more anger, she fully rips the wrapper)

And you know what else, my sweet children? I wasn't the one throwing punches, either.

So, no, I will not be going to Paradise Meadows. Guess you shoulda' asked your dad when he was alive.

(beat)

What? You all wrote letters? (sighing) Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

Roma picks up the papers again, wine bottle still in hand. She flips through them, and then begins to read from Kent's letter.

KENT (voice from offstage)

“Mom, I remember a time when you didn’t drink. Life was so much simpler then. After a certain time, you and father’s drinking problems ruined my childhood. I wish I could have had a childhood like yours, living on a farm with a happy family.”

ROMA

Kent, that’s (pause) ungrateful, pansy bullshit. First of all, I have been drinking ever since I was ten years old. I mean wouldn’t you drink if you had to—

(pauses, and continues in a more somber tone)

I never told you three, because it just didn’t make sense to. Y’all really wanna hear what life was like at that farm?

(pause)

All right, well don’t tell me I didn’t warn you.

Roma begins uncorking the bottle. She is savoring every moment with this bottle of wine, so every movement is calculated and exaggerated.

ROMA (con’t)

Back on the farm where I grew up, the old farm I never took you to, life was a hell of a lot different. Since ma died when I was too little to remember, it was just my father, your Uncle Davey, and I. It took all of us to keep the farm running, and it was all day, every day. If I wasn’t in school, I was out milking the cow, or plucking chickens.

Ever since ma died, my father had been drinking whiskey. Davey and I called him whiskey whiskers behind his back, just because it was the only way we could laugh at him. Get the upper edge.

Ol’ whisky whiskers (she chuckles) Sorry—I can’t get over that!

(beat)

Okay, Okay, so my father, he took all his anger out on me, since you know, I was the little one who couldn’t do as much work, and I look a lot like ma did. You learned quick not to call him Whiskey Whiskers to his face.

(off topic)

You kids were lucky, I never even thought about hitting you! Even if you all deserved a good smack across the head now and then. Especially with this Paradise Meadow rubbish.

(back to story)

I remember one day in particular. We didn’t have a lot of food, and dad told me to kill my pet rabbit, George. Of course, being ten, I started bawling and yapping about how I wouldn’t do it.

She is now twisting the cork, more violently.

ROMA (con't)

He hit me. Hard. Right in the nose. You kids always wondered why my nose had a bump on it. That's why. But after he hit me, something changed. I closed my eyes, grabbed George by the neck and twisted as hard as I could.

Roma finally pops the cork out of the wine bottle. As she does, she stretches her neck to one side, and rubs it gently.

ROMA (con't)

Don't you think I deserve a glass of wine after that shit?

(beat)

Oh and that wasn't the only thing that happened down on the farm. Oh no. I mean don't get me wrong; there were some good moments. Davey and I were thicker than thieves, and he looked out for me. But sometimes, Davey wasn't always around to protect me.

I remember I was eleven, and we needed more help on the farm. Cousin Dirk came in from Alabama to help us out. He was a big guy, big around as an old pickle barrel, and rough. He was a lot older than I was, but he was always staring at me.

(change of subject)

Aren't y'all cold down here? I sure could use a glass of wine, upstairs by the fireplace. Can we just go and drink some Château Pétrus and just forget this whole "Paradise Meadows" thing? Ya know how I just hate the cold.

She pauses, and looks pleadingly out at the audience, and then sighs.

ROMA (con't)

Davey couldn't always come to the rescue, and one day he was too late. When he saw Cousin Dirk-- He couldn't hold back his anger, and he just—let it all go.

(Laughing ironically)

And the funniest part? Davey went to jail. Manslaughter they called it. Manslaughter for protecting me, his little sister. Hell, I should have gone to jail too. It was my fault, wasn't it?

(sighing)

People always leave.

(beat)

Congratulations, my little babies, you have now made your mother depressed. Can we just be done now and have a couple of sips?

Roma sniffs the wine and sighs pleasantly

ROMA (con't)

Ah, I can just smell the nights of romance in France, and the warm embrace of your father. The bouquet of this wine reminds me of the rosy days with your father before everything turned into vinegar. Now *he* sure had a problem with alcohol.

