

THE BREAD, THE BRACELET AND THE DOVE

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CAST OF CHARACTERS: 18 (10f, 2m, 6m or f)

CHIARA: young girl of today - bored with doing family stuff

ROSA: Chiara's entertaining mother

TOLA (f): young, obedient daughter of GISELLA

LUCIA (f): young mischievous daughter of GISELLA

TANEO (m): young boy - servant to GISELLA

GISELLA (f): mother of TOLA

COLUMBINA (f): an over-worked cook for GISELLA

ANGELO/ANGELA (m/f): Bird Seller - very opinionated

DARIO/DARIA (m/f): baker (in Italy known as "il forno"), intensely loves his work

ROSEMARIE (f): flower seller, also very opinionated (they're all opinionated in Italy!)

CARLO/CARLA (m/f): an emotional vegetable seller

ARANCIA/ARANCIO (m/f): a rather fruity fruit seller

CELESTINA (f): wise child of Bologna; CARMINE'S sister

CARMINE (m): macho child of Bologna; CELESTINA'S brother

ZANNI (m or f): child in Bologna - loves food

DOTTORA/DOTTORO (m/f): random "thinker" child

PASTICCIA (f): an extremely sweet confection of a child

THE DOVE (f): a magical being (Could double with one of the Merchants)

SETTING:

Bologna, Italy in the mid 1600s

SCENES:

A patio or balcony in Bologna that may "spill" onto the rest of the set and a piazza in Bologna.

At rise there is a lit area at the side of the stage where ROSA and CHIARA are rolling dough. Chiara has a template of a dove but is having a hard time rolling the dough thin enough. It sticks! Rosa may have one or two dove breads already made and be decorating them. The rest of the stage is set for a piazza in Bologna, Italy during Renaissance times. The other side of the stage has a small patio or balcony.

CHIARA

Mama? Why do we always have to work so hard before a holiday?

ROSA

One must suffer before having fun. It is our way.

CHIARA

This rolling pin is broken! Everything sticks to it!

ROSA

So, we add a little flour. It is good, Chiara, that the dough sticks to the rolling pin. It means you made sweet dough and the rolling pin wants to keep it for itself!

CHIARA

Every holiday, we must make the dove bread. Why do we have to make so many? For Aunt Fay? And Tessie? And Grandma? And Auntie Anna? They're so old and boring. They don't care about it! I feel like I've been making dove bread my entire life!

ROSA

Indeed you have. And I hope you continue doing it and one day you will do it with your children and then your grandchildren and then -

CHIARA

Mama! You're zooming my life away! Making me a grandmother!

ROSA

You are right! I am zipping my lips. Leave the dough for awhile and help me decorate. That's the fun part. And you're wrong you know. The dove bread is a large part of our family history. Your great aunts and Grandma look forward to it every year. They remember when they used to make it.

CHIARA

They were probably bored out of their minds like I am.

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ROSA

Maybe. But we continue the tradition. It links us to the family that came before us.

CHIARA

Why don't we make a rabbit? Or a squirrel?

ROSA

Because the DeMarco family has been making dove bread for four hundred years!

CHIARA

Isn't it about time we took a break?

ROSA

It's - for family. Family is very important. This bread takes you time travelling. This is the same bread your family made in Italy hundreds of years ago. It is a connection I wish you to have. Do you understand?

CHIARA

No.

ROSA

Listen and learn for me, Chiara. Close your eyes and imagine now - you are in Bologna Italy. It is the height of Renaissance. Bologna is famous and filled with artists and scholars from all over the world and at the edge of town in a sweet little villa - lived your ancestor Gisella DeMarco.

GISELLA appears and freezes.

ROSA (CONT'D)

And her daughters Tola and Lucia -

TOLA and LUCIA appear and freeze.

ROSA (CONT'D)

And their young servant Taneo and Columbina the cook -

TANEO and COLUMBINA enter.
Chiara opens her eyes and is astounded.

ROSA (CONT'D)

They were very busy cleaning for a holiday.

