

A Woman of Great Virtue, or, What's in a Name?

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Dramatis Personae

Pantalone, a wealthy merchant and a miser

Isabella, his daughter, a shoe lover

Brighella, his servant

Dottore, doctor of medicine and law, who also minored in women's studies

Virginio, his son

Spinetta, his servant.

Beatrice, a courtesan, and the proprietrix of the house of negotiable virtue

Scene 1

Spinetta enters

Spinetta starts complaining about all the work she needs to do to organize the wedding of Isabella and Virginio. Finally, after many misadventures, both fathers have agreed to their marriage, and the wedding is next week. She hears someone's coming, hides and eavesdrops.

Pantalone and Brighella enter

Pantalone is outraged about the upcoming marriage – the cost! The cost! And the work! He has no idea how and why he agreed to it. Brighella is bored, until Pantalone mentions that Brighella's pay will have to be cut, and he will have to do extra chores to organize the wedding. Brighella and Pantalone argue about pay. Brighella brings up Pantalone's sources of income, Pantalone comes up with increasingly ridiculous excuses why he has no money. Finally, Pantalone pulls out his account books, and realizes that Isabella spent the entire wedding budget on a pair of shoes. Pantalone is outraged, calls the wedding off, and sends Brighella to settle the formalities. Spinetta hears all.

Spinetta exits

Pantalone exits

Scene 2

Enter Isabella and a pair of shoes.

Isabella sees and greets Brighella. He doesn't answer, and the two stare at each other. Isabella says that she knows that Pantalone is upset and wants to call off the wedding. She also knows that Brighella is sent to break up her and Virginio. She can see right through him! And she can refute all of his

arguments! Isabella starts bringing up all the excuses to call off the wedding, and then argues against them. She takes both sides of the argument, argues for and against Brighella, and eventually comes up with an irrefutable excuse to call the wedding off. Isabella breaks up in tears, curses Brighella, who wasn't able to say a word in the entire scene, throws the wedding shoes in his face and storms out.

Brighella attempts to pick up the shoes, Isabella marches in, picks up the shoes, and storms out again.

Isabella exits
Brighella exits

Scene 3

Virginio enters

Virginio talks about his love of Isabella and about the wedding.

Dottore and Spinetta enter.

Spinetta tells Dottore and Virginio that Pantalone called off the wedding. Dottore is outraged. Virginio is heart broken. Spinetta tries to console Virginio who is epically inconsolable. Dottore, outraged, curses Pantalone, and swears on Spinetta's broom that there will a marriage between two households no matter what! Virginio looks frightened, Spinetta takes the broom away.

All exit

Scene 4

Virginio and Beatrice enter

Virginio is heartbroken. He is on a rebound, and goes to Beatrice for consolation. Beatrice asks Virginio directly, what is it that he wants, exactly? Virginio says that he doesn't know, but that's where his father goes when he is upset. Beatrice drops progressively more and more transparent hints, Virginio is clueless, and, as Beatrice finds out, broke.

Beatrice really doesn't need Virginio especially as he tries to pay for her services in bad poetry, all dedicated to Isabella. Beatrice refuses his advances and his poetry.

Virginio laments the loss of Isabella and describes her beauty and virtue in sickening detail, and wails that no woman in town compares to her. Beatrice points out that beauty is only skin deep, and virtue is a deeper hidden quality. Also, if Virginio wants virtue, he came to a wrong establishment. Beatrice then describes how true virtue is a hidden gem, and can be hidden behind a plain or even repulsive appearance, hoping that Virginio will lower his standards and go elsewhere. Virginio takes it all to heart.

Virginio exits
Beatrice exits

Scene 5

Virginio enters

He is determined to find a woman of great virtue, worthy of his love and poetry. He goes over all girls, starting with Isabella (not accessible), Donatella, Ariella, Cinderella, Ella, findings faults with each one. Lists a bunch of names ending with -ella, eventually stops with Brighella. Virginio goes into a tirade about how ugly and horrible Brighella is, and realizes that if Brighella ends with -ella, which is a woman's name, Brighella is a woman, and if he is so nasty and ugly, he must be a woman of great virtue! Because Beatrice said so, and Beatrice knows women. Virginio vows to discover Brighella's inner beauty.

Brighella enters

Brighella is very smug about having broken