



roma heroes

DIGITAL COLLECTION OF EUROPEAN ROMA THEATER AND DRAMA

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European Family

written by Richard R. O'Neill

translated by Viktória Kondi

CHARACTERS:

FATHER

MOTHER

MELO

LUCI

TOMI

A Roma family is scattered throughout Europe due to work and leisure. Luci, one of the three children of Richard and Sonia, is the main support for her parents. When their mother goes on holiday, Luci is charged with helping her technophobe father join in the Zoom calls she organises.

SCENE 1

Father and Luci are having an interaction about getting the laptop connected to the family Zoom call with Mother, who is on holiday. Father moves around in and out of the picture before sitting down and trying to connect.

Father: *(Speaking on phone)* Luci? Are you there?

Luci: *(Speaking on phone)* Yes, I'm here, Daddy! Hello!

Father: Luci, I've put the laptop in the place you said. It's all set up how you set it up before.

Luci: Everything is set up, you just have to sit in front of the laptop.

Father: What do I have to do now?

Luci: *(Frustrated)* You're sitting in front of the laptop. Daddy, please pay attention, as we discussed, pick up the earphones.

Father: Do I have to turn my phone off?

Luci: Yes, we can hang up the phone. *(They both hang up the phone)* Ok. Now push the button I showed you.

Father: Which one?

Luci: You know which one, that big one in the middle.

Father: The one in the middle?

Luci: Yes, the one in the middle. Of course, as always. Daddy, please! Just push it!

Father: Listen, it's all right for you. But I don't know why you just didn't come round and show me this. Why couldn't we do it together like we did it before?

Luci: Daddy, I told you: I have the school conference.

Mother: *(Mother appears in the Zoom call)* Hello! Thank you for setting up the Zoom call, Luci, I don't know how you got your father on it, but I'm so glad you did. *(Tomi appears in the Zoom call)* I can see you, Tomi. Melo? Can you see me?

Tomi: Yes.

Melo: (*Melo appears in the Zoom call*) I can see you, Mama.

Mother: It's so lovely here, the things I'd only seen in pictures I'm now seeing in real life. I just wish you could see them too, husband, but I'm recording it all for you.

Father: I'm happy here, I have my grandchildren and my workshop – what more do I want to see?

Luci: He's a bit tired, mama. Melo's children have worn him out today.

Melo: The children love their grandfather.

Mother: When I get home next week, I want you all to come to my birthday party, you know it's one of the big round numbers!

Luci: Do you need me to help with anything?

Mother: No. It's all arranged and paid for, all I need is my children.

Melo: Mama, I can't come.

Tomi: Me neither.

Father: (*Angrily*) What do you mean, you can't come? Your mother has organised something for the family, and you're both too selfish to come to her party? What excuse is it this time?

Mother: Maybe I could change it for summer!

Father: Why are we always changing things for those two? No! This time, they come home or they don't love their mother!

Mother: Don't say that!

Luci: But it has to be said! Father's right: they don't contribute to the family, they never come home, they never help out, and Melo – don't even get me started on his idea of family!

Melo: Finally, I have this project. I have this contract to be signed in the next few days. Finally, I'm working with the biggest Roma orchestra in Europe.

Luci: It would be nice if you could come home once in a while, or even once a year, especially for your mother's birthday.

Tomì: I'm sorry, but I have to work. This is a new camp, a refugee camp, families with many children, I have to take care of them. You know, they're in a very bad situation. They don't have any food. If the government gives them food, it's pork but they're Muslims. Do you know what that means for them? It's terrible. If I don't go, they'll have no one to help them.

Father: I'm sick of hearing these excuses. Your sister does all of that and looks after us and your children, Melo. And you, Tomì, you just let people walk all over you.

Luci: I agree with Father – you spend all your time talking about how important your lives are, I look after disadvantaged children in my school, I look after our parents, I try to have some life of my own too, you're both selfish!

Mother: You are all doing good in your own way.