All manically clean and finally slow down.

TOLA

Mama...why do we always have to work so hard before a holiday?

GISELLA

One must suffer before having fun. It is our way.

COLUMBINA

So true...so true.

GISELLA

And the Academy of Cooking has made this holiday even more stressful!

COLUMBINA

They have. Indeed they have.

GISELLA

They announced the official recipe for ragu! And it does not use nutmeg!

COLUMBINA

It's a disgrace, that's what it is. Not Italian!

GISELLA

So after five days of creating the finest ragu, I must disguise the taste of nutmeg or I will not be serving "Official aristocratic Bolognese ragu sauce!" How dare they declare an "official" recipe and get it wrong?

COLUMBINA

I don't know what the world is coming to, Signora, with these new-fangled notions!

LUCIA

Mama? Are we poor?

GISELLA

Of course not! Look at our grand villa! And the food I am working myself silly to make! These are signs we are not poor.

LUCIA

But we dress sort of poor.

GISELLA

Clothes are not what make a woman fine! Fancy dresses that will only get dirty are a waste of money! Fine women do not squander the ducat!

TOLA

But we only have one cook and one servant. And he's sort of useless!

TANEO

Am not!

GISELLA

How many servants should we have then? You think I want strangers to clean my house? You think I want strangers gossiping about our family? Making mouths about my ragu? No more servants. Every day I work my fingers to the bone! I take pride in that. I flatten the dough, roll the pasta, sauce-the-simmer and pepper the cannolis! And do you know why? So that you will always know how much I love you, si?

LUCIA AND TOLA

Si, Mama.

GISELLA

Lucia? Is that my bracelet?

LUCIA

Si.

GISELLA

And Tola - is that your father's bracelet?

TOLA

Si. I feel protected when I wear it.

There is an outburst from Chiara
and all freeze on stage.

CHIARA

That looks just like Auntie Anna's bracelet.

ROSA

It does, doesn't it?

And the action on stage
continues.

TOLA

May I wear it to town? Per favore?

GISELLA

Don't you lose them! They are from my grandmother. A memento of our famiglia. Famiglia is very important, Tola! Now my dough has an appointment with the oven in town at two o'clock. Do not be even a second late or I lose my place in line. And my dough is magnifico, see?

COLUMBINE

It is a work of art!

TOLA

Bella, Mama! Bella!

TANEO

Race you, Tola! I'll beat you Lucia!

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LUCIA

Oh no you won't!

They start to run off.

GISELLA

And don't jostle the dough!

Gisella and Columbina exit as Taneo, Lucia and Tola exit to town. We return to Rosa and Chiara.

CHIARA

Mama! What does any of that have to do with the dove bread?

ROSA

Patience, my dear. We are getting to it. Bologna was filled with markets that day. All was lively and enticing.

The space becomes alive with vendors. ROSEMARIE brings on her flowers, CARLO/CARLA has baskets of vegetables. ANGELO/ANGELA has a cage with a dove and ARANCIA/ARANCIO has a basket of fruit. DARIA/DARIO could be giving out samples of bread or simply be sweeping by his shop. A simple sign or doorway would do. CELESTINA, CARMINE, ZANNI, DOTTORA/DOTTORO and PASTICCIA are upstage playing a game reminiscent of jacks or a little hopscotch. They use nuts as playing pieces.

ROSEMARIE

ATTENZIONE! Everyone! Did you hear about the decree? About the "official" recipe for ragu?

ANGELA

Really Rosemarie, all this fuss about not using nutmeg in the ragu! I never use nutmeg! That is for people who cannot cook!

CARLO

The nutmeg does not belong! No! It is a foreign ingredient! Not Italian! I make the best ragu in Bologna. The Academy should have consulted me! And I simmer for two days - not three!

DARIO

But you don't add cream! What is a ragu without cream? Just another meat sauce.

ARANCIA

I think ragu should have sweet fruit. Apricots...
Strawberries ...

ANGELA

In a meat sauce?????

ARANCIA

Si. Very delisiozo!

