

THE OLIVE TREE

by

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EXT. DAY. THE ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE. 1970

OLD GIOVANNI, an elderly man dressed in rough-hewn cottons and wearing a straw hat, sits in the shade beneath an old olive tree. Giovanni's features are pronounced and distinctly Mediterranean, his age apparent in the wrinkles caressing his bronze face. Wiping the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief, he gazes ahead to the panoramic view of the valley below. Along with vineyards and fruit trees, the silhouette of a crumbling castle upon a hill can be seen. Giovanni raises his hand to his lips and whistles. A dog, an old German Shepherd, slowly walks through some tall grasses towards Giovanni. Laying next to Giovanni, the dog places a paw and his head affectionately upon Giovanni's lap.

OLD GIOVANNI
 (petting dog, sighing)
 Bello, bello... How many
 afternoons you and I have spent
 here together, hmm? But now, we
 are both old... just like our
 lovely friend above who gives us
 shade each day.

He smiles as he gently pats the trunk of the olive tree.

OLD GIOVANNI
 (continuing; content)
 Even after all these years, these
 hills, all this before us, hasn't
 changed... well, not too much; not
 too much. Not like America!

Giovanni thrusts one hand in the air to accentuate his point. His dog, in response, barks once. Giovanni takes his hat off and slowly begins fanning his face.

OLD GIOVANNI
 (continuing; tired)
 Ahh, America. Only work, work,
 work. You live to work instead of
 working to live, and then you have
 no family, and for what? I ask
 you, for what? Greed and envy, a
 wasted youth...

Giovanni slowly places his hat back on.

OLD GIOVANNI
 (continuing; slightly
 smiling)
 Si, si. America. A place for the
 young... but we too were once
 young, huh? Si, America...

Giovanni smiles and slowly slides his hat over his eyes.

CUT TO:

An ECU of Giovanni's lips.

OLD GIOVANNI
 (whispering)
 Si... America...

We begin hearing the sounds of a crowded street with horse-driven carriages as the camera begins booming up Giovanni's face and along up the trunk of the tree into it's leafy branches.

DISSOLVE TO:

The camera continues an upward boom through leafy branches of another tree to reveal:

EXT. DAY. COBBLESTONE STREET. NYC. SUMMER 1906.

The streets are hustling with people, vendor-carts, and horse-drawn carriages, all beneath a canopy of drying laundry on clotheslines stretched between the buildings.

CUT TO:

A group of five young boys between the ages of ten and twelve years old are running and playing a game of chase through the street. Three boys break away from the others and run down an alley, squeezing through a narrow opening of a wooden fence at the alley's end, crawling out of the bright sun into a narrow, tunnel-like passage. The three boys, sliding aside a wooden panel, emerge from their passage into a dark, cool warehouse full of men unloading crates of food supplies from unhitched, horse-drawn carriages. Sprinting to the nearest carriage, upon and next to which wooden crates of fruit are stacked, the boys huddle underneath it, chuckling. One boy is our YOUNG GIOVANNI. He quickly brings a finger to his lip to shush his friends, YOUNG MARCO & YOUNG ANTONIO, as the legs of a large man walk past their hiding place.

YOUNG GIOVANNI
 (whispering)
 It's nice and cool here, eh Anto?

YOUNG ANTONIO
 (excited)
 Si, si!

YOUNG MARCO
 (cautious)
 We better be careful or we'll get
 a belting!

Antonio peaks his head out from underneath the carriage, and quickly grabs three peaches from the nearest crate labelled "FRATELLI BROTHERS." Returning to Giovanni's side, he offers his friends fresh, juicy peaches.

YOUNG GIOVANNI
 (gestures a toast
 with the peach)
 Grazie, bello.

YOUNG ANTONIO
 (smirking)
 Don't thank me, thank the
 "Fratelli" brothers!

The boys laugh quietly. Huddled underneath the carriage, they enjoy their peaches. Once finished, Giovanni takes off his shirt, and they all reach into the open crate, retrieving peaches and placing them into the shirt. The echo of a dog barking in the warehouse motivates them to quickly fold up the shirt full of peaches.

YOUNG GIOVANNI
 (worried)
 C'mon. Let's go.

The barking comes closer as they scramble away. Turning, they see the guard dog, a German Shepherd, running towards them. They sprint to their secret panel as the dog closes in on them.

YOUNG MARCO
 (agitated)
 Presto! Subito! Core'!

Marco scrambles through the opening, leaving his two buddies behind.

