

WHAT WE CARRY FOR SUNDAY DINNER

Written by

PROLOGUE

Darkness. Then a single pool of warm light, center stage.

NICKY CAPPALETTI stands in it. He's in his undershirt, house slippers, a cup of coffee in hand. He looks the way he looked on Sunday mornings unhurried, a little rumpled, entirely himself. He does not look like a man who is dying. He looks like a man who has something he needs to say before he runs out of time.

Somewhere upstage, barely lit, BELLA stands watching him. She's in jeans and a hoodie, her arms loose at her sides. She watches her father the way you watch someone you love and cannot reach.

NICKY looks out at the audience. He takes a sip of his coffee. He doesn't rush.

NICKY

*I've been thinking about what I
want to say.*

(beat)

*I've been thinking about it for a
while, actually. You'd think a guy
would have the speech ready. You'd
think after sixty-five years you'd
know what the big closing statement
is. The thing you leave them with.*

(he looks into his coffee)

*But every time I try to put it
together, it comes out wrong. Too
long. Too much. Or it sounds like
something off a greeting card and
that is not that is not me.*

(beat)

*So I'll just say the simple
version.*

(he looks up)

*I had five kids. I lost one too
soon.*

(this costs him)

*And the ones I have left they drive
me absolutely out of my mind. Every
single day. They fight and they
hold grudges and they keep score
and they don't call enough and when
they do call it's because they need
something a beat but there's warmth
under it*

*And I would not trade a single one
of them. Not for anything on this
earth.*

(MORE)

NICKY (CONT'D)

(beat)

That's the whole speech. That's
what I've got.

*he looks toward BELLA he can't see her, but he looks in her
direction anyway, the way you do when someone's on your mind*

I just hope they know it. When all
the noise dies down.

(back to the audience)

I hope they know.

*The light on NICKY fades slowly. BELLA takes a step toward
him. She reaches out.*

She can't touch him.

She lets her hand fall.

*Darkness. Then: the sound of a phone ringing. Once. Twice.
Three times.*

GIANNA (V.O.)

Mom. Mom, pick up the phone.
Something's wrong with Dad. Mom.
Silence.

*Then a cry Marie's voice, off. The kind of sound a person
makes only once in their life.*

Lights out.

*The Cappaletti living room. It hasn't changed in twenty years
good furniture worn soft at the edges, family photos crowding
every wall, a crucifix above the door, an oil painting of the
Virgin Mary above the TV. A hospital-grade oxygen tank stands
in the corner beside Nicky's recliner. No one has moved it
yet.*

*Three days after Nicky's death. Early morning. The light is
gray and thin. MARIE CAPPALETTI sits at the kitchen table in
her housecoat and good slippers, both hands around a mug of
tea. She's been up for hours. She stares at the middle
distance with the expression of someone doing difficult
internal arithmetic.*

*GIANNA enters from the hallway, sweatpants, oversized shirt,
hair in a bun that started the night as a good bun and has
become something else. She stops when she sees her mother.
She's also been up for hours.*

They look at each other. Neither speaks first. They both know the other didn't sleep.

GIANNA

You didn't sleep.

MARIE

I slept.

GIANNA

Ma.

MARIE

(not unkindly)

I slept enough. Go eat something.

GIANNA opens the refrigerator. She stares. The refrigerator is absolutely, entirely full foil covered pans stacked on Tupperware stacked on casserole dishes, a geological record of the neighborhood's grief.

GIANNA

There is so much food in here.

MARIE

The Ferraras brought ziti. The Mangiones sent two whole chickens. Mrs. Deluca from the block made her stuffed peppers, which, honestly, I don't know why she thought this was a stuffed pepper occasion

GIANNA

Who made the lasagna? There are two lasagnas.

MARIE

I don't know who made the second one. Someone just left it. People do that.

(beat)

It's a very good lasagna.

GIANNA closes the refrigerator. She pours coffee. She sits across from her mother. For a long moment they just breathe together in the quiet of the kitchen. This is something they're good at being in the same silence.

GIANNA

(carefully)

Allegra called last night. She and Chris will be here by noon.

MARIE

(still looking at the middle distance)

I know.

GIANNA

And Joey

MARIE

I know about Joey.

GIANNA

He's bringing Rosalie.

MARIE

(a pause that contains multitudes)

That's fine.

(beat)

It's fine.

GIANNA wraps both hands around her mug.

GIANNA

Teeny texted. She said she needs a ride from me because Sal can't drive her.

MARIE

What does that mean?

GIANNA

(a look)

I think it means what it means, Ma.

MARIE

(sighs the particular sigh of a woman who has been sighing about Sal D'Marco for years)

Just go get her. And Gianna please. Today is not the day.

GIANNA

What day?

MARIE

The day you and Teeny get into it.

(off GIANNA's expression)

You always have a look on your face around her. A look.

GIANNA

I don't have a look.

MARIE

You have a look.

(beat)

Your father had the same look. He thought he was hiding it too.

GIANNA almost smiles at this. It flickers and goes.

GIANNA

How are you doing? For real.

MARIE

(a long pause she's not going to lie, but she's also not going to fall apart at the kitchen table at seven in the morning)
 I'm doing what needs doing.
(beat)

I'll do the rest later.

GIANNA

That's not actually an answer.

MARIE

looking at her daughter direct
 I know. I love you. Go get your sister.

GIANNA stands. She gets her coat from the back of the chair. She pauses, looks at her mother at the oxygen tank in the corner, at the empty recliner. She doesn't say what she's thinking. She never quite does.

She leaves.

MARIE sits. After a moment she reaches over and puts her hand flat on the empty chair beside her NICKY's chair, his specific dent in the cushion, still there. She keeps her hand there.

BELLA drifts in from the hallway. She moves to stand behind her mother's chair and looks down at her. She lifts her hand slowly toward MARIE's shoulder. She can't make contact. She lets it fall.

MARIE doesn't see her. But she shivers once — the way a room changes when someone enters who isn't quite there.

She keeps her hand on the chair.

Lights shift.

GIANNA's car, moving. She drives. TEENY D'MARCO sits in the passenger seat.

TEENY is wearing leggings that have seen better days, a blouse that's been slept in once or twice, but her nails are freshly done long coffin-shaped acrylics in a deep wine red, not a chip in sight and perched on her lap is a handbag that costs more than Gianna's monthly expenses. It is enormous and very beautiful and completely incongruous with everything else.

