

CIAO, PROFESSORESSA!

ADAPTED BY
LARYSA BABLAK
LAURA COLACCI ADAM SAROUJI
NICOLE SCIULLI

ADAPTED FROM THE FILM
CIAO, PROFESSORE!
DIRECTED BY LINA WERTMÜLLER

AND THE BOOK
IO SPERIAMO CHE ME LA CAVO
BY MARCELLO D'ORTA

DRAFT 2
ENGLISH

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

SPERELLI	F - Teacher
PRINCIPAL	F - Pregnant, married to government official
MIMÌ	M - Janitor
MRS. AIELLO	F - Mother of Gennaro
MS. LUCIO *	F - Old teacher
NICOLINO	M - Fat kid, “spy”
VINCENZINO	M - Ice-Cream boy
GENNARO	M - Rebel, bad kid
ROSINELLA	F - Flirt/suck up, daughter of a policeman
TOTÒ	M - Sells cigarettes on the black market
CONCETTA	F - Works nights collecting cardboard with father, doesn't know her own last name
LUCIETTA	F - Dreamer, devoted to charity
MARIA	F - Totò's sister. Motherly, responsible beyond her years

MINOR CHARACTERS

NUN	F
TOTÒ'S FATHER **	M
SICK MAN	M
TOOTHLESS	M - off-stage voice

*MS. LUCIO and NUN can be played by the same actor.

**The final three minor characters can be played by the same actor.

TIME Early 1990's

SETTING CLASSROOM
SCENES AROUND ARZANO

ACT 1

ACT 1, SCENE 1

LUCIO, mid-forties, is seated at her desk in front of an almost empty classroom. She's reading a thick paperback novel. ROSINELLA, 8-years old, alert and smiling, watches her teacher with hands folded on an open notebook. She raises her hand. LUCIO looks up from her novel, taking in her student, then returns to her book. A moment passes. ROSINELLA lowers her hand, no longer smiling.

MARTHA SPERELLI stops just outside the room and knocks on the doorframe.

SPERELLI: Good morning. Is this the third grade?

LUCIO: *(relieved; organizes her belongings)* Ah. Thank god. It's over! Class has ended, go in peace.

SPERELLI: Pleased to meet you. I'm the new teacher.

LUCIO: *(ironic)* Deepest condolences.

SPERELLI: They screwed up my transfer: instead of Corzano, in Lombardy, they sent me here.

LUCIO: Well, I'm afraid you're in **Arzano**. *(mockingly ironic)* And that's my cue! *(rises from chair)*

SPERELLI: There's nobody here. How many are in this class?

LUCIO: Not sure, maybe seven, eight, who knows.

SPERELLI: "Who knows?" *(to ROSINELLA)* And you? What's your name?

ROSINELLA: *(smiling)* Rosinella. What's your name?

SPERELLI: Ms. Sperelli. Rosinella, where are your classmates?

ROSINELLA shrugs, then is silent. SPERELLI turns to LUCIO.

Excuse me. Who's responsible for getting the kids to school?

LUCIO: Welcome to the south...we have different priorities here. Get used to it.

SPERELLI: Going to school is obligatory in the south just as it is in the north.

LUCIO: (sarcastically) Equal? Eh there, teacher, you're wrong. (gets up from the desk, putting it into a canvas bag; takes SPERELLI by the arm) Do you see children? (ROSINELLA react - she is indeed there) No. But the holes in the walls, in classrooms that are disgusting, yes? The windows don't open in the summer and in the winter there's no heat. Here everything is backwards.

SPERELLI: Well, why didn't you complain?

LUCIO: (gathers belongings, places them in her canvas bag) To whom and for what? It's not like anything would change.

SPERELLI: We'll get the janitor to fix the windows....

LUCIO: (laughs) We? You! I'm outta here. And, good luck getting through to the janitor - he's the one who runs this school.

SPERELLI: And what about the principal?

LUCIO: (mockingly) Who's that? (pregnant) You know, it's probably best if you don't hold onto hope for someone who'll never come or something that'll never happen. Welcome to Purgatory.

SPERELLI: So, this is Hell. But, they say that in the south life is good "as long as there's sunshine".

LUCIO: (as she walks to the door) Certainly, and they also say, "Life is like a ladder in a chicken coop: short and shitty." Good luck.

*LUCIO walks past SPERELLI as she leaves.
SPERELLI looks around the room, frowning.
ROSINELLA raises her hand. SPERELLI looks at her for a moment.*

SPERELLI: My question first: why are you here? (to herself) Why am I here?

ROSINELLA: (all dialogue has been changed)

SPERELLI: You talk a lot. (pause) Let's go and find your class.

Lights fade to black.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

VINCENZINO and NICOLINO, both 8, stand beside an ice cream cart. VINCENZINO is wearing a white apron and holds a scoop. SPERELLI stops near them.

VINCENZINO: Sorry, there's no chocolate.

NICOLINO: What is there?

VINCENZINO: Vanilla, pistachio, strawberry, coffee and lemon.

SPERELLI: *(sternly)* I'll have a cappuccino.

VINCENZINO: I'm waiting on someone.

NICOLINO: Hmmm.

VINCENZINO: *(looking under lid)* Nicolino, hurry up and decide 'cause that'll be gone soon too.

SPERELLI is becoming impatient. VINCENZINO sees her.

What are you looking at?

SPERELLI: What grade are you in?

NICOLINO: Third.

SPERELLI: At the De Amìcis school, no?

NICOLINO: De Amìcis? This woman talks funny! It's called De Àmicis; that's how you say it.

SPERELLI: Oh is that so: De Amìcis.

NICOLINO: Yes.

SPERELLI: Did you know that you are all my students?

VINCENZINO: Me? I don't belong to anybody.

SPERELLI: Okay, maybe I should introduce myself differently: I'm your teacher.

NICOLINO: Oh, the new one? You seemed like a foreigner.

SPERELLI: Foreigner? Lombardy is foreign? It's still part of Italy.

NICOLINO: Ah you are still part of Italy?

SPERELLI: (what's your name)

NICOLINO: My name is Nicolino. And he's Vincenzino.

SPERELLI: (to VINCENZINO) I see even you have an earring. Isn't that what women wear?

VINCENZINO: Ehe. (gesturing to his ears)

VINCENZINO: Ain't you got nothin' better to do?

NICOLINO: On the right. On the left is for men.

ROSINELLA approaches with LUCIETTA who carries a basket of flowers.

ROSINELLA: You have to buy a flower. I promised Lucietta or she said she wouldn't come.

SPERELLI: No one's buying a flower. And the ice cream cart goes back where it came from.

VINCENZINO: I ain't goin' nowhere.

SPERELLI: You're going to school. Or do you want me to turn in your employer?

VINCENZINO: Go ahead. My boss won't care. Her brother is the mayor.

SPERELLI: Then she'll know all about child labour laws. Let's go.

VINCENZINO is about to say something. She stares him down. They all begin to walk.

VINCENZINO: Child? Watch what you say.

SPERELLI: Certainly, because you're all grown up. Someone tell me, what it's like in Arzano?

VINCENZINO: What are you, blind? The streets are all busted. The houses are smashed from the earthquake. There's garbage and junkies' needles. Every Sunday, you know what my father says? "What the hell are we doing in this shithole? Let's go to Naples." So we dress up and go to Naples. But when we come home, it's still Arzano. *(pointing)* See those guys over there? They're all crooks. They think they own Arzano.

SPERELLI: Yes.

VINCENZINO: *(they're all crooks)*

TOTÒ, 8, enters carrying a box.

TOTÒ: Marlboro, Merit, Marlboro. Who smokes?

NICOLINO: That's Totò.

VINCENZINO: Rat!

NICOLINO: Shut up. I'm not a rat.

ROSINELLA: *(laughing)* Spy! Spy!

TOTÒ: I'm working.

SPERELLI: Come here! You must also be a third grader at De Amìcis?

TOTÒ: De Amìcis? Oh, the new teacher? *(spits on the ground, then ignores her)* Marlboro, Merit, Marlboro. Who smokes?

SPERELLI grabs him by the collar.

SPERELLI: Business is closed. Let's go.

TOTÒ: Where? I got bills to pay.

SPERELLI: To school.

TOTÒ: Let go! I don't give a fuck about school. I got a responsibility. I got work!

SPERELLI: You call this work? Selling cigarettes on the black market at your age isn't work!

NICOLINO: He smuggles.

