

# **DANCING IN THE GARDEN**

By Michael Walker

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DANCING IN THE GARDEN was developed at Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Kate Snodgrass, Artistic Director. It was first produced the Festival Theatre Company in association with Paul Gregory and Gary Verrill and opened in New York at the Living Theatre on August 12, 2011. The play was directed by Bruce Ward; lighting design by Kim Negrete; set, and costume design by Festival Theatre Company. The Dramaturg was Paula T. Alekson and the production was stage managed by Christy Benanti with the following cast:

Rosa Tanglia	Judith Knight Young
Maria Tanglia	Sarah Corey
Angelo Tanglia	Joe Gioco
Father Mike	Sam Kitchin
Daani	Cathy Prince

## **DANCING IN THE GARDEN**

### **CHARACTERS**

Maria Tanglia, mid 20's  
 Rosa Tanglia, 35-50, her mother  
 Angelo Tanglia, early 40's-late 50's, her father  
 Father Mike, early 40's-late 50's, her priest  
 Daania (Daani), mid 20's, her lover, Iranian-American  
 (Some actors play a range of ages)

### **TIME**

The play spans the years 1955 – 1970.

### **SETTING**

The overall intention is for the action to flow from scene to scene seamlessly by a light change and a turn of the head. There is an open stage with furniture pieces defining the various locations. The creative team will decide on what and where, however this script is loosely based on the “design” below. The play does not depend on this or any other design.

Downstage right: The Parlor, with Angelo's chair, possibly another chair, a side table and a footstool.

Downstage left: A flexible playing area for a number of scene locations including: a confessional, a street scene, a desk area in the city library, Maria's apartment living room and Father Mike's office.

Upstage Right: It is an empty area at the top of the show and later becomes the hospital room, with a comfortable side chair and a side table. If a hospital bed is not available, it may be possible to use a wheelchair.

Upstage Left: The Dining Room, with a dining table and at least four chairs.

### **SET DRESSING AND HAND PROPS**

There are very few hand props and very little set dressing.

### **ITALIAN AND LATIN\*\***

For readings and development, NO ACTOR NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK ITALIAN OR LATIN. For production, Rosa should appear to be fluent in Italian. Rosa's Italian speeches can usually be shortened as needed for exits and entrances. Fr. Mike's Latin is important and short.

*\*\*Translations of the Italian and Latin can be found in the Appendix.*

## DANCING IN THE GARDEN

### ACT ONE

#### PROLOGUE

MUSIC. An Italian waltz, which might be played at a wedding, can be heard as the LIGHTS RISE. MARIA (mid-20's), an athletic, young woman, is dancing with ANGELO (mid-40's), her father. It is a dream dance – a memory of when she was a little girl. As the music ends Angelo sits in the chair in the parlor area, down right. The lights close in on Maria, down center. ROSA (mid-30's), her mother, enters and exits often while setting the table for dinner.

#### SCENE ONE – THE HOUSE

ROSA (OFFSTAGE)

Maria!

MARIA

That's my mother.

ROSA (OFFSTAGE)

(Angry.) Dove stai???? Maria! Mi servi adesso! Maria! \*\*

MARIA

She's saying she loves me very much.

ROSA (OFFSTAGE)

(Very angry.) E non fare finta di non sentire – VIENI QUI!

MARIA

And wants to kiss and hug me.

ROSA (OFFSTAGE)

Maria! Come here, I need you.

MARIA

Coming, Mama. (To audience.) Sometimes, when I was little, my father and I would dance in the parlor before dinner. And after, I would sit in his lap or on the floor and he would light a big cigar – I loved the smell of the cigar smoke. You see, even as a little girl, I was different. I know; maybe I should have figured it out then: God's plan for me. Father Mike says God has a plan for all of us and if we can't see it, we probably aren't paying attention to the signs. Signs play a big part in this story.

\*\* Translations of Italian and Latin can be found in the Appendix.

ANGELO

Look at that one, Maria!

MARIA

Papa was always fascinated by signs.

ANGELO

Maria. Yesterday, I went to the bank and I parked in the new lot they built behind, you know? Big lot – very convenient. But when I was driving out, there was a sign right there and what did it say?

MARIA

What?

ANGELO

Big sign: “Do Not Enter - Enter Only.” These geniuses have all my money.

(ROSA enters bringing items for the table.)

ROSA

Angelo, Father Mike will be here any minute – go get ready. Maria, what are you doing in there?

(ANGELO exits.)

