

Mamma Mia – La Befana?!



A Family Friendly Full-Length Play
Based on the Italian Christmas character, *La Befana*

By
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MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

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Thank you to the 2021 acting students at Villa Victoria Academy in Ewing who, via zoom, courageously during the Covid lockdown brought Mamma Mia - La Befana?! to life.

And to my nonna, Maria Rosaria Solla, who made every day magical.

Cover art by Janet Cantore Watson

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Characters

Mary De Angelis	Precocious ten-year old girl.
Maria De Angelis	Mary’s Italian American mom
Nonna (Marianosaria Amato)	Mary’s ageless Italian grandma
Bethany	Mary’s friend
Micah	Mary’s friend
Gaspar	Mary’s friend
Joe De Angelis	Maria’s husband
State Trooper	
Suitcase	This magical prop plays a major role.

Cast of seven (7) with double casting. Feel free to add a children’s choir.
Joe and *State Trooper* may be played by the same actor.

Location: Montpelier, Vermont. This can be done with limited set pieces.
The action flows from space to space.

Time: Christmas Eve through Epiphany

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SCENE ONE - Christmas Eve

Walking together towards the De Angelis house, MARY, MARIA, MICAH, GASPAR and BETHANY are singing the Christmas carol “Angels We Have Heard on High.” Extra children and adults could be used here. If the staging accommodates it, more of the hymn could be sung. As they get closer to the door, Mary’s bellowing drowns everyone out.

MARY and MARIA. *(Intersperse ad-libs – bye bye, Merry Christmas, etc.)* Angels we have heard on high - Bye Bye - Sweetly singing over the plains - See ya. And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains. Glo-ori-a. In excelsis de-o. Glo-ori-a. In excelsis de-o.

ASSORTED CAROLERS. *(Assorted ad-libs interspersed with the singing.)* Bye Mary. Merry Christmas. Bye Mrs. De Angelis. See you. *(Stamping of snow off feet outside the door.)*

MARY AND MARIA. *(Continue singing outside the door.)* Shepherds, why this Jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?

(Maria and Mary enter, continue stamping boots in time to music. Mary takes off her coat, drops it on the floor revealing an angel costume. Maria carries or drags in a very large shipping box. They sing with great joy and force.) What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heavenly song? Glo-ori-a, In excelsis de-o. Glo-ori-a. In excelsis de-o *(A grand finish complete with over dramatized arms!)* Glo-ori-a, In excelsis de-o! Glo-ori-a! In excelsis de-o¹ *(Mary and Maria giggle and twirl each other around until Mary notices the box.)*

¹ Traditional French Hymn “Gloria” Translated 1862 by James Chadwick

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MARY. (*Hugging the large box.*) Mama, what do you think Nonna sent? Can we open it tonight? It's Christmas Eve. Come on, we both have been so very good this year and with Dad away with Doctors Without Borders we need a treat – please, please.

MARIA. (*Laughing*) Whoa, from the Christmas Angel to the Christmas whiner. Pick the coat up off the floor and then we can think about the package.

MARY. (*Picking up coat from floor and twirling with it around the room.*) Bethany, Micah, Gasper and I were brilliant tonight! Finally, we were old enough to have major roles with lines!

MARIA. You were brilliant – so were the halo, the candle and the follow spot that your cousin Vittorio hit you with when you floated in and started your monologue.

MARY. I wish Dad had been here to see me.

MARIA. Your friend's parents and Father Dave took tons of photos and video. Your Dad can see you in high def!

MARY. Is it true that Nonna is coming? What's up with that? She never comes for Christmas.

MARIA. She said this year she would brave the Montpelier cold to be with her little De Angelis Angel.

MARY. (*Ripping off her costume to reveal leggings and a t-shirt*) Angel? Nah, I'm her demon - speed demon. She calls me that all summer when I'm dashing up mountain trails and leaving her in my dust. (*Dragging the big package to her mother and doing a pleading jump/dance.*) Please, please, can we just take the brown paper off Nonna's package and see who it's for?

MARIA. You know the rule - presents are for Christmas morning to remind us of the gift God gave us. Besides this is addressed to Nonna not to you or me.

MARY. Ma, just one present...

MARIA. Mary!

MARY. This year is different. Snowbird Nonna is flying north!!!! She'll want us to thank her when she gets here tomorrow. Puleeeeze!

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MARIA. Basta. ² Basta means enough!

MARY. I bet she wrapped the present in sparkling paper, with silver ribbon and bits of evergreen. SHE wouldn't want this ugly old brown postal poop paper under the tree. (*Gives her mother a huge suck up smile.*) Maria De Angelis, you know you are going to give in – you always cave to your only child.

