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The Flower of Beauty

A Short Comedy Adapted for the Stage from “The Flower of Beauty” in Tales of Enchantment from Spain

Part of the Series: *Commedia dell’Arte Plays for the Modern Stage*

by

Gwen Adams

Bardstreet.com

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The Flower of Beauty
A Commedia dell'Arte Play for the Modern Stage

Based on the story "The Flower of Beauty"
collected by Elsie Spicer Eells in *Tales of Enchantment from Spain*

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND.....	v
SYNOPSIS.....	vii
CHARACTERS, TIME, PLACE, RUNNING TIME	viii
THE PLAY	1
ACT I.....	1
Part 1: A town, somewhere in a place a little like Italy	1
Scene 1.....	1
Scene 2.....	1
Part 2: A bakery, one day later.....	2
Scene 3.....	2
Scene 4.....	2
Part 3: A town, somewhere in a place a little like Italy, same day.....	2
Scene 5.....	2
Part 4: A butcher shop, one day later	3
Scene 6.....	3
Part 5: A town, somewhere in a place a little like Italy, same day.....	3
Scene 7.....	3
Part 6: The studio of the royal court painters, a few weeks later	5
Scene 8.....	5
Scene 9.....	7
Scene 10.....	8
Scene 11.....	11
Part 7: The Royal Palace, same day	12
Scene 12.....	12
Scene 13.....	13
Scene 14.....	14
Part 8: The studio of the royal court painters, same day	16
Scene 15.....	16

BACKGROUND

I believe my friends Ben and Anna Hatke introduced me to Commedia dell'Arte shortly after college. What a form of theater! What variety of spectacle! Commedia dell'Arte combines dancing, acrobatics, stock speeches and recitation, gags, improvisation, slapstick, and music to enliven the show. In his classic text *The Empty Space: A Book about the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*, Peter Brook defines Rough Theater as “close to the people.”¹ Is there any form of theater closer to the people than Commedia dell'Arte? Rough Theater capitalizes on every gag, mistake, and chance occurrence.² As Brook writes, Rough Theater exists “unashamedly to make joy and laughter, what Tyrone Guthrie calls ‘theater of delight’ and any theatre that can truly give delight has earned its place.”³ For all its earthiness, Rough Theater pairs happily with what Brook calls Holy Theater, for example, in plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with its blend of comic situation, buffoonery, mystery, and innocence. I aimed for that same blend in *Two Commedia dell'Arte Plays for the Modern Stage*.

Commedia dell'Arte plots are simple and characters archetypal, characteristics they share with fairy-tales. One characteristic they don't always share with fairy-tales is the “happy ending” as defined by J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien believed an essential element of “all complete fairy-stories” was a happy ending, a moment of “sudden and miraculous grace . . . giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”⁴ The unexpected happy ending marks Elsie Spicer Eells' version of “The Flower of Beauty” as well as Charles Perrault's version of “Bluebeard,” which forms the basis for *A Fine Fiasco* (originally titled *The Secret Room*). By retelling these fairy-tales within the merry world of Commedia dell'Arte, I hoped to combine Rough and Holy Theater, to offer both delight and consolation in *Two Commedia dell'Arte Plays for the Modern Stage*.

I am grateful to West Lafayette and the Tippecanoe Arts Federation for an Arts Grant which enabled me to write and produce parts of *Two Commedia dell'Arte Plays for the Modern Stage* during a 2005 Summer Street Theater Festival. I am also grateful to Rev. Timothy Alkire who was pastor of St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church when I first began developing these plays with our parish young Catholic Actors Guild.

The plays employ French scenes. If the use of French scenes is not helpful, the director/production can use the alternate division of “Parts” which correspond to the longer scene lengths in regular plays.

No lighting changes are necessary. The plays require minimal props and sets and lend themselves easily to street theater. Properties, stage furniture/equipment, and sets can be used or entirely pantomimed. The script gives directions for using real properties and a few pieces of stage furniture

¹ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space: A Book about the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 79.

² Brook, 80.

³ Brook, 84.

⁴ J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” in *The Tolkien Reader*, with an introduction by Peter S. Beagle (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 85–86.

while pantomiming other aspects of the set. Typical Commedia plays had fewer, sometimes no lines. I have tried to preserve this effect by giving ample opportunities for “business” or improvisation and *lazzi* (stock business which can be inserted as needed). In place of “stock speeches” I have suggested some public domain poems which could be inserted. Note: neither I, the author, nor Bardstreet, LLC can advise as to whether these poems are definitely in the public domain (see the Caution which precedes the Play.) Stage directions suggest how to incorporate these poems within the wider story. There is also ample room (indicated in the stage directions) for other elements of Commedia dell’Arte: dancing, acrobatics, gags, slapstick, and music. Commedia dell’Arte characters took various roles depending on the story in which they appeared. For example, Isabella was always a princess, damsel in distress, or main love interest. Columbina was always a clever servant. I have tried to fit the Commedia characters to the characters of the fairy-tales as traditionally as possible. As the plays developed, my Scaramuccia also developed and no longer resembles the original character. Instead, he is an older version of the sympathetic Pedrolino character, but with more social status and authority. Katarina and Perpetua are my own creation.

