

Small Potatoes

by

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Draft 1-B

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CHARACTERS

COSMO LANGTRY (once Cosimo Langhetti), male, 70, husband of Valentina and father of Teresa, a charismatic but unreliable "idea man" with a history of entrepreneurial ventures and a tendency to leave his family for extended periods.

VALENTINA LANGHETTI, female, 69, mother of Teresa and wife of Cosmo, a first-generation Italian immigrant with a failing memory but an undiminished drive to work and feel useful.

TERESA RUSSO, female, early 30s, daughter of Valentina and Cosmo, wife of Gianni, and mother of Lucia, a pragmatic and weary woman who has reluctantly assumed the role of matriarch in her small family.

LUCIA BALDUCCI, female, 13, daughter of Teresa from a previous marriage, granddaughter of Valentina and Cosmo, a bright and energetic young girl who still holds onto the starry-eyed hope of youth. She dreams of one day becoming a ballerina.

GIANNI RUSSO, male, early-30s but appears older due to hard labor, husband of Teresa and stepfather of Lucia, a hardworking and quietly loving man employed at a demanding meatpacking plant. He feels underappreciated at his job and yearns for something more.

TIME

November to December, 1932

SETTING

The cramped main room of the Russo apartment in East Harlem, New York. Clearly a home cleaned and cared for, yet still cluttered, claustrophobic and dilapidated. A cookstove squats next to a standalone sink covered with a large cutting board to create some counter space. A dining table stands near an open hutch that likely holds all the dishes they own. On one wall, next to a radiator, a single bed is partially hidden by a folding screen pressed into service as an impromptu clothing rack for several shirts and pants on hangers. A battered front door and an opening to a hallway are the only exits.

ACT I

I-1: PIECEWORK

TIME: The day before Thanksgiving, 1932.

SETTING: The fourth-floor apartment of Gianni and Teresa Russo of East Harlem, New York. For too many years these walls have housed too many people who can afford too few dreams.

AT RISE: VALENTINA hems a pant leg on a sewing machine set up at the table. A first-generation Italian immigrant, Valentina's memory has begun to fail but her drive to work and her need to feel useful are undiminished. Her daughter TERESA stands at the stove adding broth to a pot. The mundane tragedies of life have knocked the gilt off the American dream for Teresa, and she has reluctantly assumed the role of matriarch for this little family. Her daughter LUCIA still exudes the starry-eyed hope of the American youth, brimming with excitement for future adventures. For now though, she stands at a folding ironing table, pressing a man's shirt.

VALENTINA

Mind the cuffs, Teresa.

LUCIA

It's Lucia, Nonna.

VALENTINA

Of course it is. My eyes see Lucia, my mouth says your mother sometimes. But you mind those cuffs. Mister Marino is very particular about his cuffs.

LUCIA

But this is Poppa's.

VALENTINA

No, no...are you sure?

TERESA

(over her shoulder)

Pretty sure, Mama. Eddie Marino died in twenty-nine.

VALENTINA

He was a sweet man.

TERESA

Uh-huh.

Teresa pours a ladle of broth into
the rice and stirs.

VALENTINA

Did you heat that stock first? You gotta warm up the broth
before--

TERESA

I know how to cook risotto, Ma.

VALENTINA

Because you always forget to--

TERESA

One time. When I was fifteen. Will you let it go?

VALENTINA

Fine, fine. You don't need my help. I've only been cooking
fifty, sixty years...

(pause as she sews)

When did you say Tony's getting home?

Teresa freezes. She doesn't know to
answer.

TERESA

(after a moment)

He's not, Ma.

VALENTINA

Not coming home for supper?

TERESA

Anthony never came home from the war. I'm married to Gianni, now.

VALENTINA

I meant Gianni. I get names crossed up sometimes. Where is he?

Teresa breathes again.

TERESA

Should be on his way. But it's not even six...he doesn't get
off till five-thirty.

VALENTINA

Remind me to tell him I need a new belt for the Singer.

TERESA

You closed the shop, Mama.

VALENTINA

Who did?

TERESA

We did. Remember?

Pause.

VALENTINA

Of course I remember.

She lifts the presser foot and
clips a thread.

There. These are ready.

Teresa examines Valentina's work.

TERESA

That's a nice hem.

VALENTINA

What's next?

TERESA

That's all we have today.

(she frowns at something)

Lucia, fetch me the tape.

Lucia picks up a cloth measuring tape
and wraps it around her waist. She
holds out the free end to Teresa.

LUCIA

Pull.

TERESA

What? Hand it to me.

LUCIA

Pull it, Mama!

TERESA

Why?

VALENTINA

Is a little game. Watch.

Valentina reaches over and grasps
the end of the tape, pulling it to

herself. As the tape pulls away,
Lucia spins into pirouettes as if
the tape spun her around.

VALENTINA (cont'd)

See? Like a wind-up top!

LUCIA

Like a ballerina!

VALENTINA

Always dancing, that one.

TERESA

Too much dancing. Not enough chore-doing.

VALENTINA

Oh, Tess, let her be.

(conspiratorially, to Lucia)

With your Mama, it was *singing*.

LUCIA

Really?

VALENTINA

Ugh! All day, all night, everywhere! At home...helping me in
the shop--

TERESA

But I still got my work done, though!

Lucia looks a question at Valentina.
Valentina shakes her head: "No, she
didn't." Lucia giggles.

VALENTINA

Customers called her my little nightingale. She wanted to
sing for records. If we'd've had radios back then, she'd
have never--

TERESA

I learned when *not* to sing.

LUCIA

(to Teresa)

But you never sing!

TERESA

I sing in church!

LUCIA

That doesn't count.

Teresa lays the pants on the table
and takes the tape from Valentina,
measuring the inseam. She frowns.

TERESA

These are thirty-one.

VALENTINA

They better be!

TERESA

Supposed to be twenty-eight.

VALENTINA

No, thirty-one!

TERESA

Twenty-eight! Did you forget--

VALENTINA

Trentuno! Forty years, you think I don't know your father's
measurements?

Pause. Teresa and Lucia share a
worried look.

TERESA

(gently)

Ma, these aren't...Cosmo's. They're for Leonard Falcone, and
he's only...

She holds up a hand: a short man,
maybe 5'4".

VALENTINA

Well, those are much too long for *him*...

TERESA

Yeah.

VALENTINA

I'd have to shorten 'em half a foot for Leonard to wear. Why
are we giving your father's pants away?

LUCIA

(helpfully)

Not giving, Nonna: *selling*. Mister Falcone's buying them
from us.

VALENTINA

But what if Cosmo needs them?

TERESA

Then Cosmo should come back and wear them!

VALENTINA

Teresa Grazia! He's your father; you show some respect.

TERESA

Respect.

Pause. Clearly a source of tension.

LUCIA

I think it's nice Nonno can help Mister Falcone...

TERESA

(maintaining the deception)

Your grandfather is a very generous man.

VALENTINA

Italians look out for each other. You remember that.

LUCIA

Yes, Nonna.

Teresa hands the pants back to
Valentina, who stares at them for a
long moment. For a moment, her
hands tremble and her voice wavers.

VALENTINA

How...how long, again?

TERESA

Twenty-eight. I'll help you mark them. Lucia, stir the rice. I
don't want it to scorch. Add a ladle of broth when it's dry.

LUCIA

Si, Mama.

Lucia moves to the stove. Teresa
measures and marks the pants again.

TERESA

(to Valentina, as she works)

So we've got the risotto, and the focaccia should be ready in
half an hour. After dinner, you and I can peel apples for pie.

VALENTINA

We're having pie?

TERESA

Tomorrow, for Thanksgiving.

VALENTINA

Where's the turkey? I haven't seen the turkey.

TERESA

I'm making lasagna tomorrow. Gianni likes my lasagna.

VALENTINA

It's Thanksgiving, you should have a turkey.

TERESA

Finucci's wanted forty-five a pound for turkeys!

VALENTINA

(scandalized)

Forty-five cents!

TERESA

Yeah! *Nine dollars* for a twenty-pound bird!

They commiserate in disbelief.

VALENTINA

(softening)

But it's Thanksgiving...

TERESA

No! Gianni makes four-fifty a day! You wanna spend nine on *one meal*?

VALENTINA

I remember your father, Thanksgiving morning, he'd always bust through the front door, turkey as big as you...

TERESA

I don't remember that.

VALENTINA

Back on Baxter Street.

TERESA

That was ages ago...

VALENTINA

Every year, a huge bird, barely enough time to get it cooked! Your aunts and I, scrambling in the kitchen...you and the cousins cuttin' up in the front room, Tony breakin' out his guitar with you singin' away...

TERESA

Tony? No, that had to 'a been later...

VALENTINA

I'll buy the turkey this time. I have money...

TERESA
No! Your savings have to last until...

VALENTINA
It's nine dollars...

TERESA
You spend nine bucks a day, that money won't last three months!

VALENTINA
But Teresa--

TERESA
(with finality)
I'm making lasagna, Ma.

VALENTINA
(as if she's just heard)
Oh, that'll be good.

TERESA
(is she kidding?)
Yeah.

Pause.

VALENTINA
Too bad about the turkey, though.

With a groan, Teresa moves to check
the risotto.

TERESA
(to Lucia)
See? When it looks like this, it's ready for more.

VALENTINA
You sure you heated--

TERESA
For cripes sake, I heated the broth, Ma! It's right here on
the stove.

Pause.

VALENTINA
Because sometimes you forget.

Teresa glares at her, but chooses
non-violence and adds more broth.
Suddenly concerned, she opens a
cupboard, rifles through it,

doesn't find what she wants.
Another place. Still nothing.

TERESA
(to herself)

Parmesan.

VALENTINA
What?

TERESA
What I forgot, is to buy more Parmesan.

VALENTINA
No Parmesan? You can't do risotto without--

TERESA
I know that!

VALENTINA
Send Lucia to the bodega.

TERESA
Now? I'll ask Mrs. Conchetti upstairs. She'll have some I
can borrow.

(to Lucia re: the risotto)
Watch this. I'll be right back.

LUCIA
Yes, Mama.

Lucia moves to the stove and Teresa
hands her the ladle, removes her apron,
and exits out the front door. Valentina
leans in to Lucia with a conspiratorial,
almost mischievous energy.

VALENTINA
Hey kiddo, you and me, we surprise your mother, huh? Get her
a big turkey for tomorrow like Cosimo used to.

LUCIA
It's too expensive, Nonna.

VALENTINA
It's not so bad. Come and see.

Valentina leads Lucia to the area
partitioned off with the screen: her
"bedroom." From under the bed,
Valentina retrieves a coffee can,
from which she pulls a roll of
bills. Lucia's eyes go wide.

LUCIA
You're as rich as Rockefeller!

VALENTINA
Hardly! It's only four hundred and thirty, bit more. Pocket change for Mister Rockefeller.

LUCIA
Where did you get all that?

VALENTINA
Some from selling the shop. Most through many, many years saving nickels and dimes. Nickels add up to dollars! Now here: you take this...

She peels off a bill for Lucia.

LUCIA
Is that...I've never seen a ten-dollar bill before!

VALENTINA
(amused)
Now you hold onto that, and tomorrow morning you take it to Mister Finucci and bring home the biggest turkey he's got!

LUCIA
But Mama said nine dollars for a turkey was too much!

VALENTINA
Money spent on those you love is money well spent.

LUCIA
Golly, I wouldn't spend it on a turkey!

VALENTINA
No? What would you buy?

LUCIA
Ballet lessons!

VALENTINA
Ballet...

LUCIA
It's just a silly dream.

VALENTINA
Silly? Why silly? It's good to have dreams. They give us hope.

LUCIA
What's your dream, Nonna?

VALENTINA

Me? No...

LUCIA

Please?

VALENTINA

Dreams are for young people. Other people.

LUCIA

Isn't there something?

VALENTINA

Well...there is one thing...

LUCIA

Tell me!

VALENTINA

(after a moment)

I want to spend this on a special trip...and I want to take you with me, now that you're old enough.

LUCIA

A trip to where?

VALENTINA

Your grandfather and I, we came to New York in eighteen eighty-five. We'd only been married, what, a year maybe? I was barely twenty-two, Cosmo...a year older. Oh! He was so handsome back then. But after we left Genoa, we never went back, not once. So before I die, I want to go back and see the Old Country, the village where I grew up, see it all again. And I want to take you with me, show you what Italy is like. This is my dream.

LUCIA

Just the two of us? What about Mama and Papà? Won't I ever see them again?

VALENTINA

Oh, my sweet child! We'll come back! We'd only be gone for a--

Teresa re-enters through the front door with a hunk of Parmesan wrapped in a cloth.

TERESA

Lucia! I told you to mind the stove!

Teresa hurries to the stove, ladling more broth into the pot as Valentina quickly puts away the money.

VALENTINA
Don't blame the girl. I
called--

LUCIA
I'm sorry, Mama, but Nonna--

A BUZZER sounds, interrupting them.

VALENTINA
Are we expecting company?

No... TERESA

(to Lucia)
Go see who it is. It might be your father forgot his key.

Lucia runs out the front door.

TERESA (cont'd)
(to Valentina)
What were you talking about?

VALENTINA

Hmm?

With Lucia. TERESA

Oh. Ballet lessons.

TERESA
Ballet? Ma, it would help me if you'd help keep her on task.
And her head out of the clouds.

VALENTINA
She's twelve, Tessie.

TERESA

Thirteen. And she needs to learn how to *work*! I've been thinking of asking Karl Zimmerman if he needs anyone. She could iron, fold, she could learn the dry cleaning machines...