Father: No, they aren't! Those two can't even be bothered to come back for your big birthday. This is the thanks for everything you've done for them? And I bet you even sent them money. Selfish babies is what they are.

Luci: Daddy is right: they're just doing whatever they want because they are boys. You sent them money!

Melo: It was a loan, I'll pay it back.

Father: I was a good singer, but I didn't take money from my mother to follow some silly dream, I used my hands to make money and get married and look after my family like a proper Roma man.

Melo: I also work with my hands. Look! (*Showing his hands*) I've been working with these hands since I was six years old. I've been rehearsing and practicing to come to this point. You just want to criticise me! You're just jealous.

Luci: Please, stop! I don't want to criticise you, Melo. We just want you to come back for the party.

Father: (*Father gets a brief glimpse of a man in Tomì's house*) Tomì, who's that man in your house?

Tomi: This man...he's just...just my colleague... We have to go to work, so we're going to the camp now. He's waiting for me, so I don't really have much time left.

Father: When are you gonna get married? When are you going to get married, Tomi?

Tomi: Bye! Bye!

Father: Don't pretend you can't hear me!

Mother: Bye Tomi! He'll get married when he's ready to get married.

Melo: (*Angrily*) Hey, Dad! Why don't you go to your garden? Go back to your garden! I don't wanna talk any longer. I'm off. Bye, Mum!

Mother: Hey you guys! I have to go, my new friends are calling me for lunch. Bye-bye! Luci, look after your father.

Luci: Ok, Mummy, have a good time! Love you!

Father: I... I.... I miss you, make sure you keep safe, I... I...

Mother: Of course I will, and I know you love me, but you should learn to say it, too.

Father: Luci, has she gone? Hello? Hello? Has everyone gone...?

SCENE 2

Late at night/early morning. Luci video calls her father, they have a discussion about the devastating news they have to break to Melo and Tomi.

Father: Luci, we have to tell the boys... Can you get them up on this thing like you did before?

Luci: Oh Daddy, I can't do this.

Father: You have to, Luci!

Luci: I'm not able to do this.

Father: You have to, Luci. I can't believe it either... I think I'm in shock... but we have to do it. You have to get them, Luci.

Melo: *(Appears in video call)* Hey, hello! Who is there? Is that you, Luci? Why are you calling this late at night? I was sleeping. We've been rehearsing all night. I just went to sleep and you wake me up like this... Come on! What's wrong?

Melo: Luci, can you hear me?

Father: Tell him, Luci.

Melo: Dad, Dad! Are you also there? What's wrong? Come on? What's happened?

Luci: It's Mother... she's d...

Tomi: *(Appears in the video call, sleepy)* Hey, what's going on, I have to be up early tomorrow. Couldn't this have waited?

Melo: Shut up, Tomi! What happened to Mother?

Luci: Mother... she's...

Tomi: What about Mother?

Melo: What happened? Is she finally leaving Dad? *(Laughs)*

Luci: She's dead!

Tomi: What?

Melo: What? Come on, you're joking!

Father: You heard your sister! And I want you both back home now!

Melo: Whoa... what? No, no, no. Tell me you're joking!

Father: I want you both home! Right now!

Melo: Luci? Dad?

Father: You heard your sister... I want you both home!

Melo: Come on! You wake me up in the night to tell me things like that. It's not fair!

Luci: No, it's not a joke... Mother is dead.

Tom: Dead...? Where...? What...?

Father: I was the only one who didn't want her to go on that holiday, I should have spoken up more, I should have stopped her!

Luci: It's not your fault, Father.

Melo: No it's not true! ... What happened? Tell us... tell us now!

Luci: Ok. She got sick with the virus and just died. They didn't even take her to hospital, because there was no room and they've... already sent her things to me.

Melo: What do you mean? Where is she? We'll go and get her.

Tom: No, there must be some mistake, some mix-up! Have you checked everything, Luci?

Father: I need you to come home!

Melo: Did you hear me, Luci?

