

# Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404  
612-872-5108  
FAX 612-874-8119

## *Merry Christmas, Strega Nona*

Story by  
Tomie de Paola

Adapted for the Stage by  
Thomas Olson

Music Composed by  
Alan Shorter

*Merry Christmas, Strega Nona* was first presented by The Children's Theatre Company for the 1987-1988 season.

*The license issued in connection with PYA perusal scripts is a limited license, and is issued for the sole purpose of reviewing the script for a potential future performance. All other rights regarding perusal scripts are expressly reserved by Plays for Young Audiences, including, but not limited to, the rights to distribute, perform, copy or alter scripts. This limited license does not convey any performance rights of any kind with this material. By accepting any perusal script(s), Licensee agrees to and is bound by these terms.*

Characters:

Strega Nona

Big Anthony

Bambolona

Little Paolo

Signore Bambo, the Baker

Paolo's Father/Puppeteer

Mayor

Priest

Signora Rosa

Paolo's Mother

Ensemble includes: Zampognari; Villagers, Children

## Act I. Scene i

Preset; The final moments of twilight. The snow covered hilltop, Strega Nona's tiny house and nearby, the even tinier goat shed wherein five Strega Nona's pet animals and her helper Big Anthony. In the distance, a valley with village square, church and surrounding cottages.

House fights fade. Preset gives way to a night of blue shadows and white, shimmering stars.

NARRATOR            (Voice-over.) Once upon a Christmas time, near a little town in Calabria, Italy, there lived an old lady called Strega Nona - Grandma Witch... (Within the house, a light from the cupped hands of Strega Nona illumines her face.) She made magic to help people, in her little house high on the hill, along with Bambolona -- the baker's daughter -- who had come to stay and learn Strega Nona's wonderful secrets. (Light from Strega's hands broadens to include Bambolona, standing at her side, gazing in wonder.) And there was also Big Anthony -- who never paid attention. (Light now includes Big Anthony, gazing too.) Big Anthony was Strega Nona's helper, but he wished that someday he, too, could learn of magic. . .

STREGA NONA        No more magic!

BIG ANTHONY  
& BAMBOLONA      Strega Nona?!

BAMBOLONA        No more magic?!

BIG ANTHONY        Never?!

STREGA NORA        No, Big Anthony. Only until Natale.

BIG ANTHONY        Natale?

STREGA NONA  
& BAMBOLONA      Christmas.

BIG ANTHONY        No magic until Christmas? But when will that be? Soon?

BAMBOLONA        No, Big Anthony. Natale is a whole month away.

STREGA NONA     *(Indicating wreath.)* See here, Anthony -- the candles on the wreath?  
They will help to count the weeks.

BIG ANTHONY     Four candles.

BAMBOLOIA     One for each week.

STREGA NONA     Yes, children, tonight begins the season of "Advent."

BIG ANTHONY     "Advent". . .

STREGA NONA     And this is an "Advent Wreath." But quick -- before the magic fades  
away -- time to light the first candle.

*Bambolona ignites a taper from the light in Strega's hands, which then fades. Strega Nona sings.*

STREGA NONA     *(Sung)* With the touch of a flame golden bright  
Bright as shimmering stars in the night  
Mark the weeks as we pass through the season of light  
Let us quick light a wick light a candle.  
When the advent wreath candle you light  
Watch your cares and your worries take flight  
Saints above! Could there be a more beautiful sight?  
As we quick light a wick light a candle.  
Though with advent comes frost in the air  
Doesn't matter -- we've no time to care!  
Si! So much to be done, but so what? -- it's great fun!  
Gifts to make, sweets to bake  
House to clean, decked in green  
Just a month till the morn of the day Christ was born:  
Then the church bells will ring  
Hear the choir, how they sing!  
What a day! Wondrous day! Magic day!

*(Spoken)* Well? I get a little excited about Christmas. . .

*(Sung)* Be our guide in the dark, show the way  
advent candle, please lead us, we pray  
to that sweet, happy miracle of Christmas day  
then that night we will light the last candle.

so come Christmas, which makes the old year  
end in happiness, youth and good cheer  
but each night till the feasting and friends we hold dear  
every night we shall light a candle.

(Spoken) Oh, Bambolona. . . Big Anthony. . . how I do so love my  
little Advent wreath!

From the distance below: many candlelit windows.

BAMBOLONA (Gazing out the window) Look! I can see my Papa's house. He lit a  
candle too! Happy Advent, Papa! (They rush outside and gasp at the  
panoramas.)

STREGA NONA So many stars tonight! Ah, bella, bella! How beautiful it is,  
Calabria!

BIG ANTHONY Look!

STREGA NONA What, Anthony?

BIG ANTHONY That star! It's growing. . . moving. . . bigger. . . closer! Like magic!

STREGA MONA  
& BAMBOLONA (Variously.) Magic? Could it be... ? (In unison.) The Christmas Star?!

STREGA NONA Un miracolo!

The distant sound of a boy's voice calling 'Strega Nona!'

BIG ANTHONY Why, Strega Nona -- the star is calling your name! (Call again ;  
"Strega Nona! " is more clear.) There it is again! (Strega and Bambolona  
suddenly laugh.) What's so funny?!

BAMBOLONA Big Anthony, open your eyes and you'll see!

Little Paola enters, carrying a lantern.