MARIA. (*Sighs and hands her the package.*) That's mama to you. Just the brown paper - again - it is addressed to Nonna. If it is a present, then under the tree it goes.

MARY. (*Ripping to reveal an old suitcase tied with string.*) What? Where is the sparkle? Where is the Nonna glitter? (*Suitcase jiggles away from Mary.*)

MARIA. Oh my, I recognize that suitcase. We cannot open it! That is definitely not for us. Every year I begged, but only Nonna opens it - on January 5th. Nonna - La Befana of Saint Rocco's Church.

MARY. (*Turning the suitcase over and over.*) A poem for me! (*Opens and reads Italian with difficulty.*) Tu non parli italiano³ e Nonna's heart is about to break. Pignoli nut cookies I am eating as fast as I can bake. Tell me, what could cause this awful ache? Mary! Mary – who only talks of Santa for Pete's sake.

MARIA. My mother always was a drama queen. Hmm, maybe that is where you get it. She obviously knew you'd wear me down to open the box.

MARY. (*Continues to read.*) What of Babbo Natale ⁴– the King of all gift givers. His gifts of Natale pasts – still give me shivers. The person I miss most – I'm still crying rivers. Is that magical mystical flying *nonnina*. (*To her mom.*) What is a nonnina?

MARIA. A tiny grandmother.

MARY. Nonna misses a little nonna? She is a little nonna!

MARIA. Nonna misses growing up in Italy and all the things her family did when she was a little girl.

²Italian - "enough"

³ You don't speak Italian

⁴ Santa Claus

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MARY. But a nonnina?

MARIA. Finish her poem.

MARY. It's kinda over – Basta – enough for now mio⁵ my oh.
Nonnnnnnaaaaa?! *Mio my oh?* You will learn more on sei gennaio.⁶

MARIA. January 6th – Epiphany.

MARY. (*Reciting.*) “Epiphany - the three kings or wise men - depending on who teaches catechism class - bring their gifts to the baby Jesus and let the whole world know that the savior is born.” (*Tone Changes.*) What does a nonnina have to do with that and why is this the first time I am hearing about it?

MARIA. After Nonna moved to Florida and Saint Rocco's congregation was younger they stopped the La Befana celebration. Besides - this is not the first time you are hearing about it.

MARY. I thought if I played along you would let me open the suitcase. Every year I suffer through a “Video Chat style” La Befana story. I usually sneak a book below the computer when Nonna starts telling the old lady Italy stories and don't pay any attention.

MARIA. Nice, Mary Rose De Angelis, really nice. Now I'm glad that your dad and I decided to ignore the tradition - presents on one day are enough for you.

MARY. Whoa - do Italian American kids get presents on more than one day? I'm one hundred percent an Italian American - why did I lose out?

MARIA. Because it is not about the presents - it is about the magic and spirit of Christmas. (*Suitcase twinkles, moves around and makes a sound.*)

MARY. Wait, did you get presents on two days when you were a kid?

MARIA. I repeat, it is not about the presents - it is about love and kindness and not being a brat. It is time you listened to the story - without reading on your tablet at the same time. Sit and listen! La Befana was a very poor old woman who lived alone deep in the woods. (*As the Story progresses, Maria gets more and more involved in acting it out.*)

MARY. Why alone? Was she a hermit or something?

⁵ Italian - “my”

⁶ Italian - “January 6th”

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MARIA. Her husband and infant son had died. In her sadness she chose to be alone.

MARY. That is so stupid - no friends! What would I do without my crew - Bethany, Micah and Gaspar?

MARIA. (*Ignores Mary.*) Her friends were the forest's birds and animals. She gardened and kept her house and the surrounding forest clean.

MARY. Clean freak - like you and Nonna.

MARIA. (*Tosses a throw blanket or shawl over her head.*) The winter was harder. Brrrr. One very cold winter day, with snow covering the ground, poor starving Befana was digging for any roots that the deer might have missed. Roots she might be able to eat.

MARY. Roots! In our wilderness camp we studied edible roots. (*Does a bad rap imitation.*) Ya gotta have a hungry tummy -- cause these here roots -- just ain't that yummy -- pitt -chichew pitt - chichew, pitt - chichew, chew chew (*Mary Attempts to high five with Maria. Maria ignores the high five with a "mom" look. Suitcase growls and jiggles.*)

MARIA. Nonno Antonio told me that in Italy during World War I the soldiers had taken all the crops for themselves. After the war, in some villages people were so poor they peeled bark off the trees to make soup.

MARY. That's disgusting.

MARIA. If you are hungry enough, you will eat roots. La Befana brought the roots into her cabin along with a pot of snow and made soup.