(beat)

More letters? Fine.

She skims through the letter as she still clings to the bottle.

GEORGIA (voice from offstage)

"Mom, I remember when I was young, we were really very close. Sometimes we would even have sleepovers together in my room, and tell each other imaginary stories of princesses. When you weren't drinking, we always had fun."

ROMA

Georgia, we still could be close. However, you chose to move all the way up to Chicago, and leave your little old mother down here, alone. You never even said goodbye. Not a phone call, letter, or even an e-mail in three years. So, I drink wine, and pour a glass for you. What's the problem with that?

Oh and those nights in your room. Those were the nights that I was afraid. Afraid of what your father was going to do next.

One of those nights, I was smoking a cigarette on the patio, and your dad came out in a drunken rage, a plate in his hand. He was raging that the plate was dirty, and in the cupboard. I never put away dirty dishes, but he wanted a fight.

He got in my face, spewing venomous words and spitting whiskey all over me. I told him to keep his voice down, and he punched me with all his might.

I fell to the ground and played possum. After he went inside, I snuck into your room, Georgia doll. You woke up, in a fright, and so I told you stories of the way I wished life could be.

Roma puts her nose once again up to the top of the bottle. She inhales deeply and smiles. She puts the bottle close to her lips, and takes a quick sip with a slippery smile.

ROMA (con't)

Oh my does this taste divine! Oh simply divine! I can just see the way your father

used to look at me when I taste this wine. Oh your father was everything I could have ever wanted when we were young. Tall, dark hair, blue eyes, with a perfectly chiseled nose. It also helped that he was filthy rich.

Now, I married for love, but I also married for money. What else was a poor lil' country girl gonna do? Go back to the farm? Jesus, Mary and Joseph no! Poor lil' country girl is going to be a rich, sophisticated lady now! Mrs. Roma Louisa Bourgeois. Doesn't that just sound classy? Mrs. Roma Bourgeois, with her fancy pants husband, Roger Bourgeois.

She looks back up at the audience. She looks a little bit shameful, as though maybe she did take one sip too many.

Well, Leon, let's get this over with.

She sighs as she finds Leon's letter and begins to skim it over.

LEON (voice from offstage)

"Mother, I am the youngest of your children. I never felt like you really loved me due to all your drinking. I know for a fact that you love wine more than me."

ROMA

How can you think that? How in God's name can you actually think that? I love you children more than anything. ANYTHING. You are and always have been my little darlings. Your father was the one who didn't love you all. Your *father* was the volatile one, whereas I just wanted to keep you safe. Where was this Paradise Meadows, then?

Sure, he hit me, but I made sure he NEVER hit you. Y'all were my top priority, and NO ONE hurt my babies.

He began to resent the way I loved you all, and you all loved me. You were my darlings. I was able to protect you, but I couldn't protect myself. Hell, not even Davey could protect me.

I always loved you, Leon. You always pushed *me* away. Just like Georgia and Kent, you didn't want me around. You all were gone, leaving your father and little old me.

(pause)

But now, even he's gone. For ten years now, he's been gone.

People always leave.

She looks at the wine bottle and then

holds it tightly

And you kids came for the funeral, and left again, like you always do. Concerned with your own lives, families, friends, careers. And I'm not begrudging y'all that, but people always go away. Every person I have ever loved has left me alone. You know what doesn't leave though? Wine. It doesn't hit you, scream at you, abandon you, or stomp you down. Wine is the only dependable thing in my life.

Roma, apparently grief stricken looks at the bottle. She closes her eyes and lifts her head, mouth open. She wildly pours the red wine into her mouth. As she does this, the deep red not only goes into her mouth, but also spills all over her hair, face, and pristine white clothing.

After the bottle is emptied, she looks out at the audience with frightened gaze, and cradles the now empty bottle in her arms. The light above her shines down on her and is reminiscent of an interrogation light. She sits down on the stool, shoulders slumped, head down. She looks up.

ROMA (con't)

All right, maybe I do need help. You won't leave me, right?

FADE TO BLACK.