

Sicilians in the Basement, Act II - (Joey, Hans, Armando, Heidi, Wendi)

JOEY. Just a minute here. What's going on?

HANS. Nothing Joey, why do you ask?

JOEY. Because I have a feeling that you have two illegal immigrants working here and I think the immigration office would be very interested to hear about it!

HANS. You wouldn't.

JOEY. Just try me.

WENDI. Why do you have to be so low down and despicable Joey?

JOEY. I don't know. I guess cause I'm really good at it.

HEIDI. Now why would you want to cause so much trouble when business is finally starting to pick up?

HANS. I'll tell you why. Because she can't wait to try to break this sweetheart lease, that's why. Isn't that right Joey?

JOEY. Look, I'm a landlord. I have a business to run. If word got out that I knew that one of my tenants was harboring illegals and I didn't promptly report it, I could be facing giant fines and possible jail time.

HANS. Who are you kidding?

JOEY. Well, I have to do my civic duty don't I? But perhaps if you agree to give up the lease and walk away quietly we could just let this little incident pass. You could open a Swiss restaurant some where else.

WENDI. Like where?

JOEY. I hear Lakewood New Jersey is nice.* *(for amateur productions feel free to Insert a local town that is least likely to support a Swiss Restaurant.)*

HANS. *(thinking about it)* Lakewood huh....Nah, it would never work. Besides, I don't feel like starting from scratch again.

JOEY. Suit yourself. I'll just make the call now....can I borrow your phone?

(Joey goes to pick up receiver on phone on the bar when Armando grabs it out of her reach)

ARMANDO. *(no accent)*

Wait a minute! You're not calling anyone Joey. Unless it's the fraud hotline. The deals off.

JOEY. You fool! What are you doing?

HANS. What deal?

WENDI. Armando, what happened to your accent?

HEIDI. Armando?!!

ARMANDO. I only use it for special occasions. My real name is Arthur. Armando is my middle name.

HEIDI. But you're from Milazzo!

ARMANDO. No actually I'm from Bayonne.

HEIDI. What about your gradnpa in the kitchen. He doesn't speak a word of English. Or does he?

ARMANDO. No, he really is from Sicily and he speaks very little English.

TED. Look, I don't mean to butt in...but could someone tell me what the hell is going on around here?

ARMANDO. It's simple Mr. Halpern. Joey cooked up this scheme with me to try to trick these nice people out of their lease so me and my grandfather could take over the restaurant.

HANS. What? Your Papa? And he seemed like such a nice, foul mouthed old man.

ARMANDO. Oh he is Hans. And he had nothing to do with this. All he knows is that he has a job cooking in your restaurant.

TED. *(tasting his food)* And he's a damned good cook. This veal is delicious!

HANS. *(to Armando)*

You were in a scam with Terazzi? And I thought you were an honorable guy. I suppose that story about your father being a sailor on a cruise ship was just a lie too?

ARMANDO. No Hans, that was true. And you've been more of a father to me the last two weeks than he ever was my whole life.

HANS. *(To Joey)*

Well Joey, your little plan just backfired and it seems the shoe's on the other foot now doesn't it? Maybe this conniving Casanova made a good suggestion. I think I'll just call the police

department and ask for the fraud division. Or maybe I'll just report you for the slumlord you are since you won't fix anything around here!

JOEY. *(suddenly panicked, starts begging)*

Oh please Hans don't. Don't do it. I wasn't really serious. I'm a landlord. I wouldn't last five minutes in jail!

HANS. Well, maybe we could work something out. How about a five year extension of the existing lease? And just to show you I'm not all dollars and cents, we'll build in an escalation clause based on the amount of business we do. If the money is rolling in, I have no problem sharing a little of the wealth with you.

JOEY. Oh Hans...

HANS. Please. Call me Mr. Segrum.

JOEY. Mr. Segrum, how can I thank you, you're a prince among men. If you weren't married, I'd marry you.

WENDI. Let's not get carried away you old cougar. Now hit the road. We have to get ready for the lunch time rush.

JOEY. Right. Anything you say.
(Joey exits)

WENDI. *(to Armando)* As for you young man...

ARMANDO. I'm sorry Mrs. Segrum. I'm sorry Heidi. I really like you...and your family. I didn't know that would happen when Terazzi told me her plan. I - I feel terrible about this.

HEIDI. I thought I found my Italian Romeo, and you turn out to be Benedict Arnold!

ARMANDO. I know, I know.... Look, Joey made it sound like I'd be helping you people out if the plan worked because you were only going to fall further behind on your rent and bills and probably wind up on the street with nothing in a few months. I thought it would be better for you...at least, that's what I told myself.

HANS. Well, it was wrong of you both but considering the way business was before you showed up, Joey may have done us a favor.

WENDI. Armando...I mean, Arthur. You lied to us. We trusted you with the restaurant. We gave you a place to stay.

ARMANDO. *(head hanging, truly remorseful)*
Mrs. Segrum, I apologize. I am truly...sorry.

