

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

Written by

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EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The city is lit up and ready for the holiday season. Rockefeller Center. Ice skating. The Tree. People shopping on 5th Ave. Macy's. Times Square.

EXT. BRYANT PARK CHRISTMAS MARKET - NIGHT

TONY DE LUCA (32) Italian American and MARK (30s) work their way through the people and stalls of the market. They stop at a stall selling clothing.

TONY

I'm telling you, Mark. I've got it all worked out this year. The perfect New York City Christmas. I preloaded the restaurant reviews, I've got my blog posts already written and scheduled, and I even have the perfect arm candy for the Times holiday party.

MARK

You're going to that this year? How'd you score an invite?

TONY

Gloria. I'll telling you, the right agent can work wonders. It's step one to getting me the Time's food critic spot once Reynard finally retires. Gorgeous arm candy and my fabulous and gregarious self. How can they not offer me the gig. I'll finally be the queen of New York City food writing. Right where I belong.

MARK

Uh-huh. And who's the arm candy this time? Ooo, I like this one.

He holds up a pashmina.

TONY

For who? Your mom? She hates mauve.

He holds up a scarf.

TONY (CONT'D)

Austin. The one from Nebraska, not the one from Mississippi.

MARK

The one who's barely monosyllabic?
Jesus, Tony! You really know how to
pick them.

TONY

He's pretty! I have to attend with
someone everyone in the room wants.

MARK

Then take Ryan Reynolds. How about
this for your sister?

Holding up a beautiful emerald scarf.

TONY

If I had his number I would. Oh,
yes, she'd love that.

MARK

You're really gonna take the male
equivalent of a fembot to the Times
holiday party?

TONY

He's more than just pretty.

MARK

Please! He may be built like a
brick shit house, but he's dumb as
a box of hair. You really need to
up your standards.

TONY

What do you mean by that?

MARK

Tony, I've known you the entire 15
years you've lived in this city,
and other than me, for the month
and a half we don't need to review,
it seems your only qualification
for dating is that they look like
an NFL quarterback.

TONY

Your point?

MARK

I think you've got some past trauma
you need to deal with so you can
open yourself up to people of
substance. Trauma related to-

TONY

Ah! I told you about that in a weak moment after 15 vodkas. We're not discussing that.

MARK

Fine. But talk about it with someone. What about this for your brother?

Mark holds up the definition of the ugly Christmas sweater.

TONY

Oh, I don't know. He's the hardest guy to shop for. Mostly because we never talk. Maybe?

Tony's cell phone buzzes.

MARK

Work?

TONY

Sister.

He send it to voicemail.

TONY (CONT'D)

I'll call her back tomorrow. I don't need any guilt tonight about coming home for Christmas.

MARK

You ever gonna let that go? It's been fifteen years.

Tony gives Mark the side eye.

MARK (CONT'D)

Fine. Sorry I brought it up. We need to hurry so we won't be late to meet Lauren.

TONY

Just a few more stalls.

MARK

Ugh! You're hopeless.

INT. ROMAN HARVEST FOYER

Mark and Tony stand in the middle of a crowded big box Italian restaurant waiting area.

It's kitsch decor of plastic vines and lattice work make the low brow touristy nature of the venue instantly apparent. Tony looks around in disgust as if he might catch something while Mark looks across the crowd for their friend.

TONY

Ugh! I don't know why I let you talk me into coming to this horrid place. I can tell the wine is terrible from here. Nothing but pre-assembled kraft food products and tourists from Ohio wearing fanny packs. It shouldn't be legal for them to advertise as Italian food.

MARK

Lauren loves their happy hour! Besides, when have you ever turned down an opportunity to berate a terrible restaurant.

TONY

I prefer not to descend to mingle with the peasants to do it. You are so buying the first round.

MARK

Fine! Look! There she is.

INT. ROMAN HARVEST BAR AREA - CONTINUOUS

LAUREN (29), Italian and no nonsense, sits at a high top for four with a glass of red wine scrolling on her phone. Mark and Tony wend their way through the crowded lobby to her.

LAUREN

Finally! You boys are always on GST! I thought I was gonna have to start fighting off the bridge and tunnel crowd. Those girls keep giving me the stink eye for taking up a whole table myself.

MARK

That I would pay to see!

LAUREN

Why the delay this time?

MARK

Tony insisted on looking at every scarf in Bryant Park.

TONY

My mother has very specific tastes.

MARK

She's a suburban wife in southeastern Virginia. How sophisticated can her tastes be?

TONY

She likes you, so I guess not very.

LAUREN

And Tony get's one point on the board. Got the claws out early tonight don't we?

MARK

He's just annoyed at not finishing his holiday shopping on schedule. Someone is obsessed with having the perfect New York Holiday.

LAUREN

Wouldn't you need a significant other for that?

TONY

Not in my script.

MARK

(waving down a server)

Uh-huh. Keep telling yourself that.

(to the server)

Ketel One martini up with a twist.

SERVER

Gotcha. And for you?

TONY

A gay water for me.

SERVER

I'm sorry?

MARK

Vodka soda. Sorry for him, he's just being difficult.

LAUREN

And an order of Italian nachos for the table.

The server heads off.

TONY

Must you inflict that upon us? It's difficult enough setting foot in this place, but to endure the food-

LAUREN

Fridays are my cheat day, I'm allowed to have carbs! Plus, drunk me thinks they're delicious.

TONY

Well, I'd have to be hammered-

FRANCIS (O.S.)

Well, well, well. Look who's deigned to descend from on high and mingle with the common folk.

FRANCIS (40s) appears at the table. Pretentious and full of himself, he's over dressed for a bar & grill and holding a martini with olives.

TONY

Ah, Francis. I thought I smelled cheap vodka and desperation. Still pining for the days of palm-aide I see?

FRANCIS

It's called style, Tony. Something you seem to be sorely lacking.

TONY

Not all of us aspire to be the coverboy of Closet Case weekly. Speaking of, where is your suspiciously young twink assistant this evening? Did he finally find an actual sugar daddy?

FRANCIS

Jayden is being seated at our table.

TONY

And you said I was slumming here.

FRANCIS

Roman Harvest is rolling out some new premium gourmet entrees tonight and they've requested that I be the first to review them.

TONY

Oh, really? Were there no raccoons available.

FRANCIS

You know, Antonino, you really need to stop snubbing your nose at these restaurants if you want the Times to seriously consider you. These days they expect a broader palette in their food critics.

TONY

I think I'm doing just fine where I am, Francis. Oh, look! Your twink is gesticulating rather wildly from your table. Better hurry before someone with actual money snatches him up.

Francis see Jayden waving at him and walks away in a huff.

MARK

I still don't understand how that guy is your main competition for a spot at the Times.

TONY

I's say there's no accounting for taste, but...

Tony's phone buzzes and he pulls it our to look at it.

TONY (CONT'D)

Now my brother is calling. They're really trying to put on the holiday guilt trip.

MARK

You sure it isn't something else?

TONY

No.

He sends the call to voicemail.

TONY (CONT'D)

They always start bugging me this time of year to come home, and my answer is always the same.

LAUREN

Hey, Tony-
 (pointing up at a TV over
 the bar)
 Isn't that the NFL player from your
 hometown?

On the screen is an ESPN story with B-Roll images of a Dallas Cowboys player on the field during a game.

(SUPER) CHYRON: WHERE ARE THEY NOW? BRENDAN WALSH

Tony looks up at the TV screen and suddenly-

FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A high school aged Tony is in a teenaged boy's bedroom and is furiously making out with another boy wearing a high school football jersey.

FLASH

INT. ROMAN HARVEST BAR AREA - NIGHT

TONY

Umm, yeah. I- didn't really know
 him.

Tony's phone buzzes again.

LAUREN

Wow, they're really insistent.

TONY

No. This one is my agent. Wants to
 meet for coffee tomorrow about a
 new review on Monday night. Hmm.

MARK

That's good, right?

TONY

Well, she normally just emails me
 the info and makes sure I'm
 available. It's weird she wants to
 talk first.

LAUREN

Maybe it's a huge thing!

TONY

Maybe.

His phone buzzes in his hand and the screen says "Mom."

TONY (CONT'D)

Guys, I gotta take this. I'll be right back.

LAUREN

You better, you're not making me eat those nachos alone!

MARK

Hey!

EXT. SIDEWALK OUTSIDE ROMAN HARVEST - NIGHT

Tony takes a few steps away from the door and resumes his phone conversation with ANNETTE DE LUCA (56).

TONY

Hey, Mom. Look, Gabby and Matteo have already called to try and talk me into coming home this year and you know my answer is gonna be the same, until Dad-

ANNETTE (V.O.)

(very upset)

TONY! Please, stop! I...I have to tell you something.

TONY

Mom? What's wrong?

ANNETTE (V.O.)

Nino...I...your father...

TONY

Mom, what's going on?

ANNETTE (V.O.)

Your father...is gone.

TONY

Gone? What do you mean gone? He left you?

ANNETTE (V.O.)
No, Nino. He was at the
restaurant...and he
collapsed...they got him to the
hospital...but it was too
late...baby, he's gone. Your
father's gone.

TONY
(shock)
I...Mom...I don't...

ANNETTE (V.O.)
Please come home, Nino. I need you
here.

TONY
Mom, I don't know if I can-

ANNETTE (V.O.)
Please, honey. I need you here.

TONY
I've got reviews scheduled, and the
Times is interested.

ANNETTE (V.O.)
Please, Nino. I know you were angry
with him, but... I need all my
children with me so I can say
goodbye.

TONY
(beat)
I'll...I'll see what I can do.

ANNETTE (V.O.)
You know that I love you...all of
who you are.

TONY
I know, Mom. I promise I'll try.

ANNETTE (V.O.)
Thank you, Nino.

TONY
Are you ok? Is there anything you
need?

ANNETTE (V.O.)
I just need you home.

TONY
Ok, Mom. I love you.

ANNETTE (V.O.)
I love you with all my heart,
Antonino.

Tony hangs up the phone and stares at the sky before going back into the restaurant.

INT. ROMAN HARVEST BAR AREA - NIGHT

Tony approaches the table in a slight daze.

LAUREN
You're back! Would you remind this human slot machine that while he may put out for any man who spends money on him, my standards are just a bit higher.

TONY
I'm not sure that's true.

LAUREN
Rude.

TONY
I'm sorry, guys, I just...I need to head home.

MARK
Are you ok?

TONY
I'm fine, just need to go clear my head, the whole Francis thing, you know.

LAUREN
Is your Mom ok?

TONY
She's...

MARK
Tony?

TONY
She's fine. I just need to go. I'll...give you money for the drink.

MARK

I got it. Remember? First round?

TONY

Right...I'll text you guys later.

Tony grabs his coat and hurries from the restaurant as Lauren and Mark look after him worried.

INT. LOCAL NYC COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Tony is sitting down at a table with his iced coffee next to GLORIA (30s) his agent, a striking Latina dressed to the 9s.

GLORIA

Tony my love. How are you? How is everything? I loved your latest piece on that new Japanese/Hispanic fusion restaurant on the Upper East Side. Got a lot of people talking.

TONY

Pretension served on a plate. Difficult, but somehow they managed. Why are we meeting, Gloria? Usually it's just an email and a calendar request. We haven't needed to meet before a review in years.

GLORIA

Well, Tony. This one could be big. I told you people were talking, and the Times expressed an interest.

TONY

Really?

GLORIA

Yes! Really. It's a new place in Hell's Kitchen. Very cutting edge. Whole new concept on the cuisine. The Times wants to read your take on it. A sort of try out.

TONY

A try out? They've read my stuff, they know what you get with me.

GLORIA

True, but lately you've been...missing something.

TONY

Missing something? Like what?

GLORIA

Well, they like what you do, but they think there's...heart missing from it.

TONY

That's rich! They want more heart from a food critic?!

GLORIA

We've talked about this. Your voice has gotten to be rote, performative, when you used to be vibrant and alive. This is your chance to find that again, really dazzle them with what you can do.

TONY

Fine, I'll sprinkle glitter on it.

GLORIA

Tony! Be serious.

TONY

Ok, ok. I'll see what I can do. What kind of place are we talking?

GLORIA

Well...

She takes a sip of her coffee.

TONY

Gloria. What's the cuisine?

GLORIA

It's- an Italian place. But its a whole new take!

Tony glares at her. Silence stretches.

TONY

No.

GLORIA

Tony, hear me out.

TONY

I said, NO! I don't review Italian restaurants. I told you that.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

Is this why you wanted to meet in public rather than at your office?

GLORIA

Yes! I hoped you wouldn't make a scene and I could explain-

TONY

WHY THE HELL DID YOU THINK I WOULDN'T MAKE A SCENE!!!

The coffee shop comes to a stop around them.

GLORIA

(overly compensating)

Don't mind us, everyone! Just practicing lines for an audition. Tony that's great but let's look at a different choice.

She leans in.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

You need to suck it up buttercup if you want a shot at the Times position.

TONY

Get them to agree to another restaurant.

GLORIA

You think I would have brought this to you if there was another option? It's this or nothing.

Tony stares off into the distance then deflates.

TONY

Fine. I'll do it.

GLORIA

Damn right you will. I'll set it up and email you the details.

TONY

Sorry I yelled at you.

GLORIA

Please. You should see my family at Christmas.

She stands to go.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

But, Tony. Whatever your reasons,
you're gonna need to get over them
if you really want to work at the
Times.

She pats him on the shoulder and saunters out of the shop.

INT. UPSCALE MODERN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Tony and Mark sit at a table in the middle of the dining room. The space is all white, glass, and stainless steel. Frosted white glass on the modern lamps and crisp white uniforms on the waiters and the staff in the open kitchen.

MARK

It's a bold move. All the white in
an Italian place. Their cleaning
budget must be immense.

TONY

It looks like Restoration Hardware
threw up in here.

MARK

Oh, be nice. This ultra modern and
clean look is all the rage now.

TONY

If you say so.

MARK

Remind me. Who was it that insisted
on stainless steel appliances when
looking for a new apartment?

Tony rolls his eyes and holds up the full wine glass the
SERVER (25) has just finished pouring them.

TONY

Here's to the wine at least being
good.

MARK

Ever the optimist.

TONY

Hey, they at least earned points
for not bringing complimentary
bread to the table.

MARK

Oh, I'm sure in a place like this
the bread isn't free.

Tony grunts in agreement as the server steps in to place
plates down.

SERVER

And here we are. The first course,
the house manicotti with ricotta
and goat cheese foam, tomato and
basil compote, and our in house
zucchini pasta spiral.

The plate features a small glass dome filled with a swirls of
smoke over three small mounds; the white cheese foam, air
bubbles popping sprinkled with bright green chopped herbs, an
artfully streaked red score of the compote, and a single
fried spiraled zucchini strip.