The Flower of Beauty is technically a one-act play with a running time of 55–65 minutes. *A Fine Fiasco* is technically a two-act full-length play with a running time of 75–85 minutes. The running time for both plays can be reduced or lengthened depending on the time given to pantomime, executing business, and incorporating music, dance, tumbling, and juggling at the suggested times or as needed. When I first directed the plays, I presented them together with an intermission between the two.

Both plays can be performed with or without intermission. Whether writing a full-length multiple-act play or a shorter “one-act” play, I always provide for an optional intermission, dividing all plays, even “one-act” plays, into two rough halves. As a director, I find the intermission indispensable. As the period where a theater group can most hope to sell refreshments or swag, intermissions can be key for recouping production expenses. Intermissions also accommodate the need for a quick break, especially with youth or family audiences. And personally, I always want an intermission so I can check in with and encourage the cast and crew before going on to the second part of the play and the big finale.

Two Commedia dell’Arte Plays for the Modern Stage are faithful to the old Commedia dell’Arte tradition while at the same time entertaining and accessible to contemporary audiences. These plays are suitable for small professional/community theater groups, touring groups, and college/university, high-school, and middle-school drama groups, to be played before youth, middle-school, high-school, college/university, family, and/or general audiences.

SYNOPSIS

Perpetua is perplexed when her son Arlecchino loses his apprenticeship, first at the bakery, and then at the butcher shop. But things begin to look up when Arlecchino apprentices with the court painter Brighella. For the king's dreams are haunted by visions of a princess, the Flower of Beauty. Brighella despairs when the king orders him to paint a portrait of the Flower of Beauty. But Arlecchino volunteers to give it a try. When Arlecchino succeeds, the king takes him on a journey to find the princess. With her maid Columbina, the princess Isabella is being held by enchantment in the tower of Il Dottore. When the king and Arlecchino free them, Il Dottore pronounces a terrible curse. How will they find a remedy?

CHARACTERS, TIME, PLACE, RUNNING TIME

Characters: (6 m; 4 w; 3 m/w). With doubling/tripling: (8 overall: 5 m; 3 w). See the *Stage Guide*, Section 1 for doubling/tripling (available from Bardstreet.com).

In Order of Appearance:

COLUMBINA (w): 18–30 years, ISABELLA’s clever maid, resourceful, loyal, occasionally outspoken, and strongly attracted to ARLECCHINO.

ARLECCHINO (m): 18–30 years, son of PERPETUA, he becomes an apprentice and eventual painter. Athletic and comic, he loves to entertain and make people laugh. He is not very thoughtful or brave, although he can rise to heights of cleverness and courage with sufficient motivation.

PERPETUA (w): 45–60 years, ARLECCHINO’s nagging mother, a poor widow much interested in her son’s worldly success.

BRIGHELLA (m): 45–60 years, he plays the baker, the butcher, and later, the court painter. He is a jack-of-all-trades, streetwise, ready and able, with a sense of humor, capable of cunning, deceit, and intrigue, although he would also like a quiet life.

KATARINA (w): 43–58 years, BRIGHELLA’s sister, and similar in character, although capable of more human warmth and kindness.

IL CAPITANO (m): 25–40 years, Captain of the Guard. He is a pompous, boastful character.

ZANNI (m): 25–40 years, another soldier and servant of the king. He is a lazy, indifferent, selfish character.

SCARAMUCCIA (m): 25–30 years, the king. He is a bit melancholy.

THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of JUAN and PEDRO (m/w): technically male and of any age, these can be played by men or women: by PANTALONE who is not cast in this play, by IL DOTTORE (if IL DOTTORE exits upon becoming a statue in II.9), KATARINA, PEDROLINO, or PERPETUA.

ISABELLA (w): 18 years, a beautiful princess, under an enchantment of IL DOTTORE’s.

IL DOTTORE (m/w): 45–50 years, a wicked magician. Once casting is determined, the appropriate pronouns and references can be selected from available choices, he/his/him/etc. or she/her/her/etc.

PEDROLINO (m): Child of ISABELLA and SCARAMUCCIA. See the *Stage Guide*, Section 1 for ideas on casting or representing PEDROLINO.

Time: A short time or a long time ago.

Place: Far away, in a place a little like Italy and another place a little like Spain.

Running Time: 55–65 minutes. An intermission can be held between Act I and II.

THE PLAY

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ACT I

Part 1: A Town, Somewhere in a Place a Little like Italy

Scene 1

(COLUMBINA enters SR.)