As Giovanni opens the panel, letting Antonio in first, the German Shepherd grabs hold of Giovanni's pants leg. Letting out a scream, Giovanni kicks the dog's head, freeing his leg and scurrying into the opening. Antonio slams shut the panel, sliding a plank into place to hold back the persistent dog.

YOUNG ANTONIO

Let's go!

The boys scurry down the alley as the barking dog continues to scrape against the panel. The boys emerge onto the crowded street in a full sprint, Antonio tightly holding onto the shirt full of peaches. A block away, looking back, they stop running and, catching their breath, begin laughing. Giovanni reaches down to check his torn pants.

YOUNG GIOVANNI

Too close, eh?

YOUNG MARCO

Oofa! Andiamo, it's time for lunch.

Giovanni, Marco and Antonio make their way to the stoop of an apartment building. Giovanni's mother, AGATELLA, leans out of her windowsill. In her late twenties, she is wearing an old floral dress with an apron covering it. Her hair is up and she is dabbing sweat from her neck and chest with a handkerchief. The boys turn to her as she calls out, motioning her hand to come in.

AGATELLA

(annoyed)

Giova! Oh! Viene dentro e mangiare! Sto aspettando mez-orra adesso! E dov'e il suo camicia, critino? Viene! Il tavolo e' pronto.

GIOVANNI

(impatiently waving
his hand back at her)

Si, si. Sto venendo!

Agatella turns away and goes inside. From windows of the apartment buildings on each side of Giovanni's building, two other young women, ANTONIO'S MOTHER and MARCO'S MOTHER, lean out and call to their children who look up and wave.

ANTONIO'S MOTHER

Anto! Vien-a-mania!!

MARCO'S MOTHER

Oh! Marco! Entrare! Questi bambini
sta sempre nella strade!

The two mothers return to their apartments.

YOUNG MARCO

Geez! They never leave us alone!

YOUNG GIOVANNI

Ci vediamo Antonio and Marco.

YOUNG ANTONIO

Don't forget to bring some peaches
home!

YOUNG GIOVANNI

Oh, yea! Grazie!

The three divide up the peaches equally and start heading up
the stairs to their buildings.

YOUNG MARCO

But remember! We *found* them in the
alley behind the market. Right?

ALL

Right!

YOUNG GIOVANNI

See you guys after dinner!

Giovanni's mother leans out the window again.

AGATELLA

(upset, waiving her
hand in a spanking
motion)

Oh! Giova! Se vengo fuori, ti lo
dai un schiafo, capisce?

Giovanni waves good-bye to Antonio and Marco and runs into
the building and up the stairs. The camera cranes up the
building to Agatella's window where we see her standing at
the oven putting sauce over a plate of steaming spaghetti
just as Giovanni comes flying into the room, putting his
shirt down and giving her a kiss.

YOUNG GIOVANNI

Ciao mamma.

AGATELLA

Siedi, bello, e mangia un bel po
di pasta.

The camera pans away from the window revealing a long shot of the street bustling with people, vendors, horse-drawn carriages, ect.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DAY. COBBLESTONE STREET. NYC. DECEMBER 1916.

Some carts line the streets and people are bustling about. The horse drawn carriages are gone now, replaced by cars and trucks. GIOVANNI, about 22 years old, wearing a black wool coat and duffy cap, is speaking with a beautiful young woman on the stoop of a building. Giovanni is a typical mediterranean looking young man. He and the girl embrace, kiss on the cheek, and say bye to one another as she walks into the apartment building. Giovanni turns to walk away and is greeted by his two boyhood friends, ANTONIO and MARCO.

GIOVANNI

(cheerful)

Ciao ragazzi! Come stai?

ANTONIO

Bene, but not as good as you! And who is that one?

GIOVANNI

(smirking)

I really don't know, actually.

ANTONIO

(laughing)

You don't know!? E vai!

GIOVANNI

(casually)

No, really, I don't. We just met this afternoon alle' macellaio.

MARCO

(smiles)

What's her name?

ANTONIO

He's forgotten already!

GIOVANNI
 (grinning)
 Her name is Maria... or is it
 Mariana?

Mark and Antonio laugh as Giovanni places his hands in his pockets and begins walking away with a smirk on his face. His two friends run along after him. Just as they catch up to him, a beautiful YOUNG WOMAN walking towards them, carrying a basket of fruit, eggs and bread, smiles warmly at Giovanni.

YOUNG WOMAN
 Ciao, Giova...