Suddenly, she heard knocking at her door. (*Mary knocks on the table. Suitcase leaps once, growls and rattles. Mary and Maria do not notice.*)

MARY. (*Deep scary campfire voice.*) Who knocks at La Befana's door? "It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more." Dumbledore

MARIA. (*Shoots another raised eyebrow mom look.*) The old woman was scared. No one visited her in the woods. She slowly drew back the curtain and peeked out the window.

MARY. (*Announcer Voice.*) To see Darkseid - god of evil - monarch of the planet Apokolips.

MARIA. Do you want the know this story or not? Santa is still watching you – (*Mary rolls her eyes and sighs yes. Suitcase growls.*) She couldn't believe what she saw - not one, not two but three men dressed in robes of

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fine fur, silk and gold. Each wore a crown - one brighter than the other. They looked as though they were dropped from another world. The sky was dark, not a star could be seen.

MARY. Now, I see where this scary story is going - suddenly the star will shine brightly in the sky like Nonno Antonio's star - and lead them all to Bethlehem.

MARIA. Not just yet. The old woman swallowed her fear and invited the three strangers in out of the snow.

MARY. (*Racing around looking out windows.*) Inappropriate behavior. Never let strangers into your house when you are alone - especially three men in weird – (*Maria stops her with a look. Suitcase slides over and trips Mary.*) Owwww. Where did that come from?

MARIA. - and fed them her watery but tasty root soup. The kings said they couldn't follow the star that was leading them to the newborn king. The snow clouds had covered the sky and they were lost.

MARY. Nimbus-stratus clouds.

MARIA. What?

MARY. Nimbus - stratus clouds - we learned that in science. The weather channel online too. They cover everything. When it is cold enough, it snows.

MARIA. What's your point?

MARY. So meanwhile back in the woods the nimbus-stratus clouds made it impossible to follow the star.

MARIA. Ahh - well thanks to good old nimbus stratus, the three kings were touched by the poor woman's generosity. When they looked out the door, the sky was clear, and one star was glimmering in the heavens. They asked the old woman to come with them. She thought about it but was embarrassed that she didn't have fine gifts to bring to the newborn king. Besides she wanted to stay behind and clean up after the meal.

MARY. (*Putting her costume halo back on.*) The adventure of a lifetime and she does the dishes. Weren't Bethany, Gaspar and Micah great as the three wise men in tonight's pageant? Micah's mom made the biggest, glittery crown I've ever seen.

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MARIA. (*Ignores the attempted diversion.*) After the house was clean, the old woman realized that she should try to honor this new king. She went through her son's baby things to find a great gift.

MARY. Recycling - cool. I thought we were the only family that re-gifted.

MARIA. - picked up her broom to help her balance in the snow, locked the house and tried to follow the kings' footprints in the snow.

MARY. (*Pops up off her seat.*) Speaking of re-gifting. I wonder if Nonna would like a slightly dented iPod complete with a super almost tween playlist? (*Suitcase growls.*) Since she never showed up in any of the manger stories, we were taught in CCD⁷, I guess La Befana never found them and never found the baby Jesus. Get to the end - I need to put out the biscotti and wine out for "Santa." (*Suitcase growls even louder.*)

MARIA. (*Marching Mary back to her seat.*) Ahem. Not quite. Searching and searching until her feet hurt, she fell asleep under a tree. The spirit of the trees felt sorry for her - besides they recognized the broom as a distant branch of the family.

MARY. Mom, really - a "distant branch" branch???

MARIA. (*Really animated and involved in the story.*) The spirit of the trees had incredible magic powers. Suddenly - hickory, stickery alamazie - her broom had the power to fly. It soared around her and woke her up.

MARY. "Hickory STICKery"?

MARIA. Hopping on the broom, La Befana thought, "all children are precious, I will bring gifts to them as if they were the new king." So, for thousands of years on January 5th, La Befana flies over Italy and visits the homes of all children leaving gifts of the forest - fruit and nuts - in their stocking. Bad children get a gift of *carbone* - coal.

MARY. I think I will stick with the Santa story. Gifts of the forest I can find camping.

MARIA. Nonna may disagree with that come January 5th.

MARY. That is so next year.

MARIA. Please bring Nonna's suitcase to the guest room.

⁷ Catholic religion classes

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MARY rolls her eyes and attempts to pick up the suitcase. The Suitcase is angry and in defiance resists Mary picking it up. Mary falls, gets up and slowly drags the now super heavy suitcase.

MARY. Let's talk about tomorrow – you know Christmas – the day “Santa” (*Mary uses finger quotes.*) flies down the chimney and leaves me the most magical gifts a brilliant and precocious child could ever dream of, ask for or even whine for. (*Mary still struggles with the overly heavy suitcase and finally sets it down near the hall.*) I must be tired. Now let's talk about opening just one present tonight - you know to raise my spirits because Dad's not here. Just one please, please - Daddy would let me.