- TOTÒ:** Fuck you, Spy!
- SPERELLI:** You should be glad to go to school.
- TOTÒ:** You call that a school? It's disgusting!
- VINCENZINO:** It's old and broken down, with holes in the walls.
- ROSINELLA:** The boys pee in the sink and clog up the toilets.
- VINCENZINO:** The principal doesn't even ever go in there. She don't give a shit.
- TOTÒ:** The real boss is Mimì.
- NICOLINO:** The janitor.
- TOTÒ:** He's a rotten son of a bitch. He's a mafioso and everyone's afraid of him.
- VINCENZINO:** Our school is hell. It's called "Filthy De Amicis."
- SPERELLI:** È stato trasferito.....

ACT 1, SCENE 3

MIMÌ is in classroom at the teacher's desk. He is making a sandwich, meat and cheese--a big production. He pours himself a cappuccino from a thermos and sips. It's as if this is just one more space in the school that is his, that he owns. SPERELLI returns with all the students. Among them is CONCETTA, 8, dressed in tattered clothing.

SPERELLI: Excuse me, kids.

MIMÌ: Come in, Mrs. Sperelli. I'm Mimì, the janitor. The principal is out. It's not absenteeism. She has lots to do. Her husband's a councilman. Sign here and here. Go on.

SPERELLI: *(indicating MIMÌ's meal on her desk)* What is this?

MIMÌ: *(passing her a sheet of paper)* It means you arrived today and are starting work and all that. Sign.

SPERELLI: But this paper is blank.

MIMÌ: I'll fill it in later, when there's time. If you don't trust me, don't sign. Who gives a shit!

SPERELLI: No, no. Could you give me a class list?

MIMÌ: Sure! Rosinella, Nicolino...

SPERELLI: *(sternly)* I understand. Bring it to my class, please.

MIMÌ: Oh my god.. *(to students)* Look at her. What a nut!

*MIMÌ cleans up his newspaper and lunch.
NICOLINO approaches the desk.*

SPERELLI: Do you need something?

NICOLINO: My brioche.

LUCIETTA: You'll get even fatter.

NICOLINO: Mimì is right, you really are a ball breaker.

MIMÌ walks toward a cart by the door. NICOLINO follows.

ROSINELLA: (I think....)

NICOLINO: Mimì, where are you going? Where's my brioche?

MIMÌ: (*moving his cart*) We conduct business in the hallway.

SPERELLI: Stay in the classroom.

MIMÌ: Ah, Mrs...Professor Sperelli, it's brioche time. I have to take care of the kids.

SPERELLI: Oh, you **also** sell brioche?

MIMÌ: Why shouldn't I? This one is used to his morning brioche. I have to think of the students. I have a lot to do. Don't waste my time, Professor Sperelli. I have an important position here. I have lots to do.

Not having moved his cart into the hallway, MIMÌ exchanges NICOLINO's money for a brioche.

SPERELLI: (*sarcastically*) Of course, excuse me. You have a business to run.

MIMÌ: I'm working.

SPERELLI: The principal is working, you're working, the kids do too, everyone works. And they say in the south nobody works! (*again, sarcastically*) You're the busiest people in the world!

MIMÌ: (*to NICOLINO, as he sells him a brioche*) Did she just insult me?

SPERELLI: (*to NICOLINO, the brioche in his mouth*) What are you doing?

NICOLINO: I'm eating.

SPERELLI: But you just had ice cream.

NICOLINO: It's time for my second brioche.

SPERELLI: You, put it away!

MIMÌ wheels his cart out of class. SPERELLI looks at NICOLINO's fingers.

Look at your nails. Disgusting! *(to students as they take their seats)* Rule number one: Come to class with clean nails. *(CONCETTA rests her head on her desk)* Now...*(SPERELLI points to a poster of a Neanderthal on the wall)* Who knows this man behind me?

VINCENZINO: Berlusconi! Nooo, it's a caveman

SPERELLI: *(nod as though Berlusconi and caveman are not so different in reality)* Exactly.

VINCENZINO: I want to live in the Stone Age, so I could club people.

SPERELLI: They clubbed people?

VINCENZINO: Sure. If they'd meet people on the street who didn't say hello? Just pow, pow! And they'd beat them. In those days, everyone always fought and

NICOLINO: Even a newborn baby was a caveman right away.

ROSINELLA: They didn't have heat or television. There was nothing for them to do so they drew doodles on the walls.

SPERELLI: Doodles?

ROSINELLA: Scribbles. Nonsense. Dirty pictures.

SPERELLI: Prehistoric graffiti, I get it.

VINCENZINO: They were all dirty. They didn't wash or comb their hair or shave. Even women didn't shave.

SPERELLI: Do women shave now?

VINCENZINO: They shave their legs.

ROSINELLA: Teacher, can I say something?

SPERELLI: Yes, tell me.

ROSINELLA: I can't say it to everyone, just you.

SPERELLI: Why?

ROSINELLA: Because it's intimate and personal.

SPERELLI: Come here. Intimate and personal.

ROSINELLA approaches SPERELLI.

ROSINELLA: Your nails are dirty, too. But I won't tell anyone. I promise.

SPERELLI: *(pause, then briskly)* Thank you. Now go back to your seat. *(indicating CONCETTA)* Look at her sleeping. School isn't for sleeping. What is her name?

ALL STUDENTS: Concetta.

SPERELLI walks to CONCETTA. She slaps her desk.

SPERELLI: Ms. Concetta wake up! You're in school, facing your teacher.

CONCETTA: *(half-asleep)* Nice to meet you.

SPERELLI: Stand up. You'll keep standing the rest of the day. *(to NICOLINO)* Are you still eating? Come to the blackboard. Let's see your math skills. Hurry up, go. Take the chalk.

NICOLINO: *(5+5 bit)*

LUCIETTA shyly raises her hand.

SPERELLI: Yes?

LUCIETTA: It's the big one.

VINCENZINO: The big one! Number two!

NICOLINO: She has to poop!

SPERELLI: Then hurry up!

LUCIETTA: I haven't got the 50 lire for toilet paper.

SPERELLI: I'll come along, let's go. *(to class)* You stay here and behave yourselves.

SPERELLI and LUCIETTA exit. They meet MIMÌ in the hallway. LUCIETTA looks at him and lowers her head.

MIMÌ: The usual five sheets?

LUCIETTA: No. It's diarrhea. Gimme a flat rate. .

MIMÌ: 12 sheets for 100, plus chalk, comes to 600 lire...but you're new, so let's make it 500.

SPERELLI: I'll pay 600. No flat rate.

LUCIETTA: Help!

SPERELLI: Let's go. Hurry! We can make it. We're almost there.

LUCIETTA: *(pulling at her zipper)* Oh, God! Teacher! My zipper's broken! I can't hold it!

SPERELLI: I'll help you.

PRINCIPAL enters. She is pregnant.

PRINCIPAL: Mimì, you don't see me. I just forgot something. You must be Marta Sperelli.

SPERELLI: (*with frustration*) I don't understand what is wrong with this school. 12 sheets of toilet paper for 100 lire? These kids can't even afford to live; they don't even have the right to a piece of paper for their buns.

PRINCIPAL: Professor, you're perfectly right, but if Mimì didn't sell toilet paper by the piece, we'd be in deep shit. The State sends us nothing.

SPERELLI: I had to gather the kids from work. I can't do it every day.

PRINCIPAL: Sure, but good for you; you're setting a good example.

SPERELLI: Let's hope so. Why is the janitor selling chalk? The school pays for that.

PRINCIPAL: About the toilet paper and the chalk. We'll write a nice letter to the Board of Education and I'll sign it. Actually, it's better if you sign it. You have guardian angels.

SPERELLI: I don't really understand what you're saying.

PRINCIPAL: Professor, Professor...there are at least 500 Neapolitan teachers who'd kill to have your job at De Àmicis.

SPERELLI: I'm at De Àmicis, as you call it, only by accident. My assignment was to be Corzano..

PRINCIPAL: Corzano-Arzano, think about it for a bit. Anyways, It just means your guardian angel made a small mistake. But, an angel that cares about you.

SPERELLI: (*frustrated*) It's unacceptable!

PRINCIPAL: Relax, Sperelli. Don't get bent out of shape. You're as red as a tomato. What's wrong, if you get agitated, I'll get agitated too and I can't have that. What do you want, for me to have a premature birth right here? (*car horn, off stage*) There he is. My husband, the stud of Seville! He's given me six kids in ten years of marriage. Now that's productivity!

SPERELLI: In any case Ms., there's nothing to stress about, you can tell those 500 teachers that I have requested a transfer. In no more than a month to a month in a half, everything will be sorted out and I'll be happy again up North.