COLUMBINA

Dear gentlemen, dearest ladies, we meet again! I, Columbina, am here to tell you the whole story. Once there was a princess named Isabella. She was the Flower of Beauty. In a far-away kingdom, she lived with her parents. Their enemy? The wicked magician: Il Dottore. One night, Il Dottore captured and put a spell on the princess. To sleep forever . . . And me, too, although I'm just the maid! Who could break the spell? No one knew where we were! I'll tell you how it all came right. It begins with Arlecchino, the handsome only son of Perpetua, a poor widow. Here they come now! You'll see I'm right. Arlecchino's a handsome one!

Scene 2

(ARLECCHINO and PERPETUA enter SL. To avoid distracting the audience from ARLECCHINO and PERPETUA, COLUMBINA joins the audience or comes close to ARLECCHINO and PERPETUA, although they do not see her. ARLECCHINO is sketching.)

PERPETUA

Lazy! Good for nothing! Stupid—

ARLECCHINO

Mother! I try every job you suggest!

PERPETUA

And you always get fired! . . . Since your father died, there's even less money! Arlecchino, why can't you invent something to make us rich? I want a better son! Not one who wastes his time doodling!

ARLECCHINO

(with a guilty start, ARLECCHINO stops sketching.)

Sorry, mother. What would you like me to do?

(PERPETUA pulls out a baker's dark apron, baker hat, and baking prop for ARLECCHINO. She begins to dress her son as she talks. ARLECCHINO is embarrassed.)

PERPETUA

I've arranged a new apprenticeship. At the bakery. Don't mess it up!

(Music. PERPETUA exits SL.)

Part 2: A Bakery, One Day Later

Scene 3

(Music continues. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA enter SR as bakers. They wear dark aprons covered with flour stains, baker hats, and each wields a baking prop.)

BRIGHELLA and KATARINA pantomime baking and showing ARLECCHINO how to bake and watch the bread baking. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA exit SR.

ARLECCHINO begins to work, pantomiming kneading bread or checking on ovens. Eventually, he gets bored. He takes his sketchbook and pencil out and begins to draw and daydream. If possible, smoke effects or dry ice can be used to simulate burning bread somewhere behind or beyond ARLECCHINO's notice. The more billowy the smoke, the better the comic effect.)

Scene 4

(BRIGHELLA and KATARINA enter SR. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA pantomime smelling and rescuing burning bread and yelling at ARLECCHINO for burning the bread. In the confusion, ARLECCHINO puts his sketchbook and pencil down and tries to help, but just gets in the way. Business/lazzo.)

BRIGHELLA and KATARINA don't want his help. They strip him of his apron, hat, and baking prop and order him away. ARLECCHINO turns to exit SL, but remembers his sketchbook and pencil. He sneaks back to get it, earning more wrath from BRIGHELLA and KATARINA. ARLECCHINO finally escapes with his sketchbook and pencil, exiting SL. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA exit SR.)

Part 3: A Town, Somewhere in a Place a Little like Italy, Same Day

Scene 5

(PERPETUA and ARLECCHINO enter SL. PERPETUA gestures and berates ARLECCHINO. PERPETUA dresses ARLECCHINO in a butcher's hat and white apron covered with red stains and gives him a meat cleaver. ARLECCHINO is appalled at each new costume item. He can even faint at the first site of the apron. Music volume decreases for COLUMBINA to say her next line during the business/lazzo. If COLUMBINA joined the audience in Scene 2, COLUMBINA returns to the stage area and turns toward the audience as she pretends to have a conversation with an imaginary friend.)

COLUMBINA

“Poor Columbina! What happened to your boyfriend next?”

“I wish he was my boyfriend!”

“Tell us! Tell us!”

“Next, Perpetua arranged for her son Arlecchino to apprentice with the butchers.”

(COLUMBINA rejoins the audience or moves DSR. Music resumes normal volume. PERPETUA exits SL.)

Part 4: A Butcher Shop, One Day Later

Scene 6

(BRIGHELLA and KATARINA enter SR as butchers. They wear butcher hats and white aprons covered with red stains. KATARINA carries two meat cleavers and some white butcher paper. BRIGHELLA carries a lamb. ARLECCHINO thinks the lamb is cute and tries to pet it, but BRIGHELLA brushes him away and exits briefly SL. BRIGHELLA returns almost immediately without the lamb and instead carrying a bundle of red fabric which he deposits offstage SR. ARLECCHINO is shocked and runs about trying to figure out what happened. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA make ARLECCHINO pull himself together.

Then, in a row, left to right, BRIGHELLA, ARLECCHINO, and KATARINA pantomime cutting meat and packaging it. BRIGHELLA cuts it first, ARLECCHINO cuts it second, and KATARINA wraps it up. ARLECCHINO eventually gets bored and decides to play a joke by pretending that BRIGHELLA has cut off his hand.