STREGA NONA Well, hello, little Paolo!

BIG ANTHONY     *(Looking at Paolo.)* You mean. . .

BAMBOLONA     That's right, Big Anthony. Little Paolo and his lantern.

BIG ANTHONY     *(To Paolo.)* You're not a star!

LITTLE PAOLO     I'd like to be.

STREGA NONA     And I think I know something else you'd like: a nice warm cup of chocolata!

LITTLE PAOLO     Uh, yes, Strega Nona -- please! *(Bambolona leads Paolo inside.)*

BIG ANTHONY     Hot chocolate by the fire -- that does sound good! *(Strega Nona stops him at the doorstep.)*

STREGA NONA     Sorry, my young stargazer, but I'm afraid yours will have to wait until after you've fed the animals. *(Animals appear. Anthony groans.)* Now, now, Anthony -- you know very well that's your job. If you don't dawdle, it'll be done quick as magic.

BIG ANTHONY     "Magic." But that's just it, Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA     What?

BIG ANTHONY     Ever since I came to work for you, I've never understood why, with all your magic, we have to do any work in the first place!

STREGA NONA     *(Meaningfully.)* Anthony?!

BIG ANTHONY     I know. You've told me before. It's a good thing to work.

STREGA NONA     That's right. And. . . ?

BIG ANTHONY     "Magic only when nothing else will do."

STREGA NONA     That's right too. And . .

BIG ANTHONY     "And?" You mean now there's more?

STREGA NONA     Think, Anthony. Can you remember what I said earlier tonight?  
                         "No magic . . . "

BIG ANTHONY     ". . . at Christmas!" Now I remember.

STREGA NONA     (*'Turning to enter house. ) Bene. Good.*

BIG ANTHONY     Why?

STREGA NONA     (*Halting at the steps.*) Why what?

BIG ANTHONY     Why no magic at Christmas?

STREGA NONA     Ah. That is something you must learn for yourself. I cannot teach  
                         you that.

BIG ANTHONY     Because I wouldn't understand. . . because I'm stupid. . .

STREGA NONA     "Stupid?!" Anthony, what makes you say such a thing!?

BIG ANTHONY     I just feel that way sometimes. Lots of times. Remember when I  
                         turned you into a toad? And that time I used your magic ring? And  
                         all the trouble I caused with your magic pasta pot. . . ?

STREGA NONA     Yes. Big Anthony, I remember. But making mistakes now and then  
                         doesn't mean that you're stupid.

BIG ANTHONY     No?

STREGA NOWA     No. In fact, maybe the trouble is that you are too clever!

BIG ANTHONY     Clever?! Me?!

*She gives him a tweak on the cheek and a pat on the hand, then enters the house while Anthony  
turns to his chores. Bambolona is pouring steaming water into cups for hot chocolate as Paolo  
stirs each cup with a spoon.*

STBEGA NONA     Ah, Bambolona! You've made the chocolata! Grazie! Now then,  
                         Little Paolo, tell your Grandma Witch the reason for this welcome  
                         visit.

BAMBOLONA      It's my Papa, Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA      Signore Bambo?

LITTLE PAOLO      He sent me with a message.

BAMBOLONA      Papa needs me . . .

LITTLE PAOLO      (*Showing a coin.*) And see? He gave me a coin so I'd hurry.

STREGA NONA      Tell me, Bambolona, is something the matter?

BAMBOLONA      Yes! Christmas!

STBEGA NONA      Christmas? What's the matter with Christmas?

BAMBOLONA      Just imagine getting up every morning before sunrise in order to bake Christmas cakes and Christmas pies and Christmas cookies and Christmas breads for every single household in Calabria. And then imagine doing that day after day after day for a month.

STREGA NONA      Ah. Your Papa needs your help at the bakery.

BAMBOLONA      (*A sigh.*) Oh, Strega Nona -- what should I do? (*Strega shrugs.*) I feel so sorry for him. (*Strega nods.*) But the reason I left in the first place was Because he made me do all of the work all of the time. "That's the way things are!" he'd say. Oooh, he made me so angry I changed the way things were.

STREGA NONA      And you came here. But that was many months ago. Maybe he's changed too, eh?

BAMBOLONA      Maybe.

LITTLE PAOLO      Your Papa did give me this coin. That was nice of him to do.

BAMBOLONA      That's true.



LITTLE PAOLO      *(Pondering the coin.)* I wonder what I should buy ? I know -- Christmas presents!

BAMBOLONA      That's it! I could help my Papa as a Christmas present to him!

STREGA NONA      A wonderful idea!

BIG ANTHONY      *(Entering the house.)* Oh, boy! Hot chocolate! Thanks, Bambolona. *(He grabs mug, slurps and scalds his tongue.)* Aaaaah! HOT!!!! *(He rushes outside to grab a handful of snow. He shoves it in his mouth; steam issues forth.)* Bambolona! Why didn' you tell me id wath tho hod?!

BAMBOLONA      Because that's what hot chocolate is! Besides, you didn't give me a chance, you were so greedy.

STREGA NONA      Children, please! It's Christmastime! Let's try not to quarrel. eh?!

BAMBOLONA  
& BIG ANTHONY      Si, Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA      Bene. Now. Bambolona, why don't you tell Big Anthony your news?

BAMBOLONA      I have to go away for Christmas.

BIG ANTHONY      Oh.