Luci: Of course I did... I checked everything... I received an email from the hospital and government with her photograph, there's no mistake... *(Bursts into tears)*

Father: I need you to come back home! I need you here!

Melo: It's impossible! I can't believe this! No, no, no... What about her... body?

Luci: Her body was incinerated.

Tomì: Whoa! I can't deal with this!

Melo: It's lockdown! We can't come home now. Everything is locked. There's no trains, no planes and I don't have the papers to come home. How can I come now? It's lockdown, man!

Father: What do you mean, you can't come home because of lockdown? There's always a way around it. When my mother died, I was a hundred miles away from home and I walked for three days. And I walked and I walked and slept under an old bridge and I got a lift in the back of a truck. Don't tell me you can't come home, because you can. If you really wanted to, you'd get home.

Luci: You can come home. I have a student... whose father got struck in another country... but I got on the internet and found people to help. An aeroplane, a ride, a truck, and finally, the family got reunited. So please don't say that you can't come home, please just come.

Tomì: I can't leave my refugees in the camps, they'll starve without my help. You can't imagine what happens here.

Melo: I don't even have money to come home.

Luci: I know it's hard, but I'll lend you some money. Don't worry about your work, please just come home.

Tomì: If I leave them, it'll be terrible. There'll be no support, no food for these people. They can't make money, there's no small jobs for them in construction or cleaning anymore. All the support now is for the virus. I can't come home and just leave them with nothing.

Melo: Luci, in a few days I'm gonna get paid from the orchestra and then I can get my papers and I'll be able to come back, but I can't come today or tomorrow. I need to wait for my payment... and anyway, how can we do a funeral without the body?

Luci: We can't do a funeral, but we can do a wake, Melo, because the wake is not about the body. It's about the soul. I can do a wake online for us.

Father: Roma families are supposed to come together at times like this, what kind

of people are you, my sons? Luci is here helping me, making phone calls, printing things from the internet for me to sign... I don't even know what I'm doing anymore... What would your mother think of you two?

Tom: She would understand... Mother was the kindest person, she would help anyone... *(Starts crying)*

Father: *(Very upset and angry)* How do you know what your mother would want? You never come home. She was Roma, she would want things done properly – a proper wake with her family.

Melo: You can't do a wake without... Mother!

Luci: A wake is about the soul, not just the body. I can do a wake online for us.

Father: Online wake!

Luci: Leave it to me. I'll sort out everything, all your technology and everything else you need; you'll like it, I promise.

Father: You are a good daughter.

SCENE 3

The Wake. Everyone is prepared. It's late at night, each is in their separate homes. Melo plays some music, everyone has a candle and a glass of something to drink, the mood is quiet, sad and respectful. When the music stops, Father is first to speak.

Father: That was very nice, Melo... Luci, Tomi? Can you all see me and hear me?

All: Yes, Father. Thank you.

Melo: Thank you, Luci, for organising this, and thank you Daddy. I'm happy you liked the music.

Father: I'm still not sure about having this wake. But that music was nice, Melo. I want us all to say something about your mother, because that's how our people do it. I'll go first because I'm still the head of the family. Your mother and I have been together since we were 16 years old, I can't even work out how long that is, we've been together so long. And we had some difficult times, but she was always there for me, she was always there for you, for everybody. Everybody in the town loved your mother, you could go anywhere, mention her name and people would always have a good story and a good thing to say about her. Times were really, really hard sometimes. And there was one time when all the construction sites shut down. There were strikes everywhere. Nobody could move, nobody could work. And I thought we'd be in real trouble. I sat at the kitchen table with my head in my hands when you were all in bed, when your mother came up to me, put a hand on my shoulder and she said, 'it'll be all right'. And I turned around and I said, 'how can it be all right? We've got no money. How are we gonna live?' She said, 'we have got money'. She brought out a purse, and it was full of coins and notes, she'd been saving a little bit every week for years, she never spent anything on herself. She said: 'I thought we might need this and I wanted to be ready for it.' And she was. And we were absolutely fine through that time. She was always ready, always prepared. And now... *(Starts to cry)* I'll never see her again...