VALENTINA
Let her be a child a bit longer...

TERESA

She's part of this family. We're all responsible to each other. A few dollars more to help pay for things...

VALENTINA
I can pay, too.

TERESA

No, your money's for you, maybe for emergencies...We're gettin' by, I'm just...a few extra dollars a month would be nice, is all I'm sayin'...

(a thought)

Oh, did I tell you Gianni didn't get foreman?

VALENTINA

No! Why not?

TERESA

Didn't give him a reason. Just "no."

VALENTINA

(disgusted)

Oh...those people!

TERESA

Picked some younger guy who'd only been there three years.

VALENTINA

Gianni's been there *ten*!

TERESA

Almost *twelve*. And makin' the same as he has since twenty-eight...

VALENTINA

At least he's got a job.

TERESA

Well, aren't you sunny-side-of-the-street!

VALENTINA

It's true, though. Many don't.

TERESA

I know. I know. I'm grateful.

(eyeing the risotto)

All right, one more should do it.

Teresa ladles broth into the risotto, stirs. Suddenly the front door bursts open to admit COSMO carrying a bolt of shiny gray fabric and a large box with a strap closure.

COSMO

(boisterously)

Delivery for Langhetti's Tailoring!

The broth ladle clatters to the floor.

Cosmo? VALENTINA Papà? TERESA

COSMO
Careful there, Tess: you'll spoil the soup!

Cosmo comes fully into the apartment and Lucia follows behind and closes the door.

COSMO (cont'd)

There's my best girl!

Cosmo crosses to Valentina and gives her a kiss.

TERESA
Papa, what are you doing here?

Did you bring a turkey?

Even better!

He lays the bolt of fabric right on the pants Valentina is hemming. She leans in to examine it.

Is that silk?

COSMO

Rayon! Got this whole half-bolt at Martel's for seven dollars! And Valentina Langhetti's the only tailor in New York I'll let touch it!

TERESA
How did you even *find* her?

COSMO

Well now, that's a story! First, I went to Little Italy, to your mother's shop. Found out it's a shoe place now!

TERESA
That's been almost a year! Her health--

COSMO

--but then, the corner deli guy said she sold the place--

TERESA
--which you'd'a known if you coulda been bothered--

COSMO

--so I popped over to the old apartment on Baxter. Whaddaya know, found someone else living in it...not even Italian, the nerve! But luckily, Fran Caruso in 3-A--

VALENTINA

Oh! How is Frannie?

COSMO

Good, good. Short as ever, you know. *Wide* as ever, too, maybe more. She said the old place ain't the same without us.

TERESA

Us? *Us*?

COSMO

And Frannie told me you moved to 118th, live here with Tessa and Jimmy now...

TERESA

Gianni. His name's--

COSMO

...so I thought, "What a great time of year to visit family!"

COSMO (cont'd)

(indicating Lucia)

Haven't seen this one since she was yea high...when she answered the door downstairs, she didn't even know her own grandfather!

TERESA

She was five the last time she--!

COSMO

I'm not sayin' it hasn't been a minute!

TERESA

You...you are the most...

There are no words.

LUCIA

What's the fabric for, Grandpa?

COSMO

Oh, that! I brought *that* because I need your Nonna to make me a suit!

TERESA

What?!

LUCIA

Why don't you just buy one?

COSMO

They want twenty-five, thirty dollars for suits these days! Just knock me over the head and take my whole wallet, why don't'cha! Wasn't gonna pay that, not for something only *half* decent! *Thirty dollars...* it's robbery...but seven dollars for top-shelf fabric, see, that I'm willing to part with.

VALENTINA

That's a good deal for this.

COSMO

Right? And you'll make me something *nice...*

VALENTINA

No. Cosmo, I sold the shop. I'm...I'm out of business.

COSMO

(re: the sewing machine)

Doesn't look like it.

TERESA

This is just piecework for people in the building.

VALENTINA

Helps keep me busy.

COSMO

No, no, no...it's because they know your work! You're respected!

(to Lucia)

You pay attention to that. Build a better mousetrap and the world beats a path to your door!

(to Valentina)

What do you say? Come on, Vale...

VALENTINA

No, no. I'm too old, Cosimo.

COSMO

Valentina....*per favore...* I need this suit.

TERESA yanks the fabric up and shoves
it back at Cosmo.

TERESA

No! You can't come in here and do this. To her. To us. Take it to...there, there's a place around the corner. Mister Zimmerman's.

COSMO

Zimmerman? You'd send me to a *German* after they make you a widow?

TERESA

What, I should blame *him* for the Spanish flu?

COSMO

Germans started the war! They may not have *shot* Anthony, but they're why he was in France in the first place!

TERESA

Show me a single newspaper says Karl Zimmerman of East Harlem started the Great War.

COSMO

(a dismissive gesture)

Ahh...you're missing the point! What do the Krauts know about *style*, anyway? Not when I've got the best Italian haberdasher in Manhattan, right here!

VALENTINA

I'm not the best.

COSMO

Then why are people coming to you, huh? People want quality, they come to Valentina, not Karl Zimmerman!

(pause)

You still remember my measurements?

LUCIA

She *never* forgets that...

COSMO

(to Valentina, flirtatiously)

... 'cause I still remember yours...

Cosmo pulls Valentina to her feet and close to him. Valentina makes a show of protesting, but her heart is not in it.

VALENTINA

Stop it, Cosimo...

GIANNI enters through the front door. Years of physically punishing work has made him a dozen years older than he should be. He wears rough and workmanlike coveralls, and his shoes and lower pants legs are covered in brownish spots that may be dried blood. He wearily hangs his hat on a peg. Lucia leaps up and runs to him.

LUCIA

Papa!

She hugs him fiercely and he
revives a little.

GIANNI

Hey, Squirrel.

COSMO

You must be Gianni.

GIANNI

Yeah.

COSMO

Nice to finally meet ya.

GIANNI

You're--

TERESA

COSMO

He's my--

Tess's father.

VALENTINA

This is Cosimo!

COSMO

Cosmo. Cosmo Langtry.

GIANNI

Langtry? Shouldn't it be Langhetti?

COSMO

Ah, you know how it is out there...big city, mixin' with
people from all over, people who ain't Italian. Name like
Cosimo Langhetti says what? *Guappo* from the Old World...

VALENTINA

It's a fine name.

COSMO

Fine if you want stay stuck in Little Italy, East Harlem
maybe. But Cosmo Langtry...now that's a name you can't put
in a box. Hang your hat on *that* name. Cosmo Langtry is a man
with *ideas*...

TERESA

What? What *ideas* do you have?

Cosmo raps his knuckles on the big
box he brought in.

COSMO

(slyly)

Oh, I got a humdinger...knock your socks off!

TERESA

Gianni, why don't'cha get changed, get comfortable.
Dinner'll be on the table soon.

GIANNI

Si, buono.

(to Cosmo)

You're stayin' for dinner, right?

COSMO

Well...

Cosmo locks eyes with Teresa. A pause.

TERESA

You're my father. Of course I'll feed you.

GIANNI

Outstanding!

Gianni exits into the bedroom. Teresa
checks the focaccia.

COSMO

So what do you say, Vale? Can you make me a suit?

VALENTINA

(appraising him)

You've put on weight.

COSMO

I haven't put on--

VALENTINA

You've put on weight.

COSMO

Ten pounds, max. Eight.

VALENTINA

Twelve. Where's my tape?

TERESA

You're not really gonna make it?

VALENTINA

What? The man needs a suit.

Valentina measures Cosmo's
shoulders and arms with practiced
professionalism.

TERESA

For what? For what does he need this suit? And is he gonna
pay you?

COSMO

I get the thing I need the suit for, I'll pay you whatever
you want.

TERESA

What *thing*?

COSMO

I'll tell you at dinner, when everyone's here.

TERESA

Tell me now.

VALENTINA

Your father likes to be mysterious.

COSMO

Dramatic.

Valentina, measuring Cosmo's waist,
whistles.

VALENTINA

I'll tell you what's dramatic...

She shows him the number on the tape.

COSMO

All right, all right...twelve.

VALENTINA

Hope you bought enough fabric...

COSMO

Cute, Valentina.

Valentina chortles to herself, making
notes on his measurements. She moves
about with more animation and
awareness than we have seen so far.
Teresa hands Lucia a stack of plates
and helps her clear the table and set
it for dinner. The LIGHTS dim.

I-2: RADIO HATS

In the dim light, Gianni reenters, now in clean clothes. Everyone sits. They arrange their plates and flatware as though they are finished with the meal. The LIGHTS come back up with Cosmo in the middle of a tale.

COSMO

...now this was in Florida, not in Chicago, but right during the time of the St. Valentine's Day thing. So I can personally vouch that he wasn't there for that.

GIANNI

I always said he was innocent!

COSMO

Innocent? Big Al? Uh-uh. He might not 'a held a Thompson himself, but he set the whole shooting gallery up! The man was furious when he heard Moran wasn't there. He wanted Buggy bad.

LUCIA

I can't believe you *know* him!

TERESA

Lucia! Nonno is just...pulling your leg. He doesn't know Alphonse Capone personally!

COSMO

Don't I? Where's my box?

He springs up from the table and crosses to the large box he brought in. Reaching inside, he pulls out a wine bottle which he holds up in triumph.

If I don't know Capone, where'd I get *this*? Huh?

GIANNI

Is that...?

VALENTINA

Oh! Prosecco! I haven't had that in years...

COSMO

Straight from Veneto! Al Capone's favorite vineyard! Lucia, pop this into the icebox, would you?

But Lucia has shrunk back, pressing
into Teresa like the bottle might
bite her.

TERESA

Sweetheart, what's wrong?

LUCIA

(fearful)

Wine is...alcohol is illegal! We could go to jail!

TERESA

(comforting her)

Oh! No, no...

GIANNI

(to Lucia)

It's alright, Squirrel. No one'll get in trouble.

COSMO

That's not for tonight, anyway! Get that chilling, Gianni:
that's for a celebration when the *other* thing in the box
pays off!

Gianni takes the bottle and puts it
in the icebox.

LUCIA

What else is in there, Nonno?

COSMO

(mysteriously)

What else, indeed? Clear me a space!

Teresa and Lucia clear the dishes
off the table to make room for the
big box which Cosmo sets in the
middle with a flourish.

COSMO (cont'd)

What's in this box is nothing less than the idea that's
gonna to *make* this family again!

TERESA

(dubious)

Another idea? Really?

GIANNI

I don't get it. You got an idea in a *box*?

COSMO

A little history, my friend. Back in the day, down in Little
Italy, things were tough for the Langhettis...

GIANNI

Well, it ain't all roses now...

COSMO

Aw, no, *this*...this is the Ritz Carlton compared to what we had! Your wife, our Teresa, was maybe eleven, twelve...her mother and I were dirt poor...barely afford to buy her shoes.

VALENTINA

Clothes, I could make!

COSMO

Oh, yeah! Even back then, Mama Langhetti could take a flour sack, make a silk dress! But *shoes*, not so much, 'specially when Tessie kept growin' out of them so fast. Now, see, around that time, I was working for Papa Fugazy--

VALENTINA

It was Moretti. Salvatore Moretti.

COSMO

No, no, Moretti was *before*. You weren't even tailorin' when it was Moretti.

VALENTINA

Yeah! And I started at Campagnola's in--

COSMO

Look, in aught-*four*, it was Luigi Fugazy! All right?

VALENTINA

Are you sure? I don't remem--

COSMO

Will you let me tell my story?

VALENTINA

Fine.

COSMO

Fine!

VALENTINA

(under her breath)

Tell it wrong...I don't care...

COSMO

I was working for Lugazy...or *Moretti*, it doesn't matter... point is, I was bustin' my butt movin' dirt, pavin' roads. Just one more South Village wop diggin' ditches. Destined for nothin' but small potatoes!

GIANNI

For what, now?

COSMO

Small potatoes! Job like that, you work ten hours a day, break your back, blister your hands, and every day they take another little bite of your soul. Till what, huh? Till you look back at seventy and realize you never even lived.

TERESA

It's a job. A *paying* job!

GIANNI

Yeah, but it ain't a *life*.

COSMO

He gets it! And it ain't a life for me, brother, oh no. Not for Cosmo Langtry.

VALENTINA

Langhetti.

COSMO

Him either. I saw that road ahead, saw where it was leadin', and I said, "*Enough! Basta!*"

LUCIA

Basta!

COSMO

That's my girl!

(back to the story)

But what did I have? I was just a dumb kid from Genoa, barely had two dimes to rub together, even my English back then was so-so.

(he holds up a finger)

But I knew food...

VALENTINA

He's always been a good cook.

TERESA

It's true.

COSMO

I knew food, and every day I see these guys on the job sites, eatin' cold lasagna outta tins and I'm thinkin': "*There's a opportunity here.*" So I marched into Fugazy's office, told him where he could shove the job--

TERESA

You did not!

COSMO

Well, I *quit*, anyway...found some boards and an old bicycle and I built me a little cart with wheels on it, big enough to hold a hot box, light enough to push around. That first day, packed four dozen into the cart, went around to the job sites...sold out in twenty minutes! So I tried again the next day...same thing! They were *linin'* up! Forty or fifty calzones turned into a hundred and fifty, five days a week. After two months, I bought a second oven just to be able to make more.

VALENTINA

Make my kitchen look funny...

COSMO

Then I that hired that neighbor kid...

VALENTINA

The Alberti boy...

COSMO

Right! To push a second cart. Then a third, a fourth. By the end of the Great War, we were up to...what?

VALENTINA

Twenty-five.