MARIA. I have my anti-guilt shield up. That bit won't work. For the past two years, your Dad has spent his Christmas vacation - the month of December - not skiing but volunteering with Doctors Without Borders. New Year's Eve is our big holiday blow out and you know it.

MARY. A girl's gotta try. I know Dad's a super guy and helping lots of kids, but I still miss him and sometimes wish he'd just stay home for Christmas.

MARIA. How about I make us some hot chocolate and you get ready for bed. Tomorrow will be a long day. Daddy is Skyping at 7 o'clock to be with us Christmas morning - soooo don't even think about opening presents before then.

MARY. (*Crosses her fingers behind her back.*) Momma - I would never disobey you at Christmas time.

MARIA. Santa and La Befana are watching you all year long.

MARY. Now I have to worry about a mom, dad and two cagy characters spying on me all year long.

MARIA. Just part of the magic of Christmas.

END SCENE

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SCENE TWO - Early Christmas Morning

Small spotlight on JOE. He wears dirty surgical gear and sits far from Maria at an older computer. Maria, in a pretty robe, make-up and combed hair, sits at her computer.

MARIA. Giuseppe we have to tell her.

JOE. And ruin Christmas –

MARIA. She thinks you'll be home for New Year's Eve. She was asking about you last night - I think next year you have to rethink your volunteerism. Pre-teens are a rough age. Mary needs you too.

JOE. I'll figure out something and video chat at your midnight.

MARIA. Please - do you hear yourself?

JOE. You wouldn't believe how bad it is here. They fertilize the fields with their dead. Women and children ripped to shreds –

MARIA. Doctors Without Borders needs you - you're a great surgeon - but your patients here need you too.

JOE. Maria, thousands of frightened families have fled to the bush - no medical care, no food and then the soldiers of one side or the other see them and shoot them.

MARIA. I know you are all they have -

JOE. - they asked and asked - I said I'd stay a little while longer.

MARIA. Isn't one month long enough? Joe, Mary really misses you. I miss you. (*Enter Mary in her nightgown balancing a bunch of wrapped gifts.*)

MARY. (*Singing song reminiscent of "Seventh Heaven."*) Seven - It's more than seven. Seven - I'm in present heaven. (*Speaking.*) Mama, mama, someone left tons of presents. Thank you, mama Santa. (*Notices Video Chat.*) Dad, Dad! (*She kisses the monitor.*) Morning kisses for my favorite Daddy. Boy, do I wish you were home - I need help carrying all this stuff!

JOE. Buon Natale principessa⁸. So, Santa found our house –

⁸ Italian - "princess"

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MARY. Rudolph even left his annual thank you paw print and the wine was definitely drunk! Did Santa Mary come to Sudan? Did you get the box of goodies we sent you? Did the children in the hospital get the presents we sent from church?

JOE. Santa gave me the best present ever – seeing your face and my Maria’s face on Christmas morning. What else could a dad want?

MARY. To be home. December 30th is so far away. Can’t you come home sooner?

JOE. I’m not sure baby – but don’t you have a lasagna to make?

MARY. Nonna’s coming. She’ll want to make the lasagna alla nonna. I can’t wait to go to the airport to pick you up.

JOE. You can’t spend all morning talking to me – who will open the presents?

MARY. Where is the surprise – I heard you and mom talking about a surprise – is it hidden –

MARIA. It is hidden for now and you will find out soon enough. How about you bring the rest of the presents here and open them so Dad can see them.

JOE. Una buon’ idea⁹! (*Mary scampers out of the room. Suitcase glides into the room and shimmies.*)

MARIA. Tell her. You have to tell her.

END SCENE

SCENE THREE - The Disappointment

Maria and a disappointed Mary are sitting on the floor surrounded by unopened gifts. Maria picks up a gift and with a smile, hands it to Mary.

MARY. (*Tosses the unwrapped present aside.*) NO NO NO! I’m not unwrapping anything till my father comes home. I can’t believe he wants

⁹ A good idea

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to stay in stupid Africa. New Year's Eve is OUR day. He promised. He promised!

MARIA. What happened to yesterday's angel and the spirit of Christmas?

MARY. I am going to call the president or is it king of Sudan. Dad cannot stay there anymore. Why does he think he has to stay longer?

MARIA. Hundreds of poor children live in the refugee camps and are very, very sick.

MARY. Not my fault. Why am I being punished.

MARIA. (*Hands Mary a gift.*) Please baby. Let's open some presents before Nonna gets here and have a wonderful day together. Just open one -

MARY. (*Tosses gift aside.*) Why doesn't Micah's dad, Dr. Happy Dentist, go and help the children. He could go and fix teeth. Why should Micah's dad be home?

