

WILLOW

Written by

Anna Zeh

EXT. MIRA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

On a hot summer day, a large family walks barefoot down an empty road surrounded by marsh, their hands full of beach chairs, coolers, sand buckets and shovels.

They stop when they reach the beginning of a driveway made of broken seashells, and begin dusting sand off their feet and putting their shoes back on. LILY (8), still barefoot, takes off running. MOM (40s) groans in annoyance.

MOM
(shouting)
Lily! Cmon, put your shoes on!
You're gonna hurt your feet!

The white shells crunch under Lily's feet as she runs, unaware of the pain due to her eyes looking up at the tree tunnel above her, and the way the sun makes the leaves glow bright green. She giggles, briefly looking over her shoulder.

LILY
NO I'M NOT!

She makes her way to the clearing, where a pale pink beach house sits in welcoming. A white porch and gazebo wrap around it, surrounded by a million colorful flowers and plants.

A garage sits at the other end of the driveway, beside a koi fish pond refreshed with a little waterfall, and a patio and fire pit some distance away from a tree house... all protected by the trees and blue sky.

As Lily sprints up the steps, MIRA (70s) pushes the screen door open with her hip, holding a tray of drinks. She balances the tray on one hand as she wraps Lily in a hug, yelling out to the rest of the family following behind.

MIRA
Who's' ready for the last happy
hour of the summer?! WOOO!

The family cheers with her as they all make their way to the patio. Mira releases Lily to hold the tray carefully, as Lily looks up at her.

LILY
But, Grandma, isn't happy hour at
5? It's only 3.

MIRA
(laughing)
Happy hour is whenever we want it
to be.

(MORE)

MIRA (CONT'D)

Now, run into the garage and check
the fridge. Ed stopped by earlier.

Lily gasped in excitement.

LILY

Mr. Fish Man?!

MIRA

(laughing)

Yes, Mr. Fish Man. There's some
snacks and juice in there for you
and the other kids, too.

Lily beams up at her before taking off towards the garage.

INT. GARAGE - AFTERNOON

Lily enters through the side door and makes her way to the
fridge. She grabs the door handle, but pauses to look out the
window. Everyone's gathered outside, with the adults drinking
and laughing as the other kids play.

DAD (40s) is side-eyeing Mira as Mom stands beside him,
whispering something Lily can hardly make out through the
muffled glass.

MOM

Are you sure... Jack... doesn't
seem right...

Dad glares at Mira from across the patio, where she's pouring
people drinks and laughing. He shrugs Mom's hand off his
shoulder and whips around to her.

DAD

(whisper-shouting)

YES! I saw them... definitely
her... bitch...

As they continue to talk, Lily notices stairs in the back of
the garage that lead to a second-floor. She quietly climbs up
the steps, ducking under the window as she passes through.

INT. ART LOFT - AFTERNOON

Lily opens a door to reveal an art studio, filled with
multiple easels of different paintings of Cape Cod, art and
framing supplies scattered across the loft.

She enters and looks around, losing track of time as she studies each painting. She spots a couple of her own drawings she did when she was younger. Lily smiles to herself.

She turns and fixates on a painting of a willow tree, the branches hovering over a small river that lit up the sunset behind it.

MIRA

You like that one?

Lily gasps and whirls around, seeing Mira leaning in the doorway with her arms crossed.

LILY

Um- I was just, uh...

MIRA

(laughing)

It's okay, Lily. You don't think I've noticed you sneaking up here since you were four?

*
*

She enters the room, standing beside a sheepish Lily as she studies the willow tree painting.

MIRA (CONT'D)

What do you like about it?

Lily glances between Mira and the painting, before letting her eyes rest on the scene.

LILY

(hesitantly)

The colors... it's the river you took me to when you first let me draw with you, right? In Rhode Island?

Lily nods at the old drawings on the wall, and Mira beams at her proudly.

MIRA

Yeah, that's right. You've come a long way since then.

LILY

You're gonna take me back there, right?

Mira sighs, keeping her eyes on the painting.

MIRA

Yeah, sweetheart. Real soon.

LILY
(under her breath)
That's what you said last time...

Mira looks down at Lily, gently grabbing her shoulders and crouching down to reach eye-level. *

MIRA
Hey... *

She looks at Lily for a moment, and suddenly grins as a realization hits her. *

MIRA (CONT'D)
You have a birthday coming up,
don't you? *

Lily smiles sheepishly and nods. Mira's grin widens as she takes Lily's hands in hers. *

MIRA (CONT'D)
Alright then... name a place. Any
place in the world, no matter how
far it is, and we'll plan a trip
for your birthday. *

Lily's eyes light up, staring back at Mira in surprise before she starts giggling in excitement. *

LILY
Really?!