ARLECCHINO pretends to agonize with his hand stuck down his sleeve. BRIGHELLA hunts around on the ground for the hand. KATARINA tries to tend to the wound. ARLECCHINO then pulls out his hand to reveal his joke. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA are not amused and BRIGHELLA knocks ARLECCHINO down. They strip him of his apron, hat, and meat cleaver and order him away. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA exit SR.)

Part 5: A Town, Somewhere in a Place a Little like Italy, Same Day

Scene 7

(PERPETUA enters SL. PERPETUA gestures and berates ARLECCHINO. ARLECCHINO takes his sketchbook and pencil out of his pocket and begins to sketch PERPETUA. Music ends.)

PERPETUA

What am I going to do with you? You are hopeless! . . . Why me?

(PERPETUA walks away, a martyr. Then she turns back and notices with rage that ARLECCHINO is drawing instead of doing the walk of shame. PERPETUA gestures derisively at the sketchbook.)

PERPETUA (cont.)

Doodling again! What are you drawing?

ARLECCHINO

You, mother. Your gestures are fascinating.

(PERPETUA grabs the sketchbook then thrusts it back in horror during the next line.)

PERPETUA

Let me see that. . . . Aah! I don't look like that!

(ARLECCHINO gestures as if to say, "Sorry, but you do look like that, mother." PERPETUA adopts what she thinks is a beautiful pose, although it is rather hideous.)

PERPETUA (cont.)

Draw me the way I look!

ARLECCHINO

I'm trying.

(COLUMBINA turns away to stifle a laugh when PERPETUA says "witch" in the next line.)

PERPETUA

Then you can't draw! That doesn't look like me! That looks like some old witch! Where'd you learn to draw anyway?

ARLECCHINO

I want to capture the hook of your nose. Could you hold that scowl a little longer?

PERPETUA

(clapping her hand over her nose so her voice becomes nasally for part of the line)

My nose is perfect! . . . Can't draw a simple profile . . . You should get lessons from someone who knows what he's doing!

(getting an idea)

Don't go anywhere!

(PERPETUA exits SL.)

COLUMBINA

So Perpetua arranged for Arlecchino to apprentice with the royal court painter. And this time—are you surprised?—things went more smoothly. My friends, you can take it from here. Due to the magician’s curse, I have to go get enchanted.

(COLUMBINA dances offstage SR.)

Part 6: The Studio of the Royal Court Painters, a Few Weeks Later

Scene 8

(Music begins. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA enter SR as painters. They wear gray aprons/smocks covered with paint stains and each wields a painting prop and a small mirror, along with a similar apron/smock and prop for ARLECCHINO. They or stage crew also bring a chair onstage and place BRIGHELLA’s hat on it.

Music plays to indicate the passage of time. ARLECCHINO, BRIGHELLA, and KATARINA pantomime working side by side painting and doing related tasks. They use their mirrors for painting, looking in them at their paintings to check for errors.

All three appear to take great satisfaction with their work. BRIGHELLA sometimes glances over at ARLECCHINO or goes over to check on his painting. When BRIGHELLA believes he is unobserved by ARLECCHINO, BRIGHELLA manifests a mixture of pleasure and awe, both at ARLECCHINO’s work ethic and artistic talent.

ARLECCHINO dusts himself off, removes his apron as if going on break, and exits SL with his apron. Any painting properties can be left onstage. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA continue to pantomime painting and painting related tasks, occasionally using the mirrors to check their work. Music ends.)

BRIGHELLA

You know, Katarina, this new apprentice is something else. You were right!

KATARINA

You saw the sketches.

BRIGHELLA

I had my doubts. Terrible references. No education. The boy can’t even read!

KATARINA

Arlecchino’s had a pretty hard life. But he can draw! And he’s faster than you or me.

BRIGHELLA

He copies the paintings so accurately, I can't tell the original from the copy. He'll learn what I know, and even surpass me.

KATARINA

And continue your work when you're ready to retire?

BRIGHELLA

I'd like to paint forever, Katarina. But you have to be able to see. This detail work gets harder and harder.

KATARINA

If only our family had artistic talent and perfect vision!

BRIGHELLA

If the next court painter is one of my students . . . that would be . . .

(words fail him; it would be a dream come true)

We'll see. A few more years and the boy might be the right candidate. It's up to King Scaramuccia.

KATARINA

Are you going to recommend him to the king? Is that why you're meeting tonight?

BRIGHELLA

I doubt we're talking about my replacement. The king has other troubles.

KATARINA

They say he's having strange dreams.

(BRIGHELLA gestures as if to express "I have no idea," and begins to remove his apron and get his hat. If there are painting props, these can be left on or near the chair.)

KATARINA (cont.)

Poor king. No family left and still not married. No one to talk to when something's wrong. Except maybe you!