DARIO

No fruit! That is dessert!

ROSEMARIE

Cream is for dessert! That's why yours is so heavy! Stick to baking!

DARIO

It is the cream that makes it so rich!

ROSEMARIE

It is the cream that makes you so ill!

DARIO

I am primo creator of ragu!

CARLO

Dario - you are nothing but a frustrated pastry cook. Forced to bake bread for a living!

DARIO

That's true. Ah Carlo! You have hurt me to the quick! I am brimming with sadness!

Dario steps aside and is
comforted by Carlo.

ROSEMARIE

My recipe is the one that will be done in the next century!

ANGELA

It will take until the next century to improve it!

ROSEMARIE

You use too many bones in your ragu!

ANGELA

The bones are the best part!

ARANCIA

Which is why your ragu is never gobbled up!

ANGELA

What?

ARANCIA

Nothing. I just noticed...that your ragu...is always left over at festivals -

ANGELA

Rosemarie - would you please hold her down - while I scratch her eyes out!

ROSEMARIE

It would be a pleasure!

And they freeze in an attack position as Chiara pipes up and the lights switch to Chiara.

CHIARA

Mother! Why do you tell this story? It's silly! They're just fighting about food.

ROSA

It helps you - to understand your heritage. To understand the passion that you came from. Food is very important to an Italian. They take their recipes very seriously!

CHIARA

But what has this to do with the Dove Bread?

ROSA

I'm coming to that. Listen.

And the action continues in the Piazza.

ARANCIA

You know, you both served your ragu at Philomena's wedding last week. Why don't you ask the children which one they liked better?

ANGELA

They're bambinos! What do they know?

ROSEMARIE

But they're innocent enough to tell the truth. Children! Come here, per favore.

The CHILDREN stop playing and look up - astounded and then obediently come forward.

CHILDREN

Si, Signora!

ARANCIA

Do you remember Philomena's wedding?

CHILDREN

Si, signora.

ROSEMARIE

Do you remember that I served a ragu with the macaroni and Angela served a slightly lumpy ragu with her fettuccine?

ANGELA

Rosemarie! You are tainting their innocence!

ROSEMARIE

I'm just trying to help them with their memory.

ANGELA

In spite of you! You dare to call my ragu lumpy? You are spited forever!

ROSEMARIE

It is you, Angela - that are spited.

Angela and Rosemarie make moves to go at each other and Arancia stops them. Carlo and Dario may join them and they - what else? Argue! The children move away.

CELESTINA

That was close!

CARMINE

You know they were going to make us tell who made the better ragu!

DOTTORA

We would have made one of them pretty angry.

ZANNI

I liked all the ragus. Even the lumpy one!

CELESTINA

Besides, I couldn't possibly give them as answer.

PASTICCIA

Why not?

CELESTINA

Because my Mama makes the best ragu in Bologna!

PASTICCIA

Oh dear, Celestina, that cannot possibly be right. I am sorry to have to tell you this - but it is my Mama who makes the primo ragu.

CELESTINA

Who says?

PASTICCIA

My Mama!

CELESTINA

Your Mama puts in all that cream! She should use a touch of milk like my Mama does!

PASTICCIA

Your mother doesn't even use nutmeg!

CELESTINA

It's not Italian!

And with a huff Pasticcia and Celestina move away.

ZANNI

I don't know what it is about food that makes people in this town crazy.

CARMINE

Never talk food or politics, Zanni. You just get into trouble.

DOTTORA

It's a silly fight.

CARMINE

Exactly!

DOTTORA

Everyone in Bologna knows my mother makes the best ragu!

And Carmine, Zanni and Dottora move upstage. The MERCHANTS are setting up their bounty. Dario has moved to his Bakery door and Taneo, Lucia and Tola enter.

TOLA

Don't dawdle, Taneo!

TANEO

If we take our time, maybe all the work will be done by the time we return!

LUCIA

I like the way you think!

They speed up and come face-to-face with Dario.