SERVER (CONT'D)

We recommend lifting the dome to
experience the toasted Parmesan
smoke aroma first.

Mark eagerly lifts his dome, grabs a fork, and begins to dig
in, but stops as he sees Tony just staring at his plate.

MARK

Tony? You ok?

SERVER

Is something wrong sir?

TONY

Wrong? Are you serious?

SERVER

Yes...yes sir.

TONY

You dare to serve me this? Call it
manicotti and ask me if something
is wrong?

SERVER

It's our take on it. A
deconstructed take on a classic.

MARK

Just try it, Tony. It's delicious.

TONY

Deconstructed!? The whole point of a manicotti is that it is a STUFFED pasta dish. STUFFED!!! It's not that complicated! I comes out of the oven bubbling with melted cheese and delicious browned crusty bits on the edges, but this? This is an atrocity!

SERVER

Sir, if you'll just calm down-

TONY

Calm down? How can I be calm in the face of an effrontery to everything it is to be Italian.

Tony fairly leaps out of his chair.

TONY (CONT'D)

I'm surprised all of Little Italy isn't protesting out front of your sham of an establishment. Old Italian grandmas with signs shouting VIVA ITALIA like they did at Mussolini!

MARK

Tony-

TONY

Well, I for one will not remain one more moment in a place that is an insult to my very heritage. Shame on all of you for this disgrace!

He clears his throat and spits dramatically on the plate before grabbing his coat and storming out in a huff. Mark hastily follows.

MARK

I'm so sorry about all of this...you know Italians, so...passionate about food...

EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT

Tony is yanking his coat on as he stomps down the sidewalk, people jumping out of his way. Mark hurries up behind him.

MARK

Tony! Tony stop.

TONY
I don't want to talk about it.

MARK
Well, too bad!

Mark grabs his arm and yanks him around to face him.

MARK (CONT'D)
What is going on with you? You've been moody and cranky since Friday night. That scene was totally out of character. I know something is wrong and we're not going anywhere until you tell me what it is!

Tony looks around as if searching for an escape, but then-

TONY
My father is dead, Mark.

MARK
What?

TONY
My father is dead. That's why everyone was calling on Friday. He dropped dead of a heart attack at the restaurant.

MARK
Oh, my god! Why didn't you say something? And why would you agree to review an Italian restaurant of all places?

TONY
I thought I could just move past it. I haven't seen the man in fifteen years. Why should his death hit me so hard? But the anger- it just came right back, as fresh as the day he told me to leave.

MARK
I'm so sorry.

TONY
My mother wants me to go back for the funeral, but I don't know if I can. How do I mourn the man who hated me so much he cut me out of his life?

MARK

I don't know. But you don't have to decide right now. You need to blow off some steam.

TONY

Meaning?

MARK

You're too wound up to make a rational decision right now. I am taking you on a good old fashioned gay bar crawl. We are in Hell's Kitchen after all.

TONY

I don't know...

MARK

Come on! When was the last time you did that? Take a night off from everything, get wasted, maybe get lucky? And tomorrow you can face the world and decide what to do.

TONY

With a hangover?

MARK

What better way to avoid making a bad decision? You can make them all tonight!

MONTAGE OF GAY CLUBBING

- Mark and Tony entering a gay bar
- Mark and Tony doing shots
- Mark and Tony singing karaoke
- Mark and Tony doing more shots
- Mark and Tony on a crowded dance floor, Tony makes eye contact with a hot guy
- Mark and Tony dancing, Tony making out with the hot guy he made eye contact with

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The sun shines through the window of Tony's modern NYC apartment. Tasteful art on the walls, a well stocked bookshelf and matching walnut furniture. Tony is in the bed asleep next to the naked HOT GUY (20s) from the dance floor.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Pounding from front door. Tony stirs.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Tony groans, he opens his eyes and looks over at the hot guy.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

TONY

Alright! Alright! I'm coming.

He struggles to a sitting position as the pounding continues. The hot guy doesn't move.

TONY (CONT'D)

No I remember why I don't do this anymore. I'm coming!

He struggles into some shorts and a t-shirt and staggers out of the bedroom.

INT. TONY'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tony stumbles through the apartment tripping over clothes clearly left as they were ripped off on the way to the bedroom. Pounding is unceasing.

TONY

OK! ALRIGHT!!! Jesus!

He opens the door to an absolutely furious Gloria.

GLORIA

What the ACTUAL fuck, Tony.

She pushes past him into the apartment.

TONY

Good morning to you too, Gloria.

GLORIA

Is that all you have to say to me after your spectacular self-immolation last night?

TONY

Huh? What are you talking about?

GLORIA

What am I talking about?! THIS!!!

She pulls her gold sparkly phone out of her Gucci purse and starts a video, shoving her phone in Tony's face.

On the phone-

TONY

Calm down? How can I be calm in the face of an effrontery to everything it is to be Italian. I'm surprised all of Little Italy isn't protesting out front of your sham of an establishment. Old Italian grandmas with signs shouting VIVA ITALIA like they did at Mussolini!

Gloria stops the video and stares at Tony.

TONY (CONT'D)

Oh...that...

GLORIA

Yes, genius, that! What the fuck happened? People are talking about your obvious mental break down.

TONY

It's not really that bad.

GLORIA

Not that bad?! Do you have any idea what I went through to get you this opportunity? The favors I had to call in? This was our next big step. We've been working on this for years! How could you- What is this?

Gloria pics up a pair of skimpy Andrew Christian underwear.

TONY

Oh, I uh...

HOT GUY (O.S.)

Hey, have you seen my-

Hot guy walks in to the room completely naked, oblivious to the confrontation going on.

HOT GUY (CONT'D)

Oh, there they are. Hi there.

He takes his underwear from a speechless Gloria and bends over to pick up the rest of his clothes, giving a clear view of his spectacular ass before walking back into the bedroom. Tony stares after him.

GLORIA

Hello! Back to me! And the flames currently incinerating your career!

TONY

I'm sorry, Gloria. I've got some...family issues going on at the moment. I was just-overwhelmed.

GLORIA

Not so overwhelmed you couldn't go out get plastered and find yourself a piece of ass.

As if summoned Hot Guy emerges from the bedroom clothed.

HOT GUY

Nice to meet you, Ted. Thanks for the good time last night.

He kisses Tony as he walks past.

HOT GUY (CONT'D)

I'll call you.

Then he's out the door and gone.

TONY

(to the closed door)

It's Tony.

(to Gloria)

He doesn't have my number.

GLORIA

Unbelievable. This wasn't just about you, my reputation is on the line here too and you've left me holding the bag.

TONY

Look, I know I screwed up. I'm sorry. You're a genius, can't you fix this?

GLORIA

This is more than a screw up. I like you, Tony, but I have limits. I should drop you right now.

Tony is shocked into seriousness.

TONY

Please, Gloria. I am so sorry. I'll do whatever I need to. Whatever you tell me.

GLORIA

Fine. I'll see what I can do. But you gotta lay low for a while. Get out of town, really clear your head. And bring me something truly exceptional if you want to fix this. Something that's quintessentially your voice.

TONY

I can do that.

GLORIA

You better. Now go drink some Pedialite and shower off that boy. You smell like a Drakkar Noir knock off.

Gloria makes her exit and Tony exhales.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tony walks over to the bed and plops down on it, picking up his phone. He looks at it to find a text from Mark.

SUPER: Hey, bitch! Just checking in on you. Decided about home yet?

Tony looks up at a framed picture on his dresser of his family. After a moment, he calls someone.

TONY

Hey, Mom. I worked it out. I'm coming home.

EXT. TONY'S PARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT

Tony gets out of a cab in from of his childhood home. It's a modest two story house on the corner of a typical suburban neighborhood in southeastern Virginia.

As he pulls his wheeled suitcase up the walkway to the front porch, his mother opens the front door to greet him. She has tears in her eyes as he climbs the steps and wraps her up in a bear hug.

TONY

Hi, Mom.

ANNETTE

My baby! I'm so glad you're home.

TONY

How are you holding up?

ANNETTE

I'm managing about as well as I can. Now come on inside, you'll catch your death out here.

TONY

I live in New York, Mom. This weather is practically balmy. You don't even have snow.

She cups his face with her hand and smiles, a tear leaks out.

TONY (CONT'D)

Mom?

ANNETTE

Nothing. Its just, you look so much like your father.

They stand there for a moment.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

Anyway, come on in. Come on in.

Tony follows her in to the house.

INT. FOYER OF THE DE LUCA HOME - NIGHT

Tony rolls his bags in and shuts the door in the comfortably sized entryway.

ANNETTE

You want anything to drink? Are you hungry? The ladies from the church loaded me up with enough casseroles for any army.

TONY

No, I'm ok. Just want to head to bed. It's been a long day and tomorrow...

ANNETTE

I know, sweetie. Go on up. Your room is ready, just the way you left it.

Tony heads up the stairs, past pictures of himself and his siblings that document the course of their lives. He notices his 8x10 is still his high school graduation picture.

He opens the door to his room and it's like stepping back in time. The walls are covered with posters and memorabilia from the early 2000s. Kelly Clarkson, Britney Spears, Beyonce, and Justin Timberlake stare down from their lofty pedestals.

Tony takes off his coat and tosses it on the full sized bed before walking over to the desk and picking up a small trophy. It's engraved with his name and "Most Likely to Make It Big."

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

Your father insisted we leave the room exactly as it was.

TONY

He never was good with change.

ANNETTE

That wasn't the reason.

TONY

I really don't want to talk about it, Mom. I'm just tired.

ANNETTE

I know, honey. I'll leave you be. I'm just glad you're here. There's doughnuts in the kitchen for breakfast and your brother, sister and their crew will be here at 10 so we can all go over to the funeral home together.

TONY

Ok, Mom. I'll see you in the morning.

ANNETTE

Goodnight, sweetie.

TONY
Goodnight, Mom.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tony puts on the jacket of his black suit and straightens up his tie as he looks in the full length mirror in his room. He takes a deep breath before heading out of the room.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY LIVING ROOM - DAY

GABBY DE LUCA FORREST (29), her husband DAVE (30) and their fraternal twins KIMBERLY (6) and JONATHAN (6) are sitting in the family room with MATTEO DE LUCA (26), his pregnant wife CASSIE (27), and Annette. The twins leap off the couch and rush to Tony as he hits the bottom of the stairs.

THE TWINS
UNCLE TONY!!!

Tony kneels down to give hugs to both of them and nearly ends up on the floor.

TONY
Wow, you guys! You're so big!

GABBY
Come on you two. Let your Uncle
breathe.

She shoos them away helps Tony up into a hug.

TONY
Hey there, little sis.

GABBY
Hey there, big brother.

TONY
Y'all hanging in here.

GABBY
Well as can be expected. The twins
don't really understand, much as we
try to explain.

TONY
I wasn't expecting such a
passionate welcome.

DAVE

Well, it's only been 8 months since we saw you in New York, it's practically all they've talked about since we got back.

TONY

So good to see you, Dave.

They shake hands.

MATTEO

How was the trip down? Not to low class for you, I hope.

Matteo is clearly not thrilled with his brother.

TONY

Not at all. The train really is the best way to travel.

MATTEO

You remember Cassie?

TONY

Of course!

He hugs her warmly.

TONY (CONT'D)

You're looking radiant. So sorry I couldn't stay for the reception. I had to get back to New York for a deadline.

CASSIE

Thank you, Tony. The second trimester hasn't been so bad so far.

MATTEO

Always something more important than family.

CASSIE

Oh, hush, Matteo. Like you've never let work interfere in your family life.

Matteo clams up. Cassie clearly wears the pants.

ANNETTE

Well, now that we've all said our hellos, we don't want to be late to the service. Your father hated being late.

THE THREE SIBLINGS

Yes, Ma'am.

Annette smiles as the three siblings share bemused looks. Gabby wrangles the twins and the family heads out the door.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME - DAY

The funeral is over and the family is receiving guests at the family home. It's fairly stuffed with people there to pay their respects.

The dining room table is laden with hors d'oeuvres and there's a table in the kitchen with red and white Italian wine and various non-alcoholic options.

Annette De Luca is receiving people in the living room seated in a plush high backed chair with Tony at her side as people wait to give their respects. She looks for all the world like she's holding court.

ANNETTE

Thank you so much, Doris. It means the world that you cam today.

The lady she's talking to nods and moves off.

TONY

Who was that again?

ANNETTE

Doris Insley. You remember her. She taught your third grade Sunday School class.

TONY

Mom, I was 8.

Annette smiles at him, shaking her head in bemusement.

ANNETTE

There's no need to hover. I'm fine.

TONY

I just need to make sure I'm here if you need anything.

ANNETTE

I'm fine, Nino.

TONY

I hate it when you call me that.

ANNETTE

If you really want to be helpful,
go get me a glass of Chianti.

TONY

Sure thing, Mom. I'll be right
back.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY KITCHEN - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Tony makes his way to the kitchen table, pulling up short when he sees his brother standing there. He takes a breath, grabs a bottle of wine and begins to fill two glasses.

MATTEO

Double fisting at Dad's funeral?

TONY

One is for Mom. Chill out.

MATTEO

Well at least you're finally doing
something for her. Only took
fifteen years of turning your back
on your family.

TONY

Can we not do this now?

Tony turns to leave.

MATTEO

Typical. Running from family.

TONY

You have NO idea what you're
talking about.

Gabby appears and steps between the two brothers.

GABBY

Enough you two! Mom has enough to
deal with, without you two brawling
like toddlers in a sandbox.

MATTEO

Well, he-

GABBY

Shut it, Matteo! I'm already
wrangling two six years olds. Don't
make me treat you like the third.

Matteo snaps his mouth shut and glares as Tony.

GABBY (CONT'D)

That's more like it. Go to the
garage and get more wine from the
wine fridge, we're running low.

Matteo grunts an acknowledgement and huffs from the room,

GABBY (CONT'D)

(to Tony)

You really should tell him the
whole story.

TONY

I tried. He wouldn't hear it. He
idolizes dad. He's never forgiven
me for leaving.

GABBY

Not like dad gave you a choice.

TONY

That's not how he sees it.

Changing the subject.

TONY (CONT'D)

Why didn't mom have this at the
restaurant? There'd be more room,
and more wine.

GABBY

She said she wanted the restaurant
staff to be able to pay their
respects and take the day off, but
mostly I think it's because she
can't bare to go there yet.

TONY

Was she there?

GABBY

No, thank god. She retired from
running the front of house a while
ago. She can't stay on her feet
long anymore, not since the car
accident.

TONY
I thought she'd recovered.

GABBY
Breaking both your ankles isn't
something you ever fully recover
from, Tony.