Melo: Daddy, don't cry, let's raise a toast for Mum.

Father: *(They all raise their glasses)* Are you ready? One, two, three, four. To your mother. Now, it's time for you to tell your stories.

Melo: I used to go shopping with Mummy and she would pass by this toy store, and she would leave me by the window of the toy store so that I could look inside while she was getting food in the shop next door. I was totally in love with this little, shiny red accordion that I wanted. But I didn't dare to ask her to buy it because I thought it was too expensive. Then came November 2nd the day we used to cheer and pray for our dead folks. Under my bed there was this box and inside it...there was the little red accordion together with some sweets. You know, I was so happy that morning. I was jumping around with the accordion and playing the whole day. And I just kept playing it every single day. Do you remember? You wouldn't pay for my accordion lessons. And you never knew this, but she paid for them secretly, because she believed in me. She knew that I was going to be a good musician because I was really passionate. And later she paid for a bigger accordion, she helped me because she believed in me.

Luci: And she always wanted to see us happy. She didn't just want to help you, she wanted to see us all happy. And she did everything that she could for us.

Melo: *(Raising his glass for another toast)* For Mum! Wherever you are.

Father: Tomi?

Tomi: I must have been around twelve. I fought a lot with myself. Early one morning it was still dark, I packed up some of my clothes, and some other important stuff and I set off in secret. I wanted to leave home. I wanted to leave the family. I was walking with my backpack on my shoulder, it was awfully heavy, Mama followed me from a distance and when she saw that I was tired, she came to me and asked me why I wanted to leave home. I said because I felt that something was wrong with me, something was wrong inside. Something I couldn't come to terms with. As my tears were falling, she just wiped my face, kissed and hugged me and said: 'Look, my little son, if you feel like you have to go, explore the world or find yourself, we are your family and we'll help you with that. When you grow up, you can travel the whole world, I promise. But if you leave now, my heart will ache, because I wanted to teach you so much more about life.' She took my hand and I followed her back home.

Luci: It seems like it was yesterday when she took me to the museum for the first time. I don't know which museum it was, I only remember how beautiful it seemed, I was a little scared entering the huge building, so I stood as close to Mummy as possible. This way I could hear her whisper, because she had a story for every single picture we looked at. And that made our visit truly memorable. I think that was the first time when I fell in love with art. She taught me so many things. When I went to school, I was the only one in the class who could already write. I was so proud of myself... now I'm proud of my mother. She gave me the opportunities to learn, and now my life is all about education, but now things are changing everywhere. All the children at my school have to learn from home, all the schools are closed because of lockdown. They've been given laptops, but I'm afraid a lot of them won't use them to study at home, and the laptops will be sold before next week.

Tomi: What! Luci, you need to have more faith in your children and in your families, like I do.

Luci: All I said was that the laptops will be sold soon.

Tomi: Just because those kids are poor... our Mother and Father were poor, too, you're are a bad person to say that, you should have more trust in your children and families.

Luci: *(Angrily)* Who the hell are you to lecture me? I know these families and how they have to live. I wouldn't blame them if they sold the laptops, so don't judge me, saint Tomi!

Melo: Stop arguing. *(Raises his glass)* Come on, let's raise a toast. We're here to hold a wake for our mother. And then I'll tell you one thing. Mum, we love you! *(They all raise their glasses)* You know, Luci, you are taking care of other people's children all the time, but tell me one thing. Why don't you make your own family? It's time for you to have your own man and your own children.

Luci: You've just said we shouldn't argue and hurt each other.

Melo: I'm not arguing. You're my little sister and I'm your big brother. I have the right to tell you that I want you to be happy, have your own man and children.

Luci: Hah! Is that a joke? You don't even look after your own children. I look after

them.

Melo: It's not you who is looking after my children but Father. Daddy, tell her.