BABY BELL's car seat is in the back, empty.

They have been driving in silence. It's the familiar silence of two people who know each other too well to fill space with small talk, but also have things they're not saying.

TEENY

(without preamble)

She's at Allegra's. I dropped her off last night so she wouldn't be underfoot today.

GIANNA

Okay.

TEENY

I just she picks up on things. Emotional energy. She walked into a room two weeks ago and I was just quietly crying to myself, not even really crying, just sitting there, and she walked over and put her hand on my face and said 'Mama sad.' Two years old. She just knew.

GIANNA

(genuinely)

That's actually really sweet.

TEENY

I know. She's a good kid.

(beat)

She's a really good kid.

A real moment of softness between them. Then GIANNA's eyes briefly find the handbag. TEENY catches it.

TEENY (CONT'D)

Don't.

GIANNA

I didn't say anything.

TEENY

You were about to.

GIANNA

Teeny. I genuinely was not.

TEENY

(on the defensive anyway)

Sal got it for me. It was a birthday present. I didn't go out and just I didn't buy it.

GIANNA

I believe you.

TEENY

It's technically vintage so it's actually an investment

GIANNA

Teeny. I said I believe you.
(beat)

I'm on your side.

TEENY subsides. She runs her thumb along the strap of the bag.

TEENY

(quieter)

I keep picking up my phone to call him.
(beat)

Not even for anything important. Just I'll be making coffee and I think, I should call Dad, and then I remember.

(she looks out the window)

Does that happen to you?

GIANNA

(low)

Every morning.

TEENY

It's so stupid. I know he's gone.
But the habit is still just Lit's
still there.

GIANNA

It's not stupid.
(beat)

It just takes a while for the rest
of you to catch up to what you
know.

TEENY nods. She fidgets with her nails. Under the handbag and the fresh manicure, she looks tired in a specific way the way you look when you've been holding things up for a long time and you're not sure how much longer you can.

TEENY

Is everyone going to be there
today?

GIANNA

Looks like it.
(beat)
Joey too.

TEENY

(a dry, rueful exhale)

And Rosalie?

GIANNA

And Rosalie.

TEENY

(to the window)

Fantastic. What a day.

(beat)

Is there food? Mom always has food.

GIANNA

An unreasonable amount of food.

TEENY

Good. I haven't eaten since yesterday.

GIANNA glances at her again a flicker of genuine concern that she keeps to herself.

They drive. The neighborhoods get familiar.

TEENY (CONT'D)

(almost to herself)

He always piked up when I called.
Even when I knew he was annoyed at me. He always picked up.

GIANNA

(softly)
Yeah.

TEENY presses her lips together. She will not cry in this car. She has decided.

They drive.

Lights shift.

THE CAPPALETTI LIVING ROOM. BY TEN IN THE MORNING IT HAS TRANSFORMED FOOD DISTRIBUTED ACROSS THE COUNTERS, RELATIVES IN AND OUT, THE HUM OF LOW CONVERSATION. ALLEGRA CAPPALETTI MOVES THROUGH IT ALL WITH A LARGE GLASS OF WHITE WINE, WHICH SHE IS NURSING WITH THE FOCUSED INTENTIONALITY OF SOMEONE WHO HAS MADE A HEALTH DECISION. CHRIS FOLLOWS APPROXIMATELY FIVE FEET BEHIND HER, PHONE OUT, A LIVING EMBODIMENT OF SUPPORTIVE BACKGROUND PRESENCE.

MARIE receives everyone neighbors, cousins, the priest, the woman from two blocks over who Nicky helped once when her car broke down, a group of old men who look like they haven't been inside a house this clean in years. MARIE says thank you to every single person and means it every single time. She is extraordinary at this.

GIANNA stands at the edge of the kitchen doorway, coffee in hand, watching. She has perfected the art of the inhabited periphery.

BELLA is here standing near the window, looking in at the room full of people who loved her father. She looks like she is trying to memorize every face.

ALLEGRA sweeping toward GIANNA, arms wide, wine sloshing not quite over the rim There she is. My bookend.

She hugs GIANNA fiercely, one arm, wine glass extended out like a torch.

GIANNA

Hi, Allegra.

ALLEGRA

pulling back, cupping GIANNA's face
You look exhausted.

GIANNA

You say that every time you see me.

ALLEGRA

Because every time I see you,
you're exhausted. It's consistent.
she studies her. Are you eating?

GIANNA

There are two lasagnas in the
refrigerator.

(MORE)

GIANNA (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm eating.

ALLEGRA

(satisfied)

Good.

sips wine. My therapist said I need to set an intention for today. I told her my intention is to not get into it with Teeny or Joey. She said that's not an intention, that's a strategy. I said, Barbara, same thing. She said it's not.

GIANNA

...Who won?

ALLEGRA

(sighing)

Barbara. Always Barbara.

(beat)

But I'm protecting my peace today. That's my actual intention. Whatever happens, I'm not taking on anyone else's negative energy.

she gestures toward the room with her wine glass
There is a lot of negative energy in this room.

GIANNA

(dry)

Everyone's dad just died.

ALLEGRA

(a beat)

That was poorly phrased. I just mean I've worked very hard in therapy and I'm not going to let today undo that.

GIANNA

How's Chris holding up?

ALLEGRA

glancing back at CHRIS, who is texting, blissfully unaware
 Chris is fine. Chris is always
 fine. I genuinely wonder sometimes
 what goes on in there.

beat, then with unexpected vulnerability
 He's been really good, actually.
 This week. He made me dinner every
 night.

GIANNA

That's good, Allegra.

ALLEGRA

(recovering her composure)
 Don't make it a thing.
(pivoting)
 How's Mom? Honestly.

GIANNA

She's you know how she is. She's
 feeding everyone and thanking
 everyone and not letting anyone do
 anything for her.

ALLEGRA

(nodding)
 She needs to let herself fall apart
 a little bit. You can't just
 caretake through grief. That's
 dissociation.

GIANNA

Or maybe she knows what she needs
 and it's not us narrating it to
 her.

ALLEGRA

(a beat)
 ...That was also a Barbara thing to
 say.

GIANNA

Take that how you want.

The door opens. JOEY CAPPALETTI enters with ROSALIE. JOEY is in a good suit he looks like a man who came from somewhere different and is aware of it. He has his father's broad shoulders and his mother's careful eyes. He takes in the room with the look of someone both desperate to be here and unsure how to be here.