(BRIGHELLA manifests alarm at the idea of being the king's confidante.)

BRIGHELLA

I'll tell you all about it when I get back.

(BRIGHELLA exits SR. KATARINA keeps painting. As an afterthought, she calls:)

KATARINA

Wait, Brighella, when will you be back? Brighella!

(Hearing no answer, KATARINA hurries offstage SR, calling after BRIGHELLA.)

Scene 9

(KATARINA and ARLECCHINO enter SL. ARLECCHINO is again wearing his painter's apron. They begin to engage in painting tasks. During the following conversation, ARLECCHINO should "glow." He is not used to being good at something or receiving praise from an elder, especially a woman. KATARINA does not want to bombard the talented young waif with overt curiosity or scare him away, but she listens, glances, and ponders his statements with discreet compassion.

KATARINA looks up from her work and appears to glance at a clock or out the window.)

KATARINA

Brighella is still not back.

ARLECCHINO

(beckoning)

Mistress Katarina, can you tell me what you think?

(KATARINA comes over. She and ARLECCHINO back away from the painting and look at it.)

KATARINA

Where's your mirror?

(ARLECCHINO pulls out his mirror and is enlightened by what he sees.)

ARLECCHINO

I got a little hasty. . . . On the left side of the jaw, by the ear. I can fix it.

(KATARINA agrees, pleased that ARLECCHINO can identify the flaws in his own work.)

KATARINA

You captured the eyes. That portrait's coming along nicely.

(They return to their stations and resume work.)

ARLECCHINO

I love to paint. . . . You're lucky to do this all day.

KATARINA

You can keep painting if you work hard and persevere.

ARLECCHINO

I've messed up every apprenticeship before this. . . . Mother would say I shouldn't tell you that.

KATARINA

(smiling)

My brother and I aren't worried. We want someone who can draw.

ARLECCHINO

Did Master Brighella start with nothing—like me—and work his way up?

KATARINA

I wish I could tell you that. Brighella *is* a great painter. But . . . the old king owed our great-uncle a favor. Then the position for court painter came open.

ARLECCHINO

No one owes my family any favors.

KATARINA

You might have to look a little harder. Or be willing to travel. But you'll find something. You have considerable talent.

ARLECCHINO

I wouldn't mind traveling . . . and having some adventures! Since my father died, it's been one dull thing after another. This is the first work I've enjoyed.

KATARINA

You're doing well.

(A beat. KATARINA glances up and appears to see or hear the approach of BRIGHELLA. She is relieved; BRIGHELLA was gone longer than she expected.)

KATARINA (cont.)

There's Brighella. Let's start cleaning up and I'll put the kettle on.
(to BRIGHELLA)

That took a while!

Scene 10

(BRIGHELLA enters SR.)

KATARINA

What's the matter?

(BRIGHELLA removes his hat and sits down on the chair, putting his head in his hands. As the scene progresses, BRIGHELLA can remain seated, stand, or use the chair as needed to express his frustration.)

BRIGHELLA

Remember the king's strange dreams? Last night he dreamed of a princess, the Flower of Beauty. He has ordered me to paint a portrait of her. By tomorrow!

KATARINA

What? But that's not—

BRIGHELLA

How can I paint her portrait? I've never seen her!

KATARINA

Did the king make some kind of bet? What does he get if you succeed? What do you get?

BRIGHELLA

(sarcastically)

There's nothing in it for me. . . . Just part of my duties.

(as if reading and checking off an item on a job
description)

“Paint dream maiden.”

KATARINA

Did you tell the king—

BRIGHELLA

I couldn't change his mind.

KATARINA

What happens if you fail?

BRIGHELLA

(gloomily)

Look for work! Even if the maiden were here, it takes me days to paint a portrait. I'd ask you to try—

KATARINA

I'm no quicker. Is she real? Could we contact—

BRIGHELLA

The king's never seen her before.

ARLECCHINO

Excuse me, master, but did the king describe the Flower of Beauty? How does she look? Dark?
Light?

BRIGHELLA

She is dark and lovely, according to the king's description. But she's only a dream maiden. Who has
the skill to paint a maiden haunting the king's dreams?

ARLECCHINO

I don't say I have the skill. . . . Would you . . . let me try to paint the portrait of the Flower of Beauty? You can still tell the king it's your work.

BRIGHELLA

I don't like that idea. . . . Besides, my boy . . . You heard. There's no special reward.

ARLECCHINO

(gesturing dismissively at the idea of a reward)

I want you to stay court painter so I can keep learning. I'd like to try. Or do *you* want to?

BRIGHELLA

(protesting)

I'll fail. I don't know what she looks like and the portrait's due tomorrow. I can't paint that fast.

ARLECCHINO

Then let me try.

(*A beat.*)

BRIGHELLA

Arlecchino, finish cleaning up your station.