PRINCIPAL: Ah, there it is. You see Professor Sperelli, you're just passing through and just like everyone else, you want to fix the South, beginning with De Àmicis? Ha, good luck!

SPERELLI: You too? De Amìcis.

PRINCIPAL: Who's that? It's pronounced De Àmicis. Oh dearest Sperelli, you want to change too many things here.

Lights fade to black.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

NICOLINO enters classroom first holding a big cup of gelato.

NICOLINO: (eccomi, vedete....)

VINCENZINO: (to SPERELLI) 20,000 lire, please.

SPERELLI: 20,000 lire? For ice cream?

VINCENZINO: Nicolino said, "The maestra is paying."

SPERELLI: Why should I be paying?

VINCENZINO: Should I be paying?

SPERELLI: No. Fine. (reaching into her bag, taking out money; she hands it to VINCENZINO) Enjoy.

NICOLINO: How much do you weigh?

SPERELLI: What?

VINCENZINO: (chesta nun....)

SPERELLI: 95 kilos. You?

NICOLINO: I'm a mess too...51 kilos. At my age, what were you like?

SPERELLI: Me? Like this. (shows her pinky finger)

NICOLINO: (shows his own pinky finger) Like that?

SPERELLI: Yes..

NICOLINO: That's even worse than what Momma said.

SPERELLI: What did Momma say?

NICOLINO: If I keep eating like this, I'll get fat like you.

SPERELLI: Thanks. What a compliment. What are we going to do about this?

NICOLINO: Exercise? Try this...*(they both attempt some physical activity and fail)* How about we just stick to a diet? Have you ever tried one?

SPERELLI: What kind of diet do you mean?

NICOLINO: Weight Watchers.

SPERELLI: Do you diet?

NICOLINO: No, because at my house, we're only happy when we eat.

ALL STUDENTS: (Ue)

SPERELLI: Really?

ALL STUDENTS: Yes.

NICOLINO: Pasta and beans in octopus broth. *(students gather around him)* Octopus with olives and capers. Meat soup, stew, vermicelli with garlic and oil...pork, innards, peas, eggs. Pizza with meatballs and sausage. Little pizzas. Persimmons, pears, cherries, dates and melons.

NICOLINO: At Easter time, my father brings home a lamb to slaughter. But we always feel sorry for it and we end up keeping it. And then my parents fight. My mother says, "Mother of God! Another fucking lamb! Every fucking year these lambs! You never have the guts to slaughter them! I'll slaughter you!"

SPERELLI: I'm getting hungry.

VINCENZINO: Sausage, prosciutto—

TOTÒ: Lard, bacon, salami, pig's feet, pig's skin, pig everything!

ROSINELLA: And for dessert: blood pudding, babà, éclairs, éclairs with chocolate, éclair with cream—

NICOLINO: Pastries, elephant ears, zeppole, delicious Sicilian cannoli. Sfogliatelle, struffoli and roccò!

SPERELLI: That's a normal meal?

ROSINELLA: Not all in one day.

NICOLINO: We'd have broken pipes.

SPERELLI and NICOLINO enter classroom. The students are huddled around TOTÒ, all except CONCETTA who is asleep at her desk.

SPERELLI: (polenta bit)

SPERELLI: Everyone sit down. (*students sit; TOTÒ stays standing*) Why are you still standing?

TOTÒ: Thanks to you, I can't sit.

VINCENZINO: Great, Maestra!

LUCIETTA: You got his ass whipped!

VINCENZINO: They sent you from the north! You've been busting balls since the moment you got here.

SPERELLI: Quiet.

LUCIETTA: I don't like you.

SPERELLI: But thanks to that whipping for the first time I have an almost complete class.

CONCETTA snores.

LUCIETTA: She's snoring.

VINCENZINO: Let her sleep.

SPERELLI: Concetta... Concetta? Is it possible?

CONCETTA: Present

SPERELLI: Obviously. Tell me your last name.

CONCETTA: Concettina?

SPERELLI: Concetta--Concettina is impossible! You must have a last name.

CONCETTA: I don't remember my last name.

SPERELLI: Tell me something. Where do you live? All of you tell me, but first Concetta.

CONCETTA: In an apartment. A lot of people sleep in my house. We sleep all in the same bed and we kick each other by accident. I never get any sleep. My house is all broken, the ceilings are broken, the furniture is broken, the chairs, the floor, the walls, the washroom, everything is broken. There's no money in my house. My house is all cracked. Sometimes I feel cracked, too. *(Concetta falls back asleep and slouches back into her chair)*

LUCIETTA: Sometimes, I feel cracked, just like my house. But, I love my broken house; I feel attached to it. When my friends come over, they laugh that my house is all broken but they play with my chickens. In my family, we eat sweets, but we also give food to people that need to eat. By the way, I would just like to take this opportunity to tell you that I may have had an accident, but I am cleaner than most of these people in my class.

TOTÒ: Except that we don't shit our pants.

ROSINELLA: My mother says that the Third World isn't even lucky enough to have cracked houses, so we shouldn't complain.

(Concetta can be heard snoring. Sperelli walks over to her).

VINCENZINO: Professor, be careful: every morning another one of your students, Concetta, rolls in garbage before class. But not for fun, for work. Then she comes to school and infects us with wigs.

CONCETTA: My father's a junk man. Mornings he has another job. He comes back in the afternoons. He sleeps a little, eats...and he collects cardboard boxes at night. Many times I go with him.

SPERELLI: That's why you sleep in class? Because you work at night? Now I feel bad. I scolded you and made you stand up.

CONCETTA: Don't worry. I learned how to also sleep standing up.

TOTÒ: You say school is mandatory. They pay you to come to school. But who pays us? Nobody!

Students continue to banter, ROSINELLA walks up to SPERELLI's desk.

SPERELLI: (5+5 bit)

TOTÒ begins to walk towards GENNARO.

SPERELLI: (to TOTÒ) You, stop. (he stops) Stay there. "Mark me present?!" Come in and close the door. You have some nerve!

TOTÒ: I'm talking intelligently with one of my men and you're crushing my cantaloupes.

SPERELLI: What did you say?

TOTÒ: You're smashing them—

ROSINELLA: Tell her what cantaloupes are.

TOTÒ: Balls!

SPERELLI: How dare you? Get out!

TOTÒ: I go when I want to go.

SPERELLI: (moving toward him, threateningly) Out, you illiterate!

TOT: You wouldn't dare. You know, I spat in the other teacher's face, but I'll smash yours into the wall!

SPERELLI: Get out! (*slaps Gennaro*) You understand? (*a brief pause, then she's shocked with herself*) I'm sorry.

GENNARO runs out of room. Fade lights to black.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

SPERELLI and PRINCIPAL are in the principal's office.

SPERELLI: I don't know what got into me...but his face was...so full of hatred...like a little delinquent, like—

PRINCIPAL: ..like a mafioso? That's for sure. This is the south, not Switzerland. Kids like Gennaro leave you no choice.

SPERELLI: I'm an educator. All my life I've taught the philosophy of nonviolence. Now I've hit an eight-year-old boy. You must report me to the School Board. You should fire me.

PRINCIPAL: We'd have to fire every teacher...every mother, every father... grandparents, uncles, one and all. When I was young and in school, my teacher used to hit me. My father smacked me and my mother whacked all eight of us kids. Look at how I turned out, I would say perfectly perfect, no?

SPERELLI: (*amused*) Perfectly perfect? (*serious*) You're not even close. I don't like you at all. You know why? Because your philosophy is at the root of all that's wrong here!

PRINCIPAL: Here? You don't like me?

SPERELLI: No.

PRINCIPAL: I like you even less! You're a presumptuous racist...with friends in high places.

SPERELLI: Oh, a racist?

PRINCIPAL: A racist. Underneath, you're just a racist like everyone else up there. I bet you even voted for the Northern League. Arzano is no place for you. Here is war. It's a war here in the south. These kids have brass balls! And the teachers should also have them. That slap was the best thing you've done since you got here! Now the class will show you more respect!

SPERELLI exits office and walks to classroom. She enters the room, sits at her desk, faces her subdued class.

SPERELLI: Did you like what I did? The teacher has earned your respect. But how? By slapping one of your classmates. You see, you now admire me...for something for which you should not respect me. Because respect gained by force...today with a slap and tomorrow...with a revolver - that's not respect. It's shame. And it may be the cause of all the trouble in the south. Violence is shameful in a civilized person, especially in a teacher.

SPERELLI stands, packing her belongings.