COSMO

Twenty-five carts, all over the South Side! And *that* is how Cosmopolitan Calzones was born!

GIANNI

Wait, I loved those as a kid! That was *you*?

COSMO

(pointing to himself)

Cosmo-politan? Get it?

GIANNI

No way...

COSMO

That was me!

VALENTINA

That was *us*!

LUCIA

Do you still make calzones, Nonno?

COSMO

No, 'cause here's the best part! One day, this nice lady buys one, loves it, just raves about it, and says "I'm gonna
(MORE)

COSMO (cont'd)

tell my brother about these!"...I'll never forget, she had the prosciutto and mozzarella--

VALENTINA

Oh, that was my favorite...

COSMO

It was...mwah! Anyway, it turns out, that lady? She was Jane Shattuck. Sister to Frank Schrafft, *the* Frank Schrafft, the restaurant guy! And he came and tried one, liked it so much he made an offer for the whole company on the spot!

GIANNI

No! You pullin' my leg here?

TERESA

It's true. His one brush with greatness.

COSMO

Gave me five thousand dollars. Cash.

LUCIA

Golly!

COSMO

'Course he rebranded the carts "Schrafft's on the Street"...

GIANNI

Not as good 'a name. Can't say it.

COSMO

That's what I said!

LUCIA

What did you do with all the money?

VALENTINA

With half of it, is how I bought my tailor shop!

COSMO

But the kicker was this: Frank Schrafft, I mean, come on, Frank *knows* business...and do you know what he said to me? What he called me?

GIANNI

No, what?

COSMO

He said I was the "biggest idea man in New York." And that's when I learned that *ideas* are the most important part of business. And *that's* what I have in this box!

VALENTINA

Finally, he gets around to it!

COSMO

Now, before I open this...I have to swear you all to secrecy. What you see here can't leave this room until the deal is done and the investor signs off on the contract. You understand?

GIANNI

Sure. Yeah.

LUCIA

I promise, Grandpa!

VALENTINA

Who would I tell?

Pause.

TERESA

Fine.

Cosmo reaches into the box.

COSMO

Without further ado...ladies and gentlemen, I give you...the radio hat!

Cosmo pulls out a straw hat, like a boater. Attached to it are several strange crystals, knobs, wires, horns, and even an antenna.

GIANNI

That's amazing!

TERESA

You don't even know what it does!

GIANNI

What's to know? It's a hat. With a radio. I ain't dumb.

TERESA

Gianni, I never said you were d--

COSMO

This is going to sweep the nation! Imagine listening to music as you stroll down the street! Imagine listening to the ball game when you're cuttin' the grass!

VALENTINA

Imagine having a yard again...

GIANNI

You built this all yourself?

COSMO

It was my *idea*. I know a guy, Engels. Swiss. Fixes watches and such but plays around with radios for fun. He put the parts together, helped me tinker with it till we got it working. It was just a toy for Engels. An amusement. But for an idea man...

GIANNI

This is gold!

TERESA

Until someone else gets the same idea.

COSMO

Way ahead of you. Already filed a patent. "Patent pending," as they say.

GIANNI

Smart, smart. I wouldn't even know where to *start*, with all that.

COSMO

It's complicated, for sure. But there was an ad in *Modern Mechanix* magazine. It's an inventor monthly. In the back, they got all kinds of classified, where to buy parts, services, that sort of thing. And there was an ad for help filing patents, with a Manhattan address. I wrote in, the guy wrote back, we met in his office down on Greene Street, filled out the paperwork and he filed it for me.

TERESA

And how much did *that* cost you?

COSMO

Twenty.

VALENTINA

Twenty bucks to fill out some papers?

COSMO

Twenty *total*. Ten for the government, five to get the drawings made, five for the guy's time. But, *but*...it was him put me on to Edward Harper!

TERESA

Who's he?

COSMO

He is why I need the suit! He's an investor, 'specially in new technology, worked with the patent guy on a couple things before. The guy's married to the niece of J.D.

(MORE)

COSMO (cont'd)

Rockefeller himself! And he wants to meet me next Thursday!
Get a load of this!

(pulling out a folded letter)

Lucia! Read this to your mother!

Cosmo hands Lucia the paper, which
she unfolds to reveal a typed
letter on official-looking
stationery.

LUCIA

(reading)

"Dear Mister Langtry, after our initial con...sul...consul--"

COSMO

"Consultation..."

LUCIA

(reading)

"--consultation, I spoke with Edward Harper about your
invention, and showed him the pre...liminary drawings. He
said he sees "immense upside profit potential" and is
"highly interested" (his words) in your idea. He would like
to discuss your invention over dinner, perhaps at the
Belvedere restaurant in Midtown on Thursday, December 1st at
6:00 pm...."

COSMO

"Immense upside profit potential..."

VALENTINA

...and the *Belvedere*...

GIANNI

You're gonna be rich!

COSMO

We're gonna be rich. As Cosmo goes, so goes *mia familia*!
Maybe get us a place Midtown, enough bedrooms for all of us,
don't have to do piecework no more!

LUCIA

Could I take ballet lessons?

COSMO

I land this pitch, you can dance your heart out! That's why I
gotta look sharp for that meeting!

VALENTINA

Oh, I'm gonna make you something *nice*...

COSMO

That's my girl!

LUCIA

(re:the hat)

Nonno, can we hear it? Does it work?

COSMO

Does it work, she asks! Feast your ears!

He twists a knob and the radio hat crackles to life. The sound comes out a bit tinny through the small horn speaker, but the signal is clear enough. We hear a news broadcast in process:

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

"...national relief efforts as the winter months approach. Reports indicate a slight increase in unemployment figures in the industrial Midwest, prompting further debate on the administration's proposed economic recovery plan. Meanwhile, overseas, tensions remain high in Manchuria following the latest developments in..."

Everyone marvels at the sound, even Teresa: it actually works. But Cosmo reaches for a second knob.

COSMO

Forget the news. Too depressing.

We hear static and squelch as he adjusts the tuning. A song plays: *When You and I Were Seventeen*, by Gus Kahn and Charles B. Lawlor (1924). Cosmo puts on the hat, dances solo a moment, then pulls Valentina in.

VALENTINA

No, Cosmo, my knees...

But they dance anyway, swaying to the music. Valentina lays her cheek on Cosmo's shoulder and we see a glimpse of their dancing days from forty years before. For a moment, hardships are forgotten and everyone is happy.

COSMO

(singing)

WHEN YOU AND I WERE SEVENTEEN,
AND LIFE AND LOVE WERE NEW,
THE WORLD WAS ALL A FIELD OF GREEN
AND SKIES WERE SMILING BLUE.

LUCIA
(to Teresa)

Sing, Mama!

At first reluctantly and then with joy, Teresa sings. She has a beautiful voice which she has not used in a long time, and Gianni is quite taken aback.

TERESA
(singing)
THAT GOLDEN SPRING WHEN I WAS KING
AND YOU MY WONDERFUL QUEEN...

Gianni takes Teresa's hand and pulls her out to the "dance floor", dancing beside Cosmo and Valentina.

TERESA (cont'd)
(singing)
DO YOU RECALL WHEN LOVE WAS ALL
AND WE WERE SEVENTEEN?

Lucia twirls to the music as well, doing her best ballet moves. Everyone dances on to the music, even changing partners, and including Lucia. The SONG fades and the LIGHTS dim.

I-3: PROMISE

In the dim LIGHT, hours have passed. It is late, and Lucia is nearly falling asleep, and Valentina sits, nodding off as well.

TERESA

(to Gianni)

It's late...get to bed, Lucia.

Lucia mutters something incoherent,
and Gianni picks her up in his arms.

GIANNI

Come on, little squirrel.

Gianni carries Lucia off to the
other room while Teresa helps
Valentina up.

TERESA

You too, Mama...it's late. Been a long day.

VALENTINA

A good day. I have my Cosi back.

She stops at the screen near her bed.

Come to bed, Cosmo.

Cosmo looks at Teresa.

TERESA

You have somewhere else to go?

COSMO

Rooming house.

Pause.

TERESA

Tomorrow's Thanksgiving. You should be with family.

COSMO

(he looks to Valentina)

I'm coming, Vale.

Valentina exits behind the screen.

COSMO (cont'd)
(to Teresa)

Thank you.

Cosmo crosses toward the screen.

TERESA
(calling out, but softly)
It's not just Rayon, you know.

Cosmo stops.

COSMO
What isn't?

TERESA
You can't just show up, plopp down a bolt of fabric and expect a suit to magically appear. Where's your lining fabric? Where's your facing? Huh? The thread, the buttons, the zippers, the things that hold a suit together...where are they?

COSMO
Well...I thought that--

TERESA
No, you didn't. You didn't *think*. That's just it: you never do. All that other stuff, the bits and bobs, all those pesky little details, that comes out of Gianni's paycheck, that's where that comes from. But what do you care? You come back, you think all's the same, all's like it's ever been. Like the whole world stops when the great Cosmo Langtry's not there.

COSMO
If you need some pin money, I've got a little--

TERESA
Ma's not doin' well, Daddy. She seems so, sometimes, but she ain't. She forgets stuff.

COSMO
Oh, well, she's always...we're old...we're always forget--

TERESA
No. Not little things. Not appointments, not "I bought eggs but forgot the milk." Big things. Important things. She forgets her granddaughter's name. She forgets you're not still around. She forgets where she is, some days. That's why we had to close the shop. Not the economy, not slow business. Her *mind*. But she can still sew, so what do you care?

COSMO
I care! Of course I do. She's my wife.

TERESA

Wife! That's rich, from you. You left Ma to fend for herself, left me, a widow with a kid, while you went off and...chased your crazy ideas! And you're still doing it.

COSMO

No, this is different! This one's big, Tess, I can feel it! I won't have to leave, after this. Look at it! I got an investor lined up, I got a patent on the way...it's gonna finally *work*!

TERESA

(with a bitter laugh)

I hope it does, you know? I hope it *is* big. I'd like a bigger house, sure. I'd like to afford dancing lessons for my kid...

COSMO

And you'll get it!

TERESA

But what I want, what I need, Papa, is for you to stay. Win, lose, draw, doesn't matter--you stay here and you stay in our lives. I want Lucia to know her grandfather. I want help taking care of Ma. Can you do that?

COSMO

Of course I can! Everything's gonna be fine, after this.

TERESA

Even if it isn't. Even if this flops. You stay. Stay with your family. Stay and take care of Mama. Promise me.

COSMO

I promise.

TERESA

Even if you have to get just a regular job to help out the family!

COSMO

But we won't need to--

TERESA

Promise.

COSMO

Yes! I promise.

Pause.

TERESA

Okay. And Papà?

Bareford -- Small Potatoes -- 35.

COSMO

Yeah.

TERESA

After tonight...you don't have to leave.

COSMO

I can stay for Thanksgiving?

TERESA

And after. Don't go back to the rooming house.

I-4: PROSECCO

It is the following week: evening on Thursday, December 1st. Teresa is in the kitchen, sweeping. Lucia studies at the table, referencing a book and writing something on a paper.

LUCIA

(speaking as she writes)

"I think Jo is the most interesting. She wants to be a writer and not just get married like everyone expects. I like that she's not afraid to be different. That seems exciting, to have a dream like that and make it come true...."

(to Teresa)

How is that?

TERESA

Is that what you feel?

LUCIA

I guess so.

TERESA

You think dreams come true?

LUCIA

Don't they? They must, sometimes.

TERESA

Dreams don't come true.

LUCIA

But people always say they do...

TERESA

When do you dream?

LUCIA

When? When I'm sleeping...um...sometimes when I stare out the window at school...

TERESA

When you're doing *nothing*. That's when you dream. And you know what comes of nothing? *Nothing*. Dreams don't come true, Lucia. But *goals*...

(she smiles)

Goals can come true. But goals require work. Planning. Step by step, day after day, putting in the time, the work. That is what comes true. Not your dreams.

LUCIA

Yes, Mama.

TERESA

What's the next question?

LUCIA

(reading)

"True or false--"

Valentia enters from the bedroom.

VALENTINA

Is there coffee?

LUCIA

True!

TERESA

Should be ready. Yeah.

LUCIA

(reading)

"In the story, the March family faces both happy and difficult times." That's easy: true.

(the next question)

"Describe one instance where the family faced a significant challenge. What did this event reveal about their values or their bond as a family?" I don't know...I don't understand this book. I hate Mrs. Crowley's class!

TERESA

Don't give up...try.

LUCIA

Maybe when...Amy got mad and burned Jo's stories because Jo didn't take her to the theater?

VALENTINA

Some scribbled words get burned, and that's hard? Hard for Jo, maybe Amy, but the whole family? Eh...

LUCIA

I don't know!

(to Teresa)

What do you think, Mama?

TERESA

I think the hardest time for the March family would have been when their father went off to the war. I mean, they missed him something awful, and they didn't have much money while he was gone. But...they all tried to be brave for their mother and they helped each other with the chores and by being good. Showed how much they loved each other and how they'd stick together and be strong even when times were tough.

LUCIA

Can you just write it?

TERESA

(laughing)

Lucia! It has to be *your* words...

The front door opens as Gianni enters. He is back in his grimy work clothes and more tired than ever. He hangs his hat wearily. Lucia leaps up and runs to him.

LUCIA

Papa!

GIANNI

Hey, Squirrel.

LUCIA

You missed dinner!

GIANNI

Sorry about that. Mr. Peyton got us all on overtime to get ready for Christmas rush. Everybody'll want their hams, their roasts...

TERESA

There's some panissa in the icebox. Mama made it.