ROSALIE is impeccable pressed, composed, polite in the way of someone who has practiced being polite. Her eyes move over the room in a quick sweep that is not quite subtle enough.

MARIE sees him from across the room. She makes her way to him. Joey takes one step toward her and then stops something in him stalls, some old calculus. Then MARIE gets to him first and puts her arms around him, and whatever was stalled in him gives way.

MARIE

holding him
Joey. Look at you. You're here.

JOEY

holding on
I'm sorry, Marie. I'm so sorry.

MARIE

pulling back, looking at his face searching it
He loved you. You know that. He
talked about you all the time.

Something crosses JOEY's face too fast to name.

JOEY

(quietly)
I know.

ROSALIE steps forward, extends both hands to MARIE's.

ROSALIE

(warmly professional)
Marie. We're just so sorry. Nicky
was he was really something.

MARIE

(graciously)
Thank you for making the trip.

ROSALIE

looking around, just barely

Of course. Of course.

ALLEGRA, from across the room, makes a face so small only GIANNA catches it. GIANNA looks at the ceiling.

TEENY appears from the kitchen, a full plate in hand. She stops dead when she sees JOEY. A long beat. The last time they were in the same room, things were said.

TEENY

(neutrally)

Joey. matching it Teeny.

ROSALIE *too brightly, filling the silence*
Justine! How are the kids?

TEENY (CONT'D)

a beat

she has one kid, Kid. I have one.

ROSALIE

(unperturbed)

Right, of course. Baby Bella. How is she?

TEENY's expression does something. She looks at GIANNA. GIANNA gives her the smallest shake of the head not now.

TEENY

(measured)

She's great. She's with Allegra.

ALLEGRA

from across the room, raising her wine glass, She's an angel.

(beat)

We watched four episodes of a cartoon about a dump truck this morning.

Baby Bell's mere mention shifts the energy in the room. A few people smile. The tension drops a degree.

ELIJAH HERNANDEZ comes through the front door, hat in hand, in a clean button-up.

He has the careful body language of someone who grew up in and out of this house and knows it better than his own but also knows today he is a guest. His eyes find GIANNA.

ELIJAH

to MARIE first, hat still in hand
Mrs. Cappaletti. I'm so sorry.

MARIE

genuinely warm she always liked
Elijah

Elijah. Come in, honey, come in. There's food in the kitchen.

ELIJAH

Thank you.
(to GIANNA, crossing to her)
Hey.

GIANNA

Hey. You came.

ELIJAH

Of course I came. Your dad he was the reason half the guys I know didn't end up somewhere they couldn't come back from.
(beat)
Including me.

GIANNA

something soft moving across her face
He really loved you guys.

ELIJAH

I know. We knew.

They stand together for a moment at the edge of the room. It's easy between them always has been.

BELLA has drifted closer to GIANNA. She stands just behind her sister, studying her face with the intensity of someone who hasn't been able to look at someone they love in a very long time.

Lights shift.

Later. The room has settled. Neighbors have cycled out. It's family and close friends now. SAL D'MARCO has arrived he gave TEENY a kiss that landed somewhere between her cheek and the air beside it, accepted a beer, and parked himself against the wall with the look of someone running a slow-burn internal negotiation. There's nothing specific you can point to. Just something slightly off in the timing of things a half-second delay in his responses, a stillness that isn't calm.

GIANNA has found a corner. She sits with Baby Bell on her lap. Baby Bell is luminously indifferent to all family drama. She is currently offering GIANNA crackers one by one with great solemnity.

GIANNA

*(accepting a cracker with
matching solemnity)*

Thank you.

Baby Bell pats her face. GIANNA allows it.

GIANNA (CONT'D)

(to Baby Bell, very quiet)

*You know, you're the only person in
this room who hasn't said something
that needed to be unsaid.*

Baby Bell offers another cracker. GIANNA takes it.

Across the room, JOEY and ALLEGRA have found a corner of their own. They are having the quiet version of an argument voices low, bodies angled away from the room.

ALLEGRA

*(measured, which means she's trying
hard)*

*I'm not attacking you. I'm just
saying he asked about you.*

JOEY

*(clipped)
I called him.*

ALLEGRA

A phone call is not a visit, Joey.
 (beat)
 He got sick and he told me on the
 phone that he'd seen you once in
 two years. Once.

JOEY

We had things going on. Rosalie's
 mother was

ALLEGRA

I know. I know about Rosalie's
 mother. I'm just telling you what
 he said. He missed you. He didn't
 say it like that you know how he
 was, he'd never just say I miss my
 son but I could hear it.

JOEY is quiet. He holds his drink.

JOEY

(lower)
 I know I should have come more.

ALLEGRA

(softening a little)
 I'm not trying to pile on.

JOEY

It felt like every time I came back
 here it was just. *he searches for*
the word
 loud. It was always so loud. And I
 didn't know how to

he stops

ALLEGRA

(quietly)
 I know it was loud. It was loud for
 all of us, Joey.

JOEY

(a beat)
 I know.

*ROSALIE materializes, placing her hand on JOEY's arm in a way
 that is both affectionate and redirecting.*

ROSALIE

pleasantly Joey, I just want to
make sure we look at the traffic
situation before it gets too late

ALLEGRA

the softness evaporating instantly
We haven't even been to the funeral
home yet.

ROSALIE

(still pleasant)
I know, I'm just being practical
about the drive

ALLEGRA

The man's body is in a box across
town and you're talking about
traffic.

JOEY

Allegra

ALLEGRA

not breaking eye contact with
ROSALIE, I am going to protect my
peace so hard right now.

ROSALIE

with the serene confidence of
someone who has won many of these
I'll give you two some space.

*She drifts away. JOEY watches her go with the particular look
of a man who has chosen his life and sometimes wonders what
the choosing cost.*

ALLEGRA

to JOEY, quiet
Joey. I say this with love. Get
your balls out of your wife's
purse.

JOEY

(closing his eyes briefly)
Allegra.

ALLEGRA

She walked into your father's house
on the day of his wake and started
talking about the Turnpike

JOEY

(sharp, quiet)
I know. I know, okay? I know.

He walks away. ALLEGRA watches him go. She finishes her wine.