(*ARLECCHINO tidies up while BRIGHELLA takes KATARINA aside.*)

BRIGHELLA (cont.)

What's the game? Is the boy trying to curry favor with the king?

KATARINA

I think he wants to help. If you lose your position, he'll have to find a new place. He said you can tell the king you painted it.

BRIGHELLA

I'm not going to take credit for someone else's work—good or bad!

KATARINA

Well, you can't tell the king you farmed the job out to your apprentice.

BRIGHELLA

One more reason I should paint the portrait.

KATARINA

But you just said you can't.

BRIGHELLA

Nobody can!

KATARINA

If nobody can do it, then let Arlecchino try. He's fast enough to have something ready by tomorrow.

(A beat.)

BRIGHELLA

(to ARLECCHINO)

Arlecchino, we've agreed. If you paint something, I'll take it to the king.

(ARLECCHINO is elated.)

KATARINA

Come have some dinner and then begin.

ARLECCHINO

There's no time to eat!

(BRIGHELLA and KATARINA exit SR. ARLECCHINO gathers his painting materials and begins to pantomime painting. He occasionally uses his mirror. See the Stage Guide, Section 2 for ideas about representing the portrait of the Flower of Beauty. Music plays to indicate the passage of time. KATARINA enters SR later with a tray and sets it quietly on the chair. ARLECCHINO does not notice her and she tiptoes out so as not to disturb him.

ARLECCHINO continues to paint, then puts the finishing touches to the portrait and falls asleep.)

Scene 11

(Music ends. BRIGHELLA and KATARINA enter SR.)

BRIGHELLA

Let's see what the boy has done.

(BRIGHELLA and KATARINA gaze in wonder at the portrait.)

KATARINA

But does it look like the Flower of Beauty?

BRIGHELLA

How can I tell?

(rousing ARLECCHINO)

Arlecchino! Arlecchino, my boy! Is it ready? Is it her?

ARLECCHINO

(waking up)

Take it to the king. Let him judge.

(ARLECCHINO turns over and falls asleep again. Business/lazzo of BRIGHELLA and KATARINA rushing about the house and bumping into each other, as they get BRIGHELLA ready to go to the king.)

BRIGHELLA exits SR with his hat and the portrait of the Flower of Beauty, if using a real prop to represent this. KATARINA and ARLECCHINO exit SL. They or stage crew remove the chair, tray, and any painting props.)

Part 7: The Royal Palace, Same Day

Scene 12

(IL CAPITANO and ZANNI enter SR. During the following dialogue, ZANNI continually attempts to go to sleep on the nearest surface which will hold him up.)

IL CAPITANO

Was I scared?

(gesturing scornfully)

I'm Il Capitano. One look at my muscles and they ran.

(ZANNI pulls IL CAPITANO's arm, plumps the bicep like a pillow and lays his head on it to take a nap. IL CAPITANO pulls his arm violently away.)

IL CAPITANO (cont.)

Zanni, wake up! I'm telling you about my muscular prowess. Also: how lean and agile—
(tripping, flailing, and yelling)

Watch that loose board!

(ZANNI gets down on his hands and knees to look for the loose board. Meanwhile IL CAPITANO collects himself and strikes a heroic pose to regain his self-esteem.)

ZANNI

Where, Il Capitano, where? I don't see any loose board.

(Finding nothing, ZANNI stays lying down and begins to take a nap.)

IL CAPITANO

I see why the girls can't leave me alone. I'm like a smoldering volcano. A hot star! Zanni, what do you call the hottest stars?

ZANNI

White dwarf? Blue dwarf? Also known as a degenerate dwarf. They're like the corpses of stars—

IL CAPITANO

Never mind. How do the rest of you soldiers cope? Knowing you can't compete with my athletic ability?

(ZANNI sleepily begins a litany, using some or all of the following words. IL CAPITANO can interrupt at any point.)

ZANNI

Fragility? Puerility? Sterility? Futility? Juvenility? Imbecility? Unreliability? Vulnerability? Scurril—

IL CAPITANO

A-bil-i-ty! Zanni, are you listening?

(IL CAPITANO aims a kick at ZANNI. ZANNI grabs IL CAPITANO's foot, "plumps" it up, then puts his head on it.)

ZANNI

Pillow!

(IL CAPITANO hops on one leg trying to disengage his foot. ZANNI snuggles into the floor and his new "pillow.")

IL CAPITANO

I'm not your pillow! Stop it! Here comes the king!

ZANNI

Snuggles!

IL CAPITANO

He's really coming!

(ZANNI jumps up, still holding IL CAPITANO's foot. IL CAPITANO hops about on one foot and may have to lean on ZANNI to support himself during this business/lazzo.)

IL CAPITANO (cont.)

Zanni, let go! Let go of my—

Scene 13

(SCARAMUCCIA enters SL.)

SCARAMUCCIA

Zanni, put that pillow down. We have things to do.