VALENTINA

The Genovese way. How my Mama taught me.

GIANNI

Molto bene. Grazie.

TERESA

I'll start it heatin' up for you.

GIANNI

Forget about it. I'll take it cold.

TERESA

Well, sit, anyhow. You look beat.

As Teresa plates up his dinner, Gianni slumps heavily into a chair.

GIANNI

The last three hours, Franco switched me to wrap-and-tie.

TERESA

What for? You're a trimmer!

GIANNI

We ain't got enough guys on wrap. By five-thirty, we'd backed up almost two dozen hogs all cut and trimmed out, just waiting for paper. And the guys we do have wrapping are goddamn goldbricks!

(to Lucia)

Sorry, I shouldn't say that...

(to Teresa)

...but they are. So Franco stuck me in the wrap room to bust their chops and get a move on, just so we could get outta there sometime tonight.

TERESA

See? They shoulda made you a foreman!

GIANNI

(with a sigh)

I can try an' ask again...

VALENTINA

What, you have to be in charge, to be happy?

GIANNI

(a chuckle)

Ain't nothin' about a meatpacking plant makes me happy. Coming *home*, that's happy.

(his mouth full)

Mmm...this *panissa*...that's happy!

LUCIA

Do you have to work late tomorrow, Papà?

GIANNI

Looks like it, Squirrel, sorry. This whole month, prob'ly.

VALENTINA

Oh! Is too much. Look what it does to you.

GIANNI

No kidding, Geez, I'm knocked out. What time is...?

TERESA

Almost nine.

GIANNI

(to Lucia)

And you're still up?

LUCIA

Homework. *Little Women* for Mrs. Crowley...

TERESA

And she wanted to wait up for Cosmo.

GIANNI

Right, the big investor's meeting...that was tonight. Any word?

VALENTINA

Not yet. Maybe that's good?

LUCIA

Maybe Nonno sold the radio hat for a million dollars and you won't have to work anymore, Papà!

TERESA

Your lips to God's ear.

The front door bursts open and Cosmo is there, grinning ear to ear. He is dressed in a fine Rayon suit, tailored just for him, looking like a million bucks. He pauses, clearly for dramatic effect.

VALENTINA

Cosmo!

Well?

TERESA

LUCIA

How did it go, Nonno?

COSMO

Gianni, do me a favor, would you? Bust out that bottle of Prosecco!

VALENTINA

Bravissimo!

Cosmo steps fully into the apartment, doing a few happy dance steps along the way.

TERESA

I take it dinner went well?

COSMO

Oh! Belvedere's is *perfetto*! So good. I had the Porterhouse, medium rare, seared just the way you like it, with roasted potatoes and--

TERESA

I meant with the investor.

COSMO

Oh, that...

(feigned nonchalance)

He liked it.

GIANNI

That's it? That's all he said?

COSMO

I believe his exact words were...

(the "cool" facade
cracks)

"This is gonna set the entire radio industry on its ear!"

There are general exclamations of
joy and relief from everyone.

TERESA

He really said that?

COSMO

He's thinkin' the first run, maybe a thousand units, twenty-dollar price point...my cut would be twenty percent of that.

GIANNI

Four thousand dollars?

COSMO

Uh-huh. He said he doesn't want to wait a minute to get this thing in production! Even wanted to keep my prototype to show his engineer. Tonight.

VALENTINA

Tonight? It's nine o'clock!

COSMO

When you're as rich as Rockefeller, the little people move to *your* schedule!

GIANNI

Ain't that the truth.

COSMO

Ed's hopin' to start advertising next week, get his factory spun up, maybe even start makin' 'em for Christmas shopping!

TERESA

How can they possibly do it that fast?

COSMO

Well, it's like Charles said, the technology--

TERESA

Who's Charles?

COSMO

The guy who helped me file the patent.

TERESA

Why was *he* there?

COSMO

He set the whole thing with Harper up! And Charles pointed out--the technology's not new...radio's radio...but makin' it wearable...it's the *idea* that's gold here!

GIANNI

And you're the biggest idea man in New York!

Gianni pulls the cork on the Prosecco.

COSMO

Glasses!

Valentina gets four glasses off a shelf and Lucia hands them out to the adults. Gianni pours.

GIANNI

(re: Lucia)

Where's hers?

TERESA

She's *thirteen*, Gianni...

GIANNI

She's Italian! A cryin' shame she's that old and never tasted Prosecco!

LUCIA

Mama?

TERESA

Fine. It's a special night.

A glass is poured for Lucia and everyone smiles at each other.

VALENTINA

Should we toast?

Teresa raises her glass.

TERESA

To my father. You finally did it. I don't know how! Woulda sworn you didn't know a radio from a hole in the ground, but you did it!

COSMO

Never stop chasin' your dream, kiddo!

GIANNI

To dreams!

EVERYONE

Dreams!

They all drink. Lucia's eyes go wide.

TERESA

Small sips, sweetie!

Teresa and Gianni gather around
Lucia and talk while Valentina
moves to Cosmo. She pats his chest
and gives him a kiss.

VALENTINA

I never doubted you for a minute!

COSMO

(laughing)

Boy, I sure did! But this suit! Worked like a charm. Charles
even asked, "Who's your tailor?"

VALENTINA

No! He like it?

COSMO

Loved it!

VALENTINA

You think maybe, when the money comes in, we could maybe use
some to open up a tailor shop? I've always wanted a shop of
my own...

Cosmo's expression falls.

COSMO

Sure...sure, sweetie...you'll be the best tailor in
Manhattan.

VALENTINA

And maybe Tessie and Tony and little Lucia could get a place
of their own. To be just us again, huh?

COSMO

That'd be swell. Hey, why don't we get you to bed? You look
a little tired.

VALENTINA

Si, maybe a little.

COSMO

A little sleep, you'll be right as rain.
(to Teresa and Gianni)
I'm gonna get her to bed.

TERESA

(to Lucia)
Time for your bed, too, Little Missy! You have--oh!

The DOOR BUZZER sounds loudly.

GIANNI

The hell? It's after nine.
(with a glance at Teresa)
You go on, I'll see who it is.

Teresa and Lucia go off into bedroom
while Gianni exits out the front
door. Valentina sits on her bed, face
heavy with sadness. Cosmo joins her.

COSMO

What is it? What's wrong?

VALENTINA

I don't have a shop no more.

COSMO

I know. I know.

VALENTINA

I forgot, before.

COSMO

It happens.

VALENTINA

Too much it happens!

COSMO

What, we're old, we forget some things--

VALENTINA

Not *some* things! *Everything*!

COSMO

You just need rest.

VALENTINA

It's more than that! My brain, it's...
(she trails off)
At first it was little things, slipped away: a...a measurement
I just took, a seam allowance...I had to start writing things
(MORE)

VALENTINA (cont'd)

down to remember. Then I'd forget to even write them. Or I'd see a customer I'd had for years and their name...*whoosh!* Gone. One time a lady came in to pick up her husband's suit and...and there it was on the rack. But I had no memory of getting the order, didn't even know why it was hangin' there. Happened' more and more, worse an' worse, until one day I forgot how to roll up the metal gate out front. Couldn't open the shop until Teresa came down. That's when I knew I couldn't do it no more. I forget everything.

COSMO

You don't forget *everything*.

VALENTINA

I do.

COSMO

You don't forget *us*...

VALENTINA

(with a smile)

No. I remember us.

COSMO

What? What do you remember? Tell me.

VALENTINA

I remember the boat from Genoa.

COSMO

Ah, we were kids! What were we, twenty-three?

VALENTINA

You, maybe. I was twenty-two. We'd only been married, what...?

COSMO

Six months?

VALENTINA

(agreeing)

Six months...

COSMO

Two kids on that great big ship! What was the name of it, again? Something German...

VALENTINA

The *SS Waffen*.

COSMO

The *Waffen*! See? Your mind's just fine!

I-5: MEMORIES

The LIGHTS change, becoming less naturalistic and more stylized, dreamlike. Valentina steps downstage, out of the apartment and onto the deck of the SS Waffeln in 1885, nearly fifty years ago.

VALENTINA
(excited, pointing)
Vieni a vedere, Cosimo! È l'America!

COSMO
Inglese, amore. We have to speak English now.

VALENTINA
Si. Yes....yes.
(pointing)
It is America.

COSMO
New York City.

VALENTINA
New York. New...life.
(off his look)
What? Is a good thing!

COSMO
So che...

VALENTINA
Then what?

COSMO
*We only have a few hundred *lira*...no job...no family here...*

VALENTINA
Your uncle says he's coming. With his whole family, all the girls.

COSMO
*He says *maybe*. Maybe they come. For a while it's only us.*

VALENTINA
We will be...
(searching for the word)
...bene, bene...
(brightening)
...okay! We will be okay.

COSMO

Okay.

(a thought)

I suppose they must have fishing boats here, too. Maybe I could get on a--

VALENTINA

(forcefully)

No! No more fish boats!

COSMO

Che cos'è?

VALENTINA

(reminding)

English!

COSMO

Fishing, I know. Is *all* I know.

VALENTINA

We come for a new life, not the old one.

COSMO

I know. But my Papa, my brother--

VALENTINA

No! You must...must...*segui la tua strada!*

(frustrated)

Come se dice in inglese?

COSMO

"Walk your own street?" No...no..."follow your own path."
That's better.

VALENTINA

Si. Do that. Follow your own path. You are meant for much more than fishing, Cosimo.

COSMO

Fishing can pay bills...

VALENTINA

I am not worried of bills.

COSMO

No? Not worried about money for food?

VALENTINA

What good is food if your soul is starving?

Cosmo gently wraps Valentina in his arms. There is a moment of peaceful silence as they gaze at the horizon.

COSMO

I love you, Vale...

Valentina breaks away suddenly, almost forcefully, moving to a different part of the stage.

The LIGHTS shift. We don't know it yet, but Valentina has jumped to 1905, fifteen years after their emigration voyage...we can hear it in her improved English.

VALENTINA

(angrily)

Then why would you say that to Mister Moretti?

COSMO

Because I don't want to pave roads my whole life!

VALENTINA

So you just *quit*? Without a plan for another job?

COSMO

I don't want another *job*! I wanna try and make something for myself! Make something *of* myself!

VALENTINA

Then we *plan*! We save. We do it slowly. We don't--

COSMO

"Follow your own path!" You said that! Those are *your words*!

VALENTINA

When did I say to--

COSMO

On the boat! When we first saw New York. We stood by the rail and--

VALENTINA

That was a hundred years ago! We have a child now! What am I gonna say at Romano's?

COSMO

(confused)

Romano's?

VALENTINA

For *groceries*, Cosmo! When the money runs out, how do I buy *food*?

COSMO

What good is food if our souls are starving?

The bedroom door opens and YOUNG
TERESA enters. She is twelve years
old here, and dressed for bed.

YOUNG TERESA

Mamma? What's wrong? Papa?

COSMO

Nothing, Tessie, go back to bed. Your Ma and I are just
having a talk.

VALENTINA

No! She has a right to know! She's a member of this family!

YOUNG TERESA

Know what?

VALENTINA

Teresa, your father here decided to tell Mister Moretti he
quit today!

YOUNG TERESA

Why, Papa?

Cosmo's demeanor shifts. No longer
defensive, he now blossoms into the
excitement of sharing his dream.

COSMO

Tessie...you know how your father bakes calzones sometimes?

YOUNG TERESA

(nodding)

Those are really good...

COSMO

I'm hopin a lotta other people think so too, 'cause I'm
gonna make a whole bunch of them and sell them to the guys
that work on the streets, the buildings.

YOUNG TERESA

Don't they bring their lunches like you?

COSMO

Not when I get there! They'll be linin' up! Line up to get yours!
Lunch for a quarter! Just two bits for hot lunch from Cosmo--

(MORE)

Bareford -- Small Potatoes -- 50.

COSMO (cont'd)
(the idea strikes)
--Cosmo...*politan* Calzones!

YOUNG TERESA
Hooray!

COSMO
(turning to Valentina
for approval)
Hah? Hah?

VALENTINA
(grudgingly)
It's a good name...

Cosmo starts to dance with Young Teresa.

COSMO
We're gonna be rich--

VALENTINA
But it's'a lotta work! Easy makin' four or five calzones for
family. You wanna make forty or fifty? It's'a lotta work!

The LIGHTS shift. It is 1910 now.
Young Teresa exits. Valentina moves to
the table and kneads imaginary dough.

VALENTINA (cont'd)
Get up, four in the morning, get the dough rising...roll it out...

COSMO
Not too thick--that's the secret--but not too thin or the
stuffing spills out.

VALENTINA
Quarter inch.

COSMO
Quarter inch...that's the sweet spot. You nailed it, every time.

VALENTINA
(modestly)
I can cook.

COSMO
That calzone idea was *gold*...couldn't stock carts fast enough.

VALENTINA
I quit my job sewing at the dry cleaners to help out.

COSMO

But you never complained, just put your shoulder to the wheel and worked.

VALENTINA

It was your dream. I am your wife.

COSMO

We moved to the house on Baxter. So much space! I felt like a king!

VALENTINA

You piled sacks of flour in my parlor.

COSMO

...that big kitchen to cook in...

VALENTINA

The whole house smelled like a pizzeria for years.

COSMO

...the back yard for Teresa.

VALENTINA

That yard was full of food carts, most the day.

COSMO

I miss that house...lotta memories, that house. Good memories.

Pause. They both silently reminisce.

VALENTINA

They weren't all good.