MIRA
Really. Anywhere! *

Lily looks down at her feet as Mira watches her think for a while. *

MIRA (CONT'D)
Well? *

Lily's eyes return nervously to hers. *

LILY
...Paris? *

Mira smiles warmly at her and nods. *

MIRA
Paris. *

Lily's face breaks out into a huge grin as she squeals, jumping into Mira's arms excitedly. Mira laughs and hugs her tightly before letting her go again. *

LILY
You really mean it?!

MIRA
I do!
(sighing)
I know I've been a little busy
lately, but I never back out on a
promise. I haven't let you down
yet, have I?

Lily shakes her head. Mira smiles softly.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Exactly. So, I promise.

Mira looks back at the painting for a moment, thinking. She finally lifts the painting off the easel, walking across the studio to place it down on a work table with lots of frames.

She glances at Lily briefly before opening a desk drawer.

MIRA (CONT'D)
Your favorite color is yellow,
right?

Lily nods, watching her with slight confusion.

Mira pulls out an antique gilded frame, placing the painting inside and securing the canvas to the frame tightly.

She smiles and grabs a pen, writing something on the back of it before giving it to Lily.

DAD
(from outside)
LILY, LET'S GO! WE'RE GONNA HIT
WICKED BAD TRAFFIC ON THE PIKE!

EXT. MIRA'S HOUSE - SUNSET

Mira holds Lily's hand as they walk towards a line of three cars, one of them her parents are packing into thoroughly.

As they close the trunk and begin saying goodbyes to the rest of the family, Lily lets go of Mira's hand to hug her waist, the other hand clutching the painting.

LILY
Thank you, Grandma.

Mira hugs her back tightly, kissing the top of her head.

MIRA

Anytime, pumpkin. Remember, if you
ever need me...

She crouches until she's eye-level with Lily, grinning as she
pulls out a toy walkie-talkie from her pocket.

MIRA (CONT'D)

(muffled voice through
speaker)

Niner, Niner, Moon Lady to Water
Lily, Over.

Lily giggles as she pulls hers out from her backpack, raising
the walkie-talkie to her mouth.

LILY

(muffled voice through
speaker)

Water Lily here, Grandma, over.

Mira laughs and starts tickling Lily playfully.

MIRA

No, silly! I'm Moon Lady, remember?
We need these code names so nobody
finds us ou-

Suddenly Dad steps in from behind Lily, breaking up the fun.
Lily quickly shoves the walkie talkie back into her pocket
before he sees it.

DAD

Lily. Let's go.

Mira and Lily take a step back from each other in response to
Dad glaring at Mira. After a moment, Lily walks to the opened
car door and turns around, waving excitedly.

LILY

I love you. See you at
Thanksgiving!

MIRA

(hesitantly)

Yeah, sweetie, I'll see you at
Thanksgiving. Love you lots.

Lily climbs into the backseat, looking out the back window as
the car starts. As they drive away, She keeps waving at Mira,
smiling brightly at her.

Mira waves back, but a weird sadness appears on her face. Lily's smile fades slowly, staring at Mira as the car turns onto the road.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Lily sits in the backseat, staring out the window as snow falls to the ground of the thick woods. The car is silent, a local Western Massachusetts radio station playing announcing classic rock songs fills the background.

DAD looks at Mom hesitantly for a moment, taking a deep breath before glancing at Lily in the rearview mirror.

DAD
Hey, kiddo.

Lily looks back at him through the mirror, watching him quickly return his eyes to the road.

DAD (CONT'D)
So... Grandma Mira won't be coming
to Thanksgiving this year.

Lily's eyebrows furrow as she sits up straighter, looking more intently into the mirror at him. Dad's eyes refuse to meet hers.

LILY
Why not?

DAD
Don't talk about it when we get
there, okay?

LILY
What do you mea-

DAD
Just don't say anything.

Lily stares at him as they pulled into the driveway.

INT. GRANDPA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Lily and her parents enter the cabin, dropping their bags on the floor and shaking off their coats and the snow in their hair.

GRANDPA
(jokingly)
Hey! Is that my eldest son at the
door?