I'm going home. I don't feel well. Anyway, I'm only here temporarily. I don't expect to be well until I receive my transfer. Good luck. I'm sorry.

SPERELLI exits classroom. MRS. AIELLO meets her in the hallway.

MRS. AIELLO: Professor, I'm Gennaro Aiello's momma.

SPERELLI: Mrs. Aiello? Please, sit down (*gestures to chair*).
SPERELLI and MRS. AIELLO take a seat on a bench in the hallway.

I'm very sorry about hitting your son yesterday.

MRS. AIELLO: Professor, I'm 45 years old. My husband was crippled in a shootout with customs officers after trying to smuggle drugs. I have four kids. The oldest is called Rosario. You know where he was until last week? At Filangeri.

SPERELLI: The correctional institution?

MRS. AIELLO: Yes...He took over his father's businesses. And the worst part is that he's better off in prison because at least there he won't get shot. Gennaro is the second and he's following the same path. I can only pray for my two youngest to follow a better one. But when I heard that you picked up the kids one-by-one, I thanked the Holy Mother; Gennaro may have a chance. But now I hear you're abandoning the school.

SPERELLI: Mrs. Aiello, I'm not abandoning the school. I was sent here by mistake. There was some confusion with the—

MRS. AIELLO: Professor, you cannot leave; the children here need a role model. Many of their parents work all day and all night just to earn a few pennies. This is why the children have to fend for themselves. You've seen them working in the streets. Sometimes they have no respect for anyone, but they respect you, Professor.

SPERELLI: Well, thank you for saying that. But, Mrs. Aiello, I submitted a request for another transfer. Shortly, the school board will approve it, and then—

MRS. AIELLO: Please, Professor, for me, but, more importantly, for the children, you're the last hope.

SPERELLI: Mrs. Aiello—

MRS. AIELLO: I brought you a basket of eggs; it's what I can offer. I hope you will reconsider.

Fade lights to black.

ACT 2

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Classroom. GENNARO holds out a plate of feces to the students who are laughing as they stand around SPERELLI's desk.

NICOLINO: It stinks.

GENNARO: Go and see if she's coming.
CONCETTA runs to the door.
 She deserves to sit in shit!

NICOLINO: She said she won't come; she won't come.

CONCETTA: She's here! Sit and be quiet!

*Students rush to their seats, standing beside them.
 Enter SPERELLI.*

ALL STUDENTS: Good morning, Maestra.

SPERELLI: Good morning. Sit down.
Students sit.
 As you see, I'm feeling better and I've come back. Let's forget what happened yesterday.

SPERELLI sees the plate of feces, then picks it up.
 But I see that someone didn't forget and he's also in class today. I'm happy to see that, Gennaro. This object, a symbol of vendetta against me, is human excrement in a cylindrical and squashed shape.

Students laugh.
 You laugh, but it's a natural part of the life cycle...just like butterflies, flowers, and stars. Feces have inspired many jokes and amusing stories. They've also inspired famous writers and poets like Dante, Boccaccio and other Neapolitan writers. I'd like to read something to you. *(picking up a book from her desk, finding the page)* Listen to these grandiose verses. "Shit.

Students chuckle.
 On the street, by the sun's ray lit...A fly sings you a lullaby...So sleep in peace...Oh, noble shit."

Collective laughter.

LUCIETTA: One time, it happened one time.

SPERELLI: (*chuckling*) No, Lucietta. Accidents happen. We're still talking about the poem. (*to class*) Some time ago, you all would rather have worked than come to school. Do you all still feel the same way?

*Students turn to one another, shaking their heads.
GENNARO doesn't participate.*

NICOLINO: School's not bad.

ROSINELLA: With you school is fun, and we also know that you care about us.

SPERELLI: Then in that case...

SPERELLI sits at her desk, pulls out a pen and paper, and recites as she writes. Students huddle around Sperelli.

"To the Board of Education. I, Martha Sperelli, hereby withdraw my request for a transfer. I wish to remain in my current position as third-grade instructor at De Amicis in Arzano, Naples." How is that?

Students cheer. GENNARO crosses his arms, won't join in.

Now, let's hear those compositions we were working on. Lucietta?

LUCIETTA: (*standing*) Rain. My composition. "Rain is beneficial, because it is part of the water cycle. The sea boils under the rays of the sun, evaporates, and turns into clouds that then turn into rain. When it rains, all the air is fresher, the trees, they are fresher, the earth fresher, the sea fresher, the streets more fresh. We also feel fresher."

TOTÒ: I hate rain. Rain is only good in Africa where it's always August, but in Arzano it is not good, it's harmful. I'll explain: when it rains here, Arzano floods. The roads become rivers, seas, waterfalls, fountains. Everything stops. Cars sink and so do people. And when it rains in Arzano, it's better to not to use the toilet.

SPERELLI: And why is that?

CONCETTA: If we're sitting on the toilet, it's better to do only number one so that we only use half a litre each time, but if we go number two, (and especially my dad, who brings his newspaper with him), then we use ten litres of water!

TOTÒ: When I'm older, I'll move somewhere it never rains!

LUCIETTA: In Calabria it never rains in the season.

SPERELLI: Which season?

LUCIETTA: The season.

SPERELLI: There are four seasons.

LUCIETTA: Yes. Autumn, winter, spring and the season.

SPERELLI: You mean summer. Why call it "the season"?

ROSINELLA: Because it's the nicest. The winter for example, is not so nice. You can't go out or take a walk. Winter's okay for the rich, but for the poor, it's awful.

TOTÒ: She doesn't give a fuck. Her house has heat!

ROSINELLA: Is it my fault that my father works and that (*singing*) 'I am a material girl.'

VINCENZINO: I know a very poor family of twelve children, and when winter comes, children do not have clothes for the winter. A lady from the Catholic Association of my building always collects money and gives it to the family for the winter.

LUCIETTA: If I were a billionaire, I would not be like Berlusconi and keep everything for myself, give nothing to anyone and only make dirty films. He does not think of poor people, but the poor vote for him anyway. And there are so many poor people that this guy might just win. But if I were rich like him I would do good, and go to Heaven. If I were a billionaire, I would give to the poor, to the blind, to Third-World countries, and stray dogs. If I were a billionaire I would build a new Naples and make more parking lots. I would not give a penny to the rich in Naples, only to the poor. Then I would buy a new car (for my teacher too, because hers is all dented). Finally, I would like to talk with Madonna, but not the immaculate one, the famous one, and invite her to my house.

NICOLINO: In the season, my father puts his clothes in the fridge so they smell fresh.

VINCENZINO: In the wise words of the poem “Livella,” The rich should not act like fools just because they are rich. Afterall, sooner or later they have to die too just like all of us.

SPERELLI: (*astonished and moves on*) Uhhh...that's enough. Rosinella, let's hear your composition.

ROSINELLA: (*quickly stands*) “Switzerland. Switzerland faces Switzerland, Italy, Germany...Switzerland and Austria. Switzerland sells weapons to the whole world so they can kill each other off. But the Swiss won't even fight a small war. They use that money to build banks but not good banks. Banks for bad guys and for druggies. Sicilian and Chinese delinquents deposit millions in there. The police go and say, “Whose money is this?” The bank says: “That's **our** fucking business. The bank is closed.” But it isn't closed. It's open. In Naples, if you have cancer, you die. But if you go to Switzerland, you die later or you might live. Their hospitals are the most beautiful. Carpets, flowers, polished stairs...not even one rat. It's so expensive that only crooks can afford to go there.” End of composition.

SPERELLI: (*joking*) That composition's really dangerous. If the immigration people hear it, they'll deport us.

ROSINELLA coughs and snuffles.

Are you sick?

ROSINELLA: My baby sister is, maybe I caught it.

SPERELLI: What did she have?

ROSINELLA: Nothing. A touch of measles. It's probably because of all the rain or a gust of wind.

SPERELLI: A gust of wind?

TOTÒ: A draft. Rosine', you're such a donkey. Anyway, see, I told you rain is no good!

LUCIETTA: Rain is a gift from God. If Jesus didn't send rain, there would be problems. The plants would droop, the trees would wilt...the earth would be parched, animals would croak. I'd croak and so would everybody else.

VINCENZINO: There's all this rain and we still don't have any water to drink, so I'd say we're croaking anyway!

TOTÒ: You can buy clean water on the black market, if you want.

ROSINELLA: My father says that the black market exists because nobody cares in the south and nobody cares ABOUT the south. Not about the law, not about each other, so everybody cheats everyone else.

GENNARO: Southerners don't cheat southerners, only northerners because they're stupid enough to fall for it!

