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Dramatic Publishing

Ciao, Baby!

by

KENT R. BROWN

Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(CIAO, BABY!)

ISBN: 1-58342-100-9

Ciao, Baby! was given workshop productions in 2000 by Love Creek Productions in New York City and by West Coast Ensemble Theatre in Los Angeles.

CIAO, BABY!

A One-act Play
For 3 Women

CHARACTERS

AMANDA YORK: British, well-born, early to mid-40s, attractive. Teaches English Literature in a small university in England.

JOAN SAMPLES: Midwestern American, affable, mid-30s. Works as an advertising copywriter.

MARIA: Italian, has seen it all.

SETTING: A small sidewalk cafe on a side street in a small town in Tuscany, a bit run down, sustained primarily by the locals.

TIME: The present, March, 1:30 in the afternoon.

CIAO, BABY!

AT THE CURTAIN: *AMANDA YORK* is seated at a cafe table. She is casually but smartly dressed. A briefcase leans against her chair. She is reading a book of poetry. She finishes one page, turns it, contemplates, then turns back to it and reads it again. She withdraws a pen and notepad from her briefcase. Brightly colored tabs divide the notepad into sections. She makes a few notes, turning from one tabbed section to another. She begins to write, quickly and confidently.

After a moment, *JOAN SAMPLES* enters carrying a small tote bag. She seems anxious. A USA Today International Edition is tucked under one arm. She pauses a moment, checks her watch and then quickly sits at another table and begins skimming through the newspaper.

AMANDA stops her writing and returns to reading the book of poetry, occasionally glancing at *JOAN*.

JOAN (suddenly, to *AMANDA*). I need some coffee. Is the coffee good here? (Louder.) Excuse me, I don't mean to bother you but I need to know if the coffee is good here. Oh, dear. You don't speak English, do you? I always hope someone who looks like me talks like me, don't you? Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm just a bit out of focus. You

can't understand me, why do I bother. (*JOAN makes preparations to leave.*)

AMANDA. The coffee here is quite good as far as Italian coffee goes.

JOAN. Oh, my God, you do understand me! What a relief, thank you. But the cups are so small, aren't they?

AMANDA. That's espresso. Very concentrated. The cups are small all over the country, by the way, not just here. It's not a conspiracy.

JOAN (*looking around*). Do I wait here? Do they know I'm out here? Maybe I should go inside.

AMANDA. She'll be out shortly. It's slow today.

JOAN. Must be off-season. No one's around. How do they make any money?

AMANDA. Well, I'm sure the locals help out and then I think they make it all in a big rush from the tourists. We all swoosh down in the summer months and soak up all the Renaissance we can bear and then scurry back to our little lives.

JOAN. They're just waiting, then, inside, for the hordes of cameras and sunglasses?

AMANDA. I suppose you're right.

JOAN (*rising suddenly to her feet*). All this is fascinating, but it's March and I have a lot of things I have to take care of. I can't wait until summer. I'm going inside and—

(*MARIA enters.*)

JOAN (*cont'd*). Ah, thank you. Hello.

AMANDA (*to JOAN*). Maria.

JOAN. Maria? Isn't that wonderful. So Italian. *Buena sera, Maria*. No, it's too early for *sera*, isn't it? Uh, I'm so ... *giorno!* Hi. How are you?

MARIA. Good afternoon. I am fine. How are you? I have a brother in Cincinnati and a cousin in San Diego. I have not been to America, but some day soon I will go. Me and my husband, Raphael. Good. So. You know all about me. Now, what do you want?

JOAN. Oh, thank you. Please, some coffee, maybe, in a big cup?

MARIA. *Que?*

AMANDA. May I suggest a cappuccino?

JOAN. Oh, thank you.

AMANDA. A bit more flavor, more fun to drink.

JOAN. Oh, you're an angel. Thank you. (*To MARIA.*) A cappuccino, please? (*MARIA begins to exit.*) No, I'm so sorry. Two, two cappuccinos ... cappuccin—

MARIA. *Due cappuccini?* Sure. I can do that.

(*MARIA exits with a shrug. JOAN slumps in her chair.*)

JOAN. I've read that language book, you know the one.

AMANDA. Ten-Minutes-a-Day-and-You'll-Speak-Like-a-Native?