(ZANNI dutifully drops IL CAPITANO's foot. IL CAPITANO hurriedly adjusts his clothing and strikes a pose.)

SCARAMUCCIA (cont.)

Gentlemen, I have had another strange dream. I saw the Flower of Beauty trapped in a strange tower. Has Brighella come?

ZANNI

I'll go check, your majesty.

(ZANNI exits SR.)

IL CAPITANO

Your majesty, if that painter makes trouble, I'll deal with him. No matter what he tries. I remember a battle where the enemy was so numerous my comrades ran away.

Scene 14

(ZANNI and BRIGHELLA enter SR, unseen by IL CAPITANO. ZANNI walks up to IL CAPITANO and taps him on the shoulder as IL CAPITANO continues to talk.)

IL CAPITANO

Did I run? I don't scare easily—Aah!

(screaming shrilly as ZANNI taps him)

Don't do that! You nearly gave me a heart attack!

ZANNI

(to IL CAPITANO, with amusement at his discomfiture)

We're back!

(to SCARAMUCCIA)

Sire, here is Brighella with the portrait.

IL CAPITANO

(belligerently, to BRIGHELLA)

Is that any way to answer the king?

BRIGHELLA

(nettled)

I haven't said anything yet.

IL CAPITANO

Well, don't. I have my eye on you.

SCARAMUCCIA

Il Capitano, that will do. Brighella, let us see the portrait.

(BRIGHELLA presents the portrait with great anxiety.)

SCARAMUCCIA (cont.)

That is the princess from my dream! The Flower of Beauty! . . . Brighella, you have been more than successful—

BRIGHELLA

To tell the truth, your majesty, it wasn't [me]—

(The word "me" dies on BRIGHELLA's lips as SCARAMUCCIA continues.)

SCARAMUCCIA

You must come with me when I go to find her. We may have to travel the whole world.

BRIGHELLA

You're going to look for the Flower of Beauty? Sire . . . she might not be . . . real!

SCARAMUCCIA

I am certain she exists. And she is in danger. We must leave as soon as possible.

BRIGHELLA

I'm an old man! I can't—

SCARAMUCCIA

I need you to paint my dreams. I had a new dream last night.

(While SCARAMUCCIA is still finishing the previous line, BRIGHELLA wordlessly pronounces "Paint your dreams?" then abruptly begins:)

BRIGHELLA

I don't think I can paint—

SCARAMUCCIA

You did an excellent job with this dream. You must come. Be back in an hour. We leave tonight.

(SCARAMUCCIA, IL CAPITANO, and ZANNI exit SL. As they exit, IL CAPITANO and ZANNI remove the portrait or pantomime removing it with ceremony. Astounded, BRIGHELLA slowly exits SR.)

Part 8: The Studio of the Royal Court Painters, Same Day

Scene 15

(KATARINA and ARLECCHINO enter SL, bringing the chair and any painting props back with them. They begin to pantomime painting-related tasks. BRIGHELLA enters SR, frustrated and angry. KATARINA and ARLECCHINO crowd round.)

KATARINA

Something's wrong. What happened?

ARLECCHINO

What did he say?

BRIGHELLA

The king's pleased with the portrait. It looks exactly like his dream.

(ARLECCHINO is astounded. Then he slowly begins to look pleased at his accomplishment.)

BRIGHELLA (cont.)

Now King Scaramuccia is going to seek the Flower of Beauty throughout the world. . . . And he orders me to go with him!

KATARINA

What in the world for?

BRIGHELLA

He says he'll have more dreams and wants me to paint them.

KATARINA

(racking her brain for ideas)

Tell the king . . . you'll never be able to do it again! You put all your soul into painting that portrait!

BRIGHELLA

He'll just think I'm trying to get out of the trip.

KATARINA

Sooner or later . . . he'll see you can't paint his dreams.

BRIGHELLA

Yes! He'll see I'm a fraud! But by that time, we might halfway round the world!

(KATARINA hesitates. Then she pulls BRIGHELLA aside for a private conversation.)

KATARINA

Can't you tell him about—

(KATARINA can gesture at ARLECCHINO rather than pronounce his name.)

BRIGHELLA

I was beginning to explain . . . Then the king ordered this crazy expedition. If I tell the truth now, the king will force the boy to go.

KATARINA

We'll think of something. When are you supposed to leave?

BRIGHELLA

In less than an hour!

(hopelessly and louder)

Traveling around to find a dream maiden . . . at my age!

ARLECCHINO

(speaking up)

Master Brighella? This is my fault—

BRIGHELLA

Don't blame yourself! You did excellent work.

(to KATARINA)

There's nothing we can do. I'll have to go.

ARLECCHINO

Wait, master, I have an idea. Tell the king you'll go. On one condition. That you take your son.

BRIGHELLA

But I don't have a son.