TEENY materializes beside GIANNA, lowering herself into the next chair. Baby Bell reaches for her mother, who scoops her absently and settles her on her own lap. For a moment the three of them GIANNA, TEENY, Baby Bell are just a family sitting in a corner.

TEENY

watching Joey
What's Allegra yelling at him
about?

GIANNA

Not coming around enough.
(beat)
The usual.

TEENY

a short sound that isn't quite a laugh
Rich, coming from the woman who
went limited contact for two years.

GIANNA

Let's not.

TEENY

I'm just saying.
(beat)
Hey speaking of, you're going to
the will thing tomorrow?

GIANNA

(carefully)

Yeah.

TEENY

Good. Me too.

a pause she's building up to something, and GIANNA can feel it like a change in air pressure

Things have just been really hard lately. You know how it gets. Sal and I have had a rough couple of months and money's been it's been tight.

GIANNA

Teeny

TEENY

I'm not asking for anything specific. I'm just saying. If there's anything in the will that's more flexible it would really help right now.

quickly, For Baby Bell. More than anything, for her.

GIANNA

measured

Teeny. Our father is in a funeral home. We haven't even been there yet.

TEENY

(defensive)

I know that. I know where he is. I'm not I'm grieving too, Gianna, I'm not just

GIANNA

(quiet, firm)

I know you are. I know.
(beat)

Just not today. Okay? Just let today be what it is.

TEENY is quiet. She adjusts Baby Bell on her lap. Baby Bell reaches up and touches her mother's chin and says something that is almost a word.

TEENY's face, for just a moment, is entirely open all the armor down, nothing there but how much she loves this child and how tired she is.

Then she straightens up. The armor comes back.

TEENY

(lightly)

Fine. You want anything from the kitchen? I'm going.

GIANNA

I'm good.

TEENY goes. GIANNA watches her.

MARIE appears beside her, slides into the empty chair.

MARIE

What did she say?

GIANNA

Money stuff.

MARIE

(the sigh again)

I figured.

(beat)

Your father used to say she was the one who needed a net under her the most and didn't know how to ask for it straight.

GIANNA

She knows how to ask. She just asks sideways.

MARIE

a small, rueful smile maybe the first one today
Yeah.

she's quiet a moment, then He left her something. Before you worry. He left all of them something. He wouldn't the wasn't that kind of man.

GIANNA

(a little surprised)
How do you know?

MARIE

The lawyer called. There's a
reading tomorrow.
(beat)
There's something separate for you
too.

GIANNA

What do you mean, separate?

MARIE

I don't have details. We'll find
out tomorrow.

she looks at GIANNA
Don't make yourself crazy about it
tonight.

GIANNA

(a dry look)
That's like telling me not to
breathe.

MARIE

(patting her hand)
I know, baby. I know.

*she looks out at the room at Joey talking to one of the old
neighbors, at Allegra refilling her wine, at Teeny coming
back from the kitchen with a full plate*

Look at them.

He loved them so much. All of them. Even when they made him
absolutely crazy.

GIANNA

(quiet)
Especially then, I think.

MARIE

(looking at her daughter)

Especially then. *The afternoon light through the windows is turning gold. BELLA stands near the window, her face in it. Lights shift.*

SCENE FIVE — THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WAKE

Late. The living room quiet the visitors gone, the food wrapped, the dishes done. GIANNA sits alone on the couch in the dark, lit only by the lamp in the corner. She has her phone in her hand but she isn't looking at it.

ELIJAH appears at the door. He knocks softly. She lets him in without getting up.

ELIJAH

(quietly)

Your mom said it was okay if I stayed a while.
off her expression. I ran into her in the kitchen. She said, Elijah, you want coffee, stay and talk to my daughter, she's just sitting in there.

GIANNA

not quite a smile

She did not.

ELIJAH

Word for word.

he sits in the armchair across from her
She also gave me a plate of something. I think it was baked ziti.

GIANNA

It was the second lasagna. Nobody knows who made it.

ELIJAH

It's good.

GIANNA almost laughs. It doesn't quite get there.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

(after a moment)
How you doing, Gi? For real.

GIANNA

she's been asked this all day and
has deflected every time she
doesn't deflect now
I keep thinking about the last time
I talked to him.

(beat)
It wasn't a big conversation. It
was just I called him to tell him I
was coming home for dinner and he
said okay, bring the good bread.
The round kind from Martino's.

(beat)
That was three days before.

ELIJAH

Did you get the bread?

GIANNA

I got the bread.
(a pause)
He only ate half of it. Said he
wasn't that hungry.

she looks at the lamp

I didn't think anything of it.

ELIJAH

(gently)
You weren't supposed to.

GIANNA

I know. I know that.
(beat)
I'm not doing the thing where I
blame myself. I'm past that.
(a beat)
I'm doing the other thing, where
I'm just really mad.

ELIJAH

Mad at who?

GIANNA

(a breath)

Nobody specific. Just mad. At how fast. Mad that everyone got to have a whole day of drama today while I was the one making sure Mom ate and telling Teeny not right now and keeping an eye on Sal

she stops

I'm always the one keeping an eye on things.

ELIJAH

Your dad did that too.

GIANNA

(surprised)

What?

ELIJAH

He was always even when we were kids, running around out there he'd be on the stoop and you could tell he was watching everything. Not in a weird way. Just. Like he needed to know everyone was okay.

(beat)

You got that from him.

GIANNA

something in her face

He told me to stay out of it.

ELIJAH

Watching and getting into it are different things.

GIANNA

(long pause)

He said that to me my whole life.

(MORE)

GIANNA (CONT'D)

The second I'd say anything about
Teeny or Joey or stay out of it,
Gianna. Stay in your lane. Don't
make waves.

(beat)

I think he thought he was
protecting me.

ELIJAH

You think he wasn't?

GIANNA

honestly

I think he was protecting me and
also making me invisible. Both.

she looks at her hands

I think those can both be true.

ELIJAH is quiet, respecting the weight of that.

ELIJAH

(after a moment)

You know what he said to me, last
time I saw him? Like three months
ago. I ran into him at the hardware
store and we talked for God,
probably an hour. You know how he
was at the hardware store.

GIANNA

a real small laugh finally breaking through
He could not be stopped.

ELIJAH

(smiling)

He could not be stopped. He's
explaining to me the right way to
caulk a bathtub for twenty minutes.
And then out of nowhere he says,
you know my youngest? Gianna? I say
yeah. He says, that one's going to
surprise everyone. Including
herself.