TOTÒ: *(to SPERELLI)* Yesterday, didn't you buy a stereo cassette player in Forcella?

SPERELLI: How do you know?

VINCENZINO: And instead of the stereo, you found a brick in the box?

SPERELLI: Actually, two bricks.

VINCENZINO: They made a fool of you!

TOTÒ: How could you let them? *(stands)* Even the Japanese don't fall for that!

VINCENZINO: *(stands)* Not even the Germans.

ROSINELLA: *(stands)* Not even the Milanese!

SPERELLI : *(chuckling)* That's just about everyone. Okay, sit down.

TOTÒ: What'll you do?

SPERELLI: What do you mean?

VINCENZINO: You should get back at them!

SPERELLI: Should I tell the police? What would you do?

VINCENZINO: The police? They probably set the whole thing up!

ROSINELLA: HEY!

VINCENZINO: I'd say, "Up your mother's..."

TOTÒ: I'd tell that low-life, "*(Sperelli covers his mouth)* "...your dead ancestors!" like they say in Rome!

GENNARO: "You have ---- for brains!"

CONCETTA: I'd punch him 50 times!

ROSINELLA: I'd break his...*(the whole class is awaiting Rosinella who never swears) watch! (the class sighs in disappointment)*

NICOLINO: Oh, my God! *(he's not appalled at the language, but happy that he found a snack in his pocket)*

CONCETTA: I'd bury him!

TOTÒ: I'd say, "Your wife was a dream last night!" *(all the students gasp as if this is the worst of the insults)*

SPERELLI: Can we please stop with these vulgarities?

ALL STUDENTS: No!

SPERELLI: Enough! Let's continue our lesson. How many months are there in each season?

ROSINELLA: *(quickly stands)* January, February, and March, but not all of March, and December are winter months. Some of March, April, May and some of June are spring months. Some of June, July, August and some of September are summer months, and all the rest are autumn. *(takes deep breath as if to start on another topic)*

Students groan.

TOTÒ: Professor, she'll talk forever! We'll be here all night! It's ten after one!

SPERELLI: *(looks at watch)* Why didn't the bell ring?

NICOLINO: Professor, I'm starving!

SPERELLI: I'm not so sure you are. Alright then, put away your books. Please hand in your compositions. I'll read the rest of them tonight.

Students hand in composition books and move to the door, but don't leave the room.

What are you waiting for?

ROSINELLA: The bell.

SPERELLI: Where's the janitor?

ROSINELLA: Probably on the phone.

SPERELLI: *(looks toward window)* It's drizzling. Let's go before it starts to pour.

ROSINELLA: Not before Mimì rings the bell.

SPERELLI: It's 1:15. Everyone is hungry, Nicolino is wasting away. Should I ring the bell?

ROSINELLA: You'll have to deal with that maniac!

SPERELLI: No problem.

SPERELLI exits the classroom, the students following. In the hall, she rings the bell.

Go ahead. Go on. Leave.

MIMÌ: *(rushing into hallway)* Excuse me. Stop! Stop! Where are you going? Who gave you permission to leave? Who rang the bell? *(looks at Rosinella for the answer)*

ROSINELLA: For the first time in my life, I do not have the answer.

MIMÌ: Come right back inside! Nobody leaves this school before I ring the bell. I'm in charge. Who was it? Who dared to ring the bell?

SPERELLI: I did. *(students gasp giggle, cover their mouths, make 'you're in trouble' hand gestures)*

MIMÌ: Oh, yeah? I knew it, Professor! It's my job. You're the teacher so you teach! I ring so I...*(doesn't have a good comeback)*, well, ring! Come on. Everybody back in your room!

TOTÒ: He insulted you! Call him a wuss!

SPERELLI: *(ignoring)* If it's your job, why didn't you ring the bell on time?

MIMÌ: Why? Because, that's why! Inside, kid!

TOTÒ: Call him a wuss!

CONCETTA: Say it!

MIMÌ: *(to students)* Enough of these games. Let's go. *(to SPERELLI)* You're causing issues!

The PRINCIPAL enters hallway.

PRINCIPAL: *(to SPERELLI and MIMÌ)* Excuse me. What's going on?

MIMÌ: This woman is upsetting our order and she doesn't respect my position.

SPERELLI: Enough of this nonsense. Madame Principal, permit us to leave.

PRINCIPAL: You stop this nonsense, Sperelli.

MIMÌ: *(to SPERELLI)* No northerner is gonna tell me what to do!

TOTÒ: Call him a wuss!

VINCENZINO: Will you call him a wuss?

MIMÌ: I'll teach this wuss teacher a lesson!

VINCENZINO: You see? He got you!

SPERELLI: (*shrugging*) I was too slow!

MIMÌ waits for everyone to return to the classroom, then rings the bell. Students exit, slowly, muttering under their breath.

TOTÒ: Was all that show necessary? For a bell...

VINCENZINO: Couldn't even call him a wuss...

Lights fade to Black.

Lights up low. SPERELLI sits alone on the bench in the dim hallway. Spot light on NICOLINO as he recites his composition:

NICOLINO: Composition. "Being Sick": When I get sick, it's trouble for the whole house. The doctor who visits me isn't too good. He misdiagnoses everything. When the doctor comes, my father already knows he wants to cheat us 'Let's hope this moron gets something right,' but time after time, he's wrong. **But he doesn't know, he never knows, and always** gives me the wrong medicine. Often he mistakes one sickness for another and after five or six days, without eating I'm worse than before and almost dead from starvation, and so my dad calls a second doctor who, however, gets 100,000 lire. My father would say, 'To the souls of all your dead ancestors! I should spit in Dr. Fiscella's face!' The second one is Dr. Arnone and he gets 100,000 lire. My father hasn't got the money for the second doctor and has to go into debt. When the second doctor arrives, the whole family trembles. Giuseppe pees. The doctor says nothing. He examines me quietly. He seems like a corpse. He seems so pale, that when he speaks we all pee our pants. But he always guesses the right illness. When he leaves my father curses the Madonna and breaks everything. And I cry in bed because it's all my fault."

SPERELLI: Very good, Nicolino. "What doctors" Dear God!

*She writes grade on page. Picks up another
composition book. Lights fade to Black.*

ACT 2, SCENE 2

SPERELLI enters classroom with pastries and mimose flowers.

SPERELLI: *(handing flowers out)* For Lucietta...Concetta, Rosinella.

ROSINELLA: Thank you.

SPERELLI: I brought these for the 8th of March, Women's Day. Do you know why we celebrate it?

ROSINELLA: I think women should be equal to men. Otherwise it's not fair.

TOTÒ: They're equal on March 8th.

SPERELLI: Ah, only on March 8th?

ROSINELLA: Not all women get mimose flowers today, some women receive abuse. My father is a policeman. Have I mentioned that?

SPERELLI: Yes, once or twice.

ROSINELLA: One time he told me a story about reporting to a call on the 8th of March. He encountered a couple fighting, the husband was hitting his wife. The male was my father's friend. His friend wouldn't stop kicking his wife. My father couldn't arrest his friend.

TOTÒ: If I was that man, I would not kick a woman on the 8th of March, any other day, sure.

SPERELLI puts sweets on the table, everyone reaches for one.

SPERELLI: Please, one at a time. Take it easy. *(to NICOLINO)* No, not you! Today, you and I are dieting. We'll eat again tomorrow afternoon. All right? Concetta, at least today, tell me your last name.

CONCETTA: Concetta.

SPERELLI: Not your first name. Tell me your last name. (*CONCETTA shrugs*). (*NICOLINO sneaks a pastry*) Madonna...I've been asking you for months—Where do you hide these pastries?(*SPERELLI looks at empty box*) Where's the last one?

NICOLINO: (*holding a pastry in his hand*) Huh?

SPERELLI: No "Huh!" (*pause*) Put it back. (*takes away pastry*) Confiscated! Back to your seats. Let's talk a little more seriously about Women's Day.

TOTÒ: You bring women flowers, but you don't receive any.

SPERELLI: I don't.

NICOLINO: You're not married? You have no children?

TOTÒ: So, you must be an old chicken.

SPERELLI: What?

ALL STUDENTS: Old chicken!

SPERELLI: (*not really offended*) How dare you!

ROSINELLA: She's not an old chicken, she's a wise hen.

TOTÒ: Why get mad? What's the big deal? My aunt's not married; she always brings me the best gifts and sweets. She's very nice.

SPERELLI: I'm sure she is.

ROSINELLA: And where's your husband?

SPERELLI: My husband left.

TOTÒ: Sure, because you're so old!

