

A: THE COFFEE CAN

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! Four hundred and thirty-seven dollars. 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
(MORE)

VALENTINA (cont'd)

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 slips the ten-dollar bill
back into the coffee can without
Valentina noticing.

LUCIA

That will be *amazing*, Nonna. But I need to get back and check the risotto.

B: PROMISE

Cosmo crosses toward the screen.

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

Cosmo stops.

COSMO
What isn't?

TERESA
A suit. That fabric's just the *idea* of a suit.

COSMO
What, you need the pattern?
(a dismissive wave)
Ah, your mother knows how to--

TERESA
Where's the jacket lining? Huh? Or the interfacing. Or the buttons or the zipper or the *thread*, for God's sake! You got those in your hip pocket somewhere?

COSMO
Well...I thought that--

TERESA
No, you didn't. You *didn't* think, Cosmo: you never do.

COSMO
Now Tess, that's not fair.

TERESA
Fair?! You never give one thought to all the little stuff--the stuff that's somehow "beneath you." The bits and bobs, the boring details, the thankless, unseen work. The things that actually hold a suit together!

Pause.

COSMO
Oh. Well, if you need some notions, I've got a few bucks--

TERESA
You still don't get it! You come waltzing in like it's all hunky-dory. Like you were never gone. Like the whole world stops when the great Cosmo Langtry isn't there.

COSMO
It's been a long night. Why don't you--

TERESA

Ma's not doin' well, Daddy.

COSMO

She's fine! Just tired, is all.

TERESA

She forgets things.

COSMO

Tessie, we all forget--

TERESA

No! I don't mean "forgot where she put her glasses," or "bought eggs and forgot the milk." I mean *important* things. Lucia's name. Where she is. Last week she went down to Finucci's grocery before it was open...and stood outside wondering why her old shop key wouldn't work.

COSMO

Well...we're old.

TERESA

Sure. Old. 'Cause she can still sew, so what do you care?

COSMO

Of course I care! 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, to go off chasing your crazy ideas! And you're still doing it.

COSMO

No, this is different! This one's big, Tess, I can feel it!

TERESA

(with a bitter laugh)

I hope it is, you know? If it would stop you runnin', I hope it *is* big.

COSMO

This thing's gonna come on like gangbusters! I'm gonna buy you a bigger house, dancing lessons for Lucia...

TERESA

I'd like that. But what I *want* is for Lucia to know her grandfather. What I *need* is your help taking care of Ma. Promise me you'll stay.

COSMO

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

TERESA
Even if it isn't. Even if this flops.

COSMO
It won't.

TERESA
Even if you have to get a regular job to help the family.

COSMO
But I won't need to--

TERESA
Promise me.

COSMO
I did!

TERESA
Say it. All of it.

COSMO
(long pause)
I promise I'll stay. Even if this flops. Even if I have to
get a regular job.

Pause.

TERESA
Okay. And Papa? 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.

C: GIANNI/TERESA

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!

D: THE TRUTH

Gianni opens the front door. Cosmo freezes.

TERESA

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.

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.

TERESA

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."

TERESA

So there's nothing?

GIANNI

Nothing. 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!

E: DREAMS

*Laundry day in the Russo household.
Valentina pours a kettle of hot water
into a tub as Teresa waits with a
laundry dolly. Lucia irons a 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

Because drew a picture? 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. And that kind of man, he needs a wife who *believes* in him, 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 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.

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.

LUCIA

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

TERESA

Well, dream but keep ironing.

LUCIA

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

TERESA

Really, Mama?

VALENTINA

Si, 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.

F: FLASHBACK

VALENTINA

(angrily)

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

VALENTINA

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.