BAMBOLONA      My Papa needs my help at the bakery.

BIG ANTHONY      Oh?

BAMBOLONA      Well.. . ?

BIG ANTHONY      "Well," what?

BAMBOLONA      Well, aren't you going to miss me?

BIG ANTHONY      I don't know. I'll have to wait and see.

BAMBOLONA      Then I won't keep you waiting any longer! (*She stumps back into the house angrily.*) Where's my shawl?

BIG ANTHONY      (*Following, to Strega.*) What did I say?

STREGA NONA      I think, Anthony, it's what you didn't say.

BIG ANTHONY      Oh. I'm sorry, Bambolona.

BAMBOLOMA      (*Brightening.*) Are you?

BIG ANTHONY      I'm sorry you're going to have to work so hard. Especially since all I have to do is wait for Christmas. (*Bambolona growls and turns away again.*)

STREGA NONA      Don't feel too sorry for her, Anthony. Save a little sympathy for yourself.

BIG ANTHONY      Huh?

STREGA NONA      So you expect to just sit around the whole month, do you?

BIG ANTHONY      Well, it is winter; we can't do any work in the garden. Of course, there's the animals to feed, and...

STREGA NONA      . . . and everyone in the village.

BIG ANTHONY      . . and everyone in the. . . What?!

STREGA NONA      Every Christmas Eve - I make a big feast for all the people of Calabria. It's my little gift to them.

LITTLE PAOLO      It's wonderful, Big Anthony! Tables and tables full of food . . .

BAMBOLONA      ...and singing and dancing and decorations.

STREGA NONA      But I'm going to need your help, Anthony, to get everything ready. The whole house must be cleaned from top to bottom. . . and then there's the cooking and the baking. . .

BAMBOLONA      Speaking of baking, I'd better be on my way. Don't work too hard, Big Anthony.

STREGA NONA      Bambolona, it's late and supper is almost ready. You can go in the morning. *(To Paolo.)* You too, Paolo -- wouldn't you like to stay the night?

LITTLE PAOLO      Oh, yes, Strega Nona! Yes, please!

STREGA NONA      Only how can we let your parents know, so they won't worry?

ANTHONY,  
BAMBOLONA  
& PAOLO      Magic?

STREGA NONA      No, children. No magic. But something just as good: the help of a friend. Big Anthony, would you and Paolo please go fetch my little dove?

*Anthony and Paolo go outdoors and get Dove as Strega quickly writes a message. Animals assemble to observe. Strega Nona and Bambolona step outside. Strega Nona speaks to the Dove which Anthony has handed to her as she puts the message in the Dove's beak.*

STREGA NONA      *(To Dove.)* Now, my friend -- please fly down to the village with this message for Little Paolo's Mama and Papa. Grazie!

LITTLE PAOLO      Tell them "buona notte." *(Strega tosses Dove into the air. As an afterthought, Paolo calls.)* Oh -- and maybe a kiss goodnight?

STREGA NONA      For Mama and Papa -- always a kiss!

*All blow a kiss dad wave fare well. Dove soars up, across and off. Lights fade to Blackout.*

## Act I. Scene ii

Lights rise on the village square and the hustle and bustle of Townspeople (adults and children) and Vendors. The arches of the square are decorated with garlands and ornaments during the dancing and song.

TOWNSPEOPLE   Viene, vedi , come and see  
Such a morning! Can it be  
Natale! Natale! Christmas drawing nigh?  
Natale! Natale! Christmas spirits high!  
Natale! Natale! Snow in Italy?!  
Natale! Natale! Brings a welcome change of scenery!

Viene, vedi , come and see  
Such a morning! Can it be  
Natale! Natale! Christmas drawing nigh?  
Natale! Natale! Christmas spirits high!  
Natale! Natale! Bid all cares " adieu"  
Natale! Natale! Now may all our Christmas dreams come true

Bella, bella, bells how merry  
Ring andiamo come, don't tarry  
Strumming, drumming. Humming everywhere  
Singing of Christmas -- sing "merry Christmas!"  
Bringing a Christmas day beyond compare!

Mayor enters with crate of decorations.

MAYOR           Buon giorno, buon giorno! Good people of Calabria -- let us  
decorate the square for Natale!

TOWNSPEOPLE   hustling, bustling, wrappings are rustling  
Christmastime is near  
Dusting off garlands and trimming the boughs evergreen  
Conniving, contriving and secrets reviving  
This comes but once in a year  
Oh, no! Ah-choo! May god bless you!  
no matter, it adds to the sheen

TOWNSPEOPLE    Christmas in Italy, in all the world, is the place to be. Si!  
Nothing but the best! Come, sir, be my guest! You'll agree!  
Yuletide meetings, yuletide greetings  
Girls dressed in fine array inspire Clabrian boys to say  
"oh, come let us make romance,  
Make this a every man's holiday!"

Natale! Natale! Music in the air  
Natale! Natale! Gathering round the square  
Natale! Natale! Hand in hand with me  
Natale! Natale! Christmas makes each day a jubilee!

*Dance. The dance is interrupted by offstage chimes of church.*

TOWNSPEOPLE    Bells From The Steeple, Calling All People  
People from far and near  
Gently they bid us please recall  
The source of Christmas cheer

Child of the manger birth,  
It is to thee we say a prayer  
Thanking thee for thy gift of love,  
Releasing us from despair.