SPERELLI: No, because we're divorced. He had a problem. He always wanted to be right. Let's drop the subject and get to your assignments. (*she hands each student a sheet of paper*) You have thirty minutes to write your answers.

The students start working on the assignment as

SPERELLI returns to her desk. Silence.

ROSINELLA approaches her teacher.

(dryly) You're finished already?

ROSINELLA: Can I ask you a personal question?

SPERELLI: Another one? Certainly.

ROSINELLA: Can I have your wedding dress because you're divorced now?

SPERELLI: Back to your assignment.

Bell rings for recess. The students stand and walk to the door. ROSINELLA joins NICOLINO.

ROSINELLA: *(as they walk from the room)* I love Mrs. Sperelli very much because she is a good teacher and teaches us lots of things. She doesn't really get along very well with the other teachers, because the other teachers always shout at each other. But Mrs. Sperelli doesn't shout. I love her.

SPERELLI is the only one in the room. She picks up the last pastry and is about to eat it. NICOLINO comes back in.

SPERELLI: Don't get the wrong idea.

NICOLINO: Let's split it and not tell.

SPERELLI splits the pastry. Lights to Black.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

The STUDENTS and SPERELLI are in the classroom, getting ready for a field trip. SPERELLI is at her desk, searching through papers in her bag. ROSINELLA stands at the window.

ROSINELLA: You know what I love most about elementary school? First, my teacher, who I will never ever forget, even when she dies. Second, my friends (except one). Third, field trips. They're so great! We get to go to—

The sound of GENNARO'S motorcycle zooming past, heard from backstage.

That's Gennaro on his motorcycle. Look how reckless! Gennaro! Stop being reckless! *(students cheer him on)*

SPERELLI: *(standing with papers in her hand)* Are you idiots? When he's killed himself, will you be happy? And whose bike is that anyway?

SPERELLI hands a paper to TOTÒ. Throughout scene, students examine the lyrics on these pages with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

TOTÒ: His jailbird brother owned it. He used it to steal more quickly.

SPERELLI: What a delinquent. *(to the class)* I want you to study these lyrics. *(to TOTÒ)* A bike, muggings, drugs, jail, cemetery! A great career path! Why is it that in Naples lately, that's all you ever see on TV?

SPERELLI hands a paper to LUCIETTA.

LUCIETTA: Once I watched a Madonna concert. Then the TV broke, and I never got to see it. Thinking about it makes me crazy.

SPERELLI: Well, today you get to be Madonna. Class, on the handout is a song I put together from things you've said or written. We can sing it on the bus ride to the Royal Palace of Caserta. Maybe if we're good enough, we might appear on TV at the Sanremo Music Festival. At least then there would be something decent on TV instead of the usual bad news.

SPERELLI hands a paper to NICOLINO.

NICOLINO: My father always watches dinnertime news. Pasta, trouble!
Dessert, trouble!

SPERELLI hands a paper to ROSINELLA.

ROSINELLA: When my father sees the word “Naples,” he says... “Silence. Let's see what new trouble we're in now.”

TOTÒ: They say that the problem with the south is that we are all poor and there is a lot of unemployment around.

VINCENZINO: We in Arzano are better off. We only have 8 deaths a year.

SPERELLI: Well, then we can rest easy.

VINCENZINO: My grandma lives in Secondigliano. It's like a war zone there. They'll kill you for anything there.

SPERELLI: Why do you think these things happen?

LUCIETTA: Mafia and drugs!

SPERELLI: Ah, mafia and drugs. It's a painful subject, but let's talk about it. What do you know about drugs?

ROSINELLA: When I was in kindergarten, my mother told me to never accept candy from anyone, even from a teacher or director. But once my teacher offered me candy, and I forgot that it was probably drugged, and I ate it anyway. But I was fine.

LUCIETTA: First it makes you happy. Then you become an idiot. In your eyes you see butterflies, colours, rainbows, and you want to fly. Then everything ends and you only see Arzano.

TOTÒ: One gram costs 10,000 lire.

VINCENZINO: But all druggies are poor, so they steal...and mug people...and kill their parents.

GENNARO appears at the door, leaning on the frame, unnoticed by the others. He looks at SPERELLI, sneering.

SPERELLI: *(to her students as she claps her hands)* Okay class, I want to practice the song until the bus arrives. The melody goes like this. *(hums melody)* Okay, let's try it. *(taps hand on desk)* Ready, one, two, three, four...

The students begin to sing, awkwardly, as SPERELLI struggles to keep them in time. GENNARO watches, silently. We sense that he would like to be singing as well.

The North blames us for the Mafia
The North blames us for being poor
For pollution and drugs and earthquakes
For police who won't arrest their friends
And I tell them, "Fuck your dead ancestors!"

In the South I learn about Misery
In the South I learn there's no work
I drink brown water from the rusty pipes
And walk to school on broken roads
And I cry in bed because it's all my fault

The North blames us for trash in the streets
The North blames us for muggings and death
For vulgarity, being dirty and laziness
For heavy accents and too many dialects
And I tell them "Fuck your dead ancestors!"

SPERELLI: *(applauding)* Bravo!

ROSINELLA: The bus is here!

The song ends.

SPERELLI: Okay, students, line up.

GENNARO appears at the door.

Oh, you decided to show up after all.

GENNARO: *(sarcastically)* U professo'! Bravo! When you win Sanremo, Berlusconi will invite you to play on his network!

Lights to Black.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

SPERELLI and students are seated on a blanket downstage, having finished their picnic. Behind them is a section (or symbol) of the Royal Palace of Caserta.

SPERELLI: Queen Maria Carolina was the sister of Marie Antoinette. You remember Marie Antoinette?

ROSINELLA: The one in the French Revolution. They chopped off her head.

VINCENZINO: They were right!

GENNARO: They were jealous.

SPERELLI: You think the French Revolution was caused only by jealousy?

ROSINELLA: And because Queen Marie Antoinette had a good life. She got up at five past noon...had breakfast with cappuccino and cake...washed her face, did her nails and used the bidet...and bought loads of dresses and jewelry with the poor's taxes.

NICOLINO: So people got mad. She got on all their nerves. So they started the French Revolution.

TOTÒ: They pummeled each other and spat in each others' faces.

VINCENZINO: Then they invented the guillotine and chopped off everyone's head.

ALL STUDENTS: Chop, chop, chop!

GENNARO: Now, I know everyone says it's wrong but **it's** right: men are not equal. Some are handsome, some ugly, some tall, some short. Some are smart; some are dopes. There's real men and there's shitheads. And there are different nationalities. For instance, I hate the Germans 'cause they're always starting wars.

NICOLINO: I hate the French because they think they make the best brioche.

LUCIETTA: I hate the Canadians because they always apologize. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.

SPERELLI: If you can hate the Canadians, you must hate just about everybody.

VINCENZINO: I only like Italy. Precisely, I only like my half of it. I hate northerners because they treat us like animals. With all respect.

SPERELLI: Like animals?

NICOLINO: They think that us southerners are thieves, murderers, and drug addicts. [The Northern League makes things worse!](#) If one earthquake comes, ten houses go. There are one and a half million unemployed. There are twenty children in the same house.

LUCIETTA: In the north, all that's bad is the weather: it's always raining, snowing, there is terrible fog. The North has no other problems: my father says that people are rich, polite, and civil. The buses are never crowded, and cars actually stop at red lights.

GENNARO: If someone drops a piece of paper in Milan they say he's from Naples, without knowing if he is. I know he's from Naples, but how do they know?

SPERELLI: *(standing)* Now, my dear little Neapolitans, you'll pick up all the litter and cans. Otherwise I'll hate you all. During the Easter vacation, I want you each to write a composition about any parable you choose. Gennaro, come here.

They step away from the students who listen in anyway.

Why don't you write one too?

GENNARO: No.

SPERELLI: Go on, just to see how you write.

GENNARO: You're being too pushy.

TOTÒ: *(laughing)* He should write about the parable of the lost sheep.

GENNARO: Shithead! *(taunting)* Write about the lost sheep yourself. I didn't even want to come along with you guys today!

SPERELLI: Enough! Let's go.

ALL STUDENTS: *(sing song like taunting)* The lost sheep! The lost sheep!

GENNARO moves away from SPERELLI, but she follows, taking hold of his arm.

SPERELLI: You have to come with us. Why be ashamed of that?

GENNARO: *(struggling to pull free)* Let me go!

SPERELLI: Stop it!

GENNARO: You gonna slap me again?

SPERELLI: *(shocked, letting him go)* Gennaro.

GENNARO: You'll pay for this!