Father: It's Tomi who should be getting married now. Tomi, your mother wanted it! And you, Melo, when are you going to grow up?!

Melo: What a terrible thing to say! I am grown up! What do you mean, 'grow up'?

Father: Hah ha, you sound like a child!

Melo: What do you mean?

Luci: Father is right: you have no responsibility, me and him are bringing up your children when you should be doing it.

Melo: That's a terrible thing to tell me. What are you telling me? You should get yourself a man, get married and have your own children!

Luci: Get married and have children! Is this all you can say? And what makes you think you can say things like that you are a long way from perfect. You should take care of your own children.

Melo: I'm the biggest brother, you don't have the right to...

Father: Hold on! Tomi, who was that man there?

Tomi: He's one of my friends.

Melo: Tomi, please can you back me up?

Luci: But it's a private occasion, Tomi. Why is your friend there?

Melo: Who is this man?

Father: It's supposed to be lockdown!

Melo: He's a stranger; he's not part of the family.

Father: (*Angrily*) Shut up, Melo, you musical failure!

Melo: What? You're a musical failure, Dad. Because you didn't want to become a musician. And you're just jealous because I became a musician. You know what? When I go to America, I'll send you all the money you can think about.

Luci: Oh, yes, the money again.

Melo: (*Angrily raises his voice*) I'm gonna pay for your funeral, Dad!

Father: (*Laughs*) You couldn't even pay for your own funeral!

Luci: You shouldn't talk to our father like that.

Father: That's the kind of person he is: disrespectful to his father. That's the kind of person he is, you're not my son.

Melo: I'm disrespectful because you're treating me so badly all the time. Why are you so mean to me? You only think about Luci. She is your favourite... what about me?

Luci: Shut up, and don't tell another lie, because you're always lying. Do you know, Father, he hasn't been home because his wife kicked him out!

Father: Hah! The truth... Good for her, I say, she finally got sick of his bullshit.

Melo: Let's talk about lies. What about your headmaster, Luci? And the little affair you're having and everybody in our town is talking about it!

Luci: That's enough Melo, I'm not interested in your lies. I hate you!

Tomi: Stop shouting, stop shouting! I'm gay, ok, I'm gay!

Father: What the hell are you talking about? This is not the place to say this! Did you know about this Luci... Melo?

Melo: (*Laughing*) I wanna raise a toast to that, Daddy. Way to go, Tomi! Hey, how do you like that Father? Your son is gay, hah hah! All that time you were having a go at me, and your son is gay... How will that go down with your friends? Hah hah!

Father: So both my sons are liars now. Both of them. 'I can't come home because I'm working...' Hah! Telling lies about going to America... hah! And 'I can't get married because I'm gay'! Both liars!

Melo: Thank you Tomi, now you are his biggest problem, hah hah!

Father: Shut up, Melo! You have nothing to laugh about! You ruined your marriage and deserted your lovely wife and children.

Melo: My lovely wife. Haha. You like her, don't you? You can marry her now, eh, is that what you want? You can have her. I'm gonna have my own free life. You're just a pig!

Luci: That's a wicked thing to say, especially tonight! You're disgusting!

Melo: It's just the truth. Tomi is gay and Luci is having an affair and Father likes my wife.

Luci: Tomi, you're gay... it all makes sense now. Have you no shame, to tell us this tonight?!

Melo: Ha hah... Tomi is gay!

Father: Shut up Melo, you've disrespected everybody in this wake. You're disrespectful! You're a piece of garbage!

Melo: What! You're a pig! I'm gonna pay for your funeral! It's a promise!

Luci: Stop it! You're behaving like a child! Father is right. You always act like a child.

Mother: *(Just the voice of Mother is heard)* Stop it!

Everyone is shocked into silence and all of them freeze like statues.

Melo: What was that?

Luci: Come on, you guys!

Mother: Listen to me.

Father: It sounded like your mother... No, it can't be... Did anyone else hear that?

Luci: It was Mama.

Tomi: I heard it.