LIGHTS shift. We jump to 1918.
There is a KNOCK on the front door.
Cosmo answers it, and is handed a
folded yellow paper. He stands,
staring at it. This memory affects
him quite powerfully.

VALENTINA (cont'd)

Who was it?

COSMO

Western Union. For Teresa.

VALENTINA

From the Army?

(Cosmo nods)

Open it.

COSMO

I can't.

VALENTINA

You can.

COSMO

Valentina, I don't want to remember this.

VALENTINA

We take the bad with the good, Cosimo. Give it to me.

Cosmo hands the telegram to
Valentina. She opens it.

VALENTINA

(reading)

"We deeply regret to inform
you--"

COSMO

(reading)

"We deeply regret to inform
you--"

VALENTINA

"--that Corporal Anthony James Balducci died of the Spanish
flu in La Grange-Aux-Bois, France on September 29th, 1918.
Our condolences go out to the family and to Mrs. Teresa
Balducci, who qualifies for a widow's pension..."

COSMO

Forty-five lousy dollars a month! That's supposed to make
Tessie feel better?

VALENTINA

(softly)

The money will help.

COSMO

She's a widow at twenty! She has a baby on the way that'll
never know her father!

VALENTINA

Then we pass on his memory.

COSMO

No! This isn't the way the world is supposed to be! Not here
in America!

VALENTINA

Come to bed, Cosmo.

Valentina moves toward her bed,
stopping at the screen to look
back.

COSMO

You go on. I'll come soon.

Valentina returns to bed as Cosmo
stands, lost in thought. The
LIGHTS fade back to the present
day.

I-6: EARNEST REQUEST

The front door opens and Gianni returns, holding a folded yellow paper.

COSMO

Who was it?

GIANNI

Western Union. For you.

COSMO

(still in his memory)

What?

Gianni hands the telegram to Cosmo.

GIANNI

Guess you're a big man now! Telegrams at all hours!

(off Cosmo's expression)

Problem?

COSMO

Hmm? No! Just...business stuff. You know how it goes.

GIANNI

Me? Naw, I don't know nothin'. I only *wish* I was that important.

COSMO

Yeah.

GIANNI

Well, good night!

Gianni exits into the bedroom. Cosmo crosses behind the screen to Valentina. He extends the telegram to her.

COSMO

I can't.

Valentina opens it.

VALENTINA

(reading)

"To: Cosmo Langtry. From: Charles B. Murdock..."

COSMO

My patent guy.

VALENTINA

(reading)

"Harper good for production next week. Stop. Legal due diligence required immediately to expedite patent and check counterclaims. Stop. Standard procedure to protect invention and enable production. Stop. Need four hundred payable Friday by 6pm at Midtown office. Charles."

(to Cosmo)

What does all that mean?

COSMO

It means Mister Harper's ready to start makin' the hat radios, but he needs to make sure I'm on the level and really got the patent free and clear. So Charles needs money to pay some lawyers to dot the I's and cross the T's, prove I own the idea.

VALENTINA

(not really understanding)

Oh.

COSMO

What it really means is I need four hundred dollars by tomorrow at six.

VALENTINA

Four hundred dollars...that's a lot of money. Do you have it?

COSMO

I couldn't give him *forty*, much less four *hundred*. Why do you think I came to you for this suit?

VALENTINA

And if you don't pay? Then what?

COSMO

I don't know. I'm pretty sure Harper backs out.

VALENTINA

The little snake!

COSMO

No, no, it's just...business. Look at it from his side: he starts makin' hats without a patent in hand, someone else could say it's their idea and sue him. He don't want to risk his money, his reputation, on some *guappo* who might be tryin' to con him.

VALENTINA

But you're not!

COSMO

I know that. But how does *he* know?

VALENTINA

So what will you do?

COSMO

That...I don't know.

There is a long silence.

VALENTINA

Oh! I can give you the money!

COSMO

What are you talking about, Val?

VALENTINA

I have four hundred dollars! More!

COSMO

Sure you do. Where would you get that kind of cash from?

VALENTINA

(trying to remember)

From, from...uh...

COSMO

We've never in our lives had four hundred bucks just lyin' around.

VALENTINA

(a sudden memory)

Oh! When you sold the calzone business!

COSMO

Amore...that was ten years ago. We used most of that money to buy you your tailor shop, don't you 'member that?

VALENTINA

Oh...my shop...I loved that shop.

COSMO

Worth every penny to see your face when I handed you the keys. But there's no money now.

VALENTINA

(still struggling to remember)

No, I remember, I...I was saving for a trip back to Genoa...

COSMO

(gently)

No, no...you wanted to go back, when we got the money, but I needed the rest for my...for that Aroma-Ads idea.

VALENTINA

(fondly)

The Aroma-Ads!

(quoting)

"Cosmo Langtry's Unique Aroma-Flow System: Grab Customers by the Nose and Lead 'Em to Your Door!"

(to Cosmo)

That should'a worked.

COSMO

It should'a. 'Specially the coffee one for diners. Little spritzes in front of the door, smell the coffee brewin', pull people right in.

VALENTINA

I liked the Baking Bread one.

COSMO

Me too, until it mixed with car exhaust fumes...then it smelled like an open sewer.

(he sighs)

All that money, gone.

VALENTINA

So...I don't have four hundred dollars?

COSMO

No, *amore*.

VALENTINA

And we can't go to Genoa?

COSMO

Genoa's long since forgotten us.

Loss and grief and confusion hits
Valentina and she cries, sobbing into
Cosmo's shoulder as he pulls her in.

COSMO (cont'd)

Shh, shh...it's all right, it's all right. Just rest. Rest now. I'll find somewhere to get the money. It'll all work out. I'll come up with an idea. I always do.

VALENTINA

(wiping her eyes)

You always do. You're the biggest idea man in New York.

Cosmo suddenly lurches bolt upright.

COSMO

That's it! *He* could do it!

VALENTINA

Who could what?

COSMO

Schrafft! The guy who said that! 'Bout me bein' the idea guy!

VALENTINA

I don't under--

COSMO

Look, the guy dropped five G's, cash, for Cosmo's Calzones! So what, four hundred? A drop in the bucket for Frank Schrafft! I'll go to him first thing tomorrow morning.

VALENTINA

You think he remembers you?

COSMO

Oh, he'll remember: I made him a mint with the calzone thing. I'll ask him for a loan, short-term...thirty days, sixty max... whatever interest he wants! I don't care if he gouges me, even double. It'll be worth it. So what it's eight hundred, if I'm gonna get four thousand? That's easy math!

VALENTINA

Are you sure he--

COSMO

Valentina, you're a genius!

VALENTINA

Oh...okay.

COSMO

Now I can rest. Now we can rest easy.

They lie back on the bed as the
LIGHTS dim.

I-7: A NICKEL SAVED

On her bed partially hidden by the screen, Valentina sleeps. At the table, Gianni draws on a large notepad. There are several wadded-up pages near him. He is in casual, non-work clothes and is smiling and humming as he draws.

Teresa enters, carrying a large string bag filled with groceries. She enters like she doesn't expect to see anyone, and stops dead in her tracks when she sees Gianni.

TERESA

Gianni!

GIANNI

Hey.

TERESA

What are you doing here?

GIANNI

I thought I lived here.

TERESA

You know what I mean. It's two in the afternoon!

Gianni holds a finger to his lips.

GIANNI

Shh...your Ma's taking a nap over there.

TERESA

(now softly)

Are you sick? What?

GIANNI

I feel better than I have in months. Years.

TERESA

Then why are you--

GIANNI

Franco stuck me back in wrap-and-tie, again, said I was prob'ly gonna be there all next week, too. I told him, "Hell, no, I'm a trimmer!" One of the best he's got!

TERESA

You are.

GIANNI

Damn right!

TERESA

Yeah. And what did he say to that?

GIANNI

So Franco gets all up in my face, screamin' at me, front of the entire line, everybody starin'...and I get one of them moments, like in a dream, you know? Where you're standin' there and you're watchin' yourself. Like I'm somewhere up high, lookin' down on me an' him, like it's a scene out of a picture show. And I'm watchin' Frank blow his top, just cursin' and yellin', red in the face...and I'm thinkin', "What the hell? Is this my life? Twelve years at a place, bustin' my hump, to get screamed at by some little greaseball?" So get this: while Frankie's all carryin' on, cussin' and spittin', I very calmly take off my apron, I fold it all nice...and I drop it right on the floor in front of him! You shoulda seen...his eyes nearly bugged outta his head!

TERESA

No, Gianni...

GIANNI

Then without a word, I marched straight to Mister Peyton's office, right past Debbie, his little "assistant," and I told Peyton he could shove his small potatoes job!

TERESA

You...quit?

GIANNI

God, it felt so good! A pile of bricks off my chest!

TERESA

But do you think...I mean, after everyone's cooled off, they'll...you think they'll take you back?

GIANNI

Take me *back*? What for?

Teresa begins to pull some cans
out of her bag.

TERESA

Maybe they'll let me bring back the cans. They're not open; no harm done. Not the meat, though. Not after you take it outta the store...

GIANNI

What are you doing?

But Teresa ignores him.

TERESA
Stupid to splurge on the veal. I knew I shoulda got the chuck...

GIANNI
Tessie!

TERESA
(sharply)
What?

GIANNI
What is this?

TERESA
What is what, Gianni? I'm just tryin' to think if Finucci's
will take the veal back or not.

GIANNI
Why?

TERESA
Because it cost--

GIANNI
(whispering)
Keep it down. Your Ma!

TERESA
(a fierce whisper)
Because it cost a dollar twenty!

GIANNI
So? We'll be fine! Don't worry about--

TERESA
Don't worry? You think you can just walk out, find a job
that pays twenty-three a week?

GIANNI
I won't need to--

TERESA
We'll be in *bread lines*, Gianni!

Gianni is about to respond when
Cosmo enters from the front door.
He is still in his suit, but he
seems deflated and small, not the
showman who entered last night. He
slowly closes the door behind him.

GIANNI
(quietly, almost a whisper)
Hey! There's the man of the hour!

COSMO
Gianni, you're...what time is it? You knock off early?

GIANNI
(with a grin)
Better. I pulled a Cosmo.

COSMO
You what?

TERESA
Gianni quit his job at the meatpacking plant.

GIANNI
Best decision I ever made!

Teresa makes a frustrated noise and
starts repacking cans back into her bag.

COSMO
(faltering a little)
So...what are you...gonna do now?

GIANNI
Well...I had an idea...

Gianni snatches up the pad he's
been working on, revealing a sketch
of an NYPD patrolman's hat with
rough shapes sketched on top of it,
including a foot-long antenna.

COSMO
Is that a...police...?

GIANNI
It's a cop's hat, yeah! Well, it's your radio hat, but made
for the beat cop! Imagine: a call comes into the station
house, someone's in trouble, and the station gets the horn,
puts out a call, the boys in blue pick it up *right on their
hats*, and the precinct sends 'em right where they're needed!
No more checking in at call boxes, or hoping you can catch
one on the street! You could even set the hats to different
frequencies for different precincts!

COSMO
(begrudgingly impressed)
That's a...really good idea.

GIANNI

Good? It's fantastic! Think of it, Cosmo! There's what... fourteen, fifteen thousand beat cops? And every cop needs a hat, plus spares for if they get broke, call it twenty thousand hats! And that's just in New York alone! Why would I stay at a meatpacking plant when this family's gonna be the next Marconis!

COSMO

(weakly)

Sure...we'll be loaded!

TERESA

Will we be loaded by next Friday when I gotta buy groceries again?

GIANNI

I don't...I mean...I don't *know* when the actual money--

COSMO

It'll be a little tight until the profits start rollin' in, but once we push through that--

GIANNI

I'm chasin' my dream, Tess!

TERESA

No! It's *his* dream! What dream do you have?

GIANNI

Hey!

TERESA

You had a good job, Gianni! A safe job!

COSMO

Ships are safe in the harbor, too, but that's not what they're meant for!

GIANNI

Yeah!

TERESA

(incredulous)

Yeah?

(a sigh)

Fine. Have your little dream session, keep your head in the clouds. I gotta go back to Finucci's.

GIANNI

Teresa...

TERESA

Lucia will be home any minute. Tell her she can have peanut butter on a slice of bread if she's hungry.

GIANNI

Tessie, this is a good thing. You'll see.

But Teresa is out the door and gone. There is an awkward silence for a moment.

GIANNI (cont'd)

(to Cosmo)

So where were you today? More inventor stuff?

COSMO

No, I...went to see Frank Schrafft.

GIANNI

Hey, hey, look at you! Cosmo Langtry, hobnobbing with the big shots! First Harper, now Schrafft! You got another restaurant idea for him?

COSMO

No, I wanted...to talk with him. Catch up, you know.

GIANNI

Smart, keeping those contacts up. Get a nice lunch meeting in?

COSMO

He, uh...he didn't remember me.

GIANNI

Who didn't?

COSMO

Schrafft. I went to his office, told the secretary who I was, she buzzed back...Frank said he didn't know me, to make an appointment next week some time.

GIANNI

Well...it's been what? Ten years? He probably just didn't match your name with the face.

COSMO

I thought that too, so I waited outside his office, caught him going to lunch. I said, "Hey, Frank...it's Cosmo Langtry, the idea guy from Cosmopolitan Calzones!"

GIANNI

And then he recognized you.

COSMO

He said, "I don't believe we've met."

GIANNI

Come on...why would he say that?

COSMO

Because he had no idea who I was. I could see it in his eyes...like he was searching. I was nobody to him. Another face on the street.

GIANNI

Frickin' Anglos, am I right? You do something for 'em, you're a prince! But the next day, oh! They act like it never happened.

