

Sample Scene

from

AVA, a new musical by Mary Morton

It is 2015, same-sex marriage is legal, but Zell, a middle-aged radical lesbian feminist, is suicidal. Upon Zell's release from a psychiatric hospital, Ava, the ghost of a lesbian aviator killed in 1925, appears to help her re-engage with life. Ava, who can be seen and heard only by Zell (and the audience), has been working her magic on Zell for several days.

On one side of the stage, in darkness, Ava, dressed in her aviator outfit, sits on a sofa in Zell's living room next to a coffee table with a liquor bottle and glasses.

On the other side of the stage, the spotlight is on Zell's stylish, twenty-something niece Madeline in her office after a party her employees have thrown to celebrate her upcoming wedding. A banner reads "Congratulations, Boss!" Madeline kisses the last remaining employee on the cheek, waves goodbye and heads off to see her Aunt Zell. Along the way, she is approached by a male minister motioning for her to select Bible passages for the ceremony, a seamstress holding up a wedding dress for final sizing, and a sales clerk proffering large, heavy shopping bags. Madeline attends to each in turn, dancing and singing all the while.

MADELINE *sings*: I ALWAYS DREAMED I WOULD FIND MY TRUE LOVE.

NOW I'VE A SOULMATE WHO'S SENT FROM ABOVE.

PROVIDENCE RATHER CHANCE

GUIDING US IN THIS ROMANCE.

WE FIT TOGETHER LIKE HAND IN A GLOVE.

MARRIAGE REMINDS ME OF A ROUND.

TWO MAKING ONE PLAIN TUNE PROFOUND.

SWEET SONG WITHOUT END,
PURE, HEAVENLY BLEND.
NEAR TO PERFECTION AS HUMANS CAN SOUND.

As the song ends, Madeline takes the shopping bags, walks up to Zell's apartment and rings the bell.

MADELINE, *calls out*: It's me, Aunt Zell. Open up!

AVA: You never mentioned a niece.

Zell enters the living room dressed in a robe with a towel on her head.

ZELL: Try to behave. She already thinks I need a nursemaid.

Ava reaches into a pocket and pulls out a compact, and starts applying lipstick. Zell, seeing this, shakes her head and chuckles. Zell walks over to the door.

ZELL: Madeline!

Madeline sweeps past Zell.

MADELINE: Aunt Zell, you're a brilliant lawyer, go make some money and move out of this horrible neighborhood.

ZELL: You used to be proud of your public defender aunt. [*Waving at the shopping bags.*] What's all this?

MADELINE: Vases for the wedding. They cost a fortune, I couldn't leave them in the car.

Madeline sets down her shopping bags. Ava gets up and walks over. Zell still stands at the door.

AVA: What a dish! Shame on you, Zell, hidin' her away from me!

ZELL: I'm sorry, Madeline, it's not a good time—I have an appointment. Why don't I call you tomorrow?

Madeline walks back and leads Zell away from the door.

MADELINE: No, this simply cannot wait. Go on.

Madeline directs Zell toward the interior doorway.

MADELINE: We can talk while you get ready.

Out of Madeline's line of sight, Zell wags a warning finger at Ava. As Madeline turns to look at Zell, Zell freezes and smiles. Zell exits leaving Ava and Madeline in the living room.

MADELINE, *directing her voice toward the doorway*: Aunt Zell, the wedding is only two weeks away and you still haven't RSVPed.

AVA: Wedding?! She ought to be jugglin' a passel of lovers, not gettin' saddled with just one.

ZELL, *calling out unseen from off-stage*: I know!

MADELINE: Taylor thought we shouldn't pressure you, given your hospitalization.

As Madeline looks toward the doorway, Ava gently picks up the liquor bottle and starts to pour herself a drink. Madeline turns back toward the coffee table. Just as the bottle is about to enter Madeline's line of vision, Ava sets it down. Madeline looks back to the doorway.

MADELINE: But I reminded my fiance that this is the most important day of our lives.

Ava picks up the glass and takes a sip. Madeline turns toward the coffee table. Once again, Ava waits until the last moment to put down the glass and inadvertently places it on the other side of the bottle. Madeline stares for a moment, points at the glass and then the bottle.