MARIA. Your Father is helping people live who are very badly hurt - he is giving them a wonderful gift

MARY. I only want one gift - Doctor De Angelis. He promised he would be here for New Year's Eve. He promised.

MARIA. Listen to yourself! Don't you think I want him home too? You live in a warm house - those children live under plastic sheets and don't even have clean water to drink. By sharing your dad with them you are giving them a gift too.

MARY. I don't know them, so I don't have to give them a gift.

MARIA. Now you're being rotten - I'll give the presents away.

MARY. Sure, send them to the Sudan. (*Doorbell rings, door opens and NONNA enters dragging a suitcase.*)

NONNA. Buon Natale¹⁰! Where is everyone? Our favorite Nonna is here!

MARY. Nonna, Christmas is ruined. New Year's is ruined. Why is Dad doing this to me.

NONNA. (*Nonna drops her suitcase, points her pinkie and index finger at Mary. Rotating her hand back and forth, Nonna starts madly screaming and running around the room.*) The whine monster is in the house! Save us! Save us! Back to your cave whinosaucerous - back back.

¹⁰ Merry Christmas

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MARY. (*Tackles Nonna and hugs her legs.*) You stop it Nonna. I am not a whine monster.

MARIA. (*Kisses Nonna on two cheeks and helps her take off her coat.*)
Mamma - Buon Natale. I am so glad you are here.

NONNA. Do I get a kiss from my precious nipote?¹¹

MARY. (*Stands in front of Nonna looking straight ahead.*) I am here, get the kisses over with.

NONNA. (*Pinches Maria's cheeks.*) Such a cute bambina.¹² Such a lousy attitude.

MARIA. We just found out that Doctors Without Borders could really use Joe for a little while longer and Mary is having a hard time with that.

MARY. I am standing right here. I am not having a hard time. They are having a hard time and I am having an incredibly bad time. A very, very, very, very bad time.

NONNA. Wow - a four “very” bad time. Will it last all twelve days of Christmas? Because in twelve days - (*Sings traditional chant/song.*) La Befana vien di note, con le scarpe tutte rotte, con le toppe alla sottana: viva, viva, la Befana!¹³

MARY. (*Points at Maria and Nonna on the hate lines.*) This is not Italy. Christmas is today not in twelve days. I hate today. I hate my father. I hate him. I hate you and I hate you.

MARIA. (*Grabbing and hugging Mary.*) Shhhh baby. I know it hurts that your father isn't home. I miss him too. More than you can imagine. He would hate to see you so sad on such a glorious day. (*Nonna exits quietly through the front door. The suitcase starts to dance.*)

MARY. Doctor Dad loves those other kids more than he loves me. If he loved me, he would be home NOW!

MARIA. Your dad loves you very much. The reason I love my Doctor De Angelis is that he believes that when life is good to you - you need to give back to the universe. He volunteers to help children who aren't as lucky as you are. Children whose fathers were killed by evil men. We have so

¹¹ Granddaughter

¹² Little girl – baby girl

¹³ Befana comes at night with broken shoes and a patched skirt. Live Befana.

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much and share dad with children who have so little. Now you stop acting like an obnoxious member of the whine family and come help me make the lasagna! (*Doorbell rings. Maria opens the door and Nonna rides in singing on a shiny bicycle decorated with holiday ribbons. She rides right past Mary into the living room.*)

NONNA. Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way!

MARY. Grow up. We don't ride bikes in the house.

NONNA.

MARY.

Oh what fun it is to ride a
two wheeled open sleigh-
eigh!

Shut up. Shut up. Shut
up.

NONNA. Who's ringing the stai zitto¹⁴ bell?

MARIA. Mama, basta. Mary is having a bad day.

NONNA. (*Stops and gets off the bike.*) A bad day - does she have a place to live? Is there food to eat? She doesn't know from a bad day.

MARY. I am still sitting right here you know.

NONNA. Such a bad day - a pile of presents unopened - all for the child who is having a bad day.

MARY. Grandma I have had about enough. I don't want you here! I want my Dad - go back to Florida.

NONNA.

MARIA.

Grandma?

Apologize to your nonna.

MARY. (*Crying.*) Apologize for what? For hating that stupid song? For wanting to be left alone?

NONNA. (*Drama Queens run in the family – she feigns a heart attack.*) My heart. My heart - *cough, cough* - I think it stopped. The pain is shooting down to my toes - uggg there it goes - the pain it is in my - *cough cough*.

MARIA. Mamma, stop dying please. Mary, I haven't heard an apology. It might be the only thing that will stop your Nonna from acting pazzo¹⁵.

¹⁴ shut up

¹⁵ Crazy

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MARY. Apologize for what?