*(Tempo accelerates and joviality resumes. )*

Christmas in Italy we share together as joyously  
Old friends are greeted and all are treated as family  
Gathered by fireside we hope that our happiness will abide  
In those who surround us  
With love ever-boundless this christmastime

Natale! Natale! Christmas drawing nigh  
Natale! Natale! Christmas spirits high  
Natale! Natale! And amore too  
Natale! Natale! Makes a month of Christmas dreams come true!

*At the end of the song, Anthony, Bambolona, and Little Paolo enter the square.*

LITTLE PAOLO    *(Running to his parents.)* Papa! Mama! I got to spend the night at  
Strega Nona's!

MOTHER Did you have a good time. Paolo?

LITTLE PAOLO Oh, yes! A wonderful time! *(He runs to tell the other Children about his evening.)*

FATHER Grazie , Big Anthony; thank you for seeing our boy safely home.

BIG ANTHONY Oh, that's alright. I had to come to town anyway.

PRIEST Ah, buon giorao, Bambolona!

BAMBOLONA Good morning, Father.

PRIEST And what brings you to the village? It seems we only get to see you and Strega Nona at church.

BAMBOLONA I've come to stay the month with my father, Father.

PRIEST You've come to work at the bakery? With your father? Oh, my dear child, you're a saint!

BAMBOLONA Oh. I hope it won't be that bad.

PRIEST But what about your magic lessons with Strega Nona?

BAMBOLONA Oh, Father -- Strega Nona won't do any magic at Christmas. She says, "Christmas has a magic all its own."

PRIEST And so it has! *(He pats Bambolona on the hand and exits.)*

BIG ANTHONY Oh, my! Will you just look at all the pretty decorations!

*Paolo and Children enter, laughing and shouting, as they throw snowballs at Anthony. Anthony joins in their game. The Children all throw at Anthony, who ducks, allowing snowballs to fly offstage into the wing. Children freeze, in unison say 'Oh, oh!' and then quickly rush off. Anthony remains alone onstage, snowball in hand.*

MAYOR *(Threatening, from offstage.)* BIG ANTHONY!

BIG ANTHONY Oh oh.

Mayor storms onstage – his clothes disheveled. He has clumps of snow all over himself.

MAYOR I should've known it was you!

BIG ANTHONY Hello, Signore Mayor. You're looking very. . . festive.

MAYOR I am, am I? Well, that isn't how I feel. . .

BIG ANTHONY Oh, no? I'm sorry to hear that. Another one of your headaches?

MAYOR Among other things.

BIG ANTHONY What a shame! And no magic cures from Strega Nona for a whole month! She's busy getting ready for Christmas, you see.

MAYOR No doubt that's why she sent you down the hill.

BIG ANTHONY That's right. She asked me to get all sorts of things.

MAYOR Did she ask you to get in trouble?

BIG ANTHONY Trouble? No.. .

BAMBOLONA (*Rescuing him.*) Big Anthony? Anthony, come along!

BIG ANTHONY Huh?

BAMBOLONA Didn't you want to escort me to the bakery?! (*She nods her head rapidly as a cue to him; he doesn't get it.*)

BIG ANTHONY The bakery? No. . .

BAMBOLONA (*Grabbing his arm.*) Oh, what a thoughtful gentleman you are! Grazie . . . delighted! (*They are at a safe distance from the Mayor.*) Well? Aren't you going to thank me?

BIG ANTHONY What for?

BAMBOLONA      Oh, never mind! I swear, Big Anthony, sometimes you are so... so...  
Big! *(She starts upstage as the bakery begins shift in place. Anthony follows. Townspeople enter to facilitate the shift.)*

TOWNSPEOPLE    Christmas in Italy! All month we dash about frantically  
Daily trips to the shops and perpetual stops at the bakery  
Pies, breads and cake displays  
And trays of cookies with chocolate glaze  
Chewy caramel treats, honey marzipan sweets  
For the holidays. Sweet holidays!

A sight we delight in: custard cups with spice  
All bulging, indulging cinnamon at a price  
Confection perfection -- be it sweet or tart  
What rapture, this! Oh joy! Oh bliss!  
Bambo makes each cake a work of art!

### Act I. Scene iii

*The bakery. Baker is at work, alone. Suddenly, a well-to-do Matron and her two ill –behaved Children lurch in. The Children rush to the carts of food.*

MATRON            *(To Children.)* Statti fermo! Vieni qua! Non mangiate niente!

BAKER             Buoa giorno, Signora.

MATRON           Buoa giorno, Signore Bambo.

BAKER             Siete ven uta per ritirare la torta?

MATROH           Spero que sia pronta.

BAKER             Vedrete. . . *(She pays him. As he turns to fetch the cake, a frenzied throng of Customers descends upon him.)*

CUSTOMERS       Tocca a me! Vado in fretta! Aspetta il tuo turno!



Baker quiets the Customers down as he gets an elaborately decorated cake for the Matron.  
Customers gaze in wonder and admiration.

BAKER                      *(Waving them aside.)* Fate spazio, prego. Arriva la torta.

CUSTOMERS              Che bella! Perfetta! Fantastica! Straordinaria! Un capolavoro!  
Complimenti, Signore Bambo!