Gabby leaves the kitchen shaking her head. Tony, looking a bit ashamed heads back to the living room with the wine.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY LIVING ROOM - DAY, CONTINUOUS

As he winds his way back into the room, he sees RACHEL WALSH (58) a striking blonde headed woman speaking with his mother. They seem as thick as thieves.

ANNETTE
The flowers are lovely, Rachel.
From the farm?

RACHEL
Yes! I was skeptical about the
greenhouse, but Brendan insisted
and it's been amazing how well it's
done.

Tony hands Annette a glass of wine.

TONY
Here you go, mom.

ANNETTE
Thank you sweetie, you remember
Rachel Walsh, Brendan's mother.

TONY
Of course. So nice to see you, Mrs.
Walsh.

RACHEL
It's Rachel, please. You just
missed Brendan. He would have loved
to see you. He had to head back to
the farm.

TONY
Oh- I didn't realize he was back in
town.

FLASHBACK

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LOCKER ROOM - DAY

A teenage Brendan pulls a teenage Tony around a bank of lockers, pushing him into the corner and a hot make-out session.

FLASH

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY LIVING ROOM - DAY, CONTINUOUS

ANNETTE

Nino! I told you he came back to run the farm seven years ago.

TONY

Must have slipped my mind.

Annette gives Tony a hard look as he sips his wine.

RACHEL

Look who's here. I didn't expect him to come to the reception.

ANNETTE

Oh, lord...

RACHEL

Pardon me, Annette, my constitution can't handle him today.

She hugs and kisses Annette on the cheek and slips off.

TONY

Who?

ANNETTE

Marcus Graves. He's our newest town council person. Former venture capitalist, voted in a couple years ago by the move-ins.

TONY

Aren't you and dad still technically considered move-ins?

ANNETTE

After more than 30 years? Not by anyone who matters.

MARCUS GRAVES (45) approaches. He's immaculately dressed in a designer suit, meticulously groomed, and very attractive. His movie star smile sparkles but all together he still gives of a slight air of a televangelist politician.

MARCUS

Annette, so sorry for your loss.

ANNETTE

Thank you, Marcus. So nice of you to come.

MARCUS

Of course! Your husband and I may have disagreed on what direction to take the town, but he was a respected leader of Bull Island. I had to pay my respects.

ANNETTE

Will respect will translate to a reconsideration of the development plans you've been pushing?

MARCUS

You can trust I'll pursue what I believe is best for the town, as I always have.

ANNETTE

Best for the town, or best for you?

MARCUS

You wound me, Annette.

TONY

If she wanted you wounded there'd be blood on the floor.

ANNETTE

Marcus, my eldest son, Tony.

MARCUS

Ah, the prodigal son returns. And standing up for his mother no less.

TONY

My mother needs no help from me standing up to the likes of you.

Marcus blinks and takes a step back.

MARCUS

My apologies. No disrespect intended. Your father and I had a contentious relationship over our ideas regarding city planning. I'm afraid I may inadvertently have carried that over.

TONY

Not wise if you wish to keep your limbs attached. I think you'll find her patience for bullshit rather nonexistent. Especially today.

ANNETTE

Tony, dear, I can speak for myself.

TONY

Of course you can, Mom. I was just giving Marcus here a fair warning before he tried punching above his weight class.

A silence stretches between them.

MARCUS

Well, clearly I have not presented myself well here today, so I'll take my leave. Again, my deepest sympathies, Annette.

Annette nods as Marcus retreats back through the house.

TONY

Ugh, its like a sleazy New York finance bro and a used car salesman had a kid. Gross.

ANNETTE

Be nice, Nino.

TONY

That was me being nice.

ANNETTE

Well, put on a smile for me. Here comes Alice Holloway.

TONY

Who?

ANNETTE

You went to high school with her son, Bradley. He married Jan Forrest, the niece of the church choir director then you were 15.

TONY

I swear, mom. How do you keep it all straight?

ANNETTE

Alice! Thank you so much for coming. How's your son, Bradley?

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The guests have departed and the family is gathered all together. Annette remains seated on her throne of a chair.

The adults are all focused on a man standing in a dark grey suit on one side of the room holding papers. RICHARD ORDWAY (50) a genteel southern lawyer, is the family attorney.

RICHARD

The remaining liquid assets after the funeral expenses go to Annette. She'll also receive the military benefits due the surviving spouse of a retired military member.

Nods all around. So far the will is unsurprising.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Matteo, your father has left you his 1964 Camaro. He knew you'd be the one to most appreciate it.

MATTEO

He loved that car. I remember how many weekends we worked on it together.

RICHARD

Gabby, your father left you his extensive LP collection as some of his favorite memories were playing them with you on his knee.

GABBY

I didn't know he remembered that.

ANNETTE

He always wanted you to have them.

DAVE

I guess we'll be getting a record player. Anyone know where to buy one of those now?

The family shares a moment of gentle laughter.

RICHARD

And finally to his oldest son,
Antonino.

Tony looks up surprised. He wasn't expecting anything.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

He asked me to read this part out
to you. "My son. I leave you the
one thing I loved almost as much as
I did you. My restaurant. May it
bring your life as much joy as it
did mine. I love you, Tony."

There's a shocked silence in the room. Tony is floored.

MATTEO

That can't be right. There's no
way. The restaurant goes to mom!
(to Tony)
Did you know about this?! Is this
why you came home? To take
something else away from us?

TONY

What? No! I had no idea. Why would
I want the restaurant? I have a
life and a career in New York?
There has to be some mistake.

RICHARD

There's no mistake. Joe made his
intentions quite clear.

GABBY

Mom? Did you know about this?

ANNETTE

Of course I knew. We talked about
it. It's what he wanted.

MATTEO

You KNEW?!

Matteo storms out, Cassie following close behind.

ANNETTE

Matteo! Baby!

GABBY

I'll try talking to him. Lord knows
what I'll say. Dave, honey, take
the twins. Some warning would have
been nice, Mom.

She heads after him, Dave following along behind with the twins. Tony sits in continued shock.

TONY

I just, I don't understand. Why would he do this? What am I going to do with a restaurant?

ANNETTE

It's what he wanted, Nino.

TONY

He really left it to me?

RICHARD

He did.

TONY

What does that mean?

RICHARD

Well, we need to file the transfer of ownership with the city and the Commonwealth. You'll need a full accounting of assets and debt as well as projected revenue. After that, the choice is keep it and run it or sell it.

Tony sits in shocked silence.

ANNETTE

Thank you for everything, Richard. You've been so helpful.

RICHARD

Of course. Call me at my office if you have any questions. Tony, I'll be in touch about the paperwork.

Richard leaves and Annette and Tony are alone.

ANNETTE

Are you ok?

TONY

How the hell could I be? My father, who hasn't called or spoken to me in 15 years leaves me his most prized possession and finally says I Love You in his WILL!!!

ANNETTE

He did, honey.

TONY

Oh, really? SO much so he forgot how phones worked for a decade and a half. 10 digits and an "I'm sorry." Is all it would have taken. And now...NOW!!!! I'm stuck in bumfuck Virginia with a restaurant I don't want during what was supposed to be my best New York Christmas EVER!!! Goddammit, Mom, why didn't you tell me?!

Annette sits back in shock at the anger from her son. Tears begin to well up in her eyes.

TONY (CONT'D)

I'm...I'm sorry. I just...I need some air...

Tony hurries from the room leaving Annette in tears.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT BAR AREA - DAY

Tony sits on a bar stool at one end of the bar of his father's restaurant. The stores books and various papers open in front of him. It's mid afternoon so the restaurant quiet.

JOSH TURNER (31) stands next to him as they go over the books. He's been the General Manager since Annette stepped down. Tony has known him since high school.

TONY

If I'm reading this right, we're pretty much in the red.

JOSH

At the moment, but I wouldn't worry too much. It always slumps a little bit before December, but we pick up during the holiday season.

TONY

We'd have to pick up a lot to cover all this. And this bank loan?

JOSH

I don't know to be honest. I was just managing the day to day expenses. He handled all the long term stuff.

TONY

It's a lot of debt. He didn't mention anything?

JOSH

No. I gave him the delivery invoices and he took care of it. I was only dealing with front of house payments and payroll.

TONY

The staff gets above tipped wage?

JOSH

Your father hated the tipped wage. Said if he couldn't afford to pay his people a living wage he didn't deserve a business. It payed off to. We've got the best staff in three counties for a reason.

He goes back to studying the books. There's a ruckus at the door as three old men enter. Leathery skin from the salt air of the Chesapeake Bay mark them as retired town watermen.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Uh-oh. The Crabber Crew is here.

TONY

Crabber crew?

JOSH

Part of the retired watermen contingent. Made their living crabbing for the Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab. It's what we use for our crab cakes. They come in practically every afternoon.

(he leans in)

Honestly some days we only end in the black because of them.

Josh makes his way behind the bar as the three men take up the far corner and greets them.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Gentlemen. Escape the wives again?

BART HOLLOWAY (68) a round bear of a man with a long white beard lets out a belly laugh.

BART

Escaped? More like she got tired of me underfoot and asked me if I didn't have somewhere to be.

ANDY FINCH (70) a beanpole of a man with a handlebar mustache claps him on the back.

ANDY

More like she wanted you gone for her afternoon gossip session with her ladies group. Hope you stocked up on wine at the BJs.

BART

Is that why you showed up at my house. I had no idea!

They share a loud laugh. BUBBA MOORE (72) a short gruff man in a worn baseball hat grouses into the conversation.

BUBBA

Better that than spending all my money on the Shopping Network. She's already got a kitchen full of gadgets she never uses.

ANDY

Better for you, Bubba. I've had her cooking.

Another round of laughter.

JOSH

The usual gentleman?

ANDY

Better start him with the whiskey-
(indicating Bubba)
-he's in a mood today. Not that
that ain't always the case.

Josh finishes pouring them their shots of whiskey.

BUBBA

Up yours, Finch.

He shoots the whiskey.

ANDY

More like down my hatch, Bubba.

He shoots the shot then turns to Bart.

ANDY (CONT'D)

He always get's that one wrong.

Bubba huffs at them as he takes a swig from the pint of beer Josh has put down in front of him. He serves the other two the same. Bart takes note of Tony.

BART

Taking account of your father's empire there, Tony?

TONY

As much as I can. I know food, the business side never interested me. How'd you know I was his son?

ANDY

You look just like him thirty years ago. Your father was a good man, and a good friend. Town wouldn't be what it is without him. We're poorer for his loss.

TONY

Thank you.

BUBBA

He sure did insist on changes around here. Never did understand why.

ANDY

And what is that supposed to mean?

BUBBA

It was just a lot is all I'm saying.

BART

That probably the most ignorant thing I've heard you say, Bubba and that's saying something.

Bubba snorts and takes a swig of his beer.

BART (CONT'D)

Like your beautiful grandson and that wonderful son-in-law of yours would feel comfortable living here if this was still the sundown town it was when we were growing up here?

BUBBA

I was just-

ANDY

Talking out of your ass, as usual.
Don't mind him, Tony, sometimes the
mouth engages before the brain with
that one.

TONY

Um...sure no problem.

Bubba pulls his hat down in shame and hides behind his beer.

BART

You gonna be cooking the Christmas
Eve Dinner with you father being
gone?

TONY

The what?

BART

The Christmas Eve Dinner? It's
always the biggest bidding war at
the town holiday auction.

ANDY

Oh, it's a big deal. Everybody
wanted to sit at Joe's table on
Christmas Eve, he always makes that
one dish...um...sardy duh reecy
something?

TONY

Sartù di Riso?

ANDY

Yeah, that's it!

TONY

My father cooked Sartù di Riso on
Christmas Eve?

JOSH

Every year. It was one of the seven
courses he made for whomever won
the auction bidding. It always
raised the most money. This year's
charity was going to be a homeless
youth shelter in Norfolk.

TONY

I didn't know that.

JOSH

Yeah. We can make everything else,
but that was a recipe he kept to
himself. And without it...

TONY

Oh...well...

(to the watermen)

I'm sorry, I guess the dinner won't
be happening this year.

BART

I'm sorry to hear that, son.

A server comes over and speaks to Josh as Tony is mulling
this new information.

JOSH

I hate to ask you this, Tony, but
the kitchen is running low on some
of our fresh ingredients. You mind
running out to the Walsh farm and
getting them? We're a bit short
staffed today or I'd do it myself.

TONY

Yeah, yeah. Sure thing.

JOSH

Great, let me get you the keys to
the van.

Josh heads to the back leaving Tony in thought.

EXT. MAIN HOUSE ON THE WALSH FARM - DAY

Tony pulls up to next to the main house on the Walsh family
farm. It's a lovely two story white home with a wrap around
front porch straight off the cover of Southern Living.

Tony climbs out of the white van with the De Luca's logo on
the side and stops a passing farmhand.

TONY

Excuse me. I'm here for a pickup
for De Luca's.

FARMHAND

Oh, Mr. Walsh said he'd help with
that. He's out in the barn out
back. I can show you.

TONY
Thanks, I know the way.

Tony heads to the red wooden barn behind the house. As he catches sight of the barn-

FLASHBACK

INT. WALSH BARN LOFT - NIGHT

Teenage Tony and Brendan lay in each others arms on a blanket covered haystack.

FLASH

EXT. WALSH FAMILY FARM - DAY

Tony shakes his head and heads into the barn.

INT. WALSH BARN - CONTINUOUS

Tony steps through the door and closes it behind him. He heads into the building around equipment and supplies.

TONY
Mr. Walsh? It's Tony De Luca.

He hears noise coming from the back of the barn and heads towards it. As he rounds a stack of feed, he comes to a complete stop.

There in front of him, is BRENDAN WALSH (32). He's SHIRTLESS wearing boots, tight fitting jeans highlighting his beautiful ass, and is tossing bales of hay into the back of a truck.

Tony drinks in the sight of his exceptionally sculpted pro-football torso as his muscles ripple with the work. He seems to glow in the light reflecting off the sheen of sweat he's worked up. Music faintly plays from the EarPods he's wearing.

He stops runs his hands through his mid-length sandy blonde hair. Not paying attention, Tony steps forward onto a rake. It snaps up and bangs him on the side of the head.

TONY (CONT'D)
OW! SON OF A BITCH!

Brendan turns at the sound and finally catches sight of Tony rubbing the side of his head. He breaks into a wide grin and pulls out the EarPods.

BRENDAN

Oh, my god! Tony De Luca!

He fairly bounds across the distance between them and wraps Tony in a hug with his huge arms.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

It is so good to see you!

FLASHBACK

INT. BRENDAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Teenaged Brendan and Tony passionately making love on Brendan's bed.

FLASH

INT. WALSH BARN - DAY

Brendan breaks the hug in a bit of embarrassment.