NONNA. For calling me Grandma - that's what. No nice Italian girl calls her nonna "grandma". Ieeeckkk - you think I'm the Queen of England? Nonna - that is who I am. And your Nonna loves you - so come look at the bike.

MARIA. (*Pulling Mary to her in a hug.*) I know you are sad honey, but it is Christmas - your favorite time of year. Come on angel – (*Nonna joins in the giant hug and turns it into a squishing, dancing hug.*)

NONNA. (*Singing old rock song.*) Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle bell rock -

MARY. You two are suffocating me.

NONNA. We won't stop hugging until you get it.

MARY. I get it. I get it. You love me to pieces - squished pieces.

NONNA. Your father loves you too. He loves you more than spaghetti Sunday.

MARIA. He wanted to give you something really special - something you told him about.

NONNA. Una buona bicicletta¹⁶!

MARY. Is that the special present from Daddy? I thought Nonna -

NONNA. I can't think of everything - this was your dad's idea - come look at it.

MARY. I was putting Christmas on hold until Dad came home. Dad sent that for me? Can I ride it now?

MARIA. Not in the house.

MARY. (*Leaps on the bike.*) Nonna rode it in the house.

MARIA. Nonna was making an entrance. You will ride it outside.

MARY. (*Heading for the door with the bike. Stopped by Maria.*) Great, I'm going to go show it to Gaspar. It's from France just like Gaspar. He has one just like this. I said I loved it! I can't believe Dad remembered.

NONNA. Mary Rose, you still hate your papa? Maria did you hear an apology? Did Nonna, Mariarosaria Amanti, hear an apology?

MARY. Why are we all a "Mary." Aren't there any other names in this family? I'm sorry mama for saying that Dad doesn't love me. I just like it better when he's home. I wish I could ride my new bike to wherever he is.

¹⁶ A great bicycle

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NONNA. There will always be a Maria in my family! Mary, Maria – strong names for power women. Speaking of power women, I wish one would help me make those lasagna noodles. In a Nonna second I will have the dough ready to put in the pasta machine. I think the crank needs to be turned by a loveable crank. *Andiamo.*¹⁷ *(Mary rolls her eyes and follows the women out. Five count of kitchen noises, then Gaspar, Bethany and Micah can be heard loudly singing off key outside the house. Mary runs back followed by Nonna in an apron and Maria with a rolling pin.)*

GASPAR, BETHANY and MICAH. *(Singing We Three Kings off stage.)* We three kings of orient are,¹⁸ bearing gifts, we've not travelled far, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following Mary's star. *(Mary opens the door. Gaspar, Bethany and Micah in ski suits topped with glittery hand-made crowns, each hold a gaily wrapped present. They march in with great dignity and surround Mary.)*

GASPAR, BETHANY and MICAH. *(Singing.)* O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

BETHANY. *(Hands Mary the gift.)* Born a King on Bethlehem's plain, gold I bring to crown him again. *(Quick break in song.)* It's really a cool STEM experiment from Learning Express. *(Nonna ushers the children in and starts to sing with them.)*

NONNA, GASPAR, BETHANY and MICAH. O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to Mar-eeey tonight. Guide us to thy perfect light.

MARY. You were the best kings in the history of the Christmas Eve pageant. And are the best friends ever.

GASPAR. It's my turn - you can't have this incredible - oops - almost spilled the surprise - till I sing. *(Sings.)* Frankincense to offer have I; incense owns a Deity night. *(He explains the line.)* Incense is burned before God. It acknowledges the presence of divinity. You're going to love this! *(Hands Mary the gift.)*

¹⁷ Let's go

¹⁸ Traditional Hymn, Music & Text John H. Hopkins, Jr.

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

MICAH, GASPAS, BETHANY. (*Sing.*) O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.

MARIA. You're making me cry.

GASPAR. I'm sorry, I thought we sounded great.

MARIA. Oh no - you sounded magical. This is just so sweet.

MICAH. My solo is really sweet. (*Hands Mary her gift.*) Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom. (*Sings an overly dramatic death scene. Complete with coughing – cough cough.*)

Sorrowing, sighing bleeding dying, sealed in the stone - cold tomb. Cough, Cough, sigh.

NONNA. I love this child. What a sense of drama. Now, we could sing another chorus, or we could eat a pignoli nut cookie or two with some hot chocolate?

BETHANY. Do you use real milk or soy milk?

NONNA. Che cos'è¹⁹ soy milk? Milk comes from a mucca²⁰ not a bean.

BETHANY. Yes, yes, yes, I will have hot chocolate from moo cow milk. Yummy. In my house we only have soy and rice milk. It looks like a bad chemistry experiment. (*Nonna exits.*)

MARY. (*Singing loudly.*) O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, you brought my friends to me tonight.