Melo: You know what? I'm leaving this conversation. Because this whole family is cursed. I'm gonna leave this conversation. Good-bye.

Father: No, we're imagining it... it's our loss. We are making it happen, we must

stop this, Luci, now! This is bad luck. Shut it down, switch it off, switch it off!

Scene 4

A few months later. The family are connected through their phones and laptops, the first to notice is Father, who speaks to Luci.

Father: Luci?

Luci: Yes, I'm here. Hi, Father!

Father: Luci, did you just contact me? Because this computer has come on.

Luci: No, Father, I thought you'd contacted me.

Father: No, I didn't touch anything. You said, 'Don't touch it!' So I left it exactly at the same place it was before.

Luci: Yeah, I know what I said, but you must have pressed a button.

Father: I haven't touched anything. It just came on and it's on.

Luci: Are you sure?

Father: I just heard you, I saw the white light.

Luci: Are you sure?

Melo: *(Appears in the video call)* Hello, who is there?

Luci: Hi, Melo. Are you there?

Melo: Hey, what does everyone want?

Tomi: *(Appears in the video call)* Dad, are you OK?

Luci and Father: Melo?

Melo: Father, are you ok?

Luci: Hello, Tomi.

Tomi: Hi.

Father: Of course I'm OK. I was trying to have an afternoon nap, what little I get these days. What do you want?

Melo: Luci, why are you phoning me? Do you still want to argue?

Luci: No, I didn't call anybody.

Tomi: Yes, why are you calling us?

Luci: I think it's Daddy who has pressed a button...

Tomi: Do you want to say something?

Father: No, I don't. I was trying to...

Mother: *(Just Mother's face appears in a shadow on everyone's screens)* That's better. Hello everyone!

Father: Luci, are you playing a video?

Mother: I don't want you to interrupt me. I have only a couple of minutes. OK? I'm sorry if it's the wrong time.

Father: Is this some kind of a joke?

Luci: It was Mama's voice!

Melo: It can't be.

Mother: Please don't interrupt me! I only have a couple of minutes. Come on, you guys. Tomi! I am so pleased you told everyone. I have known since you were a child, I have known so much about all of you and now I know everything about you guys. I know your lies and your truths; I know your hopes and your fears. The only thing I don't know is how I'm able to come back to you from the place where I am now, please don't question me on this, because I can't answer you. I don't want you to quarrel and fight all the time. I want you to honour me tonight by telling the truth to each other, and be united to think better about each other. At this time, anyone can die from the virus, so please don't regret anything, please don't have room for hate. Soon your sorrow for me will fade, other things will fill your hearts and you will think of me just with joy and happiness, and not pain and loss. I want you to be together, not apart. My dear husband, you have to open your ears and listen to your children, and then it will be your turn to tell them the truth, your hopes and fears, tell them of the song you wrote for Melo when he was born.

Father: Wife, is it really you?

Mother: I said no questions, but only for you, I tell you yes, it is I, your wife.

Father: Prove it! Tell me something!

Mother: Hah, hah! It's definitely you. Remember the old motorbike you had in the shed when we got married, and I made you sell it to your cousin?

Luci: Mama, is it really you?

Mother: Oh, Luci! So much like your father... Of course it's me. I said no questions.

Melo: Mother, Mother! Did Father really write a song?

Mother: *(Laughs)* Yes, he really did.

Tomi: Mama I miss you... Did you really know about me?

Mother: Of course, I did. Mothers always know, they always know everything about you, I miss you too, but we are Roma and we must move on. Come on, Luci! Tell us about you! Take the stage for once!

Luci: I don't know how to say it... but I want to make it clear that I love you both, Mother and Father so, so dearly. Helping people is my whole life, being with children, being with my parents. And it makes me feel good, makes me feel I'm not alone. I can share my knowledge with them. It makes me happy when I see my students put energy into learning, or any important thing. But of course, it has the advantages and disadvantages as well. I don't have enough time to have a relationship, because all my weekends are about preparing to the lessons, correcting the tests, or I'm at Papa's house and spend the entire day with him and I don't mind... Well, I do mind, I just don't say it, that's why I had an affair with a married man. He was the only person available for the time I had. It's normal for people at my age to have their own family, and I'm stuck at this level and I have to move on. I have to change, I want you to set me free.