COSMO

Yeah...

GIANNI

Well, screw Frank Schrafft! You don't need him! When your hat thing drops...and then maybe we get the police contract...Schrafft'll be beggin' you for lunch dates!

COSMO

Sure. That'll be swell.

The front door opens and Lucia practically skips in with buoyant, happy energy.

LUCIA

Papa! You're home!

She runs over and kisses Gianni on the cheek.

GIANNI

And I'll be home a lot more now, too!

LUCIA

Yay!

Lucia runs over and gives Cosmo a hug, then almost immediately turns and starts searching the kitchen, peering into shelves and cabinets, opening drawers.

GIANNI

What'cha doin', Squirrel?

LUCIA

I need a coffee can!

GIANNI

Shh, quiet...Nonna's sleepin'. What'cha need a coffee can for?

Lucia digs into a pocket and
triumphantly produces a coin.

LUCIA

Look what I found on the way home!

GIANNI

A nickel! Wow! Good for you!

LUCIA

Nonna says nickels add up to dollars! She saved her nickels
and now she's got lots of money!

COSMO

(sadly)

Nonna just *thinks* she has money.

LUCIA

No, she really does. In the coffee can under her bed!

Cosmo's head snaps up.

GIANNI

Can't trust the banks!

LUCIA

That's why I want a coffee can for me: to start saving!

Gianni moves to the rubbish bin.

GIANNI

Well...I don't know about coffee, but I think I saw a bean
can in here...

LUCIA

That'd be okay for now!

Gianni and Lucia dig through the
refuse and find an empty can of
beans, which together they rinse
out and dry.

Cosmo slips over to the screen that
separates the bed where Valentina
sleeps. He gazes at her lovingly and
strokes her gray hair softly. She
doesn't stir. With a quick glance in

the direction of Gianni and Lucia, who can't see around the screen, Cosmo kneels down and retrieves the coffee can from under the bed. He opens it and, almost in shock, pulls out the fat roll of bills, thumbs through it to get a rough count.

GIANNI
(to Lucia)

There you go!

Lucia drops the nickel into the can with a satisfying *plonk*.

LUCIA
Thank you, Papa!

Cosmo stares at the money for a long moment, looking between it and Valentina. Then he quickly pockets the bankroll and returns the coffee can. He reemerges into the main room.

COSMO
Gianni, I uh...I just remembered I have to meet my patent guy for somethin'.

GIANNI
In Midtown? Now?

COSMO
Yeah. Tell Tessie I might be late for dinner.

GIANNI
All right. Hey Squirrel, get a load of these...

Gianni shows Lucia his sketch as Cosmo hurries out the front door and the LIGHTS fade.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

II-1: LAUNDRY DAY

SETTING: It is clearly laundry day in the Russo household. Two tubs sit prominently in the room, as well as a mangle/wringer and a rack holding several garments next to the stove for drying. The ironing board has also been set up again.

AT RISE: Valentina pours a kettle of hot water into a tub as Teresa waits with a laundry dolly. Lucia irons a clean shirt.

VALENTINA

(re: the washing dolly)

Now twist that back and forth real good, not just up and down.

TERESA

I know how to do laundry, Ma.

VALENTINA

(to Lucia)

When you get your own house, Lucia, you'll learn you can't just swoosh the dolly peg around like...

She mimes a cursory "stirring" of the laundry.

LUCIA

Yes, Nonna.

VALENTINA

You gotta really get in there, scrub it to get it clean.

TERESA

Do I not get things clean?

VALENTINA

Hmm? Oh, I didn't say nothin'...

TERESA

Good.

Pause.

VALENTINA

(under her breath)

I mean, it's *your* house. You do what you...

TERESA

What don't I get clean? What?

VALENTINA

Well, the legs of Gianni's trousers are always--

TERESA

Bloodstains! That's blood. That don't come out.

VALENTINA

Poor man goin' to work in stained pants...

TERESA

He works in a slaughterhouse!

LUCIA

(cheerfully)

Not anymore! Now he's an inventor!

TERESA

Well...let's don't count our chickens.

LUCIA

We don't have any chickens.

TERESA

I mean we'll see.

LUCIA

About what?

TERESA

What your father is.

LUCIA

He's an inventor. He *is*! He invented the police radio hat.

TERESA

He drew a picture.

VALENTINA

He had an *idea*. That's where all inventions start.

TERESA

(to Lucia)

Once Nonno and your father get back from talking to the factory people, *and* the mechanics there *like* your father's idea and want to *make* it, *then* he's an inventor.

LUCIA

But they're gonna love it!

VALENTINA

Of course they will! Radio hats for fifteen thousand cops?
It's a gold mine!

TERESA

It's a long way from a factory floor to a gold mine. And now
Cosmo's got Gianni's head in the clouds, too.

VALENTINA

Good!

TERESA

Good?

VALENTINA

Your father, he sees the stars. I want a man who sees that,
sees past the mud on the street, or the blood on a butcher's
apron. A man with big ideas, who's willing to try.

TERESA

He was also willing to leave you.

VALENTINA

He never left me!

TERESA

How can you say that? He practically abandoned us for *ten*
years! Since before I even met Gianni! Where was he? Who
knows! Then he shows up a couple days ago, you hadn't seen
him since, what? Twenty-four? Twenty-five?

VALENTINA

So? Just because he's not right under my nose don't mean he
left me!

TERESA

(not hiding her sarcasm)

Oh, okay.

VALENTINA

Don't you sass your mother! It takes time to go out and make
somethin' outta nothin' like what your father done. Takes
time, and a certain spirit. And a man like Cosmo, or like
Gianni is now, they need a wife who *believes* in that spirit,
not one who's draggin' 'em down all the time.

TERESA

I don't drag Gianni down! I always--

VALENTINA

You treat him the same way you treat your father. Always
with the worry, the complaining. That boy needs someone to
(MORE)

VALENTINA (cont'd)
say "Why not?" not "What for?" You should be his *wings*, not
an *anchor*!

Teresa offers her the dolly peg.

TERESA
You wanna agitate a while, Ma? 'Cause you're pretty darn
good at it!

VALENTINA
Fine!

TERESA
Fine!

Valentina takes over on the dolly,
while Teresa pulls something out
and starts wringing it in the
mangler. They work in silence for a
moment. Lucia pulls the shirt off
the ironing board and starts to
hang it up.

TERESA (cont'd)
Wait wait wait...

LUCIA
Hmm?

TERESA
(pointing)
Right shoulder, see there? Let me show you. Pull it over the
end of the board like this so you can get it flat.

LUCIA
(with a sigh)
Yes, Mama.

TERESA
(with an eye to Valentina)
Wouldn't want your father going to work all *rumpled*.

Lucia starts to iron the shirt again.

VALENTINA
Soon, Lucia, you won't gotta press your father's shirts no
more. He'll have fine suits, steam pressed right from the dry
cleaner, make him look like a businessman, not just a butcher.

TERESA
Ma, don't fill her head with all that. It's just a meeting
they're going to. We don't know nothing yet.

VALENTINA

Let the girl dream a little.

TERESA

I'm only sayin', better surprised by good news than disappointed by a dream.

LUCIA

Dreams give us hope, Mama!

TERESA

Well, dream but keep ironing.

LUCIA

I'll be on a big stage. With real ballet shoes...and a tutu ironed just so, without a single wrinkle. That's my dream.

TERESA

Your *dream*?

LUCIA

(deciding)

No. My *goal*. Being on stage is my *goal*.

TERESA

Good.

LUCIA

Nonna's goal is to take me on a boat to Italy!

TERESA

Really, Mama?

VALENTINA

I'm gonna take her to see Genoa! Show her the Old Country! First class cabin, this time, no steerage! Maybe we'll visit Rome, too, see the Coliseum!

They wait for Teresa to chime in.
She doesn't.

LUCIA

What'll you do, Mama?

TERESA

What'll I do what?

LUCIA

When we gets lots of money!

TERESA

Buy an electric washing machine.

VALENTINA

That's it? *That's* your big dream?

TERESA

They're *fifty dollars!* That ain't big enough?

VALENTINA

Pfff. Small potatoes. Dream.

Pause.

TERESA

(quietly)

Not having to save bread crumbs for meatballs.

VALENTINA

Huh?

TERESA

That's the kind of thing I dream. To make meatballs with a hundred percent ground beef and not have to stretch it out with bread crumbs or oatmeal. Even if it's eleven or twelve cents a pound. To just...make it, and not care. Or to not worry that someone's gonna get sick and we can't afford the medicine. Or to invite the Lunettis over and have nice chairs for them to sit down on and not fret how feeding 'em lasagna's gonna murder my grocery budget.

(to Lucia)

And I want to watch you in ballet class, in your little skirt, with your leg up on the barre, lookin' like a music box dancer.

(to Valentina)

And I want to be in a place where you got your own room and I can take care of you, and you wouldn't have to sew no more and could just rest.

(pause)

But I know those aren't real dreams.

Without a word, Lucia hugs Teresa.

VALENTINA

They're perfectly lovely dreams, Theresa Grazia.

The DOOR BUZZER sounds. Lucia jumps.

LUCIA

Oh!

TERESA

(to Lucia)

Go see who it is.

VALENTINA

Probably Western Union sayin' the NYPD loves the hats!

Lucia exits.

TERESA

I hate telegrams.

(re: the laundry)

Are those done? Let me help you rinse.

She pulls a pair of pants from the
washtub and moves it to the rinse
tub, swishing it around in the clean
water, then holding it up to check.

VALENTINA

Now, see: *that's* clean.

TERESA

They look real nice, Mama.

Teresa feeds the pants through the wringer.

VALENTINA

I need to sit down.

II-2: ARMY HATS

The front door opens and Cosmo enters like a freight train. He wears his new suit, but there is red mark on his left cheekbone that might turn into a bruise or even a black eye later. Lucia follows behind him.

COSMO

Can't talk! Gotta pack!

TERESA

What?

VALENTINA

Cosmo!

COSMO

The Capitol Limited rolls out at four-ten, an' I gotta be on it!

Cosmo breezes past them to
Valentina's bed area, where he
pulls out a small valise.

VALENTINA

What's happening?

TERESA

Where's Gianni?

Cosmo keeps his back to the room, packing
his few things into the suitcase.

COSMO

Still talkin' at the factory. They loved his police hat
idea! Gonna get it right into production.

LUCIA

I knew it! See, Mama!

TERESA

Why are you packing? Where are you going?

COSMO

Washington!

VALENTINA

D.C.?

TERESA

Why?

The bag is packed. Cosmo turns around.

COSMO
(triumphantly)
Because that's where the War Department is!

TERESA
Papa, I don't--
(she notices)
What happened to your face?

COSMO
(dismissively)
Oh, this? Nothin', it's a...lamppost.

TERESA
You got hit by a *lamppost*?

COSMO
No, no...bit of a funny story, actually. But I'm tellin' all backward!
(he starts to perform)
So Gianni and I take the Flushing line from Grand Central all the way to Queens. We get to the factory...big place, you know, all kinds of machinery doin'...I don't even know what! Mister Harper's there, takes us upstairs to his office, handshakes all around, cigars. He tells us the first of my hats are rollin' off the line, should be in stores next week, in time for Christmas. Then Gianni drops the police hat sketch onto his desk.

LUCIA
Did Mister Harper like it?

COSMO
(a chuckle)
Like it? I swear the guy nearly bit his cigar in two! "That's the best goddamn idea since his!" Meaning mine, of course. But then as Gianni and Harper were talking, it hit me!

VALENTINA
The lamppost?

COSMO
That's later. I'm getting to that.
(back to the story)
Get this: the Army.

LUCIA
You're too old for the Army!

COSMO
No, not to join it, kiddo: to sell to it! Radio hats for *soldiers*! Imagine officers being able to give orders to
(MORE)

COSMO (cont'd)

soldiers all across the battlefield! Talk to them right as they're fighting!

TERESA

We don't need no more wars. The world's done with that.

COSMO

No, no...I'm not sayin' I want war...but sellin' a million radio helmets to the Army?

LUCIA

We'll be the Rockefellers!

COSMO

Sure, why not! Anyway Harper, he jumps up out of his chair, "Stop everything!" Yells for his secretary to get on the horn to the War Department, find some muckety-muck Harper knows in the Signal Corps--

TERESA

He just happened to know someone high up in the Army?

COSMO

He's connected, I'm tellin' you. Anyway, the secretary patches him through and this general or whatever hears the idea and goes, "Get that man down to Washington, pronto!"

TERESA

Meaning you.

COSMO

Meaning me. That's why I'm in such a hurry.

VALENTINA

Why isn't Gianni with you?

COSMO

Because this is even bigger than police hats! Gianni and Harper needed to finish talking to engineers and hammerin' out details, but I gotta hop a train to D.C. tonight, for an oh-seven-hundred meeting tomorrow morning!

LUCIA

But how did you hit a lamppost?

COSMO

Oh, that! On the way back to the subway I was movin' so fast, and all the while I was tryin' to figure out how to get the reception clearer for the Army. I was hustlin', and thinkin', and...bam! Ran right into a lamppost! My mind's always two steps ahead of my feet!

TERESA

How long will you be in Washington?

COSMO

Hard to say. A day or two, at least. Is that shirt dry?

LUCIA

Mostly...

COSMO

It'll do. I'll be back as soon as I can.

He is almost out the front door.

COSMO (cont'd)

Oh! In such a rush, forgot to tell my best girl *ciao*!

He moves to kiss her, but she turns away.