GASPAR. Well, technically it is still day light but then the rhythm and cadence of the song would be sooooo wrong.

MICAH. My mom told me that your Dad was still helping all the children in the Sudan and wasn't home for Christmas. So, we decided to cheer you up by bringing you our presents now. The three kings found Mary!

MARIA. Buon Natale! Merry Christmas Kings.

GASPAR. Are those presents all for you? Why didn't you open them?

MARY. I was waiting for -

MICAH. For us? How did you know we were coming for you? Whooo whooo you Italian psychic -

¹⁹ What is

²⁰ Cow

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

GASPAR. (*Grabs a package and hands it to Mary.*) I love to watch people open presents - (*Nonna enters with cookies.*)

BETHANY. Cookies made with real sugar???

NONNA. Certo.²¹

BETHANY. (*Grabbing a cookie.*). Heaven!

END SCENE

SCENE FOUR - Trapped

January 5th

Mary has a pad, pen and her tablet. She is working on a project and reading the tablet.

MARY. Since it is the fifth of January, Nonna keeps babbling on and on about Befana zooming through space on her broom to bring gifts to Italian kids. When I argued that science doesn't support the crazy idea, she went ballistic. Errrrrrrrrr. In our gifted STEM program, we studied propulsion – maybe I missed something. Here – the NASA site will fill in the blanks.²² “What is propulsion? The word is derived from two Latin words: *pro* meaning before or forwards and *pellere* meaning to drive.” WHAT even propulsion goes back to ancient Italy?!? “**Propulsion** means to push forward or drive an object forward. A propulsion system is a machine that produces thrust to push an object forward.” (*Scribbling and thinking.*) Now what is on a broom that can push an object forward? Brooms need people to sweep. You can't sit on it and push it forward – (*Maria is heard crying from offstage. Mary Hears her mother coming and talking. Mary hides to listen. Maria's first line is said as she enters looking at her phone's video call with Joe.*)

²¹ Certainly

²² <https://www.grc.nasa.gov/WWW/k-12/airplane/bgp.html>

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

MARIA. Joe, I don't want to hear this. It can't be true. The rebels can't control all the airports. There must be a way for you to get out. There must.

JOE. The office in Paris is trying to figure it out. Reached out to other N.G.O's for help. The army won't let the Red Cross in. We are practically living in a bunker. And the wounded keep coming. People die on the way and are just left by the side of the road. I can't do this anymore Maria. I just can't bear it and now I can't figure out how to come home.

MARIA. What will I tell Mary?

JOE. Niente²³! Mary thinks I am staying another couple of weeks to help the sick children. She doesn't have to know that the political climate has changed, and we are trying madly to get out of here.

MARIA. Won't our government help you? (*Nonna enters with teacups and sees Mary crying silently. Mary silences Nonna with a finger to her mouth. Nonna and Mary hold a frozen look.*)

JOE. Médecins Sans Frontières is a French organization with branches world-wide. The French and Italians are trying to help. The American consulate said if we get to them, they'll get us out. It impossible to leave the camp. The rebels are insane.

NONNA. (*To herself.*) This world is insane.

JOE. Between Christmas and New Year's Day, attacks forced thousands of terrified families to flee deep into the bush. We might head for the bush next.

NONNA. (*Crosses herself.*) Caro²⁴ Antonio shine your star on them.

MARIA. I'm calling Senator Shea. You really campaigned for him last year and raised a lot of money. His office has got to help us.

JOE. Its January 5th congress is still not in session. He is probably off skiing with his family.

MARY. (*Leaps up and interrupts her parents.*) And that's where you should be. You can't stay. We have to get you home. If mamma thinks that Senator Shea can help, we have to find him right now.

JOE. Mary, I'll be fine. You know how I like to tell a story.

²³ Nothing

²⁴ Dear

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

MARY. Stop lying to me. I'm not some stupid little kid.

NONNA. This is not a lie. I will find him. (*Suitcase slides into view and glows.*)

MARIA. Someone is covering his office and can get through to him. Between my strega²⁵ mamma and I we will find him and get you help.

MARY. (*Searching on her tablet.*) And me too - I'll help find him. I am the google searching diva. I need my dad damn it -

MARIA. Mary-

NONNA. I double damn it!

MARY. Look out for Grandpa An-

NONNA. Ahem

MARY. Nonno Antonio's star - it keeps me safe. He's watching you too. I love you daddy.

JOE. Arrivederci amore mio.²⁶ Other docs need to use the computer before we are totally cut off. I love you and I promise I will get home. (*Blackout Joe. Maria begins to sob uncontrollably. Mary clings to her mother. Nonna joins the hug.*)

END SCENE

SCENE FIVE - The Plan

Later that day.

Mary sneaks in with a backpack, snow gear and helmet. She is rolling her new bike. She parks, turns on the computer and searches for something.

