

THE DENTIST

A Play in Three Acts

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>Pantalone:</u>	A rich old man.
<u>Flavio:</u>	Pantalone's son.
<u>Brighella:</u>	Servant to Pantalone.
<u>Isabella:</u>	A young noblewoman.
<u>Colombina:</u>	Maid to Isabella.
<u>Arlecchino:</u>	Servant to Isabella
<u>Il Dottore:</u>	An academician.
<u>Il Capitano:</u>	A military man.
<u>Zanni:</u>	Servant to Il Capitano.
<u>Pulcinella:</u>	A local bumpkin.

For Roger, my love and my muse

Notes From the Author

The script you hold in your hand, *The Dentist*, was inspired by a scenario published by Flaminio Scala in 1611, in his collection *Il Teatro Delle Favole Rappresentative*. I wrote *The Dentist* in the spirit of the *Commedia dell'arte*, with the characters fundamentally true to their original Renaissance personalities. I intended that the characters who would have originally been masked (Pantalone, Dottore, Arlecchino, Brighella, Pulcinella, Zanni, and Capitano) would be masked in a production of *The Dentist*. The play will work equally well without masks, however, as long as the characters retain their essential qualities and the playing style is as broad as it would be if masks were worn. The play should not be updated; the timeless themes will be brought out best if the play is produced either in the Renaissance period or in neutral costumes.

The scripted lines should be performed as written, with no words added or deleted, but there are indications throughout the script for the insertion of *lazzi* (invented business that illuminates the character or peps up the action) and improvisation, as the actors and director wish. There are also indications for the insertion of *grommelot* (gibberish made comprehensible by accompanying physicality, tone of voice, and intention). Several characters sing songs. These can be simple tunes that the actors invent. The Capitano's song should clearly be a tango, along the lines of "La Cumparsita." Music can be incorporated in the script, as desired, to start and end the show, cover set changes, etc.

Commedia dell'arte is an oral tradition, with techniques guarded jealously by family troupes as professional secrets. No comprehensive historical manual exists to guide the modern practitioner. I encourage you to look at ancient pictures, read Renaissance autobiographies and performing treatises, and draw on the deep well of comic principles that are as old as humanity itself. And, above all, use your imagination. Laugh with the masks, those ageless faces representing the enduring foibles of humanity. Laugh with them, rejoice with them. Revel with them in the sheer joy of being alive. In the words of theatre historian John Rudlin, "The holy purpose of comedy is to reaffirm life and hope...no one in the scenario is without the possibility of redemption." And as witnesses to, and participants in, the joyous theatrical event of *Commedia dell'arte*, the audience is redeemed, as well. *Evviva la Commedia!* -- Terry Glaser

ACT I

SETTING: A square in Rome.

AT RISE: All the characters are frozen in poses suggestive of their personalities and relationships. The lights, music, and action all start at the same time with a burst of energy and life. The characters interact, using only snatches of words and *grommelot*. Then they exit in ones and twos, leaving PANTALONE alone on stage. From a heavy bag hanging between his legs, he takes out a letter. He is very excited, licking his lips from time to time and making suggestive gestures to accompany the *grommelot* [indicated by xxxxx] he's mumbling, interspersed with recognizable words.

PANTALONE

Dearest Isabella, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, scrunchy scrunchy xxxxxxxxxxxx, ding-dong, xxxxxxxxxxx, bazoombas, xxxxxxxxxxx, cock-a-doodle-doo, xxxxxxxxxxx, hunga, hunga, hunga, xxxxxxxx

(LAZZO: He continues in this vein and concludes with:)

Living in the hope of an eternal union with my adored beloved, I await your reply and remain, as ever, rapturously, devotedly, fervently, rabidly, all the way down to the last little eensy weensy whisker of my overheated bodkin, yours -- Signore Pantalone.

(He sees the audience and speaks to them.)

Oops, didn't know anyone was listening. It's just a little love letter I wrote to Isabella -- the light of my life, the tallow for my candle, the flame for my wick. Very high-born lady she is, too. You gotta be a poet to write to her or she won't give you so much as a chuck under the chin. You gotta pull out all the stops, cobble up some tasty metaphors, compare her to a

PANTALONE (CONT.)

summer's day, a winter's night, autumnal brunch, the sun, the moon, the stars, you know the kind of ca-ca these damsels go for. I'm not sure I got the hang of this sort of poetic persiflage, but what difference does it make when you're as stinking rich as I am?! Yes, that's right, it's me, Signore Pantalone, the richest man this side of the Tiber, and the other side, too. Here, check out the family jewels and see for yourself!