JOAN. That's it. I even got a few tapes. But then suddenly you're right in front of them, looking into their faces, and they're staring back at you like you're in an aquarium. It's unnerving.

AMANDA. Just making the attempt seems all that's really necessary.

JOAN. And smiling a lot.

AMANDA. Quite right. If you smile and destroy their language it never appears to be such a disaster. You had a nice smile.

JOAN (*almost breathless but under control*). Did I? Did I have a nice smile? I hope so. I'm talking too much, aren't I? John, that's my husband, we're on spring break. John's the chairman of the English department at Hathaway College in Nebraska. Small but quaint, if there's anything quaint in Nebraska. John always says I talk too much. But there you are trapped in the car, aren't you, hour after hour, next to each other?

AMANDA. And you can't understand a damn thing on the radio!

JOAN. Yes, and you have to say something, try to sound enthusiastic. (*Portraying herself and John.*) "Oh, look, darling, see the hillside with the castle on top of the town? Looks just like that painting in uh, where was it? You know, in that old stone church." (*Beat.*) "They're all old stone churches, Joan, that's why we're here, to see old stone churches and drink Chianti."

AMANDA (*laughing, playing the "husband"*). Then he says, "Wait, I remember now, you mean the big ratty-looking picture of all those virgins with long, bony toes and curly hair all the way down to their butts!"

JOAN. Then he laughs like that's the funniest damn thing anyone has ever said.

AMANDA. But he doesn't remember any of it.

JOAN. You got one, too?

AMANDA. Husbands are the same the world over. Poor sods.

JOAN. You're English.

AMANDA. British.

JOAN. I didn't know there was a difference.

AMANDA. A sense of empire, perhaps.

JOAN. World domination.

AMANDA. You're American, I bet.

JOAN. Too loud, too talky, too much color?

AMANDA. No, you're reading *USA Today*.

JOAN. Oh, right! A dead giveaway. But maybe I'm Danish
and just brushing up on my English.

AMANDA. Hadn't thought of that.

(At this juncture, MARIA enters with a tray, the cups of cappuccino and a sugar bowl. She places the cups on JOAN's table.)

JOAN. Oh, thank you, thank you.

MARIA. *Prego. Due cappuccini.* OK? Good? Good.

AMANDA. Maria?

MARIA. *Que?*

AMANDA. Do you think our American friend looks Danish?

MARIA. No more Danish, all gone.

AMANDA. No, does she look like she comes from Denmark?

MARIA. She's American. Reads *USA Today*. *(MARIA shrugs and exits.)*

JOAN *(pouring considerable amounts of sugar into her cappuccino)*. You're supposed to smell the clean, fresh air, marvel at the olive trees and the grapevines and all the rest of it, but you have to carry the luggage, rent the car, and read the maps! John bought maps in Italian! "They're more authentic, Joan," he said, but he's not reading the damn things. I am! And all the roads have

those damn drive-around circles with arrows shooting off every which way! “Florence, Joan, keep your eyes out for Florence.” And I did and I said, “Here, turn here!” So John makes this screeching turn but we’re going to Pisa so I say. “Oh, good, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, sounds great.” But he says, “What’s the matter with you, Joan? The lines will be a mile long. I can’t take the time.” (*JOAN has finished her first cup of cappuccino and immediately begins pouring sugar into her second cup.*)

AMANDA. Travel can be stressful.

JOAN. They just give you one cup, everywhere. Then you have to order another cup. By the time you’re finished you’ve had four cups and paid a fortune. In Venice we couldn’t stand it anymore so we went to a McDonalds and ordered the biggest coffee they had and went back for two refills. We were floating. It was heaven. (*JOAN finishes her second cup.*)

AMANDA. I don’t mean to be rude, but I have to ask. Are you all right?

JOAN. All right? In what sense, all right? I drink a lot of water, if that’s what you mean. Have to stay hydrated, all the magazines say that. All right? Not actually. (*Beat.*) I’ve just left my husband.

AMANDA (*beat*). Oh, I see. Well, leaving a husband can be very stressful, too, I suppose.

JOAN. On the floor.

AMANDA (*beat*). I beg your pardon?

JOAN. On the floor, on his back, looking up at the ceiling. Or at least he was. Wrapped in the courtesy bathrobe they hang in the closet, you know the ones?

AMANDA. Yes. Some hotels are gracious that way.