MADELINE: What's with the alcohol, Aunt Zell? Should you be self-medicating like that?

ZELL: I'm fine.

AVA: One night with me and she'd forget this Taylor fella--

MADELINE: Hmm. Anyway, this wedding has to be perfect, and it won't be if you're not there. So--

AVA: --with my tongue on her sweet spot and my hand--

Ava cups her fingers and thumb together and moves them upward in a twisting motion.

AVA: --up her---

ZELL: Jesus Christ!

MADELINE: Excuse me?

AVA: Don't lump me in with that choirboy.

ZELL: You, stop! Madeline, if my being there means that much to you, I'll come.

MADELINE *sings*: I ALWAYS DREAMED I WOULD FIND MY TRUE LOVE.
NOW I'VE A SOULMATE WHO'S SENT FROM ABOVE.
PROVIDENCE RATHER CHANCE
GUIDING US IN THIS ROMANCE.
WE FIT TOGETHER LIKE HAND IN A GLOVE.
MARRIAGE REMINDS ME OF A ROUND.
TWO MAKING ONE PLAIN TUNE PROFOUND.
SWEET SONG WITHOUT END,
PURE, HEAVENLY BLEND.
NEAR TO PERFECTION AS HUMANS CAN SOUND.

ZELL *joins in singing*: WHO'D EVER GUESS THAT SHE
ONCE LEARNED RIGHT AT THE KNEE
OF AN ICONOCLAST LIKE ME?
ONCE SO BRIGHT,
GONE IS MY RADICAL ACOLYTE.
MARRIAGE REMINDS ME OF A ROUND.
OBSOLETE FORMS THAT GRIND US DOWN.

SUCH TEDIOUS THINGS.
EACH WITH HOLLOW RINGS.
STIFLING ARRANGEMENTS WHERE FREEDOM MUST DROWN.

AVA joins in singing: SHE THINKS THAT SHE'S SO FULL OF GRACE,
BUT I SUSPECT SHE WILL EMBRACE
LOVE SENT FROM A LESS SACRED PLACE.
PIETY
PALES NEXT TO CARNAL VARIETY.

Ava sweeps Madeline into her arms and begins to waltz. Madeline excited to be moved by an apparently spiritual force continues to sing.

AVA sings: MARRIAGE REMINDS ME OF A ROUND.
THIRD-PARTY ENTRY POINTS ABOUND.
AND WHAT A SURPRISE!
NEW VOICES ARISE.
DUOS ARE NICE BUT A TRIO RESOUNDS.

MADELINE, ZELL and AVA sing: EV'RYONE HAS HER DRUTHERS.
EACH TALKING PAST THE OTHERS.

MADELINE sings: I'M OUT FOR BLISS.

AVA sings: A STOLEN KISS.

ZELL sings: STEPPING AWAY FROM A YAWNING ABYSS.

MADELINE, ZELL, and AVA sing: MARRIAGE REMINDS ME OF A ROUND.

Ava and Madeline stops dancing but Ava begins to caress Madeline, who becomes aroused and flustered.

MADELINE: What's the temperature in here? I feel like I'm on fire.

AVA: Me too, darlin'!

ZELL: Damn it, keep your hands to yourself!

MADELINE: Calm down. I didn't touch your precious thermo--

Zell, all dressed up and wearing heels, rushes in glaring at Ava, who jumps away from Madeline.

MADELINE: --stat.

Madeline and Ava stare at Zell in amazement.

MADELINE: Aunt Zell, I've never seen you look . . . [pauses to find the right word]

ZELL, *sarcastically*: Anything but aggressively plain?

MADELINE: Well . . . And you're going to your therapist's like that?

ZELL: I'm not going to therapy.

MADELINE: But you said you had an appointment. Where else do you go?

ZELL: A friend invited me to the ballet. I've never been but she tells me people dress up.

Ava walks over to the coffee table and begins to pour another drink, carefully lifting the glass and bottle only when Madeline's back is turned.

MADELINE: Ruth?

ZELL: No, a new friend.

MADELINE: Aunt Zell! You've got a date!

ZELL: No. I'm not her type.

MADELINE: Are you sure?

ZELL: Yes. She's quite . . . transparent.