BAKER                      *(Modestly.)* Oh, niente. *(He turns to the other Customers.)* Chi e la prossima? *(Customers resume their rude clamoring as Bambolona, followed by Anthony, enters the bakery and calls through the crowd.)*

BAMBOLONA              Papa? Papa!

BAKER                      *(Not noticing her.)* Si si-- have a little patience; you'll get your turn!  
*(Calling over his shoulder to a Woman.)* Now what was it you wanted, Signora ? A dozen almond cookies and a raisin cake?

WOMAN                      No, Signore Bambo: two dozen raisin cookies and an almond cake.

BAMBOLONA              Papa!

BAKER                      Not now, Bambolona, I'm busy... *(Sudden realization.)* Bambolona!!!  
*(Bambolona holds out her arms for a hug.)*

BAMBOLONA              Papa Bambo! *(Instead of a hug, Baker shoves an apron on his daughter, to her surprise and disappointment.)*

BAKER                      Help me find an almond cake in this mess!

BAMBOLONA              Papa! Is that all you have to say to me?

BAKER                      Yes. No-- and a dozen raisin cookies.

WOMAN                      Two dozen!

BAMBOLONA              What about a "glad to see you?" Or at least a "Buoa giorno !" ?

BAKER                      *(Embrace and kisses.)* Oh, forgive me, daughter. "Buoa giorno !" Hey, everybody -- look here, Bambolona's back at her Papa's

bakery! (*Customers respond with "Aaahs, How sweet" etc.*) From now on -- you want something, ask her!

*Customers immediately revert to rude clamoring. Bambolona heaves a sigh and steps forward to deal with them as Baker retreats to his work-station to catch his breath. A pool of light highlights Anthony as din of the bakery and movement fade and slow to enhance focus.*

BIG ANTHONY      Will you just look at all those wonderful cookies and pastries and cakes! Mmmmm! (*Matron is nearby with her spectacular cake.*) Now that's what I call a cake! Look at all that frosting! It's even got a candied cherry on top! I wonder how much it costs?

CUSTOMER          (*Snapping out of 'isolation.'* Proudly, to Audience.) Fifty florens.

BIG ANTHONY      Fifty florens?! That expensive?! I don't have that kind of money! All I've got is what Strega Nona gave me this morning; just enough to buy all the supplies she needs. I wonder how I could. . .

LITTLE PAOLO      (*Gazing at coin, to Mother.*) It's my coin, so can I decide what to buy?

MOTHER            Of course, Paolo -- you earned it.

BIG ANTHONY      . . . earn a cake! Signore Bambo! (*Action resumes as Anthony ambles over to Baker.*) Signore Bambo?

BAKER              (*Lugging a huge sack of sugar.*) Too busy... take your turn... Bambolona will help you. . .

BIG ANTHONY      It's me, Signore -- Big Anthony!

BAKER              Big Antho. . . (*He freezes, drops the sugar sack on his foot.*) Ahhh! Anthony! Oh, no! What do you want?! Oh, please, please go away! Can't you see I'm busy?

BIG ANTHONY      But that's what I was hoping to talk with you about.

BAKER              "Talk?" Fine. Later. . . sometime after Christmas. . . no, make that "after Easter". . .

BIG ANTHONY      I only thought I could help.

BAKER "Help?!" That's what I was afraid of!

BIG ANTHONY You need help, don't you?

BAKER Of course I do! But. . .

BIG ANTHONY I know, I know . . . you're thinking of the last time I helped you.

BAKER You read my mind.

BIG ANTHONY But Signore Bambo, last time was all an accident. Here I was, all alone in the bakery while you went to the town square to sit with your friends . . . and I was hungry and all the cakes and cookies looked so tempting. . . and you didn't explain to me about how too much yeast could make too much dough, and then. . .

BAKER Enough! The memory is too painful.

BIG ANTHONY I'm only saying that if you let me help you now -- things would all be different.

BAKER Different? How?

BIG ANTHONY Well. . . you'd stay here to watch over me, wouldn't you?

BAKER You bet I would.

BIG ANTHONY Then how could I get into any trouble?

BAKER Knowing you, there must be a hundred ways.

BIG ANTHONY Oh please, Signore --won't you please give me one more chance? After all, it is Natale.

BAKER So?

BIG ANTHONY Natale -- Christmas -- the season of brotherly love.

BAKER So?

BIG ANTHONY     A time to be kind and forgiving to one another. . . ?

BAKER             Oh, I understand.

BIG ANTHONY     You do?

BAKER             You want to help me as a way to say you're sorry for all the trouble you caused the last time.

BIG ANTHONY     I do?

BAKER             Don't you?

BIG ANTHONY     Well, to be perfectly honest. . .

BAKER             By all means, Big Anthony -- be perfectly honest. . .

BIG ANTHONY     All I really want is one of these big cream cakes.

BAKER             What?! Then why don't you just buy one?

BIG ANTHONY     I don't have enough money. You see, all I have is what Strega Nona gave me to. . .

BAKER             Never mind; I haven't time for the details. . . .

BAMBOLONA     Papa! We're running out of cookies!

BAKER             Another batch will be ready in a minute.

BAMBOLONA     *(Surprised to see Anthony.)* Big Anthony! What are you still doing here?

BIG ANTHONY     I'm going to help you, Bambolona.

BAMBOLONA     You are? *(Anthony nods proudly. To Baker.)* He is? *(Baker shrugs. She returns to Customers.)* Then heaven help us too!