VALENTINA

No. No *ciao*. No *arrividerci*.

COSMO

Vale, what's wrong?

VALENTINA

Where are you going?

COSMO

I told you: Washington.

LUCIA

(helpfully)

The War Department, Nonna.

(to Cosmo)

She forgets sometimes.

VALENTINA

I forget nothing.

She moves to her bedroom area.

Cosmo watches her go.

COSMO

Well, I better get going. Can't miss that train!

Cosmo turns for the door.

II-3: COMING CLEAN

Gianni opens the front door. Cosmo freezes. Even Lucia, who normally runs to greet her father, hesitates at seeing Gianni's face: a mask of pure rage.

LUCIA

Papa?

GIANNI

(to Cosmo)

I gave you a head start.

Cosmo's bravado evaporates.

COSMO

Gianni, now, I was just--

GIANNI

Told you to get your stuff and clear out before I got back.

TERESA

What?

COSMO

Look, it just took a little longer than--

Gianni advances on Cosmo, raising a fist.
Cosmo flinches and backpedals away.

GIANNI

You want that other cheek to match, old man?

TERESA

Gianni! What are you doing?

Gianni stops, looks at Teresa and the others.

GIANNI

(to Cosmo)

You haven't told them.

COSMO

There wasn't time! I was tryin' to get outta here!

TERESA

Tell us what?

GIANNI

So you're a coward, too.

TERESA

Tell us *what? What happened at the factory?*

GIANNI

The factory. Tell 'em, Cosmo. Tell your family about the factory.

COSMO

It's...There was a minor setback...

GIANNI

THE TRUTH!

The force of Gianni's shout shocks everyone into silence. Valentina stands and comes around the screen.

COSMO

It wasn't there.

(pause)

We got to the factory--

GIANNI

Factory? It was an import/export warehouse!

COSMO

--and we, we thought we...you know, had the wrong address. I had wrote down 48th and Vernon Boulevard, like Charles had told me, but the factory...it wasn't there. We walked around the neighborhood a bit, askin' around...

GIANNI

No one had ever *heard* of any radio hat factory, ever heard of Edward Harper.

COSMO

...so I thought, well, I musta been wrong. I musta wrote the address down wrong.

GIANNI

So we jumped back on the train and went back across the river to Midtown, to find the patent guy.

COSMO

Only when we got there, Charles was...gone.

GIANNI

Not gone like, "he'd gone home for the day," but gone like *vacant*. Like *cut and run*. I looked through the windows...not even a desk, an office chair.

VALENTINA

Oh, Cosmo...

COSMO

He had a whole office, before. It was *there*. "Charles Murdock, Patent Clerk" painted on the glass.

GIANNI

That was gone too. I asked the doorman, he said that office cleared out two weeks ago. "Strange thing," he said, "Since they only moved in last month."

LUCIA

But where are they making the radio hats?

GIANNI

There are no radio hats, Squirrel. No radio hats, no factory, no patent guy...

TERESA

...no job.

GIANNI

Yeah.

COSMO

We were swindled!

GIANNI

You were swindled! I was just dumb enough to believe you!

COSMO

It's just a setback. Let's not panic.

GIANNI

Are you *nuts*?

COSMO

No, Charles was a crook! Absolutely! But the *idea* is still gold! That hasn't changed! So you know what? I'll wire the Washington Patent Office, the one in D.C., see if they got any of my paperwork from before--

GIANNI

They've never heard of you, tellin' you right now.

COSMO

Then I'll do it myself! File my own patent!

GIANNI

Don't waste the money.

COSMO

But this *idea* is--

GIANNI

What? What idea? Explain to me how your invention works.
Like I'm a patent officer.

COSMO

What do you mean? It's...radio. On, on a hat.

GIANNI

Yeah, they'll want you to be a bit more specific. You got a
prototype?

COSMO

I gave it to Harper. Or whatever his real name is.

GIANNI

Drawings, then? You got them?

COSMO

Yeah! We got your police hat--

GIANNI

Schematics! Not cocktail napkins!

COSMO

Engels, he...he might've had...but...

GIANNI

(demanding)

Huh?

COSMO

No.

GIANNI

No. So you've got exactly nothin'.

Silence. Fantasy faces fact.

COSMO

Look, I know how you feel--

GIANNI

Get the hell outta my house!

Gianni advances threateningly on Cosmo.

LUCIA

Papa!

TERESA

Gianni!

COSMO

No, no, no! We can work this--

TERESA

Papa! Stop. Talking.

(pause)

Lucia, get your coat. Take Nonno for a walk around the block or something.

COSMO

Tessie, I don't need to--

TERESA

Just go!

VALENTINA

If you let him--

TERESA

(a warning)

Mama...

Cosmo and Lucia exit. Valentina
returns to her bed.

II-4: FAMILY

Gianni sits heavily at the kitchen table, rage spent and turned now to weariness and shame.

GIANNI

I'm such a fool, Tess...

TERESA

No, you're not. But you can't just hit him!
(off Gianni's look)

You already did.

GIANNI

You didn't see his face?

TERESA

He said he ran into a lamppost.

GIANNI

He's gonna feel like he ran into the Chrysler Building when I get--

TERESA

No!

(pause)

It wouldn't change anything.

GIANNI

Make me feel better.

TERESA

If we're hittin' him for *that*, then you gotta wait 'cause I'm up first. Or maybe Ma.

GIANNI

Yeah. That's fair. I'm so sorry, Tessie...

TERESA

Naw, it's me. I'm the one said he could stay around.

GIANNI

Don't worry: I'll throw the bum out on his ear!

TERESA

You're sweet. And you're sure...about all of this? No chance you just...missed the factory? You're sure you had the right address?

GIANNI

There's nothin' there, love. We were had.

TERESA

This Charles guy, and the investor. We can't find--

GIANNI

Naw, they're long gone. Seem like professionals. Won't be nothin' to trace. But don't worry, I'm gonna find somethin' else. I don't care: whatever it takes. Dig ditches, haul rocks--

TERESA

Where? Men are months on the dole looking for work! Who's hirin'?

Pause.

GIANNI

I don't know. I don't know.

TERESA

Yeah.

Pause.

TERESA (cont'd)

So, what do we do?

GIANNI

Well, first, we get Cosmo outta here, get back to normal!

VALENTINA

(calling out)

It won't help!

TERESA

(surprised)

Wha--? Ma! You been eavesdroppin' this whole time?

Valentina comes around the screen.

VALENTINA

You think this place is the Taj Mahal? How far away can I be? And you promised your father he could stay.

TERESA

What? I didn't *promise* him anyth--

VALENTINA

"Don't matter: win, lose, or draw--you stay here, you stay in our lives." That's what you said. You said that.

TERESA

Oh my God, Ma! What, you hear every little--

GIANNI

(to Valentina)

It doesn't matter what she said before. She wants him out *now*, he's out!

VALENTINA

Out where? He's got no place to go.

GIANNI

Not our problem!

VALENTINA

He's family!

GIANNI

So?

VALENTINA

So it *is* our problem. Family sticks together. Helps each other.

TERESA

Like he helped us?

VALENTINA

You said you needed him to take care 'a me.

TERESA

No, Ma, I didn't mean--

VALENTINA

It's all right, all right. I know, I can be...a lot.

Gianni opens his mouth to speak,
but Valentina holds up a warning
finger, and Gianni stays silent.

TERESA

You...really want him around? Still?

VALENTINA

(simply)

I love him.

TERESA

But he ruined everything!

VALENTINA

What? What's he ruined? Our day-dreams? Our chance at a million bucks? All that's changed is Gianni quit his job--

(to Gianni)

--which was a cotton-headed thing to do, by the way!

GIANNI

I know it, Ma...

VALENTINA

(to Teresa)

--and Lucia's more set on dance lessons than ever. That's it.

TERESA

It? That's not it.

(to Gianni)

How much money we got?

GIANNI

Right now, you and me? Thirteen bucks, fourteen.

TERESA

(to Valentina)

Yeah. And we gotta buy groceries, pay rent. How'm I gonna do that?

VALENTINA

Whaddaya mean? You already told Cosmo.

TERESA

I did?

(sigh)

What did I say?

VALENTINA

You said Cosmo stays "even if he has to get a regular job."

GIANNI

What job? *I* ain't even got one no more!

Teresa has a flash of insight.

TERESA

(to Gianni)

You gotta ask for your old job back.

GIANNI

What? I can't do that!

TERESA

Gianni! We got rent due in three weeks, and not half the dough to pay it! We'll get your job back, maybe get one for Papa!

GIANNI

I told Peyton to *shove* his job. He'd laugh me outta the office!

TERESA

That's why I'll go with you. We'll bring Lucia, too, play up the family angle, 'specially right before Christmas.

GIANNI

I don't know...I can find somethin' else.

TERESA

What else is gonna pay twenty-three bucks a week starting out? You said whatever it takes. This is what it takes.

Pause.

GIANNI

Okay.

TERESA

Yeah?

GIANNI

Yeah, no, let's go. Whatever it takes.

TERESA

I love you. This is a man I'm proud of.

II-4: DREAMS

*The front door opens, and Lucia and Cosmo return to the apartment.
Lucia starts to take off her coat.*

TERESA

Lucia, go put your Sunday dress on. We're going out.

(Lucia starts for the bedroom)

No. On second thought, just keep your coat on. Let's not look nicer than we are.

LUCIA

Where are we going, Mama?

TERESA

To get Papa's old job back.

COSMO

At the meat plant? You can't do that--

GIANNI

You don't get to say *nothin'*!

COSMO

You're gonna go *beg*?

TERESA

We're gonna go *survive*.

COSMO

I'll just...go. I'm already packed.

TERESA

Oh, no. You're staying right here.

COSMO

I don't think your husband--

TERESA

You got cheated. And we all should'a seen it comin', most of all me. But you're also family. And family sticks together. What happens to one of us, happens to all of us. So we're gonna help each other out and make it through.

GIANNI

Grab your scarf too, Squirrel. Cold out there.

COSMO

Let me come. I'll talk to Gianni's boss, maybe smooth things over--

TERESA

No. This time, you're staying here.

COSMO

I want to help.

TERESA

Then...help Ma finish the laundry. Gianni and I will figure this out. Come on, Lucia.

They start for the front door.
Lucia turns back.

LUCIA

Nonna? I don't need to see Italy just yet.

VALENTINA

(caught off-guard)

What makes you say that, child?

LUCIA

In case you need the money in your coffee can to help the family.

Teresa, Gianni, and Lucia exit.

Valentina moves to sit on her bed,
pulling out the coffee can from
beneath it and checking its
contents. But it is empty. She
checks again, gets down on the
floor and checks under the bed.
There is nothing. She returns to
the room, holding the can.

COSMO

Valentina...

Silence.

VALENTINA

You took it. To give to that man.

COSMO

You offered it to me.

VALENTINA

I forgot I had it.

COSMO

But you would have. Given it.

VALENTINA

But I didn't.

Silence.

COSMO

You were caught up in the dream, too. We both were.

Valentina tosses the empty can to
the floor.

VALENTINA

Dreams are for other people.

COSMO

Look, Vale--

VALENTINA

No, you look! Look at me. Do you even see me? Have you ever
seen me?

COSMO

What, what are you talking about? Of course I--

VALENTINA

You left me, Cosmo.

COSMO

What? I never!

VALENTINA

After the calzone money. After I opened the shop. You
disappeared.

COSMO

I don't remember it that way.

VALENTINA

You forget a lot of things.

COSMO

So do you.

VALENTINA

I don't forget you left me.

COSMO

Teresa was grown. You had your dream. I was looking for mine.

VALENTINA

What dream did I have?

COSMO

The tailor shop! You loved that place.

VALENTINA

I *like* sewing...

COSMO

See?

VALENTINA

Work is different than dreams.

COSMO

You had a thing you wanted, and you got it. What did I have? Yesterday's success and an empty tomorrow. So I went out to find my own path.

VALENTINA

And left me. Months at a time.

COSMO

I had to go where the movers and shakers are...

VALENTINA

May God forgive me, I hoped it was a woman.

COSMO

What?

VALENTINA

Did you know that? Sometimes I laid awake at night and prayed you had another woman on the side.

COSMO

Why would you *want* that?

VALENTINA

Because at least if it was a woman I knew someday--

COSMO

It wasn't!

VALENTINA

--someday you'd get tired of her and come back to me.

COSMO

There has never been another woman. Not once.

VALENTINA

I know. And that made it worse. Because you weren't attracted to someone else, you were just tired of *me*.

COSMO

(indignant)

I love you!

VALENTINA
(scoffing)

Hmpfh.

COSMO
No! Not "hmpfh!" I do!

VALENTINA
Then why did you leave me for ten years?

COSMO
It hasn't been ten--

VALENTINA
Nineteen twenty-three! August!

COSMO
That's only *nine*! Nine years!

VALENTINA
Oh, well, forgive me for--

COSMO
And I was back a couple weeks in the Spring of twenty-four!
We took the subway to Coney Island, tooled around on the
boardwalk!

VALENTINA
No, we didn't!

COSMO
Oh, yes we did!

VALENTINA
I don't remember that!

COSMO
Yeah? I'll show you!
(digging for his wallet)
I've got the...I keep this with me...you'll see: I got *proof*
of...hold the phone...
(finding a picture)
Aha!

Cosmo hands Valentina an old square
photograph.

VALENTINA
When was this?

COSMO
Nineteen twenty-four! April! Or May...

VALENTINA

I don't remember this at all.

COSMO

It was on the boardwalk! Right by the beach.

VALENTINA

(indicating the picture)

I have eyes, Cosmo.