MARIA

I was dancing, Mama. Papa and I were dancing and then...

ROSA

I don't want you dancing now; it's Sunday. Time for dinner; help me set the table.

(ROSA exits, muttering.)

Ballano, loro! E perche' non venite a ballare in cucina con me? Quando ballo, io?

MARIA

Mama was “from Italy” Italian. She came over in 1946 after the war and married my father right away. Two years later, I was born.

Papa's father came over in the 1890's – he had a room on the East Side and began training to be a barber on Shrewsbury Street until they let him have his own chair – and then he cut hair for fifty-two years. “Popi Tanglia.”

That was all in Worcester, Massachusetts, where I grew up. The East Side was the Italian neighborhood and Shrewsbury Street was the heart of it – up to Plantation and all the way to the lake. Everybody knew everybody's business and what they didn't know, Mama D'Errico told them in D'Errico's Market. Popi and Mama Tanglia tried for years to have a baby but they couldn't. So when my father was born, they were so happy they named him Angelo, “Angel.” My grandmother brought him to the shop every day at noon and everybody stopped cutting hair and played with the “bambino.”

(ROSA enters.)

ROSA

Fix your hair, Maria.

(MARIA pushes the front to the left.)

Not like that!

(MARIA pushes the front to the right.)

The back, Maria! Look at it! It's all ... out. Like a firecracker. Go get water.

(MARIA sits in her father's chair.)

MARIA

In the Twenties, everybody on the East Side spoke Italian, but Popi wanted Angelo to learn English so he sent him to St. Francis Elementary. That's where he learned to read. Me too.

ROSA

Maria!

MARIA

Yes, Mama. What?

ROSA

Che cosa? The bread isn't going to walk to the table by itself. Father Mike is coming now.

MARIA

(To the audience.) I was going to marry Father Mike.

ROSA

Maria! I need you. Mamma mia, devo fare da sola? The Lord watches you, Maria.

(ROSA exits, muttering. MARIA rises.)

Non so che ne verra' fuori di questa ragazzin - balla, legge...

MARIA

In addition to Italian, Mama spoke three languages: English, Latin and Catholic. She spoke English pretty well considering she was off the boat, and enough Latin to get her through Mass anywhere in the world. But no matter what language she was speaking, with Mama, it was always Catholic.

(ROSA enters and MARIA joins her in the dining room area.)

ROSA

Get Mama Ricci's rosary, sweetheart; Father Mike's going to bless it. Then go change to your dress – the nice blue one for Father. And fix your hair.

(MARIA adjusts some of the table settings as she speaks.)

MARIA

Mama Ricci came over from Italy when Mama was pregnant with me. She died in her sleep right over there in the room off the parlor. Mama said I killed her. 1955. I was seven.

**SCENE TWO – THE DINING ROOM**

(Father MIKE and ANGELO enter and sit at the table. Father Mike is a big man, who “looks like God.” MARIA can’t take her eyes off Father Mike. **NOTE:** Maria watches the dinner scene while standing; everyone speaks to her as if she was seven and sitting at the table.)

ROSA

Help Father Mike with his coat, Maria, and bring the antipasti for Papa.

MIKE

Maria Rosita, come let me look at you.

ANGELO

Yesterday, Mike, she said you look like God.

MIKE

You think I look like God?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Well I think you look like an angel, sweetheart; “Angelo’s Angel,” yes?

ROSA

Wipe your face, Maria; what have you got all over you?

ANGELO

Don’t fuss with her, Rosa.

ROSA

Go wash your face and bring more olives. More wine, Father? And the bread, Maria.

MIKE

Come here, Maria. How did you get so beautiful?

(She moves next to Mike at the table.)

MARIA

I don’t know.

ROSA

Give him the rosary, Maria.

MIKE

God made you beautiful, Maria. Everything you are is a gift of God; don't forget that. Let me see.

ROSA

Open it up, Maria.

MIKE

Oh, isn't that pretty? This was your Mama Ricci's rosary from Italy, you know that?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Mama Ricci said it belonged to her grandmother – that's your great-great grandmother, so it's very old. And listen to me, Maria, this rosary has been blessed by the Holy Father, Pope Pius, did you know that?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

No other little girl on the East Side has a rosary blessed by the Pope; this is a very special gift your mother is giving you; you have to take special care of it.

MARIA

Yes, Father. Will you bless it?

MIKE

But it's already blessed.

ANGELO

Oh, sure! But not from "God."

ROSA

Angelo!

MIKE

You want me to bless your rosary, Maria?