BAKER                    Here's an apron, Big Anthony. Help me make frosting for the cookies.

BIG ANTHONY        (*Donning apron.*) Oh, boy! Cookies! Just tell me what to do!

BAKER                    That sack of sugar. . . there. . .

BIG ANTHONY        You mean the one that fell on your foot?

BAKER                    No. The other one. Bring it here to the mixing bowl. But be careful, it's very. . .

BIG ANTHONY        HEAVY !! (*He stumbles and smashes sack against the bowl. A cloud of sugar dust bursts up out of the sack.*)

BAKER                    Big Ant... A... A... (*joined by Bambolona and Customers.*) A.. Ah-choo!

BAMBOLONA        Big Anthony! What are you doing?!

BIG ANTHONY        Helping. (*He sneezes also.*) I hope?

BAKER                    (*Sampling the frosting.*) Well, Big Anthony, that was pretty clumsy of you, but I must admit, that was just the perfect amount of sugar.

BIG ANTHONY        It was? Really? (*To Bambolona, a grin.*) Did you hear that, Bambolona? I was perfect! (*Bambolona rolls her eyes and walks away.*) All right, partner -- now what?

BAKER                    Well, Big Anthony, I suppose you could take the cookies out of the oven while I finish with this frosting. (*Anthony charges over toward the oven.*) Only be sure to use the oven mitt; the door, it's very. . .

BIG ANTHONY        HOT!!! (*Anthony, hopping and waving his hand in pain, collides with Baker, who has just filled a frosting tube. Frosting spurts up into the Baker's face.*) Oh, Signore Bambo - I am sorry!

BAKER                    (*About to erupt.*) I'll say you are!

BIG ANTHONY        Lucky for me it's Christmastime.

BAKER                   (Still a growl.) Lucky? How so?!

BIG ANTHONY       Christmas -- a time to be kind and forgiving and. . .

BAKER                I'll try to remember that. (He turns away and then pauses; a frown.)  
Your hands, Big Anthony -- how are they?

BIG ANTHONY        Oh, fine.

BAKER                You're sure they aren't burnt?

BIG ANTHONY        Quite sure.

BAKER                (Sniffing.) But... but something is.. .

BIG ANTHONY        Smells like. . .

BAMBOLONA         Papa? Aren't those cookies ready yet?

BAKER                My cookies! Quick! Quick!

*Smoke issues forth from oven. Anthony reaches to pick the burning cookies off the tray.*

BAMBOLONA         Careful, Big Anthony; those cookies are very. . .

BIG ANTHONY        HOT!!!

*Having grabbed the cookies with his bare hands, Anthony tosses them into the air like juggling balls, then chases them around the shop, trying not to let them fall to the floor. Customers dodge him, shrieking. The pandemonious pursuit of the cascading cookies moves out of the bakery and into the town square, where Bambolona - basket in hand - is able to finally capture the cookies. Customers cheer. Bambolona and Anthony look surprised at one another, then share a smile, before bowing to the cheers and applause, with Anthony's final bow landing his face directly into the Matron 's cake. Blackout.*

## Act I. Scene iv

Strega Nona's house. Almost dusk. The old woman is seated on her doorstep, waiting. Anthony appears over the ridge, carrying only a small basket. When Anthony notices that Strega Nona is not inside the house, he turns around to try to sneak a way, puts basket in goat house, but Goat "baahs " in greeting.

STREGA NONA     Big Anthony?!

BIG ANTHONY     (To Goat.) Tattle-tale! (Approaching Strega Nona.) Ah -- good afternoon. Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA     Good evening, Big Anthony.

BIG ANTHONY     "Evening?" Already? My, my -- how short the days become in wintertime! Have you ever noticed that, Strega Nona?

STREGA NONA     I notice a lot of things, Big Anthony. I notice you've spent the entire day down in the village. And I'm also noticing your hands are empty.

BIG ANTHONY     You're angry with me.

STREGA NONA     No, I'm not. I only want to know where's the new broom, new mop, new feather duster I asked you to buy? I know, I know. You forgot; you usually do.

BIG ANTHONY     But I didn't forget!

STREGA NONA     No?! Oh, what a good boy! Big Anthony, I am very proud of you!

BIG ANTHONY     (Beaming.) You are?

STREGA NONA     Shame on me. . . jumping to conclusions like that. Can you forgive me?

BIG ANTHONY     Of course.

STREGA NONA     Well?

BIG ANTHONY "Well," what?

STREGA MONA The broom, the mop, the other things. . . where are they?

BIG ANTHONY I couldn't buy them.

STREGA NONA Oh no? Why not?

BIG ANTHONY I didn't have the money you gave me.

STREGA NONA You lost my money?!

BIG ANTHONY No. I spent it.

STREGA NONA You spent it?! All right, tell me -- what did my money buy?

BIG ANTHONY Well. . . I went with Bambolona to the bakery and . . .

STREGA NONA And.. .

BIG ANTHONY And I had a little accident with one of Signore Bambo's cakes.

STREGA NONA Mamma mi's ! A cake cost that much?

BIG ANTHONY It was a very special cake.

STREGA NONA I should hope so! The Baker should be ashamed of himself, charging that much money for a cake!

BIG ANTHONY Oh, but there were cookies too!

STREGA NONA Cookies, you say? And how special were they?