SPERELLI: Where are you going? Come back.

Lights to Black.

ACT 2, SCENE 5

SPERELLI is at her desk in the dim, empty classroom, marking papers. PRINCIPAL enters, carrying a letter. She holds it out to SPERELLI.

PRINCIPAL: Professor Sperelli, a letter for you.

SPERELLI: Thank you.

PRINCIPAL exits. SPERELLI reads letter and sighs. MARIA enters. SPERELLI sets aside the letter.

MARIA: Good evening, Professor. I am here to pick up Totò's homework that he forgot. Did you all enjoy yourselves?

SPERELLI: Ah, Maria. Were you sick today? I thought you were going to come along.

MARIA: I had no money. Papa doesn't have any!

SPERELLI: *(stricken)* But...why didn't you tell me? I'd have given it to you.

MARIA: *(shrugs)* It's okay. Next time.

SPERELLI: All right, next time.

MARIA: When I'm older, I want to earn piles of money.

SPERELLI: *(chuckles)* So do I.

MARIA: My Papa says without dough, you can't do anything. And then he makes a disgusting face at himself in the mirror. And I know that he wants to spit at himself. And I feel sorry.

SPERELLI: You shouldn't feel bad about your father. He's a good man. Tell Totò I need his composition for tomorrow.

MARIA: Tonight, when you sleep, don't let your feet face the door.

SPERELLI: Why?

MARIA: It's bad luck!

SPERELLI: My feet?

MARIA: In Naples, if you sleep with your feet toward the door (*indicating*) it means you'll leave...feet first. Like in a coffin.

SPERELLI: I see. I still haven't learned all the local customs.

MARIA: So long.

SPERELLI: Have a good evening, Maria.

MARIA exits. SPERELLI picks up the letter and walks to the glowing light of the setting sun at the window. She looks out onto Arzano.

(to herself) A beautiful evening. *(lifts letter, examines it)* Some bad news about my future, no doubt. *(she sighs)* Well, that's life. It's always too late. As the Neapolitans say "Once you've been to Naples, you can die." and here you fall in love with Arzano, they transfer you.

GENNARO runs into classroom, out of breath.

GENNARO: Maestra! Maestra!

SPERELLI: Gennaro! What happened?

GENNARO: My momma's sick. If she's not in the hospital soon, she'll die!

SPERELLI: We'll have to call an ambulance. *(hurrying from the classroom)* There's a phone in the principal's office.

GENNARO: Calling an ambulance is pointless!

SPERELLI: Calm down.

GENNARO: They won't come.

*They enter the PRINCIPAL's office. SPERELLI
flips through the rolodex.*

They won't come!

SPERELLI: *(dialing the phone)* Be quiet. Let me do it.

GENNARO: They're in cahoots with the mafia.

SPERELLI: Yes, we need an ambulance. It's a matter of life and death! In Arzano...*(angrily)* What do you mean there aren't any? Call a private ambulance?

GENNARO: Forget it. It's too expensive.

SPERELLI: Excuse me. How much would that come to, more or less? What? A million two hundred thousand lire!

GENNARO: *(shouting into the phone too)* Forget it.

SPERELLI: You're disgusting! Taking advantage of people's pain! You're in cahoots with the mafia! I'll report you. *(to GENNARO)* They hung up.

GENNARO: Of course they hung up. Let's get going!

GENNARO exits, followed by SPERELLI.

SPERELLI: I'll come with you. We'll take my car.

GENNARO: *(hesitates)* We can't.

SPERELLI: Why not?

GENNARO: I punctured your tires.

SPERELLI: What?

GENNARO: I punctured your tires, and I put sugar in the gas tank.

SPERELLI: Sugar?

GENNARO: It destroys the engine.

SPERELLI: Damn it! Why? Explain that to me!

GENNARO: For revenge. Remember how you made me look like shit? Or did you forget? Come on. Now you don't want to help me! I knew it! *(he slaps SPERELLI on the shoulder)* Fuck you!

GENNARO turns to walk away.

SPERELLI: Wait. I'm coming with you. I do want to help you. How do we take her there?

As they rush downstage, the lights dim. The school set behind them is dark. They are on the street at dusk.

GENNARO: I'll pinch a car and you'll drive.

SPERELLI: Pinch a car?

GENNARO: Yes, I'll steal it, and you drive.

SPERELLI: Okay. Oh, damn! I'm not insured. *(pointing offstage left)* Let's take one of those.

GENNARO: Okay, then I'll drive.

SPERELLI: No, for the love of God. Let's go, let's take one of these. but damn it they are all locked. Gennaro! This one is open.

GENNARO: Oh my god, you want to steal Toothless's car?

TOOTHLESS: *(off stage)* What's going on?

SPERELLI: *(reentering, calling up to TOOTHLESS)* I can explain. Gennaro!

GENNARO: My mom is sick, Toothless. I need your van.

TOOTHLESS: *(off stage)* Take it.

GENNARO: You see? There still are some good people around.

SPERELLI: Sure. He's a black marketeer. *(to TOOTHLESS)* We will be back soon, Toothless!

SPERELLI and GENNARO exit stage left.

Lights come up stage right: the hospital.

SPERELLI and GENNARO enter stage right (the hospital) with MRS. AIELLO, who can barely walk. There is a SICK MAN slumped in a chair.

(to SICK MAN) Listen, excuse me. Where's the nurses?

SICK MAN: Nurses? They do is bang all night!

SPERELLI: They bang?

SICK MAN: They bang, bang, bang, and not like this *(indicates sweeping motion)* but like this *(SPERELLI interrupts sexual motion)*. They don't give a crap about anything. This place is gross. Cockroaches in the beds, they get all the way up to the bed.

GENNARO: With all due respect, and I'm really sorry, but my mom is not well.

SPERELLI: Excuse me, can you tell me where the doctor is?

NUN walks in, checks MRS. AIELLO, but not in a way that indicates she cares. Throughout, MRS. AIELLO groans in pain.

NUN: She needs a doctor and an injection.

SPERELLI: You don't say.

NUN: But I'm sorry, I'm not a doctor. *(turns to SPERELLI who's grabbed her arm)* But lady what do you want?!

SPERELLI: A doctor!

NUN: He's busy.

SPERELLI: He's busy? There must be at least two of them. Call someone!

GENNARO: Momma! Momma! (*Sperelli runs to Gennaro*) Where's her shot? If Toothless were here, she'd already have her shot.

NUN: Quiet! This is not a place for children. Get out! Scram!

SPERELLI grabs NUN by the collar and pushes her up against a wall.

SPERELLI: This place isn't fit for an animal you ugly bitch! Give this woman a shot now! Or will you wait until she dies?

NUN: All right, calm down! Look (*snobbishly, trying to maintain some composure*) at what we have been reduced to as southerners. (*calling out*)

SPERELLI: Hurry up because if something happens to this little boy's mother, I'll destroy you.

NUN: (*calling out as she leaves*) Get an injection ready!

NUN leaves. SPERELLI clasps GENNARO's shoulder.

SPERELLI: I'm sorry. Forgive me.

GENNARO: (*Looking up at SPERELLI*) You were better than even Toothless would've been.

NUN reenters and gives MRS. AIELLO a shot.

SPERELLI: How is she?

NUN: Don't worry. The doctor is on his way.

GENNARO: You'd better leave. My aunt will be here soon anyway.

SPERELLI: Yes I'll go, but you have to do me a huge favour, when your mother wakes up tell her I owe her a basket of eggs.

GENNARO: How come?

SPERELLI: She gave them to me so I'd get you back to school and off the streets. But now I won't be able to earn them. I'm being transferred. I'm going back up North.

GENNARO: Jesus! For real?

SPERELLI: Jesus. For real. Although you don't want to admit it, you were beginning to change.

GENNARO: Me? You got some nerve! You're changing!

SPERELLI: How?

GENNARO: You were prepared to steal a van. You smacked a nun against a wall. Two more weeks with me, and you'd learn how to live.

SPERELLI: Then it's really time for me to leave.

Lights to Black.

ACT 2, SCENE 6

The train station. There is a bench downstage centre. SPERELLI is seated at one end of the bench, looking at a card, surrounded by her students.

ROSINELLA: Can I tell you something?

SPERELLI: You wouldn't have it any other way. Tell me. *(as if ready for her usual diatribe)* What's your family doing, what new thing did you learn?

ROSINELLA: When I grow up, I want to be a teacher like you. Except also married. And, I wrote you a card and I signed it so you never forget me.

SPERELLI: I could never forget you. What a beautiful card, thank you Rosinella.

