

IL POSTINO - Synopsis

Composer - Daniel Catan

Act I

A radio announcement is heard with the news that Chilean poet Pablo Neruda has arrived in Rome. Exiled from his homeland for his communist ideas, he will now live on the southern Italian island of Cala di Sotto.

Mario Ruoppolo is reading a postcard from relatives who have moved to America. Knowing how much Mario hates working as a fisherman, his father urges him to find a job or move away. Mario tells his father that he has, in fact, found a job as a postman, starting the very next day.

The next day, Neruda is writing on his patio as his wife Matilde tends to the flower pots. He embraces her warmly, and tells her that she has turned his place of exile into a sanctuary. Mario shyly arrives with the morning's delivery, fascinated by the couple's obvious devotion to each other.

At the post office, Mario examines the letters that have arrived for Neruda. He tells the postmaster, Giorgio, that they all seem to be from women. Mario has bought one of Neruda's books, hoping to have it signed so that he can show the girls that he is a friend of the famous poet.

Mario arrives with another delivery. He tells Neruda that he would like to be a poet too, so that women would fall in love with him. Neruda recites one of his poems, and Mario is impressed by the vivid imagery and rhythm. Neruda encourages Mario to look for metaphors in the world around him.

In the cafe bar where she works, Beatrice sings a *romanza* for the few patrons. Mario enters, and the young beauty beckons him to play table soccer with her. She quickly wins and returns to her duties. Barely able to speak, Mario asks her name.

Mario tells Neruda that he has fallen in love. Describing the fleeting encounter, he asks Neruda to write a poem for Beatrice. Neruda replies that he can't write a poem about someone he doesn't know.

At the edge of the sea, Mario watches fishermen gathering their nets. He opens his notebook and tries to write, but nothing comes. Triumphant, he remembers his book of Neruda's poems and begins copying one of them into his notebook.

Act II

Beatrice tells Donna Rosa that Mario has been speaking to her in poetic metaphors. Concerned, Donna Rosa snatches away a note that Mario has written to her niece.

Di Cosimo, a politician campaigning for office, promises the townspeople that he will bring running water to the island. Donna Rosa, looking forward to the prospect of new customers when the workers arrive to accomplish this, joins the marchers supporting him.

Mario approaches Beatrice outside the cafe, trying to impress her with his poetic words.

Mario arrives at Neruda's house with his delivery, a recorded message from the poet's publisher, Antonio. Neruda's latest book has sold out and will receive a second edition. As he records his own response to this news, Neruda asks Mario to say something about the wonders of the island. Mario can only reply: "Beatrice Russo."

Donna Rosa consults with a priest about Mario's note to Beatrice. They are both horrified that someone is writing poetry to the girl.

Mario and Beatrice find a brief moment to speak outside the cafe, but Donna Rosa calls Beatrice back inside.

Neruda receives a letter with terrible news from Chile: a peaceful demonstration has been violently repressed by the government. Despite their sadness, he and Matilde long to return to their homeland. She puts a record on the phonograph, and the two sing along and dance as Mario watches admiringly. He hides when Donna Rosa arrives with a shotgun. She furiously tells Neruda that Mario has poisoned her niece with metaphors, and she will shoot the young man if she ever sees him again.

That night, Mario calls to Beatrice under her balcony. She comes down to him, and the lovers escape. When Donna Rosa realizes that Beatrice has vanished, she unsuccessfully tries to pursue them.

After the wedding of Mario and Beatrice, guests gather for a reception at the cafe. Neruda sings a song for the newlyweds and everybody toasts to the couple's happiness. A telegram arrives for Neruda: he can return home to Chile. The postmaster, Giorgio, urges him not to share this news yet, for that would spoil Mario's happy day. The celebration continues.

Act III

Pablo and Matilde Neruda are preparing for their journey home. Neruda promises Mario that he will write to him, and they say their goodbyes.

With his friend gone, Mario is unable to write any more poetry. Giorgio shows him a newspaper clipping with a report that Neruda is in Russia to award a poetry prize. Later, at the cafe, Mario, Beatrice, Giorgio and Donna Rosa read another newspaper report that Neruda is in Paris. The poet is quoted as saying that he misses the beauty of the island, with no mention of the friends he found there.

Di Cosimo has won the local election, and his party has been victorious throughout Italy. Donna Rosa, who had counted on income from workers bringing running water to the island, asks him when work will resume. When Mario states his skepticism that the campaign promises will be fulfilled, Di Cosimo threateningly calls him a communist. Beatrice tells Mario that she is pregnant. He decides that they should move to Chile.

Mario is excited when a letter from Chile arrives, the first letter that he has ever received. Tearing it open, he discovers that it is only an impersonal letter from Neruda's secretary, with instructions about where to send the few items he had left behind.

Devastated, Mario returns to Neruda's house. He finds and plays the unsent tape recording that he and Neruda had made.

Mario and Giorgio connect Neruda's tape recorder to a battery. They roam the island, collecting the sounds of Cala di Sotto.

Neruda and Matilde eventually visit the island again, remarking that it feels like coming home. They enter the cafe, where they encounter Pablito, Mario's young son, and Beatrice. She tells him how Neruda's friendship had inspired Mario to write poetry that would speak for the poorest and weakest of the island's residents. Invited to read a poem at a communist demonstration, Mario had been killed when violence overtook the gathering. Beatrice gives Neruda the recording that Mario had made for him.

Neruda listens to the tape, remembering his friend, and Mario's voice is heard, thanking him for bringing poetry into his life.