(beat)

He said it like it was just a fact.

GIANNA is very still.

GIANNA

(after a long moment)

He never said anything like that to me.

ELIJAH

I know. He probably should have.

She nods slowly. She looks at the empty recliner. BELLA is visible to the audience she has drifted in and stands behind GIANNA's couch, looking at her sister's back.

GIANNA

(to the chair)

Yeah, Pop. You probably should have.

ELIJAH stays. They sit in the quiet together.

Lights fade.

SCENE SIX — THE WAKE

The funeral home. A room full of white flowers lilies, carnations, roses. The casket is dark mahogany, closed, surrounded by framed photos of NICKY: young, old, at weddings, at backyard barbecues, in his undershirt on the stoop, surrounded by the neighborhood kids, holding a baby who is GIANNA.

People move through in waves old neighborhood men who look like they're burying a piece of themselves, women who loved Nicky from a distance, young men from the block who are trying to hold it together.

The family stands in a reception line. MARIE in the center, composed in black. To her left: GIANNA and then empty space where BELLA would be. To her right: ALLEGRA wine-free now, for the occasion then JOEY and ROSALIE, then TEENY with SAL.

BELLA stands near the casket. Her hand rests on it. She has been here the longest. She will be here the longest. She looks at her family one by one.

A NEIGHBOR approaches MARIE.

NEIGHBOR

(taking both MARIE's hands)
(MORE)

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

Marie. He was the best man. He was absolutely the best man.

MARIE

(steady)

He really was. Thank you.

NEIGHBOR

(seeing GIANNA)

And Gianna you look just like him, you know. The eyes.

GIANNA

receiving this like it costs her

Thank you. That means a lot.

The NEIGHBOR moves on. GIANNA turns away to collect herself.

ELIJAH and several of the neighborhood men hold a small cluster near the back. One of them, DANNY, has his hat off and is turning it in his hands. They are not talking. They are just there.

JOEY slips out of the line and moves to stand near ELIJAH.

JOEY

(low)

You're Elijah, right? You were one of the kids from the block.

ELIJAH

looking at him this is the man who left and never came back
Yeah. That's me.

JOEY

He talked about you. Years ago.

(beat)

He was proud of all you guys.

ELIJAH

(measured)

He was proud of his actual kids too. All of them.

JOEY takes this. He nods.

JOEY

(quietly, genuinely)

I know.

He goes back to the line.

TEENY has begun to cry real crying, not the performative kind, her shoulders moving with it. *SAL* puts his arm around her. For a moment it is simply a husband comforting his wife and it looks like what it is supposed to be.

GIANNA moves away from the line, toward the casket. She stands before it.

GIANNA

(barely a whisper)

Hey, Pop.

(long pause)

Half of them are already fighting.
You know that, right? You've
probably been watching.

(beat)

I'm not saying I'm surprised.

a beat something more honest comes up
I miss you. I already miss you so
much it's stupid.

she presses her lips together. The bread's still on the counter. I couldn't throw it out. *ELIJAH* drifts over. He stands beside her. He doesn't say anything for a moment.

ELIJAH

(quiet)

He'd say the bread thing is just
wasteful.

GIANNA

(a broken laugh)

He'd say throw it out and stop
being dramatic.

ELIJAH

And then he'd probably have a piece
first.

GIANNA

And then he'd have a piece.

A moment of real warmth between them. Then, from across the room a voice elevating above where it should be.

ALLEGRA

*trying to stay hushed but not
managing it
I'm not saying it as an attack. I'm
saying it as an observation.*

JOEY

(gritted)
This is not the time

ALLEGRA

When is the time, Joey? You've been
here twelve hours and you've
checked your watch six times. Is
there a time scheduled?

JOEY

I have responsibilities at home

ALLEGRA

You had responsibilities here.

MARIE turns from a conversation with a neighbor. She takes in the scene.

MARIE

(low, absolute)
Stop.

She crosses the room. She stands between them, very small, very still.

MARIE (CONT'D)

evenly, without raising her voice
Your father is in that casket.
There are people in this room who
loved him. You will not do this
here.

she looks at each of them

You will shake people's hands and
 you will say thank you for coming
 and you will do it with your whole
 chest. Because that is who he
 raised you to be. All three of you.

(beat)

Are we done?

*ALLEGRA and JOEY look at the floor. They are, briefly,
 children again.*

ALLEGRA

(quietly)

Yes.

JOEY

(just as quietly)

Yes.

*MARIE nods. She goes back to her post. She shakes the next
 person's hand and says thank you for coming like nothing
 happened.*

*GIANNA has watched all of this from across the room. ELIJAH
 stands beside her.*

ELIJAH

(after a moment)

Your mom is something.

GIANNA

(quiet)

Yeah. She really is.

*BELLA, near the casket, watches her family. She presses both
 hands flat against the casket like she is steadying it. Like
 she is steadying all of them.*

SCENE ONE — THE MORNING AFTER

*The Cappaletti kitchen. The next morning. The food from the
 neighbors has been reorganized, wrapped, labeled in MARIE's
 handwriting. The oxygen tank is still in the corner. MARIE is
 at the table, dressed, hair done — a small act of deliberate
 continuation. She is reading something — a card that came
 with one of the floral arrangements.*

GIANNA comes in from the hallway in her coat, keys in hand, ready to go. She stops.

MARIE

Sit down. Five minutes.

GIANNA

Ma, the appointment is at ten

MARIE

without looking up from the card
Five minutes won't change what's in
the will.

GIANNA sits. MARIE puts down the card, pours her a cup of coffee without being asked, puts it in front of her. GIANNA wraps her hands around it.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Did you sleep?

GIANNA

More than the night before.

MARIE

That's not a number.

GIANNA

Four hours.
(beat)
I heard you at two.

MARIE

I went to his closet.
she says this plainly
I just stood in there for a while.
It still smells like him.
GIANNA is very still.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Don't make a face. It helped.

she picks up her own coffee. His shirts are still in there.
I'm not moving them.

GIANNA

Nobody said anything about moving
them, Ma.

MARIE

(looking at her)
I know. I'm just telling you.
(beat)
Allegra's going to say something.
About processing.

GIANNA

(dry)
I'll intercept her.