NICOLINO: Can I sign it?

SPERELLI: Yes, you should all sign it. And write a message.

NICOLINO takes the card and several students gather around her at the other end of the bench, waiting for their chance to sign.

VINCENZINO: Professor, if you get lonely among those mountains come back to us.

SPERELLI: Okay.

TOTÒ: Teacher. *(handing SPERELLI a stack of notebooks)* These are our compositions about parables. Read them on the train.

SPERELLI: No, no. Give them to the new teacher. Please, treat him well.

TOTÒ: Sure. And don't worry, you'll have your new car engine in 15 days.

NICOLINO: I'll never forget you, not even when you're dead.

ROSINELLA: Teacher, can I write to you?

SPERELLI: You must! And tell me what you are up and what all of you are up to.

ROSINELLA: And you'll answer?

SPERELLI: Of course.

CONCETTA approaches SPERELLI.

CONCETTA: Teacher! Listen! Con-ce-tta...(pauses) Sco-gna-mi-glio.

Everyone cheers.

SPERELLI: Very good!

MARIA: Professor, this is for you.

She hands SPERELLI a red horn.

This is a red horn! It will protect you from the evil eye! And it will find you a husband!

VINCENZINO: We all chipped in.

SPERELLI: Gennaro didn't come, after all?

Enter PRINCIPAL with baby.

PRINCIPAL: You can't leave without seeing this beauty!

SPERELLI: You must be an apparition. I haven't seen you in quite a while.

PRINCIPAL: I've been on maternity leave.

SPERELLI: I know.

PRINCIPAL: Professor, you finally managed to go back up north.

SPERELLI: I did? It's you who sent me away!

PRINCIPAL: Me? No, yous!

SPERELLI: You!

PRINCIPAL: No, not me! Yous!

SPERELLI: Okay, “yous” it is. Anyway, good evening. My regards to the stud of Seville.

PRINCIPAL: Same to your sister!

SPERELLI: Up your mamma’s...!

EVERYONE laughs. STUDENT cheer.

PRINCIPAL: ...good for you, Professor. Have a good trip. Good-bye.

SPERELLI: Good-bye.

EVERYONE: Good-bye. Good-bye.

Music. Everyone exits. SPERELLI is alone on the bench. The distant sound of a train whistle. The nearer sound of a motorcycle. After a moment, GENNARO runs in.

GENNARO: Professor, wait!

SPERELLI: *(standing)* Gennaro.

GENNARO: This is for you.

SPERELLI: What's in here? Poison?

GENNARO: You’re wrong. My composition. I tried.

SPERELLI: Good for you. I’m proud of you.

GENNARO: School sucks, but you don't.

SPERELLI: Thank you? (*pats GENNARO on the shoulder*) Goodbye, Gennaro.

GENNARO exits, moving upstage to the classroom area of the set. SPERELLI sits on the bench. She places GENNARO's composition on the stack of others. The train whistles again, this time louder. She picks up GENNARO's composition and starts to read it.

Upstage, standing among the student's desks, a light comes up on GENNARO. SPERELLI, reading from the notebook, smiles as he recites his composition:

GENNARO: Composition. "My favourite parable" is about the end of the world. It doesn't scare me since I'll already be dead a whole century. God will divide everybody. There will be three doors. A huge one for hell...a medium one for Purgatory...and a tiny one for Heaven. And God will say, "Silence, all of you. One here, another one there." If any smartasses try to switch doors, God will catch them. The Earth will explode. The stars will explode. The sky will explode. Arzano will be in a thousand pieces. We'll start from the ground up. The good will laugh, and the bad will cry. Those in Purgatory will do both. The babies will turn into butterflies. Me, let's hope I make it.

Lights to Black.

EPILOGUE

SPERELLI is seated at her desk, downstage centre. She is reading a letter. Light comes up on ROSINELLA, 16.

ROSINELLA: Next year, I begin studies in Education at the University of Naples Federico II because I want to be a teacher, Ms. Sperelli. You inspired me. Thank you. If only I could express to you how much--

VINCENZINO enters, as will the others when it is their turn to speak. They will form an irregular semicircle around and upstage from SPERELLI.

VINCENZINO: *(interrupting)* Mamma mia, Rosine', enough! Professoressa! Business is going well! Boss at the ice cream shop gave me a loan and now I renovate homes. Well, not me, I hired some of the other students, I just collect the money. Even Mimi's paying me to fix up De Amicis! Camorra are starting to notice my business, but they don't bother me. You know, I don't belong to anybody.

NICOLINO: Are you still fat? My momma thinks so, but I know how difficult it is. Are you on a diet? I am, thanks to momma. One brioche a day! Although, it really doesn't matter 'cause I can't afford to buy more than one brioche, anyway. See, there isn't much work around here. For now, I'm working for Vincenzino renovating houses. He makes us work all day and pays us crap! If I go on working like this, I'll be a stick before the month is over!

CONCETTA: Maestra, the good news is that papa lets me work after school now. I don't have to work all night anymore, so I don't sleep in class. More importantly, I never forgot my last name! But Papa says that paper collecting doesn't provide enough to support a family. He and momma always fight about money. She tells me to concentrate on school so I don't have to do this job when I'm older. I'm giving it my all now. Are you proud of me?

TOTÒ: My father keeps saying if I don't have work then I will do nothing in life. So, for now, I'm trying to look for a new job. A real one, with legitimate paychecks. I'm not sure what I want to do, maybe a welder, or a sealer, but I only work to live, I don't want to live just to work. I'm satisfied with anything. The important thing is to live happily.

MARIA: Maestra Sperelli, it has been so long...life is not easy...is it possible... you're still single? (*she sighs*) For this, I light a candle for you every Sunday. As for Totò, he's still a delinquent. He stopped selling on the black market, at least. He says he wants to have a real job, but now he just sleeps all day! At least he was making a few lira before!

LUCIETTA: Maestra, I hope you are well. I've written a poem for you. I hope you like it.

ARZANO

My papa says that Arzano is fit only for dogs,
 But that's from a year without work. Each morning
 He walks the tiny streets full of garbage—via Petrarca,
 via Dante, via Pascoli—until Café Vita Nuova opens
 At eight. He plays briscola with his childhood friends,
 Sips a cappuccino and damns Il Cavaliere, the tycoon of A.C. Milan,
 Who promised “one million more jobs”
 And who still hasn't disappeared.

*Each student faces LUCIETTA when delivering
 their line of the next stanza.*

LUCIETTA: We're moving to Canada where it snows for half the year

ROSINELLA: And you can never rely on the sun. I don't want to leave

TOTÒ: My home, my cousins, my aunts and uncles and grandparents,

CONCETTA: But my uncle in Toronto owns three printing shops and Papa will run

VINCENZO: The fourth when it opens. In Toronto the streets are clean and wide

LUCIETTA: And not paved in stone, and my cousin Sophia says that she'll show me

MARIA: Where they all lead. Will there be a square where the children all play

NICOLINO: And where on Sundays they sell candies wrapped in paper?

LUCIETTA: I'll miss Arzano. I'll hold onto my city full of tiny streets and garbage
 Where nobody asks for alms because nobody has anything to give,
 Where people aren't dogs, just people who survive if they can, or leave
 With sadness, regret, yet nonetheless hopeful. They leave with the guilt
 That they could not change what they loved.
 Sorry, Sorry, Sorry...sticks in my throat.
 In Canada I will learn how to apologize.

GENNARO: Hey Sperelli. We played another class in soccer the other day. We should have won too! But the ref doesn't like our teacher. I imagine because he didn't wish him a Merry Christmas. Some things don't change here. Ahh...what do you care about soccer or even about south for that matter. Or maybe you do, I don't know, because you never came back. And you did well not to. I'm not really sure what to say... I wrote to you once that I hoped I would make it. That hasn't changed. It's still something I hope for. You remember that day we went to the Palace? When you guys were singing? Well, I was kind of bummed that I didn't get to join in. But the strange thing is, I can still remember the words.

He begins to sing. The other students will join in.

In the South I learn that the busses don't come
 In the South I learn that the schools are corrupt
 That the toilets clog up and flood when it rains
 That if I get sick, my family will sink into debt
 And I cry in bed because it's all my fault

CHORUS

My South is cracked and I feel cracked too
 Sometimes I think it never will change
 But I know who I am and where I come from
 The city of Arzano, a shithole in the South
 I call it that because I know what it means
 For good and for bad: Arzano, my home

*ALL STUDENTS move downstage and GENNARO
 is left on stage, isolated.*

GENNARO: Ciao, Professoressa.