BRENDAN

Are you ok? Oh, I'm sorry, I'm a little sweaty.

Tony is released from the spell.

TONY

Yeah....I'm fine... That's...uh... I thought your father...I mean... your farmhand said Mr. Walsh...

BRENDAN

I thought you knew. My father passed 8 years ago. It's one of the reasons I left the NFL and came home to run the farm.

TONY

I'm so sorry, I-

BRENDAN

Don't worry about it. You've been in NYC for a while. I'm sure not everything got to you.

TONY

Still, I should have-

BRENDAN

It's fine. I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to say hi to you at your father's funeral. I had to get back here to supervise a huge shipment.

TONY

Totally understandable.

BRENDAN

You sure you're head's ok?

He grabs the plaid shirt draped over the side of the truck and begins putting it on.

TONY

My head's fine. I'm sure you remember how hard headed I am.

BRENDAN

I remember something about that.

TONY

(beat)

So, I hear the farm has been doing well.

BRENDAN

Very well. We're the biggest organic farm business in this part of the commonwealth. Dad would have been proud.

TONY

I'm glad to hear that.

BRENDAN

So...what brings you out here?

TONY

Oh! Ah, the restaurant-

BRENDAN

Right, I got a couple boxes all set up for you on the porch.

TONY

Well...I Guess we should...

BRENDAN

Yeah...I guess-

Brendan looks like he wants to say something but then heads towards the door of the barn and Tony follows.

EXT. WALSH FAMILY FARM - CONTINUOUS

Brendan and Tony are walking towards the front of the house in an awkward silence. They both alternate between trying to speak but then not. Finally, Brendan breaks the silence.

BRENDAN

So, you excited to see the big holiday parade again? It's certainly been a while.

TONY

That's this weekend? I'd forgotten the town did that.

BRENDAN

Yeah, it's become a pretty big deal, well, bigger deal. There's a festival in the town square after and everything.

He grabs a box off the porch and Tony grabs the other one and they head to the van.

TONY

Has it really? Wow. I'm guessing the family plans to go, so I'll be there.

They load the crates into the van and Tony shuts the door.

BRENDAN

It's nothing like a New York City parade, but it's impressive for this town.

TONY

I'm sure. Well, thanks the supplies. Is there an invoice or-

BRENDAN

It's on me. Least I could do.

TONY

That's not necessary. Really.

BRENDAN

I insist.

TONY

I should pay you something.

Brendan smiles at Tony for a moment and then-

BRENDAN

If you want to pay me something for it, have coffee with me tomorrow.

TONY

I don't know.

BRENDAN

Come on, Tony, it's been forever...
And I've missed you.

He takes a step towards Tony and gently puts a hand on his arm. Tony's breath catches at the touch. A moment passes.

TONY

I never could say no to you.

BRENDAN

Great! 11 o'clock? Grand Beanery on Main?

TONY

11 it is.

BRENDAN

I'll see you then.

He gives Tony's arm a squeeze.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Now, I gotta get back to the barn.
The hay's not going to bale itself!

He smiles and heads off towards the barn. Tony stares after him, then climbs into the van. Just before he turns it on he looks up in time to see Brendan turn and flash a smile and wave at him.

TONY

I am in so much trouble.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Tony is putting down the last box on a table in the back of house when Josh comes in from the main dining room.

JOSH

Marcus Graves is here to see you.

TONY

I really don't want to talk to him.

JOSH

He's been waiting for an hour. Says it's important and that he needs to speak to you privately.

TONY

Fine. Bring him back to the office. I talk to him there.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT OFFICE - DAY

Tony steps into the small office space. It's a room barely big enough for a swivel chair and small desk on which sits the store computer and a desk phone, a filing cabinet against the wall, and a single chair for one visiting guest.

Shelves are mounted on the wall with binders and two pictures sit on the desk. The same picture of his family from when he was in high school, and a recent picture of Annette, a candid of her decked out and welcoming people to the restaurant.

Tony walks behind the desk and rests his hand on the empty chair, not ready to sit in it.

MARCUS (O.C.)

Hard to believe he's gone isn't it?

Tony turns to see Marcus standing in the door, dressed in designer business casual, and fixes him with a hard stare.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Your father and I had many-spirited conversations in this office. We may have disagreed on some things, but he was a formidable man and I respected him.

TONY

One of the things we had in common. I also do not suffer fools lightly.

Tony sits determinedly in the chair.

TONY (CONT'D)

What can I do for you, Marcus?

MARCUS

Straight to the point, just like your father. I'd like to talk to you about the future, Tony.

TONY

That's a little broad. What specifically about the future?

MARCUS

The future of this space. I understand your father left the restaurant and the building to you?

TONY

He did.

MARCUS

I know you have an exciting career in New York, maybe even a shot at being the next Times food critic.

TONY

And how do you know that?

MARCUS

I still have friends up there in finance...and at the Times. I understand you had a little hiccup with your tryout for them.

TONY

Your point?

MARCUS

Just that I'd be willing to put in a good word for you. Smooth the waters as it were. A sign of the respect I had for your father.

TONY

What do you want, Marcus?

MARCUS

It's not about what I want. It's about your future. Have you decided if you're going to sell?

TONY

No. Not yet. I'm still auditing.

MARCUS

Well we both know the restaurant isn't in good shape. Your father was a generous man to the community, many times to the financial detriment of this place.

(MORE)

MARCUS (CONT'D)

And the town has been rather generous in delaying collection of property taxes.

TONY

Is that a threat?

MARCUS

Not at all. It's an opportunity. What if I told you I knew of a party interested in buying the building and the restaurant.

Tony takes a moment to evaluate Marcus.

TONY

Go on.

MARCUS

Marden Worldwide is prepared to put a very generous offer on the table. They think a waterfront location like this would be the ideal spot for a Roman Harvest.

TONY

Marden want's to put a Roman Harvest in Bull Island?

MARCUS

Think of it. With a Roman Harvest anchoring the waterfront, we could start a whole new revitalization here. Attract more big name shopping interests. Bring in more tourists. The start of a whole new Bull Island.

TONY

And price out everyone here.

MARCUS

It wouldn't be like that at all. The current residents would benefit greatly from the increased profits, and the town could certainly use the tax revenue.

TONY

Uh-huh.

MARCUS

Just think about it. Marden promises a very generous buyout package, including the assumption of all outstanding debts. You can go back to New York free of this weight around your neck into the job you've always wanted.

Tony looks down at the various invoices cluttering the desk in front of him then looks back up at Marcus.

TONY

Fine. Send me the offer and I'll look at it.

MARCUS

Excellent!

TONY

Just look at it, Marcus. I'm not making any promises.

MARCUS

Of course, of course. I'm sure you'll make the right decision once you've seen the offer.

Marcus stands and extends his hand to Tony.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You won't regret this, Tony.

Tony stands and takes his hand reluctantly.

TONY

Right. Good day to you, Marcus.

MARCUS

Good day, Tony.

He turns and leaves. Tony watches him go and then slumps down into the chair. He puts his head in his hands and then looks at the family photo, focusing on his father.

TONY

What did you want me to do with this, Dad?

The silence stretches and he puts his head back in his hands.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY KITCHEN - DAY

Tony pulls a pitcher of sweet tea out of the fridge and pours himself a glass. His sister and mother come in, arms laden with groceries.

ANNETTE

Nino, honey, make yourself useful and help your sister bring in the rest will you.

TONY

Mom, I haven't been Nino since I was 10.

ANNETTE

Mother's prerogative. Now go! I don't want the ice cream to melt.

TONY

There's a tone I recognize.

GABBY

Then you should remember what happens next if you don't move.

TONY

No fair you two ganging up on me with mom voice.

GABBY

Get going you!

Gabby manhandles Tony towards the door and outside.

EXT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Tony and Gabby head down the steps towards Gabby's minivan.

TONY

What's with all the groceries? Mom hosting a party I don't know about.

GABBY

Stocking her up cause you're here, silly. And of course the booth after the parade. The restaurant's bringing the big stuff, but mom likes to add something of hers to the mix.

Gabby heads back to the house with another armload. Tony looks confused then loads up and follows her.

TONY
Booth? What booth?

GABBY
The De Luca's food booth at the holiday festival. Dad always had one and mom is insisting that she run it this year. I've told her she shouldn't be on her feet that long, but you know how stubborn she is.

TONY
Y'all really need to make a list of the things on the schedule around here. A wall calendar or something.

GABBY
That's what you get for missing family meetings.

Gabby pushes open the door with her foot and heads inside.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Tony backs the door shut and follows his sister.

TONY
That's a little unfair.

Gabby has already disappeared into the kitchen.

GABBY (O.C.)
Whatever!

Tony heads after her.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Gabby is already unloading her bags on the island.

GABBY
Tony seems to think we need a wall calendar so he can keep up with our schedule.

ANNETTE
Oh? Is the big city boy having trouble keeping up with our busy suburban lifestyle?

The both giggle at Tony's expense.

TONY
Ha ha you guys.

GABBY
Oh, let us have our fun. We're making up for lost time.

TONY
Whatever. Mom, what's this Gabby tells me about you running a food booth at the holiday festival?

ANNETTE
You father did it every year and the town loves it. I'm not gonna let it die just because he's gone and that's that.

TONY
What about your mobility? Gabby tells me you quit the restaurant because you couldn't stay on your feet for long periods of time.

Annette give Gabby a stern look.

GABBY
Don't give me that look, Mom. You know it's true.

ANNETTE
I'll be fine for one day.

GABBY
And unable to stand for the rest of the weekend. What about the pageant on Sunday? The twins will be so upset if you're not there.

ANNETTE
That's low. Using my grandchildren against me.

GABBY
Whatever works, Mom.

ANNETTE
It's a De Luca booth and a De Luca should be on the grill.

TONY
Fine. I'll do it.

A shocked silence in the kitchen.

GABBY

You will?

TONY

Sure. It's an Italian food festival booth. I'm sure I can handle it. Dad did...ah...did teach me how to cook after all. You can sit on a stool and be queen for a day.

ANNETTE

Oh, Nino. You father would be so...

TONY

It's just the booth, mom.

ANNETTE

Whatever you say, Nino.

She smiles and cups his cheek and goes back to putting away the groceries.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

You'll need to coordinate with Josh on the menu. I was going to meet with him tomorrow at 11 but you can do it instead.

TONY

Sure thing- oh... I can't at 11.

GABBY

What could you possibly have on your schedule?

TONY

I'm meeting Brendan for coffee.

Gabby and Annette freeze mid-motion.

ANNETTE

You're meeting Brendan Walsh?

GABBY

For coffee?

TONY

What? It's no big deal. He just wants to catch up.

ANNETTE

Does he now?

TONY

Mom, stop. Its just coffee. Not like it's a date.

GABBY

Ok, Tony. Sure thing. Mom, I'm going to the garage to put the sausages in the fridge-

She fixes her brother with a mischievous smirk.

GABBY (CONT'D)

So the meat can defrost.

ANNETTE

Sounds like a good idea. We want our meat to be ready.

Gabby snorts and leaves the kitchen as Tony calls after her.

TONY

Really! Its just coffee!

Tony hears his mom chuckling behind him and hangs his head.

INT. THE GRAND BEANERY COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Tony and Brendan, dressed warmly for the chill of the December weather, walk away from the pick up area of the coffee shop, both with iced lattes in hand past a huge glass case featuring locally made pastries and breads.

It's a large independent shop doing very good business. The guys make their way across the busy store to a table in the bay window looking out at the bustling town square.

TONY

The town square sure has changed since the last time I was here. And this coffee shop! Not what I was expecting.

BRENDAN

What were you expecting?

TONY

I'm not really sure, just not this. Feels like a high end coffee shop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn not one near Williamsburg, Virginia.

He takes a sip of his iced latte looks at the beverage in shock at how good it is.

TONY (CONT'D)

Wow!

BRENDAN

Best coffee in the commonwealth in my opinion. Why do you think your father got all his coffee beans from here for the restaurant?

TONY

I didn't know that. But coffee this good, I'm not surprised.

BRENDAN

There's a lot that's changed that I'm sure will surprise you.

KIM TURNER (31), light haired woman wearing a Beanery name-tag with Kim on it walks up to the table holding two plates in one hand with two incredible looking pie slices on it.

KIM

Brendan! Good to see you here!

BRENDAN

I'm in all the time, Kim.

KIM

To pick up and run out. Nice to see you relaxing a bit and with such handsome company.

She smiles knowingly at Tony, who's a bit surprised.

BRENDAN

You remember Tony from high school.

KIM

Of course! So sorry about your father, Tony. He was a godsend for me. Wouldn't have got this place off the ground without his help.

TONY

Kim Payne? Homecoming queen, captain of the softball team Kim Payne?

KIM

Well, these days I go by Kim Turner, owner of the best coffee place in all of Virginia, but yeah.

TONY

Tuner? You married Josh?

KIM

Going on twelve years and two kids now. Surprised he didn't tell you.

TONY

We haven't had time to talk about more than the restaurant really.

KIM

I'm sure. Everyone's waiting on pins and needles to hear what you're going to do with it.

TONY

Really?

KIM

Really. Oh, but listen to me go on about business, the Beanery is about relaxation and decompression. Plus I brought you pie?

BRENDAN

Tanya's?

KIM

Of course! It's our new Deep Dish Commonwealth Winter Fruit Pie with a pecan crumble. Just got it in from them today.

She places the two pie slices in front of them.

TONY

Who's Tanya?

KIM

Tanya Harper. She and her husband moved here from Boston about five years ago to open a bakery. My whole pastry case comes from them. As does the bread at De Luca's.

BRENDAN

What's in the pie?

KIM

Pears, apples, and cranberry. All of it but the cranberries grown here in Virginia.

(MORE)

KIM (CONT'D)

The apples are from your farm, so I had to bring you a slice.

BRENDAN

Thanks, Kim.

KIM

Anytime. Now you boys enjoy before it gets too cold.

She winks at them and walks off.

TONY

Didn't you date her in high school?

BRENDAN

It was required by law. You know, the high school football star and the homecoming queen.

TONY

Meanwhile he's secretly gay and dating the nerdy music theatre kid. Sounds like a very special episode of DeGrassi.

BRENDAN

I don't remember you complaining.

TONY

No, I most certainly did not.

Tony takes a bite of the pie, stops mid chew and stares at his plate.

TONY (CONT'D)

(with his mouth full)

Oh. My. God.

BRENDAN

What? What's wrong?

Tony chews slowly in an almost orgasmic like fashion.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Tony?

TONY

This is perhaps the best fruit pie I have ever put in my mouth.

BRENDAN

I told you there had been changes around here.

Tony smiles and digs back into the pie with gusto.

EXT. SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF THE GRAND BEANERY - DAY

Brendan holds the door open for Tony as they both leave the shop with their half drunk iced lattes and begin strolling down the sidewalk together.