And one more thing, Tomi, you were right about the students, every one of them brought their laptops back, they were prepared for the lessons, and passed the exams successfully. Teachers always have to learn things, too! I don't want to be the kind of person who judges others all the time. I just wanted to say I'm sorry, Tomi.

Tomi: Hey, it's no problem. I love you, sister.

Father: I still don't understand how this is possible, you are here, and you sound the same. It just can't be true!

Mother: Anything is possible with love.

Father: But...

Mother: Shhh, or I'll run out of time. It's Tomi's turn next to tell us about the love of his life and why he kept him secret.

Tomi: Phew, this is hard... I have never told anyone before, not even the people at work know about us, I mean Georgio... I had a lot of love to give but no one to give it to. I had to leave home – not because I was ashamed of what I was: I had to leave because I was scared. Every time someone said something bad about gay people, I wanted to distance myself from my people, but Roma people are supposed to love their families. Gay people are still family. I didn't tell anyone I was Roma, I was ashamed of it, not of myself. I am proud of myself now and who I am. I was the only one at the refugee camp who knew Roma and could help the families with the tins of food and Georgio showed them how to cook the food we gave them. I told them I was gay, that we were gay. One man said, 'you're Roma, you feed us, you have the best heart'. The people who couldn't eat pork told us the same, their hearts were good, Mama. Other people said they were bad people, but they were good on the inside. Mama, Georgio and I are getting married and we're adopting a child. I still want to be part of this family, but only if you fully accept us.

Mother: Tomi, you've made me so happy. Oh, my goodness! I'll have a grandchild. I love you.

Tomi: I love you and my family, too.

Melo: Tomi, you're still my brother.

Mother: Come on, Melo, now it's your turn to speak your truth with love and strength. Tell them about your situation.

Melo: I'm so sorry for all this. I should have listened to Father. He was right. I shouldn't have travelled. In the beginning, I was so enthusiastic. It was the

chance of my life. I got to play in an orchestra with the best Roma musicians from all over Europe. Everything was good, the rehearsals were beautiful, we were organising this tour, we were talking about America, everything should have ended wonderfully. Then lockdown came, and first they postponed the project, and then they shut it down. And now I'm just stuck here. I don't know what to do. I miss you so much, but I don't know how to come back. Some of the musicians left the day before the lockdown, but I didn't know that it wouldn't be possible to travel anymore. Only one good thing happened, I met these people, a Roma family at the station, and they were the only people who helped me. They took me with them into their camp, a legal camp outside the city. They gave me a wagon and at least I had a bed to sleep in. People here are so nice that I don't feel so alone. Every night we meet around the fire and everybody comes to listen to the music and it cheers them up in these difficult times. I started to play with this older musician, he's the same age as Father. We rehearsed a bit together, but we found out that we don't have much music in common. So we decided to write new songs. And you know what, Mum? One of the young guys put a song on the internet, and it's becoming a success. There was even a producer who offered to make a pop version of the song. Me and the old man will make some money from it and I can use it to come back home. I miss you, I love you, Daddy, I want to come back. I promise you, even if I have to do it on foot, I'll come back – back to my wife and kids, and I promise I'll stay forever. But it's still lockdown, I don't know what to do.

Mother: Father, have you heard enough from your children? I think you're blessed to have them.

Father: I've been a selfish man... a really selfish man. It's not you who should apologise, Melo, it's me. I wanted to sing, I wanted to do what you do, I wanted to travel. I could sing really well, I had a chance to go with a singing group... but I lost my nerve at the last minute, I wasn't brave enough and I've punished you for being brave and following your dream. I'm sorry, and don't worry – whatever you need, whatever we have to do, we'll get you home and I'd love to hear your songs. Tomi, I don't care who you love, I'm just glad you have someone to love. I wish I had your heart to think about other people instead of myself, I wish I'd told your mother that I loved her, told her properly...