(He rummages in the bag hanging between his legs and pulls out a handful of coins.)

Jingle, jingle,
Size up my dingle!
It's always in shape,
When you're hung like the grape!
Mmmmmmmmm, I could make a whole meal of Isabella, from soup to nuts, with a juicy joint in between. Not to mention the gravy.

(BRIGHELLA runs in, sniffing the air.)

BRIGHELLA

Is it lunch time, master?

PANTALONE

(To the audience)

We'll skip right to the nuts.

(To BRIGHELLA)

Now listen up, rumproast, I got an important job for you.

BRIGHELLA

Yes, master! What little task can I perform to earn your gratitude?

(To the audience)

And put num-nums in my belly?

PANTALONE

(Snapping his fingers)

Pen!

(BRIGHELLA pulls a pen out of his jacket and gives it to PANTALONE.)

PANTALONE

(Snapping his fingers)

Ink!

(BRIGHELLA takes an ink pot out of his pocket and gives it to PANTALONE.)

PANTALONE

(Snapping his fingers)

Table!

(BRIGHELLA drops down on all fours, with his rear end facing PANTALONE. PANTALONE folds the letter, places it on BRIGHELLA'S back and addresses it.)

PANTALONE

(As he writes all of the following directions on the letter)

To Donna Isabella, turn left at the butcher's, right at the baker's, up the little hill with the fancy leather shops, down into the valley with the really big stream, skip over the cow pasture, avoid the open-air sewer, go around the city dunghill, and straight on to the castle.

(He gives BRIGHELLA a swat on the rump to get him to stand up.)

Got all that?

BRIGHELLA

Yes, master!

(LAZZO: He runs around the stage, acting out what he describes.)

Left, right, up the hill, down the valley, over the stream, cut the crap, skirt the scum, dodge the dung, swim the moat, mount the steps, knock-knock, it's Brighella with a missive from my master, Pantalone.

BRIGHELLA (CONT.)

(He stops and pants for breath.)

In other words, you want me to take the shortcut to Isabella's house and give her your letter.

PANTALONE

No dawdling at the taphouse!

BRIGHELLA

No, master!

PANTALONE

No lollygagging at the cathouse.

BRIGHELLA

No, master!

PANTALONE

Run to *her* house forthwith and bring me her answer forthwith.

BRIGHELLA

Yes, master!

PANTALONE

I want you back here before the cock crows.

BRIGHELLA

(To the audience)

He'll be lucky if the cock grows.

(To PANTALONE)

Yes, master!

PANTALONE

(Rubbing his fingers together
to indicate money)

And if her answer is yes, there'll be a little something in it
for you.

BRIGHELLA

Yes, master!

PANTALONE

And if her answer is no, there'll be a little something in it
for you, as well.

(PANTALONE smacks BRIGHELLA.)

BRIGHELLA

No, master!

PANTALONE

Right, now that we've got that straight, get your ass in gear
and hoof it.

BRIGHELLA

(To PANTALONE, as he exits)

I promise I'll be back in a trice,
(To the audience, as he
exits)

You'll get your answer when I get my price!

PANTALONE

Now there's nothing to do but sit back and wait for the luscious
fruit to fall into my hands.

(PANTALONE reaches into his
codpiece, pulls out a bunch
of grapes, and bites into
them. From offstage is heard
the loud banging of a drum
and blaring of a horn.
PANTALONE drops the grapes in
surprise. ZANNI enters,
dressed as a one-man band,
with a drum, horn, castanets,
and other musical instruments
attached to his body,
shouting and banging the
drum.)

ZANNI

DA-da-DA! Here he comes! Make way, make way for the grand,
great, and glorious warrior, lover, poet, hero of the
battlefield and the bedchamber, and master chef. Numero Uno in
the flesh...

CAPITANO

(Entering)

Capitano Torbellino Furioso del Valle Inferno Conquistadoro
Rinoceronte con Sangre y Fuego y Tonnerre y Tormentas y
Stupendissimo Yeguada di Tres Huevos!

(With false modesty)

Soy yo.

ZANNI

DA-da-DA He arrives, the grand, great, and --

CAPITANO

All right, brown-nose, I'll take it from here.

(Addressing PANTALONE and the
audience in a grand manner)

CAPITANO (CONT.)