As her parents make their way down the hallway to greet the family, Lily follows, and freezes in the threshold.

The open-floor plan of the house is completely empty: bare walls, no plants or pictures, only a couple pieces of furniture, a rug, a dining table, and some kitchen supplies on the counter.

DAD
What's up, Dad? Happy Thanksgiving!

The two bear hug, laughing as Mom smiles patiently next to them.

GRANDPA
Ah, and of course, my favorite
daughter in law!

MOM
(laughing)
Sam, I'm your ONLY daughter in law!

GRANDPA
Exactly, less competition for the
"favorite" title!

They hug too, and the rest of the family swarms the kitchen, with greetings and laughter and frivolous preparation for Thanksgiving dinner.

Lily is taken aback as she walks around the house, inspecting the space before staring in confusion and disbelief at everyone, acting completely normal.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)
Why, Miss Lily, look how much
you've grown!

He walks towards her and hugs her excitedly, Lily's eyes still on the walls as she hesitantly hugs him back.

LILY
H-Hi, Grandpa. I haven't grown that
much since the su-

GRANDPA
Well, we've got turkey almost ready
to come out of the oven. Come help
me with the potatoes, come on!

He pulls away before guiding her into the kitchen, the two making their way towards the festivities.

Lily's reluctance gets the better of her, and she suddenly backs away from Grandpa's arms.

LILY

Actually, I'm, uh... I'm gonna go to the bathroom real quick. Long drive, you know?

She regains her composure, smiling innocently at him. He laughs and ruffles her hair with one hand.

GRANDPA

Ha ha! You're a funny little thing. *

BEAT. *

OH! Hey, before I forget- *

Grandpa jumps in realization as he shoves a hand down his shirt pocket. He pulls out a fifty dollar bill and gently hands it to Lily. *

GRANDPA (CONT'D) *

Happy late birthday, sweetheart. *

Lily looks up at him in appreciation, her forced smile slightly cracking. He pats her shoulder before backing away. *

GRANDPA (CONT'D) *

Okay, go ahead. *

Lily keeps smiling at everyone as she gently backs away from the scene. She turns around and walks quickly up the stairs, tucking the money into her jacket pocket. *

INT. GRANDPA'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Lily bursts into her grandparent's room, finding it just as empty. She frantically begins opening closets, drawers, and looking under the bed.

She finally stands up straight, slightly out of breath as she stares in bewilderment.

She walks into the bathroom, closing the door behind her. She crouches down to the floor as she pulls out the walkie talkie, bringing her knees to her chest.

LILY
(whispering)
Niner, Niner, Water Lily to Moon
Lady, over.

No response.

LILY (CONT'D)
Moon Lady? It's Water Lily. Over.

Nothing.

LILY (CONT'D)
Come on, Moon La-

A sudden knock at the door.

MOM
Lily? You okay in there?

Lily quickly stands up and shoves the walkie talkie back in her pocket, flushing the empty toilet and throwing the faucet on.

LILY
Ye- Yeah! I'm okay, Ma!

MOM
Alright, hon. Turkey's done - come
downstairs when you're ready.

Lily hears Mom's footsteps fade away down the hall. She shuts her eyes and sighs with relief, before opening them with sadness and confusion.

INT. GRANDPA'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone is seated around the dining room table, among the display of hot Thanksgiving dinner and decorations.

Lily is seated between her parents, staring blankly at her untouched plate as everyone around her jokes and laughs.

GRANDPA
Alright everyone! Time to say what
we're thankful for. I'll start.

He sits at the head of the table, his eyes scanning everyone with pride.

GRANDPA (CONT'D)

I'm thankful for my family. I'm thankful for their kindness, love, and all their bickering while I'm trying to cook a goddamn bird in the oven!

The family cheers, some drunkenly howling in amusement. Grandpa looks next at Dad next to him, who nods as Grandpa claps a hand on his back.

DAD

I, also, am very grateful for my family. Especially for my wife, my daughter-

Lily stares at him as he mentions her, noticing how he can barely glance at her as he does so. Her eyes return to her plate.

DAD (CONT'D)

-and, of course, my wonderful role model of a father.

MOM

Oh, you kiss-ass, you.

People crack up laughing, supporting Mom's playful remark. The commotion eventually dies down. Grandpa looks excitedly at Lily.

GRANDPA

Your turn, Lily. What are you thankful for?

She pauses for a moment, feeling people's eyes on her before looking up confidently.

LILY

I'm thankful for art.