MARY. Planning Step One! Research. Senator Shea - no not the Washington Office. District Constituent Office Montpelier. Perfect. (*Mary picks up the phone and dials a number.*) Yes - I know it is the holiday season. (*Pulls phone away from her ear and shouts at it.*) But you

²⁵ witch

²⁶ Good by my love.

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

shouldn't be closed. What do you mean you won't be returning messages until --- ugggg. (*Hangs up phone. Types something on the computer.*) E-mail contact forms - whose idea was a form - no this isn't a budget issue or health - well maybe health. My father's health and welfare. Done - send! (*SFX: Bing.*) What? Response, "closed for the holiday season. Contact the Washington staff!" I'm not riding my bike to Washington. Plan step two - Google Maps for directions from here - map – and done. (*The printer spits out a sheet of paper that Mary reads, she writes on it and adds it to her backpack. She starts to look through the backpack and check off her list.*) Water, granola bar, duct tape, goggles, flashlights, phone, directions – Check and check! Always make a plan, know where you're going and be prepared. (*Salutes and snaps to attention. Next, she takes an oversized flashlight out of the backpack and duct tapes it onto the handlebars of the bicycle.*) Who sells a bike without a pedal generated light? Morons. Thank you, Mr. Duck, for inventing tape. I'm taking it with me - a modern girl's fix it. I can't use the phone while I bike, so I'll tape the directions to the handle bars – good thinking. Do I leave a note? (*Sigh.*) Of course, I leave a note. I am not such a selfish kid that I would scare them to death. Dear mamma and nonna - blah, blah blah - oh that part is good - prepared - she'll like that - a little literary reference - perfect - Love me. (*She writes a note, tosses it on the desk, turns off the computer, turns on the flashlight and rolls the bike out of the room and the house.*)

END SCENE

SCENE SIX – Panic

Nonna is going through the suitcase and shaking out her La Befana costume. Each time she takes out a piece of clothing the Suitcase tinkles - like a giggle. Maria enters hysterically and holding Mary's note.

MARIA. (*Ranting.*) Mamma, she's gone.

NONNA. Who's gone - what?

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

MARIA. It's almost dark and the little ninny is trying to find Senator Shea. Joe is trapped and she is out in the cold - alone. Anything could happen. If I lose them both. Why - what was she thinking? The bike. That ridiculous bike. She took it and left. Why did I listen to Joe and buy her that fakackata bike? Lei é pazza.²⁷ When I find her, I am going to ground her for life.

NONNA. (*Hugs Maria.*) Shh my darling. We will find her. She is a little Vermontian riding a bicycle in January.

MARIA. She is only ten and has a *testa dura*²⁸.

NONNA. Hard heads run in the family. (*Reads note.*) Dear mamma and nonna, I did everything in order - like our science teacher says, "solve the problem one step at a time." First, I called Senator Shea's office - it is on-line you know - no one answered. Then I e-mailed - and got a prompt response that no one was in. The third step is the personal touch. Uh oh?

MARIA. (*Grabs back note and reads.*) I am riding my bike to his office - not Washington - I'm not stupid. The local one in Montpelier and I will sit there until someone sees me - like the police - when they take me in as a stalker, they will call him and then you can tell him to help Dr. De Angelis. Brilliant! Don't worry. If in your old Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys books kids can solve crimes, I can get daddy home. Love Me. Me - she signed it "me" and then Mary - Like I wouldn't know who my little "me" was.

NONNA. She reads too many books and watches too much television.

MARIA. (*Races towards door.*) I'm going after her.

NONNA. Without a coat, at dusk, in January? Calm down, stay here and call the police.

MARIA. Calm down! How can I calm down?

NONNA. Stay here. I'll take your car and try to find her. Get me Shea's address.

MARIA. Calm down! Stay here! I'm going.

NONNA. You need to stay by the phone in case she calls, or someone finds her - like me.

²⁷ She is crazy

²⁸ Hard head

MAMMA MIA – LA BEFANA?!

MARIA. When Mary sets her mind on something, she is like my hard-headed mamma. I have to go.

NONNA. The branch doesn't fall far from the tree. I am your mother. You will stay. We always taught her to just stay in one place if she was lost. I'm looking - you will stay in one place.

END SCENE

SCENE SEVEN - The Ride

Mary peddles with a fierce determination on her face. She stops and reads her plan. It starts to snow. Undeterred by the snow, Mary pulls ski goggles and a small flashlight out of her backpack. Next, she pulls out duct tape and tapes the flashlight to the ski goggles. She puts the lit goggles on, pulls out the directions and is horrified when the wind whisks them away. She leaps on the bike and tries to catch the directions. SFX: Wind and storm.

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