(studying the image)

And I remember making that dress, but...

COSMO

We were walking along, and a guy from a booth came up to us.

I'll never forget: Jewish guy, thick Russian accent:

(imitating)

"Take your picture, kids? Only fifteen cents and have picture in thirty minutes! Smile for camera now, eat ice cream cone, and poof! Picture ready!"

(his normal voice)

And you don't you 'member that? The fun we had?

VALENTINA

(handing the picture back)

So you came back for a week or two. I worked years. Alone.

COSMO

I know. And I missed you. I've kept this picture all these years.

VALENTINA

Then why didn't you come--

COSMO

Because I was jealous, alright?

VALENTINA

What?

COSMO

You didn't know that? I envied you. There was a time... years...I couldn't bring myself to be around you.

VALENTINA

(doubtful)

You envied me.

COSMO

Absolutely. You knew what you wanted, grabbed the chance, made it happen. And it was *yours*. Your place. Your own boss. People *knew* you, respected you. You *meant* something to them. Me? I was no one. Nobody. I couldn't get nothin' to...to *take off*, you know? It was always...almost. Except for. Would have worked *if*...

(MORE)

COSMO (cont'd)
(he sighs)
Story of my pathetic life.

VALENTINA
Not pathetic.

COSMO
No?
(holding up the picture)
I've got the proof right here.

VALENTINA
Because you missed me? Because we had fun one time?

COSMO
Yeah, no, we did, but there's...
(a long pause)
...another reason I keep this. Another...thing it reminds me of. You see, I went back to him a couple weeks later. The Russian Jew. Turns out his name was Anatol Josepho. See, when you and I got our picture taken, Anatol ran inside his little booth, took out the negative, dipped it in the developer, the stop bath, the fixer. Then he dried it, enlarged it onto photo paper, and ran through the whole process again to get the print. He would try to get five or six customers together in a batch, then start the process. But it was all by hand, and a fifteen cents each, he'd average about a dollar an hour.

VALENTINA
Why do you tell me this?

COSMO
Because I found out Anatol was an idea man, too. He had this notion of a new kind of camera setup that would take a picture straight onto photo paper, no negative, cut the whole process in half and double his money. But he didn't know where to go with it. With the idea.

VALENTINA
But you did?

COSMO
'Course. And my idea was to automatize it. Cut the man out of the process entirely. Anatol and I started working on a machine in the back of his camera shop. Well, he worked on buildin' the machine and I started talking it up to people: investors, backers. And I was good. Pulled in almost eleven thousand dollars for it.

VALENTINA
That's a lot of money.

COSMO

We needed it. All through twenty-four we worked on that thing. Couldn't get it right. Tricky mechanisms, all needing to work together perfectly. We went through so much photo paper, developing chemicals, lenses, machining costs. We were bleeding money, burnin' through that eleven g's like a house on fire...failure after failure after failure. By the next spring, we were down to our last thousand bucks.

He falls silent. The sting of the
memory still hurts.

VALENTINA

So what happened?

COSMO

I quit. Cut my losses. Took a couple hundred dollars severance and moved on. Looking for the next big idea. And not six months later, September of twenty-five, Anatol pulled it off. Built a machine where you'd put in a quarter, a camera snaps 8 pictures in a few seconds, and then... without a man touchin' nothin'...eight minutes later a strip of photos comes out the other end.

VALENTINA

Like the picture booths on Times Square.

COSMO

Not "like" those. *Those*. Those were his, the first photo booths ever. The Photomaton. My name, by the way. People lined up around the block. Time Magazine did a story, said in the first six months it had over a quarter-million customers. Made Anatol a millionaire.

(a bitter laugh)

But not Cosmo Langtry. He bailed out and he missed out. How could I come home to you after that?

VALENTINA

You turn the key and you climb the stairs. You don't stay away for ten years.

COSMO

I'm surprised Teresa even let me stay.

VALENTINA

You are family. And you're my husband.

COSMO

And I'm not gonna fail again, *amore*. Radio hats will work, I just gotta--

VALENTINA

Cosmo, no...

COSMO

I know...I *know*. I got taken. I lost the plans and I stole your money and it all feels horrible. And it *is*. It's a failure. I *failed*. But I look at this picture, and I remember: never give up. Never. Because don't you see? This is Anatol's photo booth all over again!

Valentina moves as if to speak, but
Cosmo is on a roll.

COSMO (cont'd)

Or the light bulb! How many times did Edison fail making it? Thousands. But he *knew*. In his heart, he knew. Or what if Lincoln had given up, huh? He lost the elections for state legislature, the House of Representatives, the Senate...huge setbacks...but he pushed through and won the White House!

VALENTINA

Now ask *Mrs.* Lincoln how the presidency went.

Beat. Cosmo tries to regroup.

COSMO

I mean, sure, if you focus on the *negative*. But--

VALENTINA

There is always a negative. Always a cost.

COSMO

But it'll be worth it when--

VALENTINA

I don't care. I don't care about radio hats, Cosimo. If they succeed, fail. I'm *old*.

COSMO

You could be an old millionaire...

VALENTINA

What would I do with a million dollars? Have lunch with *Mrs.* Carnegie? Start wearing diamonds and jewels?

COSMO

You could give Lucia a better life.

VALENTINA

I wanted to take her to see Italy. For *me* to see it, one last time. Now? Who knows? Maybe we eat beans and oatmeal for the rest of our lives.

COSMO

Can't we dream of something better?

VALENTINA

I love that you dream, that you've always dreamed. But it's also a dream to dream of life *together*. That's what I want. This is *my* dream.

Silence.

COSMO

That dream I can give you. I owe you that dream.

VALENTINA

No radio hats?

COSMO

There's a radio right here. I suppose I could wear it, if you want me to.

Valentina chuckles. Cosmo switches on the radio, and a soft, slow SONG wafts across the room. They begin to dance, slowly. The LIGHTS shift, indicating a passage of time.

II-5: SMALL POTATOES

The front door opens and Gianni enters, followed by Lucia and Teresa. Cosmo and Valentina stop dancing, and she moves to switch off the radio. Gianni and Cosmo share a long look in silence. Then Gianni turns to collect coats from Teresa and Lucia and hangs them up.

COSMO

Well?

TERESA

He did it.

GIANNI

She did it.

VALENTINA

He got his job back?

Teresa nods. Cosmo breathes a sigh of relief.

LUCIA

Everything's okay again, Nonna!

VALENTINA

Grazie a Dio!

GIANNI

(stone-faced)

Now tell them how much.

TERESA

Mister Peyton was willing to give Gianni his old job back. But not at his old wage, not at twenty-three a week.

GIANNI

He put me at twelve fu--

TERESA

Gianni!

She indicates Lucia standing nearby.

GIANNI

At twelve lousy dollars a week.

COSMO

That's robbery!

Bareford -- Small Potatoes -- 100.

TERESA

That's entry level. That's what they pay a man for his first day on the job.

COSMO

But he's been there years! Couldn't you negotiate for a--

GIANNI

It was take it or leave it! I took it.

Beat.

LUCIA

But tell him the good news, Papa!

GIANNI

They're still running short in wrap-and-tie. I wrangled you a job wrapping.

COSMO

Me?

TERESA

It's also at twelve a week, but with Gianni's twelve and your twelve, that's a dollar more than he was makin' before. That should cover the cost of you staying here. We can make it on that.

VALENTINA

Praise be to God.

COSMO

So I'd be working at the meatpacking plant?

LUCIA

With Papa!

COSMO

Doing what now?

GIANNI

It's easy. You stand there, you take a cut 'a meat, wrap it up in paper, make sure all the air's out. Tie it up with butcher's string, slap a label on it. Boom. You're done. On to the next one.

COSMO

All day?

GIANNI

Nights, actually, for new guys. Few months though, you can maybe move to swing.

COSMO
(forced)

Fantastic.

GIANNI
Fantastic would'a been you *plus* me at full salary. This
is...it's enough.

TERESA
We'll get by. I told you.

VALENTINA
(checking the laundry)
Lucia, this is dry. Take into the bedroom to fold.

LUCIA
Si, Nonna.

Valentina starts to lift a washtub.

TERESA
No, Mama, what are you doing?

VALENTINA
It needs dumping.

TERESA
That's too heavy for--

VALENTINA
I can still--

TERESA
Go sit down. I got it!

VALENTINA
Here. I open doors for you.

TERESA
That, I'll let you do.

Valentina opens the front door and
Teresa starts out with the washtub.

VALENTINA
We take it downstairs, dump it in the alley.

TERESA
(as she exits)
I know how to clean up laundry, Ma...

Teresa and Valentina exit. Cosmo
and Gianni stand in a bit of
awkward silence.

GIANNI
Through the holidays, there'll be overtime. Always is.

COSMO
Uh-huh.

Gianni glances at the bedroom,
lowers his voice.

GIANNI
So I was thinkin'...if you and I can sock away a couple bucks,
we might could get Lucia a few months of dance lessons.

COSMO
That'd be swell.

GIANNI
She's a good kid.

COSMO
The best.

GIANNI
And she likes you. I haven't seen her smile this much for a
long time, so...

COSMO
That's good.

GIANNI
Yeah.
(pause, evaluating)
Yeah, alright.

Gianni starts to turn away.

COSMO
Thanks, Gianni. For the second chance.

GIANNI
I don't know if it's the second or third or twenty-fifth, but
I'll tell you this--it's the *last* chance, *capice*?

COSMO
Absolutely.

GIANNI
'Cause I don't want Franco come bitchin' to me about somethin'
you're doin', or not doin'...I don't need none of that.

COSMO

You won't...I'll be...you won't hear a peep.

GIANNI

Alright.

(noticing the suitcase)

Whyn't'cha unpack your bag, then.

COSMO

Yeah. Yeah, alright.

Cosmo takes the valise back to the bed area. Teresa and Valentina re-enter with the empty washtub. Valentina crosses to Cosmo and helps him unpack.

GIANNI

(to Teresa, quietly)

You're Dad's pretty broke, huh?

TERESA

Think so, why?

GIANNI

Those shoes he's got ain't gonna work. I gotta get him some boots for the plant.

(pause)

Set us back maybe four bucks. You get by on eight or nine till next Friday?

Teresa kisses him on the cheek.

TERESA

Don't you worry about a thing.

GIANNI

I never need to.

Teresa moves to pick up the second washtub, but Gianni stops her. He grabs it himself and exits. Lucia enters from the bedroom.

LUCIA

What's next, Mama?

TERESA

Next?

She moves to the radio and turns it on. A bright, cheery SONG comes on.

TERESA (cont'd)

I think it's time for a little dancing. Show me your twirl.

Lucia excitedly tries a pirouette,
but wobbles and stumbles out of it.

LUCIA

No, wait! I can do that better!

She tries again. Valentina and
Cosmo emerge from around the screen
to watch.

VALENTINA

Bravissima!

LUCIA

You and Nonno should dance again!

VALENTINA

No, no...my knees.

COSMO

Turn it up, Lucia!

As Cosmo and Valentina start to
dance, Lucia runs to increase the
volume, but she notices the Coney
Island photograph where Cosmo left it
by the radio. She shows it to Teresa.

TERESA

Yes, that's them.

LUCIA

Nonna, when did you take this picture?

Cosmo and Valentina stop dancing.

VALENTINA

Oh! A hundred years ago! You were barely this high!

LUCIA

Not a hundred years! I'm only thirteen!

VALENTINA

Well, you were very little! Just a little squirrel! A
dancing squirrel!

She starts to dance with Lucia. But
Cosmo stands stock still, holding
the photograph. Slowly, he returns
it to his wallet.

TERESA

You all right, Papa?

COSMO

Hmm?

TERESA

What are you thinking about?

COSMO

Oh, nothin', just...on the way back from Queens, when I got off the Flushing at Times Square, I saw that new headquarters RCA is building, big skyscraper off Rockefeller Plaza.

TERESA

What about it?

COSMO

Well, I was thinking...maybe trying to go independent is the wrong approach. RCA's got the name and the money to put this thing worldwide--

TERESA

Papa--

COSMO

--and I was thinking it's only three o'clock or so. I could get down there, end of the day, it's a good day to grab someone's ear or even catch them as they walk out...

TERESA

For radio hats?

COSMO

Just to see.

Teresa moves away and switches off the radio. Valentina and Lucia stop dancing.

TERESA

We're done with that, Papa.

COSMO

No, no, no, I know, it's just--

TERESA

Done!

Silence. Gianni opens the front door, holding an empty washtub. He senses the odd energy in the room and stands, watching.

COSMO

Test the waters. That's it. See where it goes.

TERESA

You have a job. Starting Monday.

COSMO

And I will be there, I will absolutely be there. I'm just gonna go drop my name, plant a bug in their ear, maybe start some gears turnin'. And then I'll come back here and we'll put the Russo meatpacking plan into motion.

Valentina suddenly seems to have aged another ten years. She slowly shuffles behind the screen and sits on the bed, her back to the room.

LUCIA

You're going away, Nonno?

COSMO

No, no. I'm just gonna run downtown for an hour or so, talk to some folks at RCA. I'll be right back. Help your mother out while I'm gone, will you?

LUCIA

Yes, Nonno.

Silence.

COSMO

(chuckling)

Well, it's not a funeral! I'll be right back.

Pause. Teresa nods. Cosmo exits, and Gianni slowly closes the front door.

TERESA

Get the washtubs put away, Lucia. Help your father.

LUCIA

Can I turn on the radio again?

TERESA

Not for a while....not for a while.

The LIGHTS fade to black.

END OF PLAY