Everyone falls silent. Some chuckle nervously along with Grandpa.

GRANDPA

That's... nice, sweetheart. Why are you thankful for art?

She looks up at him and opens her mouth to talk, but Dad reaches under the table casually before grabbing her wrist and squeezing it tightly, painfully. Lily winces slightly, but continues.

LILY

It's something that makes me different. It's a part of me. I'm grateful that I get to draw, and paint, and be myself.

The family melts, awes escaping people's lips in adoration.

Lily turns to Dad, whose hand is still gripping her wrist, but he still refuses to look at her. She keeps staring at him as she wiggles her wrist out of his grasp. *

INT. LILY'S ROOM - EVENING

A single lamp illuminates the little girl's room, filled with drawings, books, arts and crafts supplies, and toys.

The opened door reveals GOLDIE, the family dog, lounging on the floor in the hallway. *

Lily sits on her bed, the willow tree painting in her hands. Her eyes are spaced out, staring at the wall in front of her. *

Echos of her parents arguing vibrate through her room from a nearby air vent in her wall. *

DAD

...that stunt she pulled yesterday.
Fucking ungrateful little-

MOM

Jack, she's eight years old. You can't expect her to understand if we don't tell her.

She gently returns to reality and rubs her head. Her eyes fall down on the painting, scanning it for a moment. *

Lily reaches for her jacket hung up on her bedpost, pulling out the money from its pocket. She returns to the painting and turns it onto its side, examining the gap between the frame and canvas with prying fingers. *

DAD

Doesn't matter, May! I'm her father, she'll listen to what I say and do as she's told, no questions asked.

MOM

When it comes to her grandmother who's suddenly gone for no reason in her eyes? *

The arguing gets louder. She slowly rises and makes her way to the air vent, sliding the lever open to hear her parents clearer. *

MOM (CONT'D) *

How would she not question that?
You need to tell her-

DAD

I DON'T NEED TO DO SHIT!

A loud crash echoes from the kitchen, and Lily jumps. She whirls around and grabs Goldie, leading him into her room and closing the door.

MOM

JACK! STOP IT!

More crashes thunder in the house as Lily pushes her desk in front of the door. She grabs the walkie talkie from her nightstand, leading Goldie into her closet to sit down and close the door.

Goldie rests his head on Lily's lap as she brings the walkie talkie to her mouth.

LILY

Niner, Niner, Water Lily to Moon
Lady. Over.

No response. Muffled shouting booms from downstairs as Lily hugs Goldie, tears beginning to fill her eyes.

LILY (CONT'D)

Moon Lady, where are you?! You
promised me...

Nothing. Shouting continues, moving around the first floor of the house. Lily can hear every footstep.

LILY (CONT'D)

(crying)
Grandma, please...

INT. LILY'S ROOM - MORNING

LILY (12) snaps awake at Mom's voice from downstairs.

MOM

(from downstairs)
Lily! Come on, time for school!

Lily closes her eyes again and groans in protest, grabbing a pillow and covering her face with it.

MOM (CONT'D)

LILY! YOU'RE GONNA BE LATE, COME ON!

She rolls over to face her clock - which says 7:03 AM. She grabs it and her eyes widen, dropping it and immediately jumping out of bed.

She runs into the bathroom, brushing her teeth quickly. She grabs a brush and starts brushing her hair frantically, wincing at each knot in her hair.

LILY

Ow, Shit, shit, shit-

MOM

(from downstairs)
I HEARD THAT!

LILY

SORRY MOM!

Lily drops the brush and races back into her room, grabbing her jacket and bag. She throws open her closet door and grabs a pair of shoes, lifting them up to reveal a dusty willow tree painting, tucked secretly into the corner of the closet.

Lily stops, staring at it as she picks it up slowly, re-familiarizing herself with its features.

MOM

(from downstairs)
LILYYYY!!!

Lily's breath catches as she snaps back into reality, spinning around and running out of her room.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Lily walks quickly into the kitchen, where Dad and Mom are hurrying to get ready for work as well. Dad swiftly packs his briefcase, and Mom tosses Lily a bagged lunch from across the kitchen before looking down to inspect her own jacket. *

Lily swings her bag around and opens it to put the lunch in, and pauses.

LILY

Shit, I forgot my sketchbook.

MOM

Language!

LILY

I'm sorry, I know, I know-

She turns around aggravated, running back out of the kitchen to head upstairs as Mom calls up to her.

