

THE ITALIAN PLUM TREE IN MY  
GRANDMA BRUNETTI'S BACK YARD

(The lights come up on a young woman, TORI, seated by herself at a table for two in a casual coffeehouse--not a hip or modern location by any means, but the kind of place where there are no dairy alternatives and the radio only plays The Rat Pack. The cannoli is out of this world. She considers her coffee mug for a moment, then begins to speak. There is no one else onstage.)

TORI

In my mind, this scene plays out a dozen different ways every time I think of it, but it always starts the same way. I'm in a little restaurant in Clarksburg, West Virginia, and the restaurant is Italian because--well, because it's Clarksburg, West Virginia, and so it HAS to be Italian, because everything and everyone in Clarksburg, West Virginia is at least three quarters Italian on its mother's side. It's one of the only places left in the world today, I think, where boy scouts have a special badge for helping a senior member of the mafia cross the street. And I'm here for the only reason I'm ever here or ever have been here, which is family. And maybe the waiter says...

WAITER

Are you waiting on someone?

TORI

And I say, yes, I am, which is mostly true. I am waiting on someone, though to be honest I don't know that I'd recognize her if I saw her. In my mind I do, though, because that's the whole reason I'm here. I'm here to meet her, so I am waiting on someone, but I'm more or less waiting on *something*, which sounds stupidly poetic in the way only an internal monologue is allowed to sound. And in some versions of this story, that's all that happens. I wait, and she doesn't show up, and that makes me feel some kind of

way that lives in between embarrassed and justified. It doesn't matter. In other versions of the story, the waiter comes back and--

WAITER

Excuse me, miss, but someone just left this for you.

TORI

Thank you. It's a letter. And I take it and read it and it says--

MARIA

(off to the side of the stage, standing dramatically in a hood and long coat)

Dear Vittoria--I am so sorry. Not just for today, but for everything. And more than anything I am sorry I didn't have the courage to face you today. Maybe it is for the best. I hope you are well. Signed, your grandmother Maria.

TORI

My grandmother and I are not related. Her second son is adopted, and my father is estranged, and so the only thing between us now is a missing link and about 12 years of absence from each other's lives. But I think if she signed anything to me, she would sign it "grandmother," because signing it anything else would mean having to talk about what happened. And even though I'm not Italian by blood, I am Italian enough to know that We Don't Talk About What Happened. We never have. We might say--

MARIA

It's a shame everything turned out the way it did.

TORI

Or we might say--

MARIA

Who could have seen any of that coming?

TORI

Or, in my wildest dreams--

MARIA

You deserved better.