DARIO

I'm waiting here five minutes! Come! What have you brought me? Ahhh! It is magnifico! The best dough yet! I may weep! Your mother - she knows how to enchant the dough! You will have the finest bread on your dinner table. I know - I've been looking at dough all day. The oven will work its magic in forty minutes. Then you must immediately come and pick up the bread. Don't be late. Signora Serafina has too many loaves and a shrill voice and she will be here in less than an hour. I'd like to get her bread in the oven and the Signora out the door as soon as possible, capisce?

TOLA

Si, Signor Dario. We will be on time. Come, you two! We can help Mama!

Dario exits with the dough.

TANEO

By the time we arrive home it will be time to come back to get the bread. You heard Signor Dario - we cannot be late for the bread.

LUCIA

He's right. We must force ourselves to stay in town and do nothing.

TOLA

But Mama needs us!

TANEO

It's all women's work anyway. Cooking and cleaning! You need to learn that stuff - but I am a man! I need to spend my time in the Piazza talking to Tradesmen.

TOLA

You're just a lazy bambino!

LUCIA

And you will be old before your time - scrubbing the villa alongside Mama!

TOLA

I like it when everything sparkles. It's very - satisfying.

LUCIA

You're always so serio! There's time enough to work when we are grown!

TOLA

I don't wish to talk with you anymore!

Tola moves away and sulks.

LUCIA

Tola! Don't go into one of your silly sulks! I'm sorry. All right! Be that way! Come on, Taneo - I see Celestina and Carmine. Let's play with them.

TANEO

Not yet, Lucia. I want to have a word with the Merchants.

LUCIA

Have fun!

Lucia joins the children upstage. Taneo goes to the Merchants. He spies Angela first.

TANEO

Good afternoon, Signora. What are you selling today?

ANGELA

Why it is my most beautiful bird. A snowy white dove. Do you like doves? Quite tasty!

TANEO

Tasty? No, Signora! You must not sell her for food. She is too beautiful!

ANGELA

One must earn a living, no?

TANEO

I will buy her!

ANGELA

I suppose she would be a nice pet. Do you have any money?

TANEO

Wait here!

Taneo runs to Lucia and friends.

TANEO (CONT'D)

Lucia! Lucia! Do you have any money?

LUCIA

Of course not!

TANEO

The bracelet!

LUCIA
Don't even think about it!

TANEO
It would fetch many ducats.

LUCIA
Taneo! I want to live to see tomorrow, capisce? Leave me
and my bracelet alone!

TANEO
Carmine?

CARMINE
No.

Taneo just looks at Celestina.

CELESTINA
Not one ducat!

TANEO
Anyone?

ALL
No. Sorry. Of course not, etc.

TANEO
What a hard world we live in! Nobody gives their bambinos
any money!

Taneo goes to return to Angela.
Tola stops sulking and goes to
join her friends. They meet in
crossing.

TANEO (CONT'D)
Tola...

TOLA
What...

TANEO
Do you have any money?

And with a "harrumph" Tola joins
her friends. And Taneo returns
to Angela.

ANGELA
Ahh! The young signor! Have you found any money?

TANEO
No. But I could work for you. Run errands...

ANGELA

I work for myself, Little Signor. I cannot afford an errand boy. Especially one who already works for Signora Gisella! I am sure she does not give you time off!

Taneo approaches Arancia.

TANEO

Arancia! Do you need an errand boy?

ARANCIA

Why, yes. How did you know that?

TANEO

I am very smart! And...hard-working... And strong.

ARANCIA

Is that so? I do need someone to help me pick the lemons.

TANEO

I love lemons! I always use lemon in my pasta!

RANCIA

Do you combine it with butter?

TANEO

But of course!

ARANCIA

That is my favorite meal!

TANEO

Mine, too!

ARANCIA

Why don't you come by tomorrow? I shall show you what to do.

TANEO

And...I will get paid?

ARANCIA

Of course! For every bushel of lemons you pick, I will give you a free one!

TANEO

Lemons? I am going to get paid in lemons?

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