MARIE

(small smile)
Good.
(she sets down her cup)
The lawyer called me last week.
Before your father passed. He your
father called him and left specific
instructions. He wanted me to know
there was something for each of
you. Something different for you.

GIANNA

What does different mean?

MARIE

I don't know the details. I only
know what he told me before
(she stops)
Before.
*(she folds her hands on
the table)*
Whatever it is, it was something he
thought about. It wasn't an
accident.

GIANNA

(quietly)
Are the others going to think it's
favoritism?

MARIE

Some of them might.
(*directly*)
That would be their problem.

GIANNA

Ma

MARIE

(*firm*)
Your father had his reasons. He
always did, even when he didn't
explain them. I trusted that when
he was alive and I trust it now.

(*beat*)

You should too.

*GIANNA looks at her mother really looks at her. She is
holding so much right now and making it look like standing.*

GIANNA

(*quiet*)
How are you going to do this? Like
going forward. How are you going to
do this alone?

MARIE

(*a long pause*)
I've been doing a lot of it alone
for the last few years, with his
health the way it was.

(*beat*)

That's not a complaint. That's just
the truth of it.

(*she looks at the table*)
We had forty years. I'd rather have
had that and be here now than not
have had it at all.
(*she looks up*)

That's how I'm going to do it.

GIANNA nods.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Now go. You'll be late.

as GIANNA stands And Gianna.

GIANNA

Yeah.

MARIE

Whatever happens in that room
today. You're allowed to feel it.
(beat)
You don't have to stay out of it
today.

GIANNA stares at her mother. MARIE picks up her coffee and the card. She is done. GIANNA goes. Lights shift.

SCENE TWO — THE READING OF THE WILL

A law office. Minimal a long table, chairs, a credenza with a dead plant that nobody has noticed. MR. FERRANTE, late 50s, sits at the head. He has done this many times. He has no illusions.

The family files in and chooses seats with the unconscious territorial logic of people who have been doing Thanksgiving for thirty years. MARIE and GIANNA together at one end. ALLEGRA and CHRIS next CHRIS still on his phone until ALLEGRA covers it with her hand without looking. JOEY takes the seat across from ALLEGRA, ROSALIE beside him. TEENY and SAL at the far end. SAL is chewing something. Nobody comments.

BELLA stands in the corner behind GIANNA. She is very still.

MR. FERRANTE opens his folder.

MR. FERRANTE

Thank you all for coming. I know
this is a difficult time and I'll
try to make this as straightforward
as possible.
(beat)
Your father and stepfather asked
that his statement of intent be
read verbatim before the specifics.
I'll do that now.

He clears his throat.

MR. FERRANTE (CONT'D)

"To my children Allegra, Justine, Joseph, and my Gianna. And to Bella, wherever she is.

a pause in the room this lands differently for each of them

I know I wasn't easy. I know I had a temper and I said the wrong things more than the right ones and I asked a lot of you sometimes and not enough of you other times. I know that.

What I also know is that you are the best things I ever did. Every one of you. The day I became your father whatever way that happened, however it started was the best day I had. I mean that. You can take that to the bank.

Please try to get along. I know that's asking a lot. But try. For Marie. For each other. For the people you're going to be when the noise dies down.

And don't fight about the stuff. None of the stuff matters. You know what matters.

I love you. I always did.
Nicky."

The room is very quiet. MARIE has her hands folded on the table, her eyes cast down. TEENY presses her fingers to her mouth. JOEY looks at the wall. ALLEGRA who has held it together all day blinks rapidly.

GIANNA stares at the table. She does not move.

MR. FERRANTE (CONT'D)

*(giving them a moment,
then continuing)*

To Allegra Cappaletti: the property at 14 Shore Road, Seaside Heights he beach house. Mr. Cappaletti noted that Allegra was the one who asked about it most over the years and he wanted her to have somewhere that was hers.

ALLEGRA breathes out. She puts her hand over her mouth.

MR. FERRANTE (CONT'D)

To Justine D'Marco: a trust in the amount of eighty thousand dollars, to be distributed monthly in increments of fifteen hundred, administered by First National until the principal is exhausted.

TEENY nods. She is trying to do math. SAL sits up slightly. TEENY puts her hand on his forearm the warning gesture again.

SAL

(under his breath, to TEENY)
Monthly. Why monthly?

TEENY

(barely audible)

Don't.

MR. FERRANTE

To Joseph Cappaletti: the contents of the Cappaletti workshop and garage, including all tools and equipment, and the 1967 Chevrolet Camaro, currently in storage.
reading from the addendum
Mr. Cappaletti noted: 'Joey, you always loved that car and always pretended you didn't. It's yours. Take it out of storage and actually drive it.'

JOEY makes a sound not quite a laugh, not quite a cry. He presses his fist against his mouth. ROSALIE puts her hand on his back. For once she is simply present.

MR. FERRANTE (CONT'D)

(a brief pause, then)
To Gianna Cappaletti. Your father included a personal addendum here as well, which I'll read in full.

He turns a page.

MR. FERRANTE (CONT'D)

("Gianna.")

You've been so good your whole life. Too good, maybe. You stayed quiet when I told you to. You stayed out of it. You took care of everyone and didn't complain and I watched you do it and I thought she's okay, she's handling it, she doesn't need me to worry about her. I was wrong.

I was telling you to be invisible because it was easier than watching you get hurt by all of it, but what I was actually doing was making you invisible. And you are not invisible. You never were. You are the most present person in every room you walk into and I think you might be the only one who doesn't know it.

I'm leaving you the equivalent of six months' first and last month's rent on an apartment. Don't give it to anyone else. Don't tell me you don't need it. Get out of that house and find your own life. You've been ready for longer than you know.

And Gianna I'm sorry. I should have told you more. While I had time.

Love, Pop."

Silence.

Absolute silence.

MARIE has pressed her fingers over her eyes. GIANNA sits very still, the way she always sits the way she has been trained to sit, quiet and contained.

BELLA has moved closer. She stands directly behind GIANNA's chair now. She watches her sister's face.

Then:

TEENY

unable to stop herself

Monthly distributions what does
that mean in terms of access?
Because we have some shortterm
expenses right now and if it's
going to take a week to process

ALLEGRA

(flat)
Teeny.

TEENY

(defensive)

I'm asking a practical question.

ALLEGRA

Not now.