TONY

I still can't believe you walked away from another contract with Dallas. You loved playing football.

BRENDAN

I did. But you know the farm is where my heart always was. Remember I decided I wanted to major in Agriculture at Virginia Tech my freshman year in high school.

TONY

I remember. It's just your career was going so well. Nearly winning the Heisman, drafted fifth with Dallas's first pick, set to take over as starting quarterback after renewing your contract.

BRENDAN

You followed my career? You hate sports.

TONY

I...may have heard a few things here and there.

BRENDAN

Uh-huh.

TONY

And what about the string of supermodels and pop stars you were always seen on dates with. Even that oil heiress. Seriously, what happened? What could possibly make you walk away from all that money.

BRENDAN

My dad died.

Tony stops right in front of the local town drug store.

EXT. CHARLIE'S PHARMACY - CONTINUOUS

TONY

Oh...I didn't mean...

BRENDAN

It's ok. You're not the first to ask. I'd always intended to come back after I retired. Football careers aren't that long really, not with all the injuries. But when my dad passed, I realized I was doing it more because it was something I was good at and what others wanted me to do, not because it was something I loved.

TONY

And that's why you left it all?

BRENDAN

It was one reason.

TONY

What was the other?

BRENDAN

Well-

ASHLEY (O.S.)

Coach Walsh!

The two turn to see two teenagers holding hands and crossing the street towards them. One, ASHLEY (16) is waving.

TONY

Coach Walsh?

BRENDAN

I've been helping out at the high school as an assistant coach.

TONY

I'll bet the boys love that!

Tony's phone buzzes. It's Marcus Graves calling.

TONY (CONT'D)

Sorry, gotta take this, it'll just be a minute.

BRENDAN

Take your time, city boy.

Tony rolls his eyes and steps away to answer the phone.

EXT. SHERYL'S BOUTIQUE AND SPA - CONTINUOUS

Tony answers the phone in front of a high end hair salon.

TONY

Hello?

INT. MARCUS GRAVES HOME OFFICE - DAY

Marcus sits behind his large cherry wood desk in his spacious and well appointed home office.

MARCUS

Tony! Marcus Graves.

INTERCUT

TONY

What can I do for you?

MARCUS

I've got great news for you, Tony. Marden sent over their offer and its even better than our initial discussion.

TONY

I'm listening.

MARCUS

They've offered to buy you out completely, including full market price for any of the equipment in the building, the assumption of all debts in the company name, as well as cover any back taxes the city wants to collect. Obviously I'll do what I can to keep that number as low as possible.

TONY

I'm sure you will.

MARCUS

In addition to that, they've offered to pay you 30% over the value of the building itself.

There's s silence as Tony considers the offer. He looks over at Brendan, who smiles at him as he's talking.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Tony? You still there.

TONY
Yeah, I'm here.

MARCUS
You're not going to get a better offer than this, Tony. Or a better way out of your problem.

TONY
Yeah, I'll look at it.

MARCUS
Tony-

TONY
I said I'll look at it Marcus. Drop it off at the restaurant and I'll go over it there and get back to you.

MARCUS
Don't take too long, Tony. The offer won't stay on the table forever.

TONY
I won't.

END INTERCUT

EXT. CHARLIE'S PHARMACY - DAY

Tony rejoins Brendan and the two teens.

ASHLEY
We were making out posters for the parade tomorrow and the idea just came to us.

MORGAN (17) a sparkly non binary teen interjects.

MORGAN
Live Like No One's Watching!
Doesn't that sound amazing!

TONY
Amazing for what?

ASHLEY

The theme for our float in the
Pride parade this year.

MORGAN

My senior year. It's gotta be epic!

Tony looks at Brendan in confusion.

BRENDAN

Ashley and Morgan are the co-chairs
of the Gay Straight Alliance at
Bull Island High.

TONY

B.I.H.S. has a Gay Straight
Alliance?!

MORGAN

For the last 10 years! Everyone
who's anyone is in it now. Jocks,
cheerleaders, theater, chorus, and
band kids. Of course having a
famous NFL player as our school
sponsor doesn't hurt.

BRENDAN

Hey, you folks do all the work, I'm
just there to facilitate.

ASHLEY

You gonna be with us in the parade
this weekend?

BRENDAN

Absolutely! Tony, you care to join
me? It'll be fun.

TONY

Well, I-

MORGAN

OMG! You're Tony De Luca! I thought
you looked familiar. Your picture
is on the drama room hall of fame!
Can I take a selfie with you for
the gram?

Morgan whips out their phone and jumps in front of Tony in a
selfie pose.

TONY

Um...sure.

He leans in and poses with Morgan for the pic.

MORGAN

Thank you so much Mr. De Luca!

TONY

It's Tony, please. Mr. De Luca was my dad.

ASHLEY

You'll have to forgive them, Tony. They've been a big fan forever.

MORGAN

I've read all your food articles online. My aunt was your high school English teacher! We read them all together. Your descriptions are totally the GOAT. It is true you're maybe moving to the New York Times?!

TONY

Uh...

ASHLEY

Come on, Morg. Let's go before you embarrass yourself any further. See you at the parade Coach Walsh!

Ashley drags her fan-girling significant other away from the two as Tony stands there in shell shock mouth agape.

BRENDAN

You catching flies there, Tony?

Brendan continues their walk down the street and Tony hurries to catch up.

EXT. MAIN STREET SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

TONY

I have so many questions.

BRENDAN

Shoot! I might as well practice since I've got that ESPN interview coming up in a few days.

TONY

I thought you'd have already done that. I saw the promo for it before I left New York.

BRENDAN

They got all the pre-career and career stuff when I was in Dallas a couple months ago. I told them the personal stuff had to be an interview here. Just haven't decided where yet.

TONY

How personal are you going to get?

BRENDAN

I'm going to tell them everything. The whole truth.

TONY

Everything? Including that the supermodels were all just beards?

BRENDAN

Yep. Everything but the names. Gotta protect the innocent after all.

TONY

So the GSA sponsorship isn't just an inclusive brand thing? You're really out?

BRENDAN

The whole town knows I'm gay, Tony. I've been out since I came back. I just haven't done it in the press.

TONY

Why not do it at your house. It's a great setting.

BRENDAN

That place is more my mom's than mine. Besides, I don't want her to have to deal with TV people all underfoot and press everywhere.

Tony has a flash of inspiration.

TONY

Do it at De Luca's.

BRENDAN

What? Seriously?

TONY
Why not? It'll be great for
business and give you a fantastic
local flavor backdrop.

BRENDAN
You mean it?

TONY
Of course!

BRENDAN
Well, it would make sense. Your
father helped guide me in using my
influence as much as I could to
make Bull Island a more welcoming
and inclusive place. Thanks, Tony!
It would be perfect

TONY
My father?- What is that smell?

Tony stops short and inhales deeply, only then noticing
they've stopped in front of Tanya's Bakery.

EXT. TANYA'S BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Coming out of the store are DEB (48) and BARB (50) a lesbian
couple laden down with packages of baked goods. Brendan grabs
the door and holds it open for them as they struggle to get
out.

BRENDAN
Here, let me hold that for you.

DEB
Thank you so much, Brendan. We
hadn't planned on getting so much-

BARB
But when we saw that new winter
pie, we just had to get a few for
the house.

TONY
The Commonwealth Winter fruit pie?
We just had some at the Beanery. It
is truly spectacular.

Barb and Deb look at Tony with confused recognition.

BRENDAN

I am so sorry, where are my manners. Barb and Deb, this is Tony De Luca. Tony this is Deb and Barb, my absolute favorite couple. They run the best Bed and Breakfast in Bull Island.

DEB

Oh, Brendan, you are too sweet.

BARB

You're Joe De Luca's oldest?

TONY

Yes, ma'am.

DEB

He was such a wonderful man. Helped us with the permitting when we were trying to get opened.

BARB

And took care of that awful contractor we were having...issues...with.

DEB

That unpleasant man won't show his face around these parts again after Joe got through with him, that's for sure.

BARB

Now we just call your brother whenever we need stuff done at the house. Don't know why we didn't do that first.

DEB

We were new to town and didn't know any better, babe.

BRENDAN

Joe certainly did have a way of dealing with homophobes.

BARB

Oh, look at us chatting away. Taking up the time of these two handsome gentleman clearly enjoying their coffee together.

TONY

Oh, it's no problem at all.

DEB

We are so looking forward to bidding on the Christmas Eve dinner at the holiday auction. Especially since the money will be going to Angel House in Norfolk this year.

TONY

Angel House?

BRENDAN

It's a homeless shelter specifically for LGBT youth. Opened last year. You father donated a lot to make it happen.

TONY

Oh...Ah...well...I'm not sure the dinner is going to happen.

BARB

Why-ever not?

TONY

Well, there was this featured dish he made every year, kinda the star of the show...and...um...he- didn't teach anyone at the restaurant how to make it so...

DEB

Oh. I see. Well, I'm sure we'll still manage to raise some money for the homeless teens.

BARB

Sure we will, honey. Its such a worthy cause.

Silence hangs in the air between them.

BARB (CONT'D)

Well, we've got to get back to the house. I promised a rundown of the dos and don'ts of Colonial Williamsburg to one of our guests after they finish their lunch on the waterfront. So lovely to meet you, Tony.

BRENDAN
See you later, ladies.

Brendan gives them each a kiss on the cheek before they head off. Tony and Brendan walk on and cross the street.

EXT. MAIN STREET TOWN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Tony and Brendan enter the beautifully decorated center of town. A white gazebo dominates the center of the large space decked out in holiday decor with a towering Christmas tree, a brilliant silver menorah, and the Kwanza candle display.

BRENDAN
They really are wonderful.

TONY
They seem to be.
(beat)
I didn't realize the dinner was
such a big deal.

BRENDAN
It's definitely become that. Too
bad your dad didn't teach anyone
how to make that dish.

TONY
Yeah...

They walk a little further and stop in front of the large tree. Brendan looks at Tony as he's gazing at the tree and almost asks a question, but changes his mind.

BRENDAN
Listen, I've really enjoyed
catching up, but I have to get back
to the farm.

He steps closer to Tony and runs his hand down Tony's arm.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
I'd like to see you again. Dinner?

TONY
I'd...well...I don't know.

BRENDAN
Come one now, what else have you
got going on?

TONY
(chuckling)
My sister asked me the same thing
about today.

BRENDAN
Can I text you at least?

TONY
Sure. Yeah. I'd like that.

BRENDAN
Good. Now I'm going to do something
I've wanted to do since we were in
high school.

TONY
What's that?

BRENDAN
Kiss you in the middle of town
square.

And he does. Its not a deep kiss at first, but after a second
Tony fairly melts into him and it becomes all consuming for
both of them. When its over Brendan smiles at him.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Wow. I didn't think it was
possible, but you've gotten better
at that.

Tony blushes deeply and doesn't say anything.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
I'll text you later, ok?

TONY
Sounds good.

BRENDAN
See you at the parade then.

Brendan kisses him quickly again and walks off, but not
before turning around to wave goodbye and flash him a cheese
eating grin that makes Tony practically melt.

TONY
So. Much. Trouble.

Tony heads back in the direction they had come and stops to
look at Tanya's Bakery, then down the street at the Beanery.
A light goes off and he pulls out his phone and dials it.

TONY (CONT'D)

Gloria! Hey, its Tony. Listen, I've got a great idea for that article you wanted for the Times.

MONTAGE - Holiday Parade and Festival

- People assembling for the parade, getting floats and banners ready
- The marching band marching and playing with the drum majors conducting.
- Flag corps twirling flags and majorettes twirling batons
- Brendan, Ashley, Morgan and other BIHS high school students on the very crowded GSA holiday float.
- Floats from various Bull Island businesses and organizations
- Bart Holloway on the sleigh float dressed as Santa with his wife beside him as Mrs. Claus.
- The festival booths in the town square selling food, gifts, and other holiday related fare.
- The De Luca booth doing bang up business. Annette taking orders and payments from her stool, Matteo plating food from chafing pans, Gabby handing out the purchased food and drink, Tony in a De Luca's apron cooking away on a large grill.
- Brendan and other farmhands manning the Walsh Farm booth, selling vegetables, meats, various jams and canned items right next to the De Luca booth
- Brendan exchanging flirting glances with Tony since the grill faces the Walsh Farm booth

EXT. DE LUCA HOLIDAY FESTIVAL BOOTH - DAY

A couple is getting their change from Annette and Gabby is assembling their order.

GABBY

Two grilled sausages on a roll, one no peppers. One order of pittule salentine with powdered sugar, and two mulled wines. Thank you!

The two happily walk away with their order. There's a sigh of relief as they all react to having a pause in orders.

ANNETTE

Well, that was exciting.

MATTEO

A lot of people seemed to want dad's food today. I guess we should be grateful you volunteered to man the grill, big bro.

TONY

Thanks, Matteo.

GABBY

Better drop another round of pittule in the fryer, Tony. We're running low up here.

TONY

Got it, Gabbster!

He fills a basket with the yeast dough balls and drops it in the hot oil. Annette pulls a stack of 20s out of the lock box she's using as a money till.

ANNETTE

Matteo, honey. Can you run over to 1st National and get us more 1s?

MATTEO

Sure thing, mom.

He grabs the money and heads off.

GABBY

What if we get busy?

ANNETTE

I can handle it.

GABBY

You've been on your feet too much already.

ANNETTE

I'll be fine.

GABBY

But, mom-

BRENDAN (O.S.)

I can help for a bit.

Brendan has come over stuck his head inside their booth.

ANNETTE

Oh, Brendan, you're too sweet.
That's not necessary. Besides,
you've got your stuff...

She indicates to his booth.

BRENDAN

Nonsense. The boys have got it.

He looks back over his shoulder and the farmhands running the booth wave.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Besides, it's just while Matteo is
away. And I'm sure Tony can teach
me anything I need to know. He
seems to be handling the meat
pretty well.

Tony nearly drops the tongs he's holding and goes back to busily turning meat as Gabby and Annette share a giggle.

ANNETTE

Well, we seem to be in a lull at
the moment, but if we get busy
before Matteo gets back, we'll give
you a holler.

BRENDAN

Sure thing, Mrs. De Luca.
(to Tony)
You'll let me know about dinner?

TONY

Um...yeah...I'll...let you know.

Brendan winks at him and heads back to his booth.

GABBY

Dinner?

TONY

It's nothing.

ANNETTE

It's not nothing, Nino. He clearly
still has feelings for you.

TONY

I told him I'd think about it.

GABBY

What's to think about? He's hot,
not crazy- except about you.

TONY

I'm not here hunting for a
relationship. I'm going back to New
York at some point.

GABBY

It's dinner not a proposal.