(Business/lazzo of ARLECCHINO pretending to be BRIGHELLA's son. He can throw his arms around BRIGHELLA or leap suddenly into his arms like a baby. BRIGHELLA is uncomfortable. KATARINA struggles to hide her amusement while remaining sympathetic to BRIGHELLA.)

ARLECCHINO

Papa!

KATARINA

He's rather convincing!

ARLECCHINO

Tell the king that I'll be a big help.

KATARINA

Arlecchino might be able to paint the dreams. I like this plan.

ARLECCHINO

When you're tired out, you can go home. I'll go on with the king.

BRIGHELLA

While I waltz home to safety? I can't let you do that for me. This journey could be dangerous—

ARLECCHINO

I want to go! I've never done anything exciting! Or been anywhere!

(A beat while KATARINA and BRIGHELLA exchange glances. Then BRIGHELLA gives in.)

BRIGHELLA

Pack your things.

(ARLECCHINO is ecstatic. More father-son business/lazzo can take place before ARLECCHINO, BRIGHELLA, and KATARINA exit SL. They, other actors, or stage-hands remove the chair and all painting props. Tumbling, music, and/or juggling would be appropriate at this break to indicate the passage of time.)

End of Act I

End of excerpt

Finish reading this script.

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CHARACTERS AND CASTING

Characters: (6 m; 4 w; 3 m/w).

Alphabetical List

ARLECCHINO (m)
BRIGHELLA (m)
COLUMBINA (w)
IL CAPITANO (m)
IL DOTTORE (m/w)
ISABELLA (w)
KATARINA (w)
PEDROLINO (m)
PERPETUA (w)
SCARAMUCCIA (m)
THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of
 JUAN and PEDRO (m/w)
ZANNI (m)

In Order of Appearance

COLUMBINA (w)
ARLECCHINO (m)
PERPETUA (w)
BRIGHELLA (m)
KATARINA (w)
IL CAPITANO (m)
ZANNI (m)
SCARAMUCCIA (m)
THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of JUAN
 and PEDRO (m/w)
ISABELLA (w)
IL DOTTORE (m/w)
PEDROLINO (m)

Male Roles

ARLECCHINO (m)
BRIGHELLA (m)
IL CAPITANO (m)
PEDROLINO (m)
SCARAMUCCIA (m)
ZANNI (m)

Female Roles

COLUMBINA (w)
ISABELLA (w)
KATARINA (w)
PERPETUA (w)

Roles which can be played by men or women

IL DOTTORE (m/w)
THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of JUAN and PEDRO (m/w). Technically male and of any age, these can be played by men or women.

Note: PEDROLINO has no lines in this play. He can play his normal 12-year-old persona, or a much younger infant or toddler version with the toy business/lazzo, or be cut entirely from the play. If PEDROLINO is cut, the child of SCARAMUCCIA and ISABELLA may be represented by a doll or bundle of fabric. In this case, ISABELLA would pose with the doll or bundle for the portrait in II.13.

Roles with Lines

ARLECCHINO (m)

BRIGHELLA (m)

COLUMBINA (w)

IL CAPITANO (m)

IL DOTTORE (m/w)

ISABELLA (w)

KATARINA (w)

PERPETUA (w)

SCARAMUCCIA (m)

THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of JUAN and PEDRO (m/w)

ZANNI (m)

Roles without Lines

PEDROLINO (m)

Off-stage Characters Who Can Play the Voice of Juan and/or Pedro

IL DOTTORE (m/w) (if IL DOTTORE exits upon becoming a statue in II.9)

KATARINA (w)

PEDROLINO (m)

PERPETUA (w)

Depending on costuming and the ability to change roles quickly, doubling/tripling can be arranged as follows. In either version, the actor/actress playing IL DOTTORE could also play PEDROLINO, leaving the actors playing IL CAPITANO and ZANNI to play a single role.

Version 1 Doubling/Tripling: Minimum (5 m; 3 w)

ARLECCHINO (m)

BRIGHELLA, IL DOTTORE (m)

SCARAMUCCIA (m)

COLUMBINA (w)

ISABELLA (w)

KATARINA, PERPETUA (w), THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of JUAN and PEDRO (m/w)

and

IL CAPITANO, PEDROLINO (m)

ZANNI (m)

or

IL CAPITANO (m)

PEDROLINO, ZANNI (m)

Version 2 Doubling/Tripling: Minimum (5 m; 3 w)

ARLECCHINO (m)

BRIGHELLA (m)

SCARAMUCCIA (m)

COLUMBINA (w)

IL DOTTORE, PERPETUA (w), THE TWO MYSTERIOUS VOICES of JUAN and PEDRO
(m/w)

ISABELLA, KATARINA (w)

and

IL CAPITANO, PEDROLINO (m)

ZANNI (m)

or

IL CAPITANO (m)

PEDROLINO, ZANNI (m)