MADELINE: Well, feelings can change, and once she sees you looking like this. I can't wait to tell Taylor. She'll be thrilled!

Ava drops the glass.

AVA: She?!

Zell tries to distract Madeline by falling against the coffee table. Madeline grabs Zell.

MADELINE: Are you OK?

ZELL: Been awhile since I've worn heels.

MADELINE: I didn't even know you owned a pair.

Zell and Madeline bend to clean up the mess. Ava darts away returning with a towel, which she discreetly puts in Zell's hand, and which Madeline looks at in puzzlement.

AVA: Sorry about the mess. I just did not see that coming.

ZELL, *addressing Ava under her breath*: No worries.

MADELINE: But I do worry. After all you've been through.

ZELL: Madeline, I feel better than I have in years.

MADELINE, *in a different, earnest tone*: Oh, Aunt Zell, do try to hold onto that feeling.

Madeline looks pleadingly at Zell, who holds Madeline's gaze for a moment and then looks away. Zell and Madeline stand up.

ZELL: So, I'll see you at the church!

Zell tries to maneuver Madeline toward the door, but she hangs back.

MADELINE, *returning to her previous tone*: I'm so happy. Now the whole family will be there. You know, Grammy adores Taylor.

ZELL, *with heavy sarcasm*: Splendid.

MADELINE: And I'll expect you at the reception, too.

ZELL, *groaning*: The Paramount?! You know they fired me for kissing my girlfriend!

MADELINE: That was 30 years ago. They're one of my best clients now. And, they have the biggest float in the whole Pride parade.

ZELL: But they're still screwing their workers!

MADELINE: Says the woman who hasn't created a single job in her life.

ZELL: I should organize a boycott!

MADELINE, *delighted*: Now that's the Aunt Zell I remember! Hold off on the boycott until after the wedding. But feel free to treat my friends to a good old-fashioned rant against the capitalist patriarchy!

ZELL: You make me sound like some pathetic throwback!

MADELINE: But you are! Aunt Zell, it's 2015! The Supreme Court has embraced gay marriage!

Zell waves her hand dismissively.

MADELINE: Aunt Zell, when are you going to get over yourself? Let go of this . . . persecution complex?

MADELINE *sings*: THERE IS A PARTICULAR MINORITY
SMALL PERCENT OF EV'RY GROUP THROUGH HISTORY,
THEY'VE BEEN LABELLED SINISTER
WITH PUNISHMENT ADMINISTERED
FOR SIMPLY DOING WHAT FOR THEM COMES NAT'RALLY.
AEONS PASSED AND STILL THEY WERE SO CRUELLY SHUNNED,
BUT AT LAST SUCH PREJUDICE WAS OVERRUN.
ONCE CONSIDERED EVIL WIZARDS
NOW EXCEPT WHEN BUYING SCISSORS,
THEY ARE TREATED JUST THE SAME AS EVERYONE.
WE ARE LONG PAST FIGHTING
WHICH HAND YOU USE WHEN WRITING.
NOW WE'VE STOPPED BELITTILING
WHICH GENDER YOU LIKE DIDDLING.
I'M A LEFT-HANDED LESBIAN, A SAPPHIC SOUTHPAW, WHAT ABOUT IT?

DOES ANYONE CARE? I DOUBT IT.
THOSE IMMUTABLE CHARACTERISTICS
BECOMING SUCH DULL STATISTICS
THAT NOBODY NEEDS TO JUSTIFY OR CONCEAL.
IF YOU ARE RIGHT-HANDED AND STRAIGHT
YOU'RE NOT DEFINED BY EITHER TRAIT,
AND NOW I SHARE
IN WHAT IS FAIR.
I'M A LEFT-HANDED LESBIAN.
I'M A LEFT-HANDED LESBIAN.
I'M A LEFT-HANDED LESBIAN, A SAPPHIC SOUTHPAW
BIG DEAL.

Madeline kisses Zell goodbye, picks up her shopping bags and walks out still singing.

THOSE IMMUTABLE CHARACTERISTICS
BECOMING SUCH DULL STATISTICS.

ZELL: Damn the lawyers who went with that argument. Immutable.
[snorts] What about all those "straight" women who wound up in my bed?

AVA, *laughing with delight*: Tell it, sister.

Ava and Zell exit.