ANNETTE

Go out with him, Nino. I'm sure
you've got lots more to talk about.

GABBY

Just not tomorrow night, I need you
to help with the post-pageant cast
party at Mom's house.

ANNETTE

Oh, you're going to help with that?
Thank you so much, Nino.

Gabby and Annette break off the discussion to serve another
customer leaving Tony staring at their backs.

TONY

I guess I am now.

He rescues the pittule from the fryer and looks over at the
Walsh booth and catches Brendan's gaze. They both smile at
each other a go back to their work. Gabby and Annette both
catch the exchange of looks.

INT. 1ST COMMUNITY CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

The Christmas pageant is happening at the front of the
church. Kimberly and Jonathan are grinning ear to ear dressed
as a pair of sheep next to two teenagers playing Joseph and
Mary.

INT. 1ST COMMUNITY CHURCH FOYER - NIGHT

Tony leans in the doorway of the darkened vestibule watching
the pageant go on. Brendan sneaks up behind him and gives him
a kiss on the cheek.

BRENDAN

Been a while since I've seen you
here.

(MORE)

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Why are you hiding in the back? You know you won't burst into flames if you go in, right?

TONY

Ha. Ha. No, I need to leave early to finish setting up back at the house for the party after and I didn't want to make a fuss.

BRENDAN

Is that all?

TONY

And I've got too much religious trauma tied up in this place to enjoy sitting in there.

BRENDAN

I remember. Hard to believe they had their first gay wedding here the day after Obergefell was decided.

TONY

Really? Huh.

BRENDAN

I told you a lot has changed around here. 1st Community has been open and affirming for over a decade.

TONY

Do you come?

BRENDAN

Church was never my thing, but I'm glad there's a safe place now for those of us who do.

TONY

Then why are you here?

BRENDAN

My sister's oldest is playing Mary this year.

They stand in silence watching the show.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Your niece and nephew are adorable as sheep. So well behaved.

TONY

Its not type-casting believe me.
They're only well behaved because
they know they don't get the sweets
after if they mess up the show.

BRENDAN

I know who their uncle is. I'll bet
the after show at the house is
quite entertaining with them hopped
up on sugar.

TONY

Absolutely! You should see it.
Every night I toast the joy of
being an uncle. Feed the kids all
the sweets and then send home.
They'll be in rare form tonight.

BRENDAN

You're on!

Tony looks at him surprised, then realizes what he just said.

TONY

Oh...I...

BRENDAN

Ah. Ah. Ah. Too late! The
invitation has been made. Besides,
I'm not passing up the opportunity
to partake of your mother's holiday
spread. It's legendary!

TONY

That is very true. She always makes
enough for an army.

BRENDAN

So I guess I'll see you there.

He swats Tony on the butt and slips in to take a seat.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME

The Christmas party is in full swing. Holiday party music is playing, the house is decked out for Christmas like Mrs. Claus lived there. Santa and elf hats are worn everywhere as the house is fairly bursting at the seams with party goers.

Eggnog, wine, and other beverages abound among the adults and the children play underfoot. Holiday hors d'oeuvres seem to cover every available flat surface.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tony is in the kitchen enjoying some wine and chatting with Josh, Kim, and Brendan.

KIM

No, really! He took me out to Messick Point after prom and had us sit there and watch the sun rise over the bay. I was all ready to give it up and this one had to go and get all romantic and gentlemanly.

JOSH

Hey! I talked the homecoming queen into going to prom with me. I wasn't gonna screw that up.

KIM

You had me at "Will you go with me," babe.

TONY

So when did you finally...?

JOSH

Oh, suite at the Omni.

TONY

No shit!

JOSH

Yep. Cost me an entire month of washing dishes at the Crab Cake House, but it was worth it. Nothing but the best for my queen.

He gives Kim a side squeeze and a kiss on the cheek.

KIM

Flatterer.

JOSH

So what about you two? When did...?

KIM

Josh!

She swats him on the arm.

JOSH

What?! Not like it's a secret now.

KIM

It's still inappropriate. But since he brought it up.

Tony and Brendan exchange bemused glances.

BRENDAN

You gonna tell them?

TONY

Oh, no. I'm not telling them, but if you want to, go ahead.

BRENDAN

Well, summer before sophomore year, Tony had just returned from drama camp and I was in training at the high school. We hadn't seen each other in weeks and well...we were-

TONY

We were horny.

BRENDAN

Right. So he came to meet me at the high school after practice. We'd only been making out at this point-

TONY

That's not what my mouth remembers.

Josh nearly sorts out the beer he was drinking in laughter.

KIM

Easy there, babe. Make sure you use the right hatch.

BRENDAN

Yes, making out and other stuff. The point is, we hadn't gone all the way yet. We started making out in the locker room after everyone else had gone, but didn't want to get caught so we went outside.

KIM

Outside? To not get caught?

TONY

Hey, horny hormone filled teenage brain. Not exactly great for higher level thinking.

BRENDAN

Anyway, we were outside and I remembered the baseball team was at an away game so no one would be near the field.

JOSH

You didn't.

BRENDAN

Yep. In the dugout.

JOSH

Tell me it was the away dugout.

BRENDAN

Nope. And remember the coach's announcement about not bringing food in the dugout anymore because he kept finding the bench sticky?

JOSH

Wait! That was because of you two...I sat in that! Ugh!!!

Kim loses it in laughter as Josh processes.

TONY

Telling him that part was entirely unnecessary.

BRENDAN

He asked.

TONY

Well, on that note, I'm gonna go refill my wine. Get you anything?

BRENDAN

I'm good.

Tony heads into another room as Josh joins Kim in laughter.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Tony weaves his way through the crowd to the drink station and begins refilling his wine glass. Marcus appears next to him ladling out some eggnog.

MARCUS

Happy holidays to you, Tony.

TONY

Marcus? What are you doing here?

MARCUS

My son was taking his first turn on the theatrical stage as Joseph. He's gonna be a star that one.

TONY

I'm sure.

MARCUS

Listen, since I've got you-

TONY

Not here, Marcus.

MARCUS

It's nothing serious. The Marden guys just want to come by and do a walk through. See what they're buying in person. Might even get their offer up.

TONY

Fine. Fine. Bring them by the restaurant this week and they can look all they like. Now, if you'll excuse me.

Tony hurries off through the crowd.

MARCUS

Always nice to talk to you, Tony.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Tony enters the kitchen and doesn't see Brendan so he goes looking for him.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tony looks into the living room and sees Brendan sitting on the couch talking with his mother.

TONY

There you are! I was afraid you'd gone to hunt down other high school friends to reveal our embarrassing secrets to.

He sits down on the over stuffed chair next to the side of the couch Brendan is sitting on.

ANNETTE

What secrets, Nino? Everyone knows you two were secretly dating in high school. What's left to tell?

TONY

Uh...

BRENDAN

Just the time I tried to teach him to throw a football, Mrs. De Luca.

ANNETTE

Annette, please, Brendan. You're practically family.

She gives Tony a small smile.

BRENDAN

Yes, Ma'am.

ANNETTE

Now, tell me about this dinner. Where are you two going?

TONY

Well, I haven't really said yes...

ANNETTE

Of course you will, honey. You know Tony always plays hard to get.

BRENDAN

Very true.

TONY

Brendan.

ANNETTE

But since you too have already done that there's no need to play the chaste virgin or waste time.

TONY

Mom.

ANNETTE

Now, I know neither of you wants kids and that's fine with me. Gabby and Matteo are giving me plenty of grandchildren.

(MORE)

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

I'll settle for living vicariously through your grand trips and dining adventures.

TONY

Mom!

ANNETTE

I'm thinking a summer wedding.

TONY

MOM!

Brendan can't hold it in anymore and bursts out laughing. Annette soon follows.

ANNETTE

I told you. Two seconds of me playing the overbearing meddling Italian mother and he'd lose it.

The laughter continues as Tony looks back and forth between the two of them, not believing what's happening.

TONY

You two planned this did you?

BRENDAN

I'm sorry, I couldn't resist. You know I'm a sucker for a practical joke. And she went right to the wedding. Your mother is wicked!

The resume their laughter and Tony finally breaks and joins in, enjoying the moment of mirth.

JONATHAN (O.S.)

Wedding?

The trio stop and turn to stare at Jonathan, realizing he'd overheard much of their conversation.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Does that mean Uncle Tony and Brendan ARE getting married? Can I be the ring bearer? When can I start calling you Uncle Brendan?

The three adults exchange glances.

TONY

Well, Jonathan...um...

He looks at his mother for help.

ANNETTE

Jonathan, honey. You know those mini-cheesecakes Grandmama likes?

JONATHAN

With the cherry and sauce on top?

ANNETTE

Those are the ones. Why don't you go and get your Grandmama two of those. And a couple for your self while you're at it.

JONATHAN

Yes, ma'am!

He turns and dashes off, excited to complete his task.

TONY

Dodged a bullet there.

ANNETTE

Maybe. Even money on whether he tells everyone between here and the dining room or not. He's a lot like you were at that age. Running his mouth nonstop.

Tony rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

BRENDAN

I knew this one was a handful growing up.

ANNETTE

Oh, more than. But I was blessed having Nino as my first.

TONY

Well, before you pull out the baby pictures I'm going to go after my loudmouthed nephew and make sure he's not being the Paul Revere of my nonexistent pending nuptials.

BRENDAN

What makes you think I haven't already seen them?

TONY

Stop encouraging my mother!

Tony swats him on the arm before heading after Jonathan.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY KITCHEN - LATER

The guests have gone and Tony is in the kitchen cleaning things up and Brendan walks in holding dirty glasses.

BRENDAN

I just finished a last round and I think I've got all of the glassware.

TONY

Thanks! Go ahead and run the dishwasher then. Detergent is under the sink.

Brendan loads the glasses in the dishwasher and gets the detergent. As he's pouring it in, Annette enters the room.

ANNETTE

Ok, boys. That's enough. I'll finish up in the morning.

TONY

Mom-

BRENDAN

It's really no problem.

She walks over to the dishwasher and takes the detergent.

ANNETTE

Nonsense. I won't have you boys cleaning up my own kitchen for me when I have two capable hands and a free Monday morning.

She closes the dishwasher and starts it.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

Brendan you've been drinking so you're not driving out to your farm. You'll be staying the night.

(to Tony)

Nino, show him where the extra linens are next to your bedroom.

(to Brendan)

You can sleep on the couch...or wherever.

She smiles and winks at Tony as she heads to the hallway to go upstairs and calls back to them as she goes.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

No I'm headed to bed. Don't worry about making too much noise with the TV or whatever. Joe may be gone, but thanks to his chainsaw snoring I can sleep through anything less than an atomic bomb. Good night, boys!

TONY

Goodnight, Mom.

They hear her head up the stairs and then the bedroom door shut louder than normal.

TONY (CONT'D)

My mother may be a little tipsy.

BRENDAN

Well, that makes three of us.

TONY

Well, I guess I better get you some sheets and stuff.

BRENDAN

Mm-hmm.

He smiles seductively at Tony.

TONY

Yeah. Ok.

Tony heads down the hall to the stairs and Brendan follows.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Tony stops and looks at Brendan before heading up the stairs past the countless family photos and Brendan follows close behind.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Tony gets to the top of the stairs and goes past the open door to his bedroom and stops to open the door to the full linen closet. Brendan stops mere inches from his back.

TONY

Well, you've got a couple choices as far as color goes.

He turns, holding two different colors of folded sheets.

TONY (CONT'D)
Which do you...prefer...

The tension between them is electric.

BRENDAN
Whichever you pic is fine with me.

He inches closer to Tony.

TONY
Well, I've always liked lavender.

They are both trying not to kiss each other.

BRENDAN
That sounds fine with me.

TONY
Or you could go with the coral.

BRENDAN
You know I'm not sleeping on the couch.

TONY
Uh-huh...

BRENDAN
If you want me to leave, you better tell me right now.

TONY
I don't want you to leave.

Tony drops the sheets and they kiss. Passionate, animalistic, all consuming. They move through the door to Tony's bedroom and begin stripping each others clothes off as Tony closes the door behind them without looking.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT BAR AREA - DAY

The regular tables and chairs have been cleared away and it has been transformed into an interview space for ESPN.

Brendan sits in a chair mic'd up in the center of studio lights, cameras, microphones and crew. Behind him is the main bar where the regulars and some of the town's most well known like Annette, Josh, and Kim are there to show support.

Tony watches from behind the main camera in Brendan's direct line of sight as ESPN Reporter ROBIN IFILL (30s) sits across from him conducting the interview.

ROBIN

So coming back to work the land really meant that much to you?

BRENDAN

It did, and it still does. Growing food and feeding people was always first in my heart. I'm just so grateful to this town for welcoming me home and helping make Walsh Family Farms the most successful family owned organic farm business in the commonwealth.

Applause and vocal support come from the people in the bar.

ROBIN

Sounds like you have a lot of fans.

BRENDAN

More like family, Robin. They're great folks.

ROBIN

You insisted on having this part of the interview here in your hometown. What was the reason?

BRENDAN

I wanted to be here to tell you something surrounded by people who've supported me completely on this journey.

ROBIN

What journey is that?

BRENDAN

The journey of excepting the truth about myself as a gay man.

Applause erupts throughout the bar and restaurant, some people standing and cheering.

ROBIN

Wow! Not the response some might expect in a small southern town.

BRENDAN

No it's not, I'm sad to say. The support I have here is amazing. But it's not always been this way.

ROBIN

What do you mean?

BRENDAN

Frankly, when I was in high school Bull Island was a lot like the stereotypes that come to mind when you mention small southern towns. Coming out wasn't really possible.

ROBIN

So what changed?

BRENDAN

People put in the work. I've been out in my personal life for years. When I came home there'd been some progress but not a lot. So I set about reintroducing myself to the town and with the help of openhearted folks like Joe De Luca and his wife Annette, and others, we began changing hearts and minds.

ROBIN

Joe De Luca, the owner of the restaurant we're in?

BRENDAN

Former owner. Sadly we lost Joe not too long ago. This town will be poorer for his absence, but he left a wonderful legacy behind. One I hope his family can be proud of.

ROBIN

Let's go back to your time in the NFL. You played with Dallas for five years. Were you out to your teammates?

BRENDAN

I was, and to the coaching staff. But they respected my privacy.

ROBIN

And the various supermodels you were connected with?

BRENDAN

Just good friends. I never lied to any of them, they knew about me and I appreciated their friendships, I still do.

ROBIN
Why the deception?

BRENDAN
It was more of an omission really.
I made a point of never lying about
the nature of my relationships with
any of them.

ROBIN
But you were hiding it.

BRENDAN
I was. Frankly I didn't believe the
league was ready for an out gay
player and I didn't want to be the
first to test that.