BIG ANTHONY Here -- you can see for yourself... *(He retrieves basket from the goat house, looks inside it, discovers it empty. )* Wha... why. where are they? *(Goat looks up at him innocently, then burps.)* Pig! *(To Strega Nona.)* I was hoping the cookies would keep you from getting angry.

STREGA NONA But I'm not angry, Big Anthony.



BIG ANTHONY      No?

STREGA NONA      There's still enough time to get the whole place cleaned up and make everything nice for Natale,

BIG ANTHONY      That's right! We've got plenty of time!

STREGA NONA      Enough time -- if we don't dawdle.

BIG ANTHONY      Right! And as for the new broom and the mop and feather duster and all. . . *(He goes to goat shed and pulls out a money purse.)* I saved up the three coins wages you paid me -- I can use that, I'll go back down to town right away . . . *(He starts off.)*

STREGA NONA      Oh, no you won't.

BIG AMTHOLYY      Huh? You mean we don't need those things after all? You'll use your magic?

STREGA NONA      Absolutely not! "No magic at Christmastime!"

BIG AHTHONY      I forgot.

STREGA NONA      You can't go now, because by the time you got down the hill, the shops would be closed. And besides, Big Anthony, you're not the only one who forgets. *(She goes into the house and gets a scroll from the table.)*

BIG ANTHONY      I'm not?

STREGA NONA      No. So I made up a new list; just a few more things. . . *(she stands at the top step and lets scroll unroll - it's almost the width of the stage.)* You'll go in the morning.

*Anthony looks at the list and groans as the light quickly fade.*

## Act I. Scene v

Town square, the following day. Various Townspeople engaged in pleasant conversation; including Children, Parents and Vendors. Suddenly the sound of Bambolona's frustrated growl and she marches angrily into the square.

BAYBOLONA        How?! How could I think that Christmas would make things any different?!

BAKER                (Offstage.) Bambolona!!!

BAMBOLONA        (She hollers back.) I don't care how busy the bakery is, Papa Bambo! I'm taking a rest!

BAKER                Bambolona!!!

BAMBOLONA        (Still hollering.) You heard me! I'll be back in a little while!  
(Bambolona marches right into Anthony.) 'scusi. . . oh, Big Anthony! Better not let my Papa see you.

BIG ANTHONY        Why? Is he still mad about yesterday?

BAMBOLONA        It took most of the night to clean up the mess.

BIG ANTHONY        Then you're mad too?

BAMBOLONA        Me? No, Big Anthony -- I'm used to you.

BIG ANTHONY        Oh. Then you're just mad at your Papa, huh?

BAMBOLONA        I'm not mad at him.

BIG ANTHONY        But it sounds like. . .

BAMBOLONA        I'm only pretending.

BIG ANTHONY        Pretending? Why?

BAMBOLONA        Promise to keep it a secret? (Townspeople all lean in to eavesdrop.) It has to do with Christmas. (They lean in further.) You see, my coming back to the bakery was supposed to be a Christmas present to my

Papa. . . (*All nod and says "Uh-huh."*) But do you know what? (*All: "Un-unh."*) This morning I realized how much I've missed him. (*Oh ?*) I guess I love him. (*Ah!*) Why, he wouldn't be my Papa Bamba and I wouldn't be his little Bambolona, if we didn't holler and fight. He expects it of me. (*Townspeople nod and 'ahh' in approval.*)

BIG ANTHONY      Like everyone always expects me to forget and cause trouble?

BAMBOLONA      That's right, Big Anthony. Anyway, I decided to try and find Papa a little something extra for a Christmas gift. But if he still thinks I'm mad at him, he won't expect anything from me and then when I do give him a present, it'll be a wonderful surprise! (*Townspeople applaud 'Brava! Brava!' Bambolona waves a finger at them.*) Now remember! I said it was a secret! (*Townspeople resume their activities as if they hadn't heard a word.*) We'd better go talk somewhere else.

BIG ANTHONY      But I can't talk, Bambolona. I've got a lot of shopping to do.

BAMBOLONA      Me too!

BIG ANTHONY      For Strega Nona.

BAMBOLONA      Oh, that's right! I've got to think of a gift for Strega Nona too!

BIG ANTHONY      (*He pulls out the scroll.*) She made a long list.

BAMBOLONA      A Christmas list -- from Strega Nona? (*Townspeople all turn their attention.*)

TOWNSPEOPLE      (*Variously, in sequence.*) Strega Nona . . . ? . . . asking...? ...for a gift?! Let's see! (*Anthony is mobbed.*)

BIG ANTHONY      No! No! Not a list of things she wants!

TOVNSPEOPLE      (*Disappointed.*) Ohhh.

BIG ANTHONY      It's a list of things she needs -- for the feast!

TOVNSPEOPLE      Ahh -- the feast!

MATRON                Why, it wouldn't seem Natale without the feast at Strega Nona's.

BIG ANTHONY        She's very busy getting the house ready.

PRIEST                But don't you know that Strega Nona loves Natale ?

MAYOR'S WIFE        That's why she's so busy!

MAYOR                Why, she doesn't even have time to cure headaches. . .

FOOD VENDOR        . . . and make love potions. . .

WART MAN            . . . and get rid of warts.

PRIEST                All the things Strega Nona does for us. . .

SIGNORA ROSA        . . . and gives to us. . .

PRIEST                . . . all through the year.