TEENY

Well when? When is the appropriate
time to ask a practical question?
Everyone keeps saying not now, not
today, not here

ALLEGRA

*(her composure beginning
to crack)*
Because our father just did you
hear what he wrote? Did any of that
land?

TEENY

(her voice rising)
Of course it landed! I'm not made
of stone, Allegra! I'm trying to
figure out how to keep my family
afloat

JOEY

(measured)
Teeny, the monthly structure is
there for a reason.

TEENY

(turning on him)
Don't. You got a car. You got a
whole workshop. I got a stipend.

JOEY

The trust is worth more than the
car and the tools put together

TEENY

That's not the point! The point is
the way it's structured, it's like
he didn't trust me. Like I need to
be managed.

ALLEGRA

(losing it now)
Teeny! He was trying to protect
you! That's what he always did! He
knew that if he handed you a lump
sum it would be gone in a year

TEENY

(wounded to the core)
That is a terrible thing to say.

ALLEGRA

It's true

TEENY

It is a terrible thing to say at a
will reading when our father just
died

JOEY

Both of you

SAL

(standing slightly)
I think there's a way to look at
this that's

JOEY

to SAL, not unkindly but with
authority. Sal. Please sit down.

SAL

I'm just

JOEY

Please.

SAL sits. ROSALIE is very still, watching.

MR. FERRANTE glances at MARIE. MARIE gives him the smallest nod it's all right.

ALLEGRA and TEENY are still going. JOEY has his eyes closed.

GIANNA has not moved. She is still exactly as she was when the letter was read. Very still. Very contained.

BELLA stands right behind her. She reaches toward her sister's shoulder the same gesture she made toward MARIE in the kitchen, the one she can never complete.

And something shifts in GIANNA.

GIANNA

very quiet so quiet that it takes a moment for the room to realize she's spoken He said I made myself invisible.

The argument sputters. TEENY and ALLEGRA turn to look at her.

GIANNA (CONT'D)

*still quiet, but something building underneath it
He said he made me invisible. And he said it in a document read by a lawyer because he couldn't say it to my face. My whole life.*

she looks at the table

And right now you're sitting here arguing about disbursement schedules and whether the car was worth more than the trust, and you haven't none of you have stopped for one second to sit with what he actually said.

TEENY

(carefully)
Gianna

GIANNA

*and now it comes not screaming, but
something tectonic, something that
has been moving underground for
years and finally hits the surface*
No. I'm going to talk now.

*she straightens up the quiet girl
is still there but she is no longer
leading*

I've been watching this family my
entire life. I've been sitting in
the corner, staying out of it, not
saying what I think because Dad
told me not to and Mom told me not
to and I told myself not to because
I was so scared of making it worse.

(beat)

You want to know something? I don't
know what I like for dinner. I
genuinely don't know. Because for
twenty-something years I've been
eating whatever was already being
made for someone else. I don't know
what I want to do with my life
because I've spent so long trying
not to add to anyone's list of
problems that I never started my
own list.

(she looks at ALLEGRA)

Allegra. You have been in therapy
for fifteen years and you use it
like armor. You talk about your
peace like it's a country you've
built and the rest of us are
invading it, but the truth is the
truth is you are still that kid who
got adopted and never fully let
herself believe it took. And
instead of sitting with that you
self-medicate and call it healing.

(ALLEGRA opens her mouth and doesn't speak)

(GIANNA looks at JOEY)

Joey. I genuinely love you. I think somewhere in there is the
person who used to sneak me extra Halloween candy and tell
Dad it was already gone. But you left. Not just physically
you left. You built yourself a whole life designed to prove
you weren't where you came from and now you can't even figure
out how to walk back through the door without Rosalie telling
you the traffic's bad.

(ROSALIE is frozen)

(MORE)

GIANNA (CONT'D)

And Teeny
her voice catches here she loves
TEENY and this costs her
Teeny. He structured it that way
because he loved you. Because he
knew you. The trust isn't an
insult. It's him still trying to
put a net under you from wherever
he is now. That's not an
embarrassment. That is a father
loving a daughter the way he knew
how.

(a beat she's shaking
slightly)

I am so tired of staying out of it.

she looks at MARIE last and this is where the anger gives way
to something more open, more frightened

Mom. I have to go.

(MARIE is still)

I love you more than anything in
this world. And I can't stay in
that house anymore. I can't be your
person and my own person at the
same time because I don't even know
who my own person is yet.

(her voice breaks)

He gave me the money for an
apartment. So I'm going to get one.
And I'm going to figure out the
rest.

(beat)

I'm sorry if that's hard. But I
think I think he already knew I
needed to do this. He just couldn't
say it out loud either.

(Silence.)

The particular, charged, irreversible silence of things that
have been said.

MR. FERRANTE stares at his folder.

MARIE has not looked away from her daughter. Her eyes are
full. Her posture hasn't changed.

JOEY stares at the table. ROSALIE stares at her hands. TEENY
is crying, quietly, genuinely no performance in it.

ALLEGRA looks at the window.

BELLA, behind GIANNA, slowly raises both hands to her face.
Her eyes are bright.

GIANNA picks up her bag and her coat. Her hands are steady.

GIANNA (CONT'D)

*(to the room, quiet, not
unkind)*

Thank you, Mr. Ferrante.

She walks to the door. She goes.

(The door closes.)

*MARIE puts her hand flat on the table. She breathes. She
nods, once, to herself to something.*

Lights fade.

SCENE THREE — THE PARKING LOT

*Outside. GIANNA stands with her back against the brick wall
of the building, face tilted up toward whatever sky she can
see between the buildings. She is breathing slowly. The
shaking is fading.*

*ELIJAH was waiting outside he drove MARIE. He reads the
situation in one look.*

ELIJAH

(carefully)

You okay?

GIANNA

*(a short, slightly
disbelieving exhale)*

*I just said everything I've never
said, in a lawyer's office, at my
father's will reading.*

ELIJAH

Did it need to be said?

GIANNA

Probably years ago.

ELIJAH

(a small nod)

Then you're okay.

She looks at him.

GIANNA

He left me money for first and last
month's rent.
*she says it like she still can't
quite believe it*
In his will. He said get out of the
house and find your own life.

ELIJAH

(quiet, careful)
Sounds like him.

GIANNA

(a broken laugh)
He couldn't just he couldn't just
say it to me. He had to die and put
it in a legal document.
(beat)
That is the most Dad thing that has
ever happened.