ROBIN
Did that play into your decision to
leave it all behind?

BRENDAN
It certainly made the decision
easier. I'm glad of the progress
the league has made, but there's
still a long way to go.

ROBIN
Anything you want to say to teenage
athletes that maybe going through
what you went through.

BRENDAN
I want them to know they're not
alone. Coming out is a process and
takes time. Sometimes you make
mistakes, but everyone gets there
when they're ready. I'd want them
to know they are loved and perfect
just the way they are. And that
towns like Bull Island are a
perfect example of how things can
and will get better.

ROBIN
That's a beautiful sentiment. I'm
just curious about what you meant
by mistakes.

BRENDAN
Oh, umm, I'm not sure-

He suddenly looks very uncomfortable and glances up at Tony.

ROBIN

Come on, Brendan. Honesty and transparency right? I'm sure your story will help someone learn.

He looks down and sighs.

BRENDAN

Yes. I just wasn't expecting to do this on camera.

ROBIN

Do what, Brendan?

BRENDAN

When I was in high school I had a secret boyfriend I loved very much.

He pauses. Tony looks at him in confusion.

ROBIN

Go on.

BRENDAN

We...we were caught together by his father and it did not go well. Afterwards when his father confronted me-

His breath catches.

ROBIN

Yes?

BRENDAN

I- I led him to believe it wasn't consensual. That his son had sexually assaulted me. The truth was it was me that pursued him.

ROBIN

Why did you lie?

BRENDAN

I was 18 and scared. I was so afraid of being outed. I had a full ride to Virginia Tech and a real shot at a pro-football career. I was the town's star quarterback. I couldn't be gay. So I lied.

Dead silence fills the restaurant. Everyone looking back and forth at Brendan and Tony while Tony stands there horrified.

ROBIN

You've kept this secret ever since?

BRENDAN

No. As soon as I came back, the first thing I did was go to his father and come clean. He was understanding and forgave me, something I did not deserve. Actually apologized for making me feel so afraid I had to lie to him.

ROBIN

And the son?

BRENDAN

We only just recently reconnected.

He looks directly at Tony.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

I hope he knows how deeply sorry I am about what I did. And about all the pain it caused.

Tony takes a couple steps back in obvious pain and anger, then turns and flees out the door of the restaurant.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Tony! Tony, wait!

He bolts out of his chair and runs after him.

EXT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Tony bursts out the door of the restaurant, tears flowing. He charges across the parking lot headed to his car. Behind him the door opens and Brendan comes barreling out.

BRENDAN

Tony, wait!

Tony doesn't slow down.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

Tony, please.

Tony comes to a stop and whirls on Brendan.

TONY

This whole time. This WHOLE TIME!
I've spent 15 years thinking my
father kicked me out for being gay,
when in reality it was because you
told him I tried to RAPE you!!!

BRENDAN

I know Tony, I'm sorry.

People from inside the bar, including Annette and Robin and a camera man, have started to spill out the door.

TONY

Sorry? You're sorry. Well I guess
that makes it alright then.

BRENDAN

I have spent my whole life
regretting what I did. One single
mistake causing so much pain.

TONY

Yeah! Pain to me! How could you? I
loved you! Why didn't you tell me?

BRENDAN

I loved you too, Tony. I still do.
I've spent the last few days trying
to figure out the right way or time
to tell you.

TONY

The right time would have been
before we FUCKED, Brendan.

Gasps come from the crowd gathered in front of the restaurant and Brendan finally notices they are there.

BRENDAN

Can we not do this here?

TONY

Why not? You're used to performing
before a crowd? Didn't you just air
our dirty laundry on camera for all
the world to see?

A black car pulls into a nearby parking spot.

ROBIN

Actually, we're taping for a later-

TONY

Whatever!

The black car's doors open and Marcus and two "suits" from Marden get out of the car.

TONY (CONT'D)

How am I supposed to trust you?

BRENDAN

Well, I-

MARCUS

Well, Tony! What's all this? You've got quite a crowd assembled.

Tony looks at Marcus confused.

TONY

Marcus? It's...ah...Brendan was doing an ESPN interview here today. What are you doing here?

MARCUS

The Marden reps wanted to see the restaurant, remember? But what a happy circumstance. I'm sure with this much press attention we can convince them to increase their buyout offer.

Brendan looks from the suits to Tony in shock.

BRENDAN

Marden? You're selling the restaurant to Marden?!

TONY

They've made a very good offer and I'm considering it.

BRENDAN

You can't...you can't do that. Do you know how many people and businesses rely on this place? What it means to people?

MARCUS

I shouldn't worry about it. Roman Harvest will do wonderfully here. Transform the whole waterfront.

BRENDAN

Roman Harvest gets all its supplies from big corporate suppliers and pays their employees as little as legally possible. It'll drive a stake through the success that Bull Island has become!

MARCUS

You're overstating your case.

BRENDAN

Am I? You've never understood what Joe and I have helped this town to become. How can you do this, Tony? How can you turn your back on everything you've seen here, on me, and run back to New York like it doesn't matter?

TONY

How can I...? You have a lot of gall, Brendan. Asking how I could turn my back on you. Everything here is built on a lie! A lie you told. What, you think just because you taught the town to read "How Not to Be a Bigot for Dummies" suddenly all is forgiven?

ANNETTE

That's not fair, Nino.

TONY

Stop calling me Nino, Mother! I haven't been Nino since I was 10. The last time I felt like a whole human being in this backwards town.

BRENDAN

Tony-

TONY

You're not upset I'm selling the restaurant. You're upset because it ruins the perfect façade you've built up here as once again the town's favorite son. I've been exiled from my home for 15 years because of you and all you care about is your image! Just like in high school.

Brendan reacts like he's been slapped.

TONY (CONT'D)

Well I've had enough of the fake smiles, the fake stories, and the fake love.

(to Marcus)

Tell you friends to come back tomorrow morning and I'll happily sign their deal as is. Unfortunately right now I'm headed home to pack.

(to Brendan)

I'll be heading back to New York tomorrow. At least there they tell you the truth to your face.

He storms off to his car, leaving everyone there in shock.

INT. DE LUCA FAMILY HOME HALLWAY - DAY

Tony bursts through the door and slams it behind him. Breathing heavy, he slumps back against it.

GABBY (O.S.)

Tony? You home? I know it wasn't mom, she never slams-

Gabby comes into the hallway with a box of items for the auction in her arms and sees Tony.

GABBY (CONT'D)

-the door. Are you ok?

TONY

What are you doing here?

GABBY

Mom had some things she wanted me to use to decorate the De Luca table at the holiday auction tonight. We might not have the Christmas Dinner to offer, but there's still gift certificates and other things we can do.

TONY

That won't be necessary, I've decided to sell the restaurant and go back to New York. I'm leaving tomorrow.

GABBY

What? Why?

TONY

Because there's nothing for me here. No reason to stay. Nothing but lies and pain.

GABBY

Lies...Brendan finally told you.

Tony looks at her in realization.

TONY

You knew?! Oh, my god of course you knew.

GABBY

I knew there was something dad wasn't saying. Brendan finally told me a couple weeks ago. He wanted to know how best to go about telling you and he thought I could help.

TONY

Was announcing it during an ESPN interview your idea?

GABBY

What? NO!

TONY

Not that it matters. I can't trust family or former lovers in this town it seems.

He starts heading up the stairs.

GABBY

Tony-

TONY

Enjoy your auction, sis.

He enters his room and slams the door shut.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tony is laying on his bed staring at the ceiling when his cellphone buzzes with a call from Gloria.

TONY

Please tell me you have something for me so I can leave this godforsaken place.

GLORIA (V.O.)

I don't know how you did it, Tony, but someone at the Times has decided they love you. You're opportunity is back on the table.

TONY

So Marcus is as good as his word.

GLORIA (V.O.)

What?

TONY

Nothing. How's the Beanery review going over.

GLORIA (V.O.)

That's what put it over the top. They loved your take on it. Small town coffee shop David slaying the Brooklyn coffee house Goliath. Brilliant. You really found your voice down there.

TONY

Oh...yeah...I guess.

GLORIA (V.O.)

Now I need you to get your ass on a plane and get back here. I've got you set up for a review tomorrow night. Its super easy, French traditional. Deliver with that voice of yours and the Times is in the bag.

TONY

Tomorrow?

GLORIA

Yes, tomorrow! You don't want the job to go to Francis do you?

TONY

No.

GLORIA

Then get on a plane and get back here. Call me when you land.

TONY

Ok. And thanks, Gloria.

GLORIA

You did the work of finding the voice, Tony. I just kept the fires out until you did.

A click and she's gone. Tony looks at the phone in thought. There's a gentle knock at his door. He ignores it.

Another knock.

ANNETTE (O.S.)

Tony, are you in there?

Tony sighs.

TONY

Come in, Mom.

Annette opens the door and enters the room cautiously, holding a very full scrapbook.

ANNETTE

I was hoping you hadn't left yet.

Tony gets off the bed and starts putting clothes into his open suitcase from the dresser.

TONY

I'll be on a plane in the morning after I sign the contract with Marden. I have a review tomorrow night to get back to.

Annette sits down on the bed.

ANNETTE

So soon?

TONY

No need to wait. Better to just rip off the band-aid.

He keeps packing his bags.

ANNETTE

Tony, would you come sit with me for a moment.

TONY

Mom-

ANNETTE

I need to show you something and then I'll leave you be.

Tony sighs and then joins her sitting on the bed.

TONY
Ok, mom. What?

Annette sets the large scrapbook on her lap and touches it with obvious deep feelings.

ANNETTE
This belonged to your father. I thought it was important you saw it before you left.

TONY
Why would I want to see this, Mom?

ANNETTE
Because it's about you.

She slides it into his lap and he looks at her in surprise as he slowly opens it. The first page has his name, written in his father's handwriting under his picture.

TONY
This is my current headshot. Where did he get this?

ANNETTE
He would download and print it anytime you put a new one on your website.

He turns the page and there's a small multicolored menu written in crayon by a child's hand.

TONY
Oh my god. He kept this?

ANNETTE
He kept them all.

Tony turns the pages slowly, one after another revealing more and more menus in the same children's writing.

TONY
I used to make up menus with him in the kitchen watching him cook. I was obsessed with gummy bears and jelly beans.

ANNETTE

He never told you, but he kept trying to develop a dessert featuring both. God love him he was never the best pastry chef.

He continues to flip the pages, and recipes begin to appear, typed carefully with hand written notes.

TONY

My recipes.

He runs his hands over one that was obviously crumpled and thrown away.

ANNETTE

Your father was so proud of you. Taking recipes and trying your own take on them.

TONY

Peanut butter carbonara, what was I thinking? I threw this one away.

ANNETTE

He saved them all, even the ones you tossed out. His happiest moments were when you were by his side cooking with him.

He turns the pages and sees an article printed from the web.

TONY

My first review.

He keeps turning the pages, and every time a new review, or an article about himself.

ANNETTE

He printed out everything you ever wrote. Every article that mentioned you. And kept it here. You were never far from his heart.

TONY

But all these years, Mom. Why didn't he call? Why did he let me think he was ashamed of me?

ANNETTE

Oh, Nino. He wasn't ashamed of you. He was ashamed of himself.

(MORE)

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

After Brendan came back and admitted to your father he had lied- I've never seen him so broken. Instead of believing in you he tossed you aside. I don't think he ever forgave himself for that.

TONY

Then why...

ANNETTE

Your father was a good man, but he wasn't perfect. In his pride he decided instead of talking to you and apologizing, he instead needed to make this town a place you'd want to come home to.

TONY

Mom, I...

ANNETTE

Tony, he didn't leave you the restaurant because he wanted you to run it. He left it to you because he hoped you'd have to come home and see the town he built for you. A place you'd feel safe, and welcomed. He changed his corner of the world for you, Nino. So you'd know he loved you.

Tears begin streaming down Tony's face.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)

Do what you want with the restaurant, Tony. Go back to New York if that's what you really want. Just know that your father loved you very much...all of you. And so do I.

She kisses him on the cheek, stands up and leaves, closing the door behind her. Tony looks down at the scrapbook and tears stream down his face. He turns pages and then can't take it. He tosses it on the bed and rushes out the door.

SONG - EVANESCENCE "MY IMMORTAL"

MONTAGE

-Tony gets into his car and pulls out of the driveway.

-Tony drives down the road crying. The town passes by him.

-He pulls up at the restaurant and stares at it. The De Luca's sign unlit. He gets out of the car and walks slowly towards the darkened building.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT

Tony opens the door and walks into the dark and empty restaurant. He stops in the foyer and stares at the bar area.

He sees an image of himself as a small child sitting on a bar stool creating a menu with crayons next to his father working on the restaurant menu. He looks up at his father who smiles down at him and tousles his hair.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT KITCHEN

Tony stands in the doorway of the kitchen and watches himself at nine chopping vegetables and cutting his finger. His father rushes over to comfort him and bandage the cut. Then holding his hand to show the proper technique.

He looks over at the stove and sees himself as a teenager stirring a large pot of sauce. He gives his father a sample to taste and looks expectantly at him. His father tastes it and smiles wide, nodding at his son with approval.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT OFFICE

Tony stands in front of the office desk watching the image of his father and his 18 year old self yelling at one another. In anger his teenage self pushes documents and pictures off the desk.

He watches his father tell him to get out and sees the instant regret for the first time.

He sees himself leave in anger. His father stands there in shock at what just happened. Tony looks through the office window and sees the 18-year old Tony turn and see his father pick something up off the floor, returning it to the desk.

Joe puts the item down then collapses in his office chair. Teenage Tony almost goes back, but then he turns and leaves.

Tony looks at the memory of his father and sees the tears and his father looking at what he had just picked up. The memory fades but the object is still there.

He goes around the desk and realizes it's the picture of the family Joe picked up first.

He collapses in the chair just like his father did. He puts his head in his hands and for the first time gives into the grief of losing his father.

EXT. BULL ISLAND TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Tony wanders through the square, hands in his pockets. He stops and looks up at the town hall, decorated for the holidays, sounds of the auction filter out of the doors. He looks about to go in, then turns to leave.

BART (O.S.)

Ho, ho, ho, there young De Luca!
Why aren't you inside with the rest
of the family?

Tony turns and sees Bart dressed as Santa Claus.

TONY

Bart! Sorry, I didn't see you
there.

BART

Just stepped outside for the
duration of the bidding. I've
always found the thought of Santa
in the room while people are
bidding on things to be unseemly.

He sits on the front steps of the town hall.

TONY

And Mrs. Claus?

BART

Oh, she has no issues. She's got
her sights set on a winery tour in
Luray this year. She seems to think
that people might have a hard time
bidding against Mrs. Claus.

TONY

She might be right.