GIOVANNI
 (tipping his hat)
 Ciao bella.

ANTONIO
 (grinning)
 And *her* name?

MARCO
 Yea, and "bella" don't count.

GIOVANNI
 I think the two of you are
 spending way too much time
 together... alone.

ANTONIO
 E' logico! You get all the girls,
 and Marco and I have each other!

Marco reaches over and, grasping Antonio's head, gives him a big kiss on the forehead.

MARCO
 (enthusiastically)
 Che' bello e' questo creaturo!

Giovanni smiles as Antonio shoves Marco away.

ANTONIO
 (feigning anger)
 Basta! se no dai un sciafo!
 Besides, if I'm going for anyone,
 it's Giovanni!

Antonio and Marco laugh again, giving Giovanni a hard time.

GIOVANNI

So, what are you two Romeos doing tonight?

MARCO

Nothing really. Anto?

ANTONIO

(shrugging his shoulders)

Boo.

GIOVANNI

I was thinking of going over to the ice rink in Central Park to skate. Voi veniere? Ther'll be lots of nice uptown girls there...

MARCO

(excited)

Sure! Whadya say Anto? You comin?

ANTONIO

Uh, I dunno. It's gonna be cold tonight, especially on the ice.

GIOVANNI

(winks)

It's only cold if you're alone, Anto!

MARCO

You better bring a sweater, then, Anto.

Giovanni and Marco laugh together. Antonio, annoyed, smacks the back of Marco's head, knocking his hat off. Now Giovanni and Antonio laugh as Marco picks up his hat, brushing it off.

MARCO

(continuing;
irritated, waving
his hand at Antonio)

Oh! Critino! Tu stai giocare con fuoco, sai?

Antonio is barely able to speak through his laughter.

ANTONIO

"Il fuoco" can't take a joke...

GIOVANNI
 (interrupting)
 So, whadya say, Antonio, are you
 coming tonight or not?

ANTONIO
 Si, va bene, I'll go.

MARCO
 (serious)
 Don't worry, I'll bring sweaters
 for all of us, just in case!

The three laugh as they turn the corner of the block.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NIGHT. CENTRAL PARK ICE SKATING RINK.

A light snow falls on a white landscape. A Santa Clause stands near the rink, ringing his bell, collecting money for charity. The rink is full of people skating, and the laughter of children can be heard. As Giovanni is skating, he watches a young woman wearing a white rabbit fur coat and hat. Her name is NATASHA. She has strikingly beautiful facial features, with high cheekbones, pronounced lips, dark wavy hair, light skin, and bright dark blue eyes. Making a turn while skating, she loses her balance and falls on her backside.

CUT TO:

A POV Long Shot of Giovanni skating up to the downed Natasha who is now kneeling. Smoking cigarettes, Antonio and Marco are sitting on a bench on the other side of the rink, keenly watching the drama unfold.

ANTONIO
 (grinning)
 This should be good. I'm glad I
 came. I give him two minutes
 before she tells him to get lost!

MARCO
 (confident, defensive)
 No way... Look, he's already got
 her on her knees. Tonight's bar
 tab says he'll get her to go to
 dinner with him.

ANTONIO

Are you sure? I can drink quite
a lot when I'm trying to be
ruthless.

MARCO

(unflinching)
Shake on it.

Antonio and Marco excitedly shake hands over their bet.

CUT TO:

Giovanni is standing over Natasha offering his hand with an
outstretched hand.

GIOVANNI

(smiling)
May I help you? Are you all right?

Embarrassed, Natasha pushes his hand away and begins to get
up on her own.

NATASHA

(with a Russian
accent)
I can do it myself, thank you.

Natasha rises and begins to skate away. Giovanni follows her.

CUT TO:

ANTONIO

(confident)
Hah! He's struck out already!

CUT TO:

GIOVANNI

(complaining)
I was only trying to help...

As Natasha skates, she loses her balance, falling a second
time. She's obviously a novice. Giovanni bursts out
laughing, and tries to compose himself, though without much
luck. Natasha's face is red with embarrassment. Giovanni
tries to suppress his laughter.

GIOVANNI
(continuing)
I'm sorry I laughed, but I just
couldn't help it. C'mon, it was
funny! Here, watch!

CUT TO:

Long POV shot from Marco and Antonio's bench. Giovanni skates around her once, and falls in front of her. Antonio and Marco look at one another, raising their eyebrows in confusion.