MARIA

Oh yes, Father.

(Maria kneels beside him as he blesses the rosary.)



MIKE

Ad laudem et glóriam Deíparæ Virginis Mariæ, in memóriam mysteriówum vitæ, mortis et resurrectionis eiúsdem Dómini nostri Iesu Christi, bene-dicátur et sancti-ficétur hæc sacratíssimi Rosárii coróna:. In nómine Patris et Fílii, et Spíritus Sancti. Amen

ALL

Amen.

MIKE

I want you to bring this to confession Saturday; will you do that for me?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Do you know how to say the rosary?

MARIA

No, Father.

ROSA

I showed you, Maria. She's learning, Father.

MIKE

That's all right, angel. You bring the rosary and we'll pray a little together.

ANGELO

Say "thank you," Maria.

MARIA

Thank you, Father.

ROSA

Get the shells, Maria. Mama Ricci's recipe, Father. You want cheese? And the gravy, Maria.

MIKE

Sister Margarita tells me you are going to be a nun.

MARIA

Yes, Father.

ROSA

She's going to convent, Father – Holy Angels – after St. Patrick's. Get the pizzelles for Father Mike.

MIKE

A Bride of Christ.

ANGELO

I'll have coffee, Maria.

ROSA

Bring coffee for Papa and the cannoli, Maria – they’re from Scano’s, Father.

MIKE

Are you in love with God, Maria?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Are you truly?

MARIA

Oh yes, Father.

MIKE

She’s a beautiful girl, Angelo.

ANGELO

(Laughing.) Maria’s in love with God and Rosa, but most of all, she’s in love with Father Mike.

ROSA

Angelo!

MIKE

Don’t laugh at her, Angelo. Is that true?

MARIA

Yes, Father, and Papa; I love Papa.

ROSA

Don’t chew with your mouth open, Maria, you look like a cow.

ANGELO

Stop, Rosa; leave her alone. Come sit with me, Maria.

MIKE

Is she a good girl, Rosa?

ROSA

She’s a very good girl, Father. Your socks, Maria – pull up your socks.

MIKE

She’s a little angel, Rosa. “Piccolo angelo” – “Angelini.”

ANGELO & ROSA

“Angelini!”

MARIA

(To the audience.) Did I mention I was in love with Father Mike?

**SCENE THREE – THE CONFESSIONAL**

(MIKE leaves the dining room and sits in his chair downstage left. ROSA clears whatever is on the table and ANGELO sits in his chair, right. MARIA kneels on the kneeler beside MIKE.)

MIKE

In nómine Patris et Fílii, et Spíritus Sancti.

MARIA

Bless me Father, I have sinned. My last confession was last week.

MIKE

Yes?

(She is silent.)

Do you have any sins, child?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

Think hard now. You can't take communion if you don't confess your sins. This is very important; are you sure? Were you late to school?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

Nothing?

MARIA

I took a cookie and I didn't ask... But nobody saw me.

MIKE

If nobody sees you, is it a sin?

(Silence.)

Who is always watching you, Maria?

MARIA

God?

MIKE

Everything we do is by the grace of God. He knew you were going to take the cookie before you did – it's part of His plan. What does God see?

MARIA

God sees everything.

MIKE

Can you hide from God?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

No.

MARIA

Did God want me to take the cookie?

MIKE

You will always have choices, Maria. God loves you regardless of the choice you make. For your penance say three *Hail Mary's* and one *Our Father*. Now say a good *Act of Contrition*. (Leading her.) "Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee..."

MARIA

Oh, my God... (To the audience.) St. Francis Elementary, St. Patrick's Junior/Senior, St. Catherine's College; I knew all the prayers. The *Hail Mary*, the *Our Father*, and with First Communion, the *Act of Contrition*. And with the prayers I learned some hard lessons starting in the second grade when Darlene Ryan told me Father Mike couldn't get married – I cried for two days. In the eighth grade I was pretty sure I wasn't going to be a "Bride of Christ," and by the end of high school, I knew Christ was going to be just fine without marrying me.

(She rises from the kneeler and stands beside the confessional.)

Bless me, Father, I have sinned. My last confession was three weeks ago.

MIKE

You haven't been to Mass in three weeks?

MARIA

I was at Mass, Father, but I didn't confess. I came to early Mass so my parents wouldn't know.

MIKE

You have sins to confess?

MARIA

Yes, Father. I said unkind things about a girl in school behind her back; and Billy Videcci kissed me in the gym twice; and I used God's name in vain three times.