Be it known to one and all that I have arrived in your fair city on the back of Bucephalus, leaping o'er the mountains and running through the rills. It was the work of but a moment to cross the Alps and ford the seas, and now I require nothing more than a cold drink, a hot wench, and a map showing the local watering holes where a man of my persuasion may wet his whistle.

(ZANNI blows a whistle. A mouse crawls quietly onto the stage from the wings toward the bunch of grapes PANTALONE has dropped and makes its way slowly across the stage during the following dialogue.)

CAPITANO

(To PANTALONE)

Come here, my good man, and conduct me to the Biggest Wheel in town, that I may acquaint him with my arrival. Soy yo.

PANTALONE

See here, Capitano...

CAPITANO

Yo! Yo!

PANTALONE

Capitano Yo-yo, I'm not accustomed to being treated like a lackey. Be it known to the two of you that I am Don Pantalone de' Bisognosi, and I am not only the Biggest Wheel in town, I am the *only* wheel in town. It's thanks to me and my prodigious piles of ducats that any of the shiftless, ungrateful blanket pressers I live with have a crumb to eat or a rag to call their own. And the worst one of all is that lazy good-for-nothing son of mine, Flavio. If it weren't for the fact that I'm shamelessly exploiting the free-loading buggers, I'd throw them all out on the street and let the horseflies chew them to pieces.

CAPITANO

Horseflies? Pah! I spit on horseflies!

(He spits.)

Pah! You have to let the enemy know who's boss! From the moment I leapt from the womb, fully clad in breastplate and mail, roaring like a lion and stamping like a bull, the world took note of a new Alexander. Molten metal was my mother's milk and gunpowder was my gruel. I cut my teeth on nails and honed my

CAPITANO (CONT.)

heft on flint. My body is a fort, my head a cudgel, my breast an ax, my thighs a pair of sabers -- even my dick's a dirk!

ZANNI

You tell him, master! Show him your arm, show him your arm!

CAPITANO

You see this arm? This is the arm that hurled Hannibal to Hades in the Himalayas, pulverized Pyrrhus at Piraeus, and throttled Themistocles at Thermopylae.

ZANNI

Show him your leg, master, show him your leg!

CAPITANO

You see this leg? This is the leg that kicked Kleisthenes in the can in Carthage, booted Brutus in the bum at Byzantium, and kneed Nero in the nuts at Numidia.

ZANNI

Show him your --

CAPITANO

I'll tell you how I'd take care of your gaggle of moochers -- the same way I'd deal with any pack of pusillanimous poltroons.

(As CAPITANO describes how he would treat PANTALONE'S retinue, ZANNI accompanies him with his castanets. CAPITANO'S recitation turns into a flamenco dance.)

CAPITANO

I'd attack, assault, assail 'em. Bombard, beset, besiege 'em. Trample, trounce, transfix 'em. And then, just to be on the safe side, I'd grind them into little bits of sausage meat!

(He finishes the dance with a flourish.)

olé!

ZANNI

olé!

(Noticing the mouse as it nears CAPITANO)

Oh, look, master -- a mouse.

CAPITANO

What do you mean, a mouse?

ZANNI

You know, master, a harmless little ball of rodentious fluff.

CAPITANO

(Nonchalantly)

Oh, right, a mouse.

(Does a double-take and runs
out, screaming in terror.)

A MOUSE!!!

ZANNI

(Running out after CAPITANO,
beating the drum and yelling)

DA-da-DA! Here he comes! Make way, make way for the grand,
great, and glorious warrior, lover, poet, hero...

PANTALONE

Look who's calling the kettle black --
The hero who flees to mount his attack.
Meanwhile my ardor burns ever more fervent.
What's keeping that mangy moth-eaten servant!

(BRIGHELLA is heard singing
offstage.)

PANTALONE

And not a moment too soon!

BRIGHELLA

(Enters singing)

Don't hit me, master!
Would have got here faster,
Except for the disaster,
When I skidded in the pasture.
Did a little drop
Right into the flop!
Couldn't broach the castle
With cow chips up my asshole!
So I took a deviation
Past the final destination
'Cause I had an obligation
To wash off the encrustation.
Jumped into the creek
To make sure I wouldn't reek!
But I knew I'd get a whipping

BRIGHELLA (CONT.)

If I showed up wet and dripping,
 Thus I had to do some stripping
 Ere I ventured on courtshipping.
 So I sunbathed on the sly
 In order to get dry!