CUT TO:

CU of Giovanni's face; a contorted, pained expression reveals that he fell harder than he intended. A smile breaks Natasha's stoic face, and Giovanni smiles as well.

CUT TO:

Antonio and Marco looking on.

MARCO
Don't ask me...

ANTONIO
He's really having a hard time on
this one... You're sure you still
wanna bet?

MARCO
Aspette. He's not over-with yet...

CUT TO:

NATASHA
(pleasantly)
Did I really look that funny?

GIOVANNI
(victorious)
Funnier!

They both laugh. Giovanni quickly gets up and extends his hand to help Natasha. As Giovanni helps her up, Natasha loses her balance again and slips forward into his arms.

They are in a close embrace for just a moment, their eyes locking, before Natasha gently pushes away, averting her eyes down.

CUT TO:

MARCO
 (excited, clapping
 his hands together)
 Did you see that? I told you!

ANTONIO
 (disagreeing)
 See what? You're crazy! She
 pushed him away.

MARCO
 (excited)
 Pushed him away!? She threw
 herself into his arms and tried to
 kiss him! She's now probably
 asking him to take her home
 tonight and make love to her...

CUT TO:

NATASHA
 (composed)
 Well, thank you and have a good
 evening. It was interesting
 bumping into you. I have to go
 now.

Natasha turns and skates away, leaving a stunned speechless Giovanni to stare at her vanishing figure.

CUT TO:

ANTONIO
 (slapping his knee in
 excitement)
 E guarda! You better get that
 sweater ready for him!

MARCO
 (watching intently)
 Shhh. Stai zito un po! Giovanni
 won't give up so easily...

CUT TO:

Snapping to attention, Giovanni quickly skates after her.

GIOVANNI
Wait! You haven't even told me
your name...

NATASHA
(composed/snooty)
I don't give my name out to boys.

GIOVANNI
(grins)
Cute, very cute, but I *do* give my
name out to women, especially
lovely ones like you.

Giovanni skates in front of her, stops, and dips into a low exaggerated bow, sweeping his arm down before him.

GIOVANNI
(continuing; proudly)
My name is Giovanni, signora
mysteriosa.

Natasha extends her hand out and gently raises him up.

NATASHA
(smiling)
My name is Natasha.

GIOVANNI
(warmly)
What a beautiful name... "Natasha"

Natasha smiles, and begins skating again. Giovanni remains standing, watching her skate a few feet away.

CUT TO:

ANTONIO
(confidently)
Now he's done for.

CUT TO:

GIOVANNI
(calling out)
Natasha!

Natasha stops and turns, and Giovanni skates towards her, coming to an abrupt stop before her.

NATASHA

Yes?

GIOVANNI

(anxious)

Mind if I skate along?

NATASHA

(smiles warmly)

If you like.

The couple begin skating together slowly, side by side. Giovanni positions his arm out so that she may embrace her arm with his.

GIOVANNI

Just in case you lose your balance.

NATASHA

Thank you.

CUT TO:

Antonio, defeated, puts his hand over his face, muttering and shaking his head. Marco leans back, triumphantly lacing his hands together behind his head, a broad smile across his face.

MARCO

Bravo...

CUT TO:

Giovanni and Natasha skating, their arms linked. Music score rises. The camera cranes up and away from the rink.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NIGHT. WINDOW OF AN ITALIAN RESTAURANT.

A light snow falls. Through the window of the restaurant, we see two people sitting at a candle-lit table.

CUT TO:

Inside, at the table, Natasha smiles warmly as she sips her glass of red wine. Giovanni places a piece of cheese in his mouth.

GIOVANNI

Natasha, have you eaten at an Italian restaurant before?

NATASHA
 (looking around)
 No. I haven't had the opportunity
 before. It's very nice...

GIOVANNI
 Here, have a piece of cheese. It
 brings out the flavor of the red
 wine.

NATASHA
 Thank you, but I haven't eaten
 cheese since I was a little girl.

GIOVANNI
 Then, how can you say you still
 don't like it?

NATASHA
 (smiling)
 I have an excellent memory.

A WAITER approaches the table.

WAITER
 Buona sera. Sei pronti?

GIOVANNI
 Si. Due piatti di linguini con la
 salsa di calimare, e anche, se ti
 puoi, porte un po di pane caldo.

WAITER
 Va bene. Ritorno in dieci minuti.

GIOVANNI
 Grazie.

The waiter leaves the table.