MAYOR'S WIFE        That's why we were hoping your list might tell us what we could do for her.

BIG ANTHONY        Oh. *(Townspeople go back to their business. Anthony confides in Bambolona.)* I'd like to give a Christmas gift to Strega Nona too.

BAMBOLONA          Well, who knows? -- maybe while you're getting Strega Nona's supplies, an idea for a gift will just come to you. Ideas usually do.

BIG ANTHONY        But Bambolona, not too many of my ideas ever turn out too good.

BAMBOLONA          That's true. Oh, but this is different. Nobody -- not even you, Big Anthony -- could get in trouble thinking up a Christmas present! *(Bambolona exits.)*

BIG ANTHONY        *(After a slight pause.)* Bambolona -- wait! I've got an idea! A good one! *(He races after Bambolona.)*

MOTHER  
FATHER                *(Noticing Paolo not eating.)* Paolo? What is it, Paolo?  
Thinking about Christmas?

LITTLE PAOLO      Yes. And Strega Nona.

FATHER  
& MOTHER      Ah, Strega Nona.

TOWNSPEOPLE      (*A collective murmur.*) Strega Nona.

LITTLE PAOLO      I wish I could think of a present.

MOTHER      A Christmas present. . .

TOWNSPEOPLE      . . . for Strega Nona.

LITTLE PAOLO      She's always so nice to me. Just like a Grandma.

FATHER      Perhaps that's why she's called Strega Nona -- Grandma Witch.

SIGNORA ROSA      Yes. Because she's like a Grandma to us all.

(*She sings*) Who could count all the days, all the times, all the ways  
All the hearts touched by her love  
Far beyond measure the treasure of Strega we share  
Think of the moments cheered suddenly hearing  
The fluttering wings of her dove  
We pause in delight to rejoice in the sight  
Of a lavender shawl up above.  
.ever there through all our days  
Strega's magic, tender gaze  
Grandma Strega watching  
Gives me strength and peace of mind  
As she blows a kiss to bless me --  
Kisses loving, warm and kind

TOWNSPEOPLE      (*various*) Like a beacon in the night / near in sight a warming light  
Little grandma hold me tight / she'll set things right

(*unison.*) So like a guardian angel hov'ring o'er me from above  
Ever wise and gentle. Understanding grandma that I love.

TOWNSPEOPLE    *(various.)* Magic in her heart does dwell  
Welcome all with soothing spell  
Tell your troubles, she will help  
And keep you well

*(Unison.)* Oh, how can we repay you, Strega, anything you need?  
Then we'll strive to share your kindnesses  
In thought and word and deed.  
May her magic live in me may it live eternally  
Come the day we gaze on high to see no more her shawl  
We shall blow a kiss recalling  
How our Strega blessed us all.

*When the Townspeople have finished their song, Anthony stumbles in. He is covered head to foot with parcels, brooms, mops, etc. The only way we know it is Anthony is by the hat on top of the moving heap.*

TOWNSPERSON    Oh, Big Anthony! Just look at you!

BIG ANTHONY    I can't look! I can't see a thing!

TOWNSPEOPLE    What an awful lot of stuff. All for Strega Nona? Broom. . . candles. .  
.curtains. . . mop. . . washtub. . . feather duster. bedcovers. . .  
tablecloth. . . carpet. . .

BIG ANTHONY    And this isn't even the whole list. . . Signora Rosa?!

SIGNORA ROSA    Over here, Big Anthony! What can I do for you?

BIG ANTHONY    *(Proffering the list.)* I'm not sure how to say it... there, near the  
bottom. . .

SIGNORA ROSA    Ah, Strega Nona needs the Baccala !

TOWNSPEOPLE    Ah, si! The baccala!

SIGNORA ROSA    A nice, dried codfish for the feast.

TOWNSPEOPLE    Si-- for the feast!

MAN                      Why, it wouldn't seem a feast without the baccala! (*Signora Rosa pulls forth an enormous, dried codfish.*)

TOWNSPEOPLE      The Baccala!

SIGNORA ROSA      Here you are, Big Anthony -- the biggest and best baccala in all of Calabria! (*Townspeople assist in placing it in his arms.*) But are you sure you can manage all this up the hill?

BIG ANTHONY        No trouble at all. Why, I've made so many trips up that hill, I could do it blindfolded!

SIGNORA ROSA      I'm only saying, with all the ice and snow, one "trip" and . . .

BIG ANTHONY        (*Starting off*) Gracie! Arrividerci!

SIGNORA ROSA      (*A shrug.*) Buona fortuna! Good luck!

Music underscore as Anthony exits the town square and lights begin to isolate group of Townspeople at the edges of the square, who observe and make ad-libbed remarks about Anthony's progress.

A Puppet Anthony slowly ascend the hill above the town square. Just as it reaches the top. Puppet Anthony loses footing and starts tumbling down, kicking up snow clouds as it snowballs head over heels.

Townspeople scream and rush to and fro in alarm of an avalanche. The parcels and implements which Anthony had been carrying begin to rain down on the Townspeople's heads. Anthony – encased in a huge snowball – finally rolls onstage and lies in the midst of them. Townspeople suddenly look up in fear.

TOWNSPEOPLE      Ahhh! The baccala!

All but Anthony scatter. The huge codfish drops on Anthony's head. Immediate blackout.

Intermission.