BART

So, why aren't you in there?

TONY

Oh...I don't think I really belong
in there...

BART

Why not?

TONY

It's...I don't want to bother you.

BART

Tony, I don't have to be the real Santa Claus to see you're pain. You need to talk to someone.

Tony looks at him uncertain. Bart pats the step next to him.

BART (CONT'D)

Tell Santa what's wrong.

Tony sits down and takes a deep breath.

TONY

I've royally screwed up. Dad left me the restaurant and instead of trying to save it, I'm basically selling it off to the first offer and running back to New York. I'm sure the whole town hates me, not to mention Brendan. I just don't know what to do.

BART

Is the restaurant really what's bothering you?

TONY

I...no. It's... I just found out I spent the last fifteen years being angry at my father over something he didn't do. If I had just called him. Talked to him. I wasted so much time, and now...

BART

Tony, let me tell you something about your father. I knew the man for 30 years. He was obstinate, opinionated, and stubborn.

TONY

I know who his son is.

BART

Yes, you two were a lot alike in that regard.

(MORE)

BART (CONT'D)

But, Joe was also a stalwart defender of the less fortunate and those looked down on by the rest of us. He taught us to accept the differences in others as a gift. He was kind, loyal, and generous to a fault. I never saw him regret a decision...except one. Telling you to leave.

TONY

But what am I supposed to do with that now? I don't have the resources to save the restaurant. I've wasted so much time. I wish I'd called, just once.

BART

Time is the one thing we can't gift back. But if you want to know the man your father became, just look around you at this town. He poured every bit of himself into it. It's a monument to his generosity of spirit and his love for you. If you want to honor him, gift back some of what he taught you.

TONY

What he taught me?

BART

Of course. Joe always said he taught you everything he knew and how proud of you he was of how far you'd gone with it.

TONY

Yeah, he'd taught me all of his recipes by the time I was 12.

Bart gives him a knowing look and a light bulb goes off.

TONY (CONT'D)

Oh, my god. He taught me every he knew! I know what I have to do.

BART

Then I suggest you hurry. Not much time left in the auction.

Tony hugs Bart.

TONY

Thank you, Santa! I mean, Bart.

Tony dashes up the stairs and into the town hall.

INT. TOWN HALL MEETING SPACE - NIGHT

The auction is in full swing. The large meeting area has been set up with tables displaying items to be auctioned and it seems the whole town is in attendance.

At the far end of the room, Andy Finch is onstage in a loud and ridiculous holiday suit holding a mic and announcing the winners of each item.

Tony bursts through the doors of the hall and looks around. He spies Andy onstage and makes a beeline for him, weaving in and out amongst tables and people.

As he nears the stage, he nearly runs over Brendan who is talking with Annette.

TONY

Oh, I'm so sorry. Brendan?

BRENDAN

Why are you here?

ANNETTE

Brendan, be fair. I'm sure he's here for a good reason.

TONY

Yes, I am. And I need to get onstage before the auction is over.

BRENDAN

Why? So you can tell anyone who doesn't know about selling the restaurant to Marden?

Marcus has wandered into earshot.

TONY

I'm not selling the restaurant.

MARCUS

What? You're not selling? I put a lot of personal and political capital into getting you that deal, Tony. What possible reason could you have for not selling?

TONY

My father wouldn't have sold to
those soulless, money grubbing,
cookie cutter, store in a box,
glorified microwave dinner
purveyors who wouldn't know real
Italian cooking if it walked up to
them on the street and slapped them
back to the mediterranean with a
fist full of al dente noodles and
neither will I.

ANNETTE

Been holding that one in for a
while?

TONY

Yes. Now I'd love to explain
further, but I have an announcement
to make.

He leaves behind a stunned Marcus and Brendan and hops up
onto the stage, striding over to Andy, who breaks off mid-
word and speaks to him off mic.

ANDY

Tony? What are you doing?

TONY

Something I should have done a long
time ago. May I?

He indicates to the mic. Andy looks unsure, but hands over.

TONY (CONT'D)

Thanks, Andy.

(in the mic to the crowd)

Hi, everyone. Most of you know me,
but for those who don't, my name is
Tony De Luca. Joe De Luca was my
dad.

He hesitates and looks down at his mother standing with his
brother and sister. Annette smiles in encouragement. He takes
a deep breath.

TONY (CONT'D)

I left Bull Island right after I
graduated and I never came back,
for reasons that I don't want to
get into, and quite frankly-

(he looks at Brendan)

-are no longer important.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

Mostly I didn't come back because I was stubborn. Just like my dad.

Light laughter ripples through the crowd.

TONY (CONT'D)

I see some if you are familiar with the infamous De Luca bullheadedness. I guess being born and raised in a place named Bull Island will do that to you.

Another round of laughter.

TONY (CONT'D)

The point is, I haven't been here to see what this place has become. When I came back for my father's funeral I expected the same insular close minded town I knew in high school. Instead I found loving and generous people who've opened their hearts and lives to everyone who wishes to call this place home. And quite frankly the best coffee and pie I have ever had, and coming from a New York City food critic that's saying something.

KIM

(from the crowd)

You know that's right!

Applause and whistles come from the crowd as everyone turns to acknowledge Kim.

TONY

I know most of you have heard that I decided to sell the restaurant to Marden.

A hushed silence falls over the crowd.

TONY (CONT'D)

Well, I've changed my mind. A Roman Harvest in that location would change the local character of the waterfront and I believe doesn't fit with the beloved community you have all built here.

Applause and cheers erupt from all around the hall. Marcus looks around in bewilderment.

TONY (CONT'D)

Now, this doesn't mean I can keep the restaurant open. I don't have the resources for that, but I can use what I have to honor my father and in the spirit of the season give back out of what he gave me.

The crowd reacts in sadness and confusion at this news.

TONY (CONT'D)

I've been telling people that the reason the dinner isn't up for auction this year is because no one knows how to make the signature dish. Well, that'd not exactly true. My father taught me. So if you're interested, I'd like to officially put the De Luca Christmas Eve Dinner back up for auction and raise some more money for Angel House.

Cheers and applause explode in the hall. Tony smiles down at his mother and hands the mic off to Andy.

ANDY

Well how bout that! Thank you Tony! Lets start the bidding shall we? At \$500? Do I hear \$500?

CROWD MEMBER 1

\$500!

ANDY

I've got \$500 here, do I hear 6?

CROWD MEMBER 2

\$600

As Andy begins the bidding, Tony walks down off the stage and to his family. His mother greets him with a warm embrace.

ANNETTE

Oh, Nino. Your father would be so proud of you.

TONY

I hope so, Mom.

MATTEO

So, you've been holding out on us?

TONY

Yeah, sorry about that.

MATTEO

It's ok. Gabby explained and for the first time, I actually listened. I'm proud of you, brother.

GABBY

He's almost as stubborn as you are.

Shared laughter and they both hug as Annette looks on.

ANDY

SOLD! For \$10,000!

The family looks over shocked as the crowd cheers on Deb and Barb for winning the dinner.

GABBY

Um, what's Brendan doing?

They all look at the stage as Brendan approaches Andy.

BRENDAN

Can I?

ANDY

It's not really an open mic-

Brendan gives him a look and Andy hands over the mic.

BRENDAN

Deb and Barb, thank you so much for your bid and Tony for putting the Christmas Dinner back up for auction. And since it's Christmas, I've decided I'll match Deb and Barb's generous donation so Angel House can help even more homeless LGBT youth this year.

Applause.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

But I'm not going to stop there. You all know this town wouldn't be the special place it is without one man, Joe De Luca. He inspired us to be better people, in fact he insisted on it.

Laughter.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

So I can't think of a better way to thank him than to save his legacy. De Luca's needs our help and I say we give it. I will match any sum pledged tonight to save Joe's restaurant.

A few seconds of chatter as people talk.

MARCUS

\$75,000

Shocked silence. Everyone turns to stare at him.

BRENDAN

I'm sorry?

MARCUS

\$75,000. Will you match that?

BRENDAN

Yes I will. But, why?

MARCUS

Safe to say I'm the last one to this particular table. I liked this town, but I never understood how special it was until now. That uniqueness should be protected, and so should De Luca's.

Cheers and applause. The De Luca's hug each other and Tony goes over to shake Marcus' hand.

TONY

Well that was unexpected.

MARCUS

Never let it be said I don't know a good investment when I see one. You realize the restaurant will need a new chef?

Tony smiles.

TONY

It's already got one.

Annette overhears this and gasps.

ANNETTE

You mean you're staying?

TONY
Yes, mom. I'm staying.

She tears up and hugs him fiercely.

ANNETTE
Welcome home, my Antonino.

He hugs her back, then looks up towards the stage and sees Brendan headed out the exit door next to the stage. Annette sees his gaze.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)
Go after him, Tony.

TONY
Thanks, mom.

He kisses her on the cheek and rushes after him.

EXT. BRENDAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Brendan pulls out of his spot on the street next to the town hall as the side door bursts open and Tony rushes out.

TONY
Brendan, wait!

His car drives into the night as Tony comes to a stop in the middle of the street looking after the receding tail lights.

INT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Christmas Eve has come and it seems the whole town has come for the dinner. The tables in the dining room and bar have been set up family style and Annette stands at the door greeting people as the last come in, dressed to the nines.

Tony comes out of the kitchen in full chef garb.

TONY
Are they here yet?

ANNETTE
Your brother said the Uber was almost here. You know how it is getting here through the bridge tunnel.

TONY
I know, I just really need-

Mark and Lauren burst through the door.

MARK

TONY!!!

Hugs and cheek kisses.

MARK (CONT'D)

How is it colder here than in New York right now?

LAUREN

Well, don't you look fetching in chef drag.

More hugs and cheek kisses.

TONY

It's a work uniform, not drag.

MARK

Bitch, are you saying drag queens don't WERK?!

Tony rolls his eyes.

TONY

Mark, you remember my mom. Mom, this is our friend, Lauren.

MARK

The fabulous Mrs. De Luca! Looking fierce and gorgeous as always. How did you not inherit any of this amazingness, Tony?

ANNETTE

Ever the charmer. You should work on that, Nino.

LAUREN

Nino? Oh, you have to tell me all about little Nino. I'm sure the stories are endless.

ANNETTE

Oh, I really like her.

TONY

Mom, if you'll show Lauren to her seat at the head table I just need a minute with Mark.

ANNETTE

Of course dear. Don't take too long though, the first course needs to start going down any minute.

TONY

I'm aware.

She winks at him and walks away with Lauren.

TONY (CONT'D)

Sometimes I wonder who's running this restaurant.

MARK

In my experience, moms are in charge of whatever they decide to be.

TONY

Did you bring it?

MARK

I can't believe you kept it all these years.

He pulls out a wrapped present and hands it to Tony.

MARK (CONT'D)

What did you need it wrapped for?

TONY

Never mind that, just thank you for coming and for bringing it.

MARK

Of course. Now, when is dinner, I'm starving?

TONY

Take your seat with Lauren and I'll start the meal in a minute.

Tony turns and points to the table Lauren is sitting down at, the head table where Tony's family is seated, a couple chairs are noticeably empty.

MARK

Excellent!

He heads towards the table. Tony turns and stiffens. Brendan is standing in the doorway.

TONY

You came.

BRENDAN

It was an invitation to the famous De Luca Christmas Eve Dinner. It would have been rude not to come.

TONY

I wasn't sure you would. You never called me back.

BRENDAN

I'm sorry about that, I-

Brendan breaks off and looks over Tony's shoulder. Tony turns to look and everyone has stopped what they are doing to watch them.

TONY

Maybe we should talk outside?

BRENDAN

Yeah, ok.

He turns and heads outside. Tony turns and looks at his mom in exasperation and she shoos him outside and he follows Brendan out.

EXT. DE LUCA'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

Tony exits the building and joins Brendan standing just to the side of the front door. He's holding his arms as if cold.

BRENDAN

Feels like it dropped ten degrees in the last hour.

TONY

You really want to talk about the weather?

BRENDAN

No. Look, I'm sorry I didn't call you back. I just needed some space. After everything that happened I needed to figure out what I was feeling, and I wasn't sure you really wanted to see me again. After you found out the truth.

TONY

Really? With all the many messages?

BRENDAN

Ok, maybe I wasn't sure I wanted to be seen. I should have told you from the start about what happened.

TONY

I understand why you didn't. My father was barely in the ground and I was still very angry with him.

BRENDAN

Anger I caused.

TONY

No. No you didn't. Not all of it. Either one of us could have picked up the phone years ago to make amends, and we didn't. That's on us, not you.

BRENDAN

So, what do we do now, start over?

TONY

No. Not start over. Pick up where we left off.

Tony hands him the wrapped gift. He looks at it confused.

BRENDAN

What's this?

TONY

Your Christmas present. Open it.

Brendan opens the present and pulls out a maroon and gold football jersey with the number 7 and the name WALSH on the back.

BRENDAN

My high school football jersey? You kept it?

Tony nods.

TONY

Of course I did. I love you, Brendan Walsh. I've loved you since the first kiss. I don't know if you feel that same way, and I know we've got things to work out, but if you'll have me-

Tony cuts off as Brendan grabs him, wraps his arms around him, and kisses him deeply. Tony returns the embrace instantly.

TONY (CONT'D)

So I guess this means-

BRENDAN

Yes, I love you! Since the day I laid eyes on you I've never loved anyone else. You caught my heart right from the start Tony De Luca.

TONY

Really? A corny football reference? In rhyme?

BRENDAN

I'm the jock, not the writer. Now shut up and kiss me again.

They both smile and kiss again. They break it when they hear muffled cheering.

TONY

What the-

They turn and look and see Tony's family, Brendan's mom, and practically the entire restaurant crowd pressed against the large storefront windows cheering and clapping and hollering.

Annette emerges from the door.

ANNETTE

Ok, you two. Enough smooching outside in the cold. You'll catch your death. Besides, there's a bunch of hungry folks in here.

TONY

We'll be right there, mom. And stop worrying, it's not that cold out here. It's not like it's snow-

A big fat snowflake lands on his nose.

TONY (CONT'D)

-ing

They both look up as huge snowflakes begin pouring from the sky.

TONY (CONT'D)

I don't believe it.

BRENDAN

Who says gays can't have a
Christmas miracle.

TONY

I already had mine.

He smiles and kisses Brendan again. They both begin walking hand in hand towards the door where Annette is staring at the sky in disbelief. She shakes her head and shoos them both inside before following.

Through the windows we see the crowd applauding Tony and Brendan as they enter. Family and friends greet and hug them in congratulations.

Tony begins shoosing them all to their tables, much like his mother and directs the staff towards the kitchen to begin serving the first course.

Outside the snow continues to blanket the small Virginia town as the Christmas lights twinkle in the night.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END