GIOVANNI
 (continuing;
 apologetically)
 I hope you don't mind that I
 ordered for us both, but I assure
 you that, even if it doesn't taste
 good, it *is* edible!

NATASHA
 Don't worry. I like surprises...

GIOVANNI
(grins mischievously)
Good! Then you'll love to meet my
mother! She's a handful!

NATASHA
I'd love to meet her. I'm sure
she's a great lady.

They finish their glasses of wine, and Giovanni refills them.

NATASHA
(continuing;
playfully)
Are you trying to take advantage
of me?

GIOVANNI
Not at all... well, maybe. So,
tell me, Natasha, how did you
manage to grow up in Russia and
not learn to ice skate?

They both share a chuckle.

NATASHA
You know, I had a great time the
other night with you at the rink.
Actually, I saw you watching me,
so I pretended to fall, hoping
you'd come to my rescue...

Natasha smiles broadly and takes a sip of wine as Giovanni
grins, not quite sure whether she's serious or not.

GIOVANNI
So, tell me about Russia. How did
a beautiful creature like yourself
come to live in this far away city?

NATASHA
Ahh... Ruske, moia lubove... My
story is like that of so many
people who come to America,
leaving behind a way of life they
weren't too happy with. My father
was a land owner outside of Kiev
some years ago. I guess we were
wealthy once...
(more)

NATASHA (cont'd)

When I was 13, we left Russia with whatever valuables we could carry and fled to Europe.

GIOVANNI

(impressed)

Wow. Sounds like a real adventure.

NATASHA

It was. I remember every detail. We left Kiev because of another peasant uprising. The Tsar's soldiers smothered it of course, violently. The people were desperate and desperation brings out the worst in most. My parents were tired of all the killings and unrest. They wanted a safer place for me, they always say. It was so brave of them to leave behind everything they had and start all over. So, after moving around Europe for almost a year, my father arranged for us to take a cargo steam-ship to America... That was seven years ago. The rest is like everyone else who comes here: hard work and dreams.

Natasha, her eyes glassy, refocuses her attention to Giovanni, and a little embarrassed, forces a smile before sipping her wine.

GIOVANNI

(quietly)

I'm sorry if I've made you uncomfortable.

NATASHA

(assuring)

No, no. Don't worry. It is all in the past.

GIOVANNI

Well, what then of the future. What will our lovely Natasha be doing in years to come. What are *her* dreams?

NATASHA

I'm not really sure, but I do want to pursue studying so I can become a teacher. Right now I'm teaching an English class to Russian immigrants.

GIOVANNI

Really? That's great.

NATASHA

Yes, I enjoy it so much, but my dream is to become a school teacher for young children. I love children, they are wonderful to be around... Eventually, I'd like to leave the city and find a nice home with a yard and have children of my own.

GIOVANNI

(softly)

And live happily ever after... Sounds wonderful. Me too.

NATASHA

(surprised)

Really? Or are you simply amusing me?

GIOVANNI

Whatya mean?! I love kids. I'd make a great father!

Natasha places her glass down and looks playfully at Giovanni. She takes away the piece of cheese Giovanni was bringing to his mouth and eats it herself. Giovanni looks back at her intently. The waiter returns with their dinner, and their uncomfortable silence is broken.

GIOVANNI

(continuing; anxious)

I hope you like it.

NATASHA

(tenderly)

I'm sure I will.

Natasha awkwardly tries to twirl the linguini onto her fork, and Giovanni looks on, smiling.

GIOVANNI
(grinning)
Natasha, no, like this...

Giovanni, deftly twirling his fork, raises the tightly wrapped linguini before him to show Natasha who smiles, and places the fork-full in his mouth, grinning while he chews.

NATASHA
You are a very talented young man.

GIOVANNI
(still chewing)
Thank you!

Natasha follows his example, and, awkwardly twirling the fork, brings the linguini to her mouth. Unsuccessful, she has to slurp up a string of linguini hanging from her mouth. They both begin to laugh out loud, and Giovanni toasts his glass of wine to her, and they both take a sip.

NATASHA
(inquisitively)
So, Giovanni, what about you?

GIOVANNI
(nonchalantly)
So, what about me?

NATASHA
(smirking)
You have me at a disadvantage.

GIOVANNI
How so?

NATASHA
You know my life's story, and all I know about you is that you are a skillful ice skater and linguini eater.

GIOVANNI
(smiling)
Well, ever since I was a little boy, I always knew that the woman I would one day marry would have sparkling blue eyes and would be wearing a furry white hat the first time I'd meet her...