Mother: Tell me now!

Father: I do love you, Yekhipe, I do.

Mother: I know you do, but it's so good to hear it...

Father: Luci, I've made you a prisoner because of my stupid attitude to technology. Many of my friends have computers and social media, and here I am like a baby who doesn't know how to do it. I've been a fool and I'm sorry, I'll learn if you'll teach me, I don't want to be cut off from the rest of you. You must be free to find a nice young man who is free to be with you.

Mother: Do you remember the words of the song? Can you sing it? Melo, he sang this song to you from the day you were born, maybe it is where you get your love of music from.

Father: When I saw you, Melo, so beautiful lying in your mother's arms when you'd just been born, my heart exploded, I just couldn't say how much I loved you, and how beautiful you were, so the only thing I could do was I write a song. I made this song for you to tell you and the people, and to remind me how much I loved you. I didn't write it down, but I'll remember how it goes.

He starts to sing the song shakily at first but then with more confidence:

My heart was in shadow my heart was a cave

My heart became whole on the day that you came

You filled it with light and you banished the shade

My heart sang with joy on the day that you came

As a flower opens and leans toward the sun

My heart was the flower and you are my son

Yes my heart was the flower and you are my son

Father: I sang that song to you, Tomi too, but Luci, by the time you came along I

was tired, really tired and beginning to get stuck in my ways, and I stopped singing altogether as it just reminded me of my lack of courage. Luci, I promise if you let me, I'll make a new song for you.

Melo and Tomi: *(Together)* I remember it!

Melo: We should all sing it together for Mother!

Mother: No! No! No! Let's hear the song you wrote, Melo. It's going to be a hit, believe me! Every Roma person is going to sing this song all over the world. In fact, everyone will be singing this song. It's going to be a big hit.

Melo: How do you know...

Mother: Hah, hah! I know it, believe me. Life is a circle. We Roma people should know this better than anyone, because we have the wheel in our flag. The wheel moves around, and the spokes keep it strong. You are the spokes of this family wheel, so you should be united. Wherever you are in Europe, be true to each other and love each other. That way, you'll be able to go over anything that happens to you. Anyone can die of the virus, so don't leave any room for regret, just open your hearts to love.

Sing, Melo! And whatever we are doing, this family will stay rolling together, even more now that I'm gone, you will remember this day for always. I love you all! Play, Melo, play!

They all sing along to Melo's song: "Wheels on my Feet":

Wheels on my feet¹

Ly ly ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly

I was born with wheels on my feet; I was born, I was born to succeed

And I listened to my teachers young and old, I listened to every story that they told

A little baby born full of hope, taking the first steps along life's rocky road

¹ Lyrics and melody by Richard O'Neill, © 2019.

And I stumbled got back up again, I learned how to fall and I learned how to mend

Ly ly ly ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly

A child in school I learned everything I could, and I read, I read every kind of book

They put a pen a pen in my hand and asked me to write down everything I planned

A young person growing up strong listening to my family learning right from wrong

Got an education university degree, the more the knowledge, the more it sets you free

Ly ly ly ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly

Out in the world, I stood up brave and proud and I spoke out, I spoke out loud

And I told them, you don't have to stay down you can rise up, rise up to higher ground

And I reached up beyond my wildest dreams to a place a place I'd never been

Left the rain, headed for the sun, and I know this can happen, happen for everyone

Ly ly ly ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly

Now I'm old looking back, thanking my lucky stars for the good life that I've had

Education and our wisdom were the key, making this world a better place for you and me

I was born with wheels on my feet; I was born, I was born to succeed

And I listened, I listened to my teachers young and old

Oh yes, I listened to every story that they told

Ly ly ly ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly ly ly la ly ly ly