MOM

Grab my sewing kit while you're up there, please! I tore a hole in my damn jacket!

LILY

LANGUAGE!!!

MOM

Oh, that's not fair!

INT. PARENT'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Lily sprints into her parents room from her bedroom directly across the hall, shoving her sketchbook into her bag quickly as she rushes into her parent's closet.

She gets up on her tip-toes and reaches high into the top shelf, her hands fumbling and searching frantically.

She finally grabs it and pulls it down, knocking down a large envelope behind it as it falls to the ground.

LILY

Oh, come on-

Lily kneels down to pick it up quickly, but pauses. The envelope is completely unmarked, and filled to the brim. She looks at it curiously, and slowly opens it.

Inside are a hundred letters, none of them opened. She pulls one out and looks at it: addressed to Lily Hayes, from Grandma Mira, the mail stamp from the current year.

Lily's heart drops.

She stares wildly at the letter for a moment, before pulling out another. Her hands begin to fly as she pulls out one after another, eventually dumping them on the floor. Each letter has mail stamps from all over the world, all since the last time she saw Mira.

Lily kneels to the ground, sitting back in bewilderment.

Her eyes fall on one letter, the mail stamp from Paris. *

MOM
(from downstairs)
LILY!!!

She cautiously picks up the letter, examining it closely.
It's from Thanksgiving four years ago.

She slowly tears it open and pulls out a postcard, of Mira in front of the Eiffel Tower... with a man. *

She flips it over to read, "Thinking of you while we're here! Love you lots, Grandma Mira and Ed." *

Mom continues to call Lily, but she can't hear any of it.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Lily slowly makes her way back into the kitchen, envelope in hand. Mom and Dad are frantically getting their things together to get out the door.

MOM
Oh, it's gonna be a miracle if you
make the bus now, Li-

Mom turns to face Lily and freezes, and Dad turns around at her loss of words to face Lily too, just as shocked. Lily's eyes were locked on him since she walked in, raising the envelope slowly.

LILY
Dad?

They stand in silence, nobody moving for a while as Lily and Dad stared at each other.

After a moment, Dad slowly reaches down to grab his briefcase, his eyes trying to leave hers as he took a step back and started to turn around. *

Lily's expression turns angry as she takes a few steps towards him.

LILY (CONT'D)
Dad...

He turns away from her fully, grabbing his jacket as he picks up the pace, making his way quickly towards the door. Lily marches after him.

LILY (CONT'D)

DAD!!!

He suddenly turns around and grabs a glass from the counter, whipping around and throwing it. It just barely misses Lily's head as she ducks, Mom screaming as it shatters on the wall behind her.

He grabs Lily's arms and pins her to the wall, infuriated.

DAD

SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

He releases her and grabs his stuff, making his way out of the house and slamming the door behind him. Lily's whole body shakes, tears flowing down her cheeks. Mom rushes over, wrapping her in a hug.

MOM

(frantically)

You need to stop, Lily. You need to let it go, okay? It only angers him the more you push it. She's not your grandmother, alright? Leave it alone. I'm so sorry-

She jumps and glances out the window as the bus honks.

MOM (CONT'D)

Shit, okay, come on sweetie-

She grabs Lily's jacket and bag, handing it over quickly as the two sprint outside. Lily quickly wiping her tears and greeting the driver nonchalantly as she climbs on. *

INT. BUS - MORNING

Lily sits by herself, her eyes puffy. She attempts deep breaths, but only manages shallow ones. She looks out the window to watch her house disappear behind the dead trees. *

She snuffles and wipes her eyes with her sleeves, trying to shake it off. She opens her bag and pulls out the willow tree painting. *

She studies it closely, gently wiping some dust off it and tracing a finger along the river's path. She turns it around to read the message: *

"You are a wonderful artist, with the biggest heart. Never lose sight of that. Love you lots, Grandma Mira."

Lily takes a deep breath, some improvement in calming herself down. She laces her fingers in between the frame and canvas, revealing multiple wads of money tucked inside. *

She pulls one out and shoves the painting back in her bag. *

She shuts her eyes for a second to take a final deep breath, opening her eyes and staring in front of her, with determination.

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

Lily gets off the bus in the line of other kids, who make their way to the school entrance, but Lily stands there.

She looks the opposite direction towards a train station down the road, then the school, then back at the station.

She gently backs away behind the bus, walking away towards the station.

On her way, Lily drops her walkie talkie in a trash can.

FADE TO BLACK.