(Without a pause, stops
 singing and speaks)

And then I realize I'm lying in an enormous nest of crawling,
 stinging, biting things and I start itching like crazy, being
 stark naked and all, not to mention the fact that I have really
 sensitive skin -- you know how I'm always using salves and
 ointments -- so I jump up, grab my clothes, and even though
 they're not completely devoid of moisture, and don't get me
 started on the lice, I squeeze into them and start running down
 the road -- well you can't actually call it a road, I mean it's
 only wide enough for a single cart to pass, and we're not
 talking one of those big four-wheelers here -- when I hear the
 sound of thundering hooves, and this fierce-looking Cossack with
 a mustache that would be absolutely perfect for self-
 flagellation -- the mustache, not the Cossack, but I'm not
 ruling it out entirely -- rides up behind me, and my jerkin,
 being all sodden and stringy, gets caught in his stirrups, which
 makes it hard for him to steer the steed, so he scoops me up
 into the saddle, and it turns out -- and this is the part you
 won't believe -- he's on his way to the castle, where he trots
 across the drawbridge, boots me off the nag, and dumps me in the
 dirt, at which point I run nimbly up the steps, knock knock on
 the front door, and say it's Brighella with a missive from my
 master, Pantalone!

(There is a long silence
 while PANTALONE thinks this
 over.)

So what did she say? PANTALONE

Who? BRIGHELLA

(Yelling)
 Isabella, you idiot! PANTALONE

She said...no. BRIGHELLA

PANTALONE

(Reaming his ear out with his
finger)

Wait a minute, there must be something in my ear. I thought you
said --

BRIGHELLA

No.

PANTALONE

(Reaming his other ear out
with his finger)

Must be in both ears. I could have sworn I heard --

BRIGHELLA

No.

PANTALONE

(Wiping his fingers on his
codpiece)

All right, now that we've got that cleared up --

BRIGHELLA

And then she laughed.

PANTALONE

(Stalking BRIGHELLA)

Now I want to make sure I understand this correctly before I
separate your head from your body. Are you telling me that I
spent an entire day pouring my heart out to the lady of my
dreams, forswearing all food and drink, risking writer's cramp,
and postponing my customary enema, only to have her reject me
without so much as a by-your-leave?

BRIGHELLA

(Keeping out of PANTALONE'S
way)

Well, if you want to get technical --

PANTALONE

I don't want to get technical, you son of a slattern, I want to
get your flea-bitten hide!

(LAZZO: In a tearing rage,
PANTALONE chases BRIGHELLA
around the stage, swearing at

him and calling him every name in the book. He) finally catches him and gives him several good swats.)

BRIGHELLA

Wait, master, don't you want to hear the *bad* news?

PANTALONE

(Stopping in mid-swat)

Bad news?

BRIGHELLA

Well, it's nothing very important, just that Isabella said she wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pikestaff and the one she really loves is your son, Flavio.

PANTALONE

My son Flavio?!

BRIGHELLA

(Innocently)

He *is* yours, isn't he?

PANTALONE

(Getting ready to complete the swat)

Of course he's mine, you clodpate! Just for that I'll beat you within an inch of your flying buttress!

(Stopping in mid-swat again)

On second thought, I have a better idea. Go and find that snivelling scoundrel Flavio and bring him here so I can separate *his* head from *his* body. Now hop to it!

(PANTALONE gives BRIGHELLA a mighty swat that sends him flying toward the exit.)

BRIGHELLA

(As he exits)

Flavio will be a most unhappy fella, When he gets this latest message from Brighella.

(From offstage is heard the loud banging of a drum and blaring of a horn. ZANNI enters.)

ZANNI

DA-da-DA! Here he comes! Make way, make way for the grand, great, and glorious vanquisher of vicious vermin, the man who, unaccompanied and unaided, singlehandedly --

CAPITANO

(Running in, brandishing his sword ferociously)

Took that mouse by the scruff of its villainous neck and knocked the stuffing out of it! Never has the world seen such a monumental battle 'twixt man and beast! The varlet put up a valiant fight, but he was no match for the Savior of Salamanca. To and fro we parried and thrust, fro and to we thrust and parried, until at last I had the vile creature cornered. He begged for mercy, but mercy was there none. "Repent, rodent!" I cried. And with one mighty slash I ran the monster through and cut him to ribbons. The only thing left was the squeak.

(ZANNI bursts into wild applause.)