ELIJAH

For what it's worth I don't think
he knew how.
(beat)
Some people, the thing they feel
most, they can't say it out loud.
They do it other ways.

GIANNA

(quietly)
The bread.

ELIJAH

What?

GIANNA

(a real, small, sad smile)
Nothing. Something my mom says.
(she pushes off the wall)
Thank you for being out here.

ELIJAH

(gently)
Where else would I be?

GIANNA looks at him really looks at him. The potential of it is there between them, unspoken, not the moment for it yet but present.

GIANNA

(softly)

Ask me how I'm doing. In a week.
When I can actually answer.

ELIJAH

*and there is a warmth in it, a
promise. I'll do that.*

The door opens. MARIE comes out. She sees them registers ELIJAH, registers the distance between him and GIANNA and what it means. She says nothing about it. She walks to her daughter and stands in front of her.

MARIE

Gianna.

GIANNA

(already)

Ma, I'm sorry if I

MARIE

(quiet, definite)

Don't apologize.

GIANNA goes still.

MARIE (CONT'D)

*(she takes a breath, and
then, clearly, directly)*

You were right. About all of it.

(beat)

I've known for a long time that you
needed to go. I've just been I've
been holding on because I didn't
know how to let the last one leave.

*(her voice is steady but
it costs her)*

First I lost Bella. Then your
father got sick and I lost pieces
of him slowly. And you were there
every day and I think I leaned on
that more than I should have.

GIANNA

(her eyes filling)

Mom

MARIE

(continuing)

Let me finish.

(beat)

I'm your mother. My job was to raise you and then let you go. And I think I forgot the second part.

she lifts her chin

So go. Get your apartment. Do whatever you need to do to figure out who you are.

and then, firm, loving, non-negotiable

But Sunday dinners. That's all I ask.

GIANNA

a laugh that is also crying

Sunday dinners.

MARIE

pulling her daughter into her arms
And you call me. Not every day well. Maybe every few days.

GIANNA

muffled, hugging back hard
I'll call you every day.

MARIE

(holding her)

Good.

(beat, softer)

Your father would be so he would be so proud of you. Today.

GIANNA can't speak for a moment.

GIANNA

*when she can
I know.*

ELIJAH looks at the sky. He is smiling.

BELLA has drifted out. She stands at the edge of the parking lot, watching her mother and her sister. She lifts her hand slowly and presses it flat over her own heart.

The doors behind them open again. JOEY comes out first, then ALLEGRA, then TEENY, who is holding Baby Bell, who she called Allegra's phone to come get the second the reading was over. They stand at the top of the steps.

They all look at each other. The parking lot is full of what was said and what hasn't been said yet and all the years that are going to need to be sorted through.

JOEY

*(to GIANNA direct, no
ceremony)
You weren't wrong.*

A long beat.

GIANNA

*(just as direct)
I know.
(a beat, then softer)
Neither were you, when you said you
should have come more.*

JOEY nods. He looks at MARIE.

JOEY

*(to MARIE)
We'll come for Sunday dinner. If
that's if that's still a thing.*

MARIE

*(simply)
It's still a thing.*

ALLEGRA, who has been very quiet since the office, walks down the steps to GIANNA. She puts her arm around her.

ALLEGRA

*in her ear, not performing it for
anyone, I hate that you were right.*

GIANNA

*(leaning into her for a
moment)*
I know.

ALLEGRA

(pulling back, looking at her)
You should've been meaner about it.

GIANNA

Give me time.

ALLEGRA laughs a real one.

*TEENY comes down with Baby Bell. Baby Bell looks at GIANNA
and holds out her arms. GIANNA takes her. Baby Bell pats her
face.*

TEENY

(quietly, to GIANNA)
He really put the trust there
because he loved me?

GIANNA

*(holding Baby Bell,
looking at her sister)*
Yeah, Teeny. That's exactly why.

*TEENY nods. She adjusts the strap of her very expensive bag.
She straightens up.*

*SAL hangs back on the steps. ROSALIE has come out behind JOEY
and is at the bottom, keys already in hand.*

*But they are all here. In this parking lot. For a moment,
they are all just the Cappaletti family imperfect, loud, and
real.*

Lights shift.

SCENE FOUR — THE APARTMENT

Two months later.

A small apartment. Fresh paint a color GIANNA chose herself, something between sage and gray that she spent two weeks deciding on. Boxes, some open, some not. A bookshelf half assembled. A secondhand couch that is deeply comfortable and slightly ugly and entirely hers. A window with good light.

GIANNA is in sweatpants and an old hoodie, takeout container on the coffee table, glass of wine, phone in hand. She looks around the room. It's small and imperfect and nothing is quite right yet.

She is not anxious.

She types a text.

GIANNA

reading aloud as she types, slowly

Hey Mom. Sunday dinner still on?

beat she adds

I'll bring the bread. Round kind.
From Martino's.

she hits send. She sits back. She looks at the room around her.

Okay. she says it to herself, the
way you say something you've been
waiting to say for a long time
Okay.

The phone buzzes. She reads it. Something happens in her face the last of a knot she has been carrying for years loosens.

GIANNA (CONT'D)

(reading the text aloud, soft)
"Sunday at four. Don't forget the
round kind, not the long one. The
long one is for weekdays."

a real laugh full, unguarded, the kind she hasn't heard from herself in a while

The long one is for weekdays.

She sets down the phone. She picks up her wine. She looks out the window.

The apartment is quiet. The particular quiet of a space that is yours and no one else's not lonely, just still.

BELLA comes in.

She moves slowly through the apartment, looking at everything the half-assembled bookshelf, the takeout containers, the paint color, the window, the secondhand couch. She touches nothing. She just looks.

She reaches the center of the room and turns. She looks at her sister.

GIANNA doesn't see her. She is looking out the window. But she pauses she goes still in the way you go still when a room changes without explanation. She turns her head slightly, as though she heard something. As though the air shifted.

BELLA watches her.

She takes in her sister the sweatpants, the wine glass, the take out container, the half-built shelf, the window with the good light. The whole ordinary beautiful specific life her sister is beginning to live.

BELLA smiles. Not a sad smile. A real one her whole face in it, the kind she used to give before everything.

She turns toward the audience. She speaks for the first and only time.

BELLA

to the audience low, warm, sure of
it, There she is.

The light stays on GIANNA looking out the window.

BELLA stays in the room.

FADE OUT.