MIKE

It is a mortal sin to use the Lord's name in vain.

MARIA

It was in a game, Father. I was missing foul shots.

MIKE

Missing foul shots is no excuse, Maria.

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

What do we know about mortal sin?

MARIA

"If we die with mortal sin, our souls will not be allowed in Heaven."

MIKE

Is there anything else?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

When you came to early Mass and didn't take communion, you were lying to your parents, isn't that true?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Do you want to be in a state of grace when you die, Maria?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

And do any of us know when we are going to die?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

Come to confession and take communion every week, Maria, and you will always be in a state of grace. Honor your parents, don't lie to them.

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Is Billy Videcci your boyfriend?

MARIA

No, Father; we just kissed. I'm not going to do it again.

MIKE

You don't want people talking behind your back, do you?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

From now on if you have something to say about someone, say it to them – don't talk behind their back.

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

For your penance, say ten *Hail Mary's* and three *Our Father's*...and without using God's name in vain once, I want you to shoot one hundred foul shots. Now say a good *Act of Contrition*.

(She walks away from the confessional.)

MARIA

(To the audience.) I confessed everything to Father Mike until I was fifteen.

MIKE

"Impure thoughts," Maria?

MARIA

Yes, Father. I was thinking about kissing and I had impure thoughts.

MIKE

What kind of thoughts?

MARIA

I had thoughts of more than kissing.

MIKE

To be attracted to a boy is not a sin, Maria. But impure thoughts, touching and lust are very grave sins and put your soul in peril. Were you touching as well?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

You have to fight temptation, Maria. Say five *Our Father's* and ask for God's forgiveness. Say ten *Hail Mary's* asking the Virgin Mary to pray for you, and pray the rosary one time. Are you sorry for your sins, Maria?

MARIA

Yes, Father.

MIKE

Do you have a boyfriend?

MARIA

No, Father.

MIKE

Don't think about kissing, Maria, and you won't break God's laws.

MARIA

I won't, Father.

MIKE

Good. Now say a good *Act of Contrition*.

## SCENE FOUR – THE DINING ROOM

(ROSA is folding napkins.)

ROSA

Maria? Come sit with me.

(A nervous MARIA joins ROSA at the table.)

What's the matter?

MARIA

Nothing, mama.

ROSA

Sit down; help me fold. So, your homework is done?

MARIA

Yes.

ROSA

Papa says you have something to tell me. So?

MARIA

Next year, Coach wants me to be on the varsity swim team.

ROSA  
Oh. I thought it was too much time.

MARIA  
They want me to be a Captain.

ROSA  
Don't you have to be a Senior?

MARIA  
I'm going to be a Junior next year and I'm the fastest one on the team except for Mimi and she's graduating.

ROSA  
When are you going to study?

MARIA  
It doesn't take any more time to be Captain; I'll study like always. And if I'm Captain, Coach says I could probably get a scholarship.

ROSA  
They give scholarships at St. Patrick's?

MARIA  
If I'm Captain for two years, Coach says... maybe college.

ROSA  
College? What college?

MARIA  
Maybe St. Catherine's, I don't know. I'm good, Mama, and I have the grades. Coach says...

ROSA  
What about Holy Angels? The Sisters? You were going to convent.

MARIA  
I know.

ROSA  
I thought you were going after high school; I always thought you wanted...

(Rosa looks to Maria for an answer.)

MARIA  
I want to go to college.

ROSA  
Maria...



MARIA

I'm sorry, Mama.

ROSA

Come here, Angelini. Stop worrying. Stop.

(Maria sits by Rosa and they hold hands.)

It's not the end of the world. So you don't go to convent. Your Uncle Thomas in Italy, you don't know him – my brother – he became a priest; Mama Ricci was so proud.

MARIA

I know, Mama. She told me.

ROSA

She told you, she told the butcher – like they don't have priests in Italy! And when she moved here, she told everybody here, too. But I tell you something, Maria: your Papa's family and my family, all of them – us – nobody ever went to college. Is that what you want: to go to college?

MARIA

Yes, mama.

ROSA

Okay; that's what I want, too. Next time, you come tell me what you want, okay?

MARIA

Yes, mama.

ROSA

You know, when my grandmother was my age she was dead already two years. Ricci women, we don't live so long so I want to see you happy now, okay? I don't want to wait.

MARIA

Okay.

ROSA

Now you go study; you have to have good grades to get into college – even with a scholarship! Go.

MARIA

Thank you, mama.

(End of "First Pages")