WENDI. But Hans is correct in one thing. You may have done us a favor. Business is booming now. And you didn't take the money Hans offered you. That counts for something. Maybe the kid deserves another chance, Hans. If he's truly sorry for what he did.

ARMANDO. You were the last person I expected to back me up Mrs. Segrum.

HEIDI. *(to Armando)*

Well, I guess if mom can forgive you I can too Armando,,ah, Arthur.

ARMANDO. Heidi, Mr. and Mrs. Segrum...I don't deserve your forgiveness. And even if you were generous enough to forgive me, I don't think I can forgive myself. I certainly can't stay here now. Not after I disgraced myself and disappointed my Papa. This is the most dishonorable thing I ever done in my life. *(turns away)* I just wanted my Grandfather to have his dream come true...that's the only reason I got involved with a snake like Joey Terazzi!

HANS. But you can't just walk out on us with business picking up. We need you!

ARMANDO. What you need is my grandpa cooking in the kitchen. Of course you'll have to start paying him. I think I can convince him to stay on a little while. At least till you can find someone to replace him.

HANS. Of course he can stay. But, *does* he have a green card?

ARMANDO. It's okay. He's completely legal.

HEIDI. But you can't go. We were going to go dancing this weekend.

ARMANDO. *(gently touching both shoulders)*

Heidi, without trust in a relationship, there is no relationship. You think you have forgiven me but I just don't think you'll ever be able to trust me again after what happened. And I don't blame you.

HEIDI. Shouldn't I be the one to make that decision?

ARMANDO. I think your judgment might be a little clouded right now. Mr. Halpern was absolutely right. Once you lose your integrity, it's hard to get it back. I'm just going to have to try to figure out a way to do it.

HEIDI. How did you know what Mr. Halpern said?

ARMANDO. Your father really needs to learn how to turn off that intercom.

PAPA. *(Off)*

Armando, que se dice, bene ca!

ARMANDO. I'm going to go explain things to Papa. Then I'm clearing out. Best of luck to all of you.

(takes long look at Heidi and then he exits)

TED. I guess I'll take the check.

HANS. Right away Mr. Halpern.
(Hans write out the check)

TED. *(he rises as he notices a despondent Heidi)*
Hey Heidi. Remember what I said. Follow your heart.

HEIDI. *(Sarcastically)* Yeah. Things aren't always what they seem.

TED. *(takes check from Hans and gives him some bills)*

Everything happens for a reason.

(he exits)

HANS. Well, I better start setting the tables in back. We're going to be one person short.
(he exits)

(Heidi sits at the table as Wendi sits next to her)

WENDI. I know you're upset baby.

HEIDI. How would you feel mom? I finally think I meet a handsome, exciting guy and he turns out to be a scoundrel.

WENDI. Scoundrel is a little harsh. A rouge maybe, and rogues are often very charming and exciting, but I think that's a little bit of an exaggeration in Armando's case.

HEIDI. You mean Arthur. I can't believe you of all people are being so understanding about what he did.

WENDI. Yes, well I think Arthur may have been just a bit misguided, that's all. After all, he is young. And even if he was doing something underhanded, there was never any doubt in my mind that he loved his Grandfather. He wanted to give his Grandfather his dream. He was just going about it the wrong way. Most of the young men I knew in my day were a little rambunctious. Even your father.

HEIDI. Dad? He's the squarest guy I know. I mean square in a nice, fatherly kind of way.

WENDI. I know what you're saying. But with age comes temperament. He wasn't always a square. Don't forget, he is a musician. And let me tell you, left to their own devices, they are a different breed! You heard that story of when we almost broke up.

HEIDI. A million times. You were engaged, you broke up. You didn't hear from him for two weeks. Then he showed up and your apartment in Brooklyn and never left.

WENDI. Yes, but what you didn't hear was why I decided to let him stay after not hearing from him for two weeks.

HEIDI. You never were specific. You just said that something your Uncle Siegfried told you. Some kind of story.

WENDI. That's right. You want to hear it now?

HEIDI. Sure mom.

WENDI. Well naturally I was pretty upset when it happened. I needed to talk to someone, preferably a male to get their point of view. My father was away on business and this was way before cell phones so I didn't get to talk to him much. But my mother's brother, Siegfried from Germany, happened to be visiting her at the time. He noticed how upset I was and told me a story from German folklore called the clockmaker's daughter. Although he swore it was true. He *was* a clockmaker and he said that when he first apprenticed as a young boy his master's daughter Gretchen had a bitter fight with her fiancée. They were due to be married in a few weeks and they broke off the engagement. The clockmaker sat his daughter down and told her that right before a young man commits to a lifetime relationship he needs time to get away and think about his decision. Gain perspective about what he was about to do and commit to. In those days divorces were not common and frowned upon so before a man made the commitment he really had to be sure. He told his daughter to give it some time and if he came back, you'd know he was ready.

HEIDI. How much time?

WENDI. I don't know. Depends on the person I guess. But to my mind if a guy doesn't miss you after two or three weeks, a month tops, he just doesn't miss you.