CAPITANO (Modestly)

It was nothing, really.

(CAPITANO blows on his sword and puts it back in his belt.)

PANTALONE

Listen, I can't stand here gabbing all day. Some people have *real* problems.

CAPITANO

Capitano Torbellino Furioso del Valle Inferno --

ZANNI

Etcetera, etcetera!

CAPITANO

Is always ready to offer succor to those in distress. Tell me your trouble and I'll fix it on the double.

PANTALONE

There's this lady, see, and every time I look at her I get all hot and bothered but she won't give me the time of day. I've tried everything -- poetry, prose, monetary reimbursement -- but nothing works. It's hard, I tell you, it's hard!

CAPITANO

Pantalone, my friend, this is your lucky day. Women are my meat and drink. The lady hasn't been born who can resist the charms of the Big Bang of Bilbao. All you have to do is follow my recipe and this --

PANTALONE

Isabella --

CAPITANO

This Isabella will fall into your arms like a ripe chicken into a pot of paella.

(Snapping his fingers to
ZANNI)

Music!

(ZANNI strikes up the introduction to a tango. CAPITANO grabs PANTALONE in a classic tango pose. As ZANNI plays, CAPITANO sings the following song, to the tune of a tango like "La Cumparsita," and leads the surprised but compliant PANTALONE in a fiery tango.)

CAPITANO

First you fold her
Into your hot embrace,
Then you hold her
While you are face to face.
Squeeze her tightly
Against your manly breast,
Gliding lightly,
Let nature do the rest.
Whisper sweetly
Words of desire,
Indiscreetly
You stoke her fire.
Her defenses
Will crumble in a trice,
If you take my advice.
Today!
And when you've got her
In position,
Make sure you've not forgot your
Keen ambition.

CAPITANO (CONT.)

You kiss her burning lips
 Until her virtue slips
 And she is hot to stray!
 If you keep a firm intention,
 You'll never spend a lonely night,
 Playing solitaire
 Until you lose your hair,
 You go insane and wreck your sight!
 Now I've told you
 All my instructions.
 If you're bold, you
 Will find seduction's
 Not so thorny
 If you recapture
 When you're horny
 These rules for rapture.
 Just be thankful
 For the machismo
 That keeps your tank full
 And snaps your gizmo
 To attention.
 That is the soldier's way!
 Attack without delay!
 Olé!

(The dance ends with a
 magnificent flourish, and
 CAPITANO runs out brandishing
 his sword and yelling
 "Charge!" ZANNI runs out
 after him.)

PANTALONE

Now I know the best way to impress her,
 That Spaniard is one hell of a professor!
 But it's my son who needs an education --

DOTTORE

(Offstage)
 And as the immortal Horace says...

PANTALONE

The good Dottore's my salvation!

DOTTORE

(Entering)

Ad susceptum perficiendu causa latet, vis est notissima ubi mel ibi apes aquila non capit muscas et vir prudens non contra ventum mingita. In other words, don't pee into the wind.

PANTALONE

Good morning, Dottore!

DOTTORE

Let us examine that proposition. Common opinion, *communis opinio*, would have us believe that "good" is a *sui generis* semasiological unit referring, *in hoc situ*, to the climatic conditions prevailing in the *antemeridian*. *Cum adhuc studium*, however, we will find that this is a *contradictio in terminis*.

PANTALONE

(To the audience)

I'll contradict his terminus if he doesn't button it.

(To DOTTORE)

Ever in awe of your superior knowledge, my dear Dottore, not to mention your enormous collection of picture books, I come to you seeking an answer to the age-old question of lack of success in the realm of animal magnetism. In other words -- why can't I get any?

DOTTORE

First, we must consider the origins of the words "animal" and "magnetism." Animal, from the Latin *animalis*, having breath or breathing or breathful, coming, *prima facie*, from *anima, id est*, that is, breath, *sublata causa, tollitur effectus*, the cause being effectively causative of the effect, to *animonomous*, the state of bestiality, as distinguished, *de facto a priori*, from *humanonomous*, or person-like, to the *usus quotidianus* of daily usage meaning...animal. Magnetism --

PANTALONE

(To the audience)

Anybody got a muzzle?

(To DOTTORE)

Yes, yes, Dottore, I get the general drift, but let's skip right to the nub of the matter -- I've got love troubles.

DOTTORE

(Nodding sympathetically)

Amor et melle et felle est fecundissimus. But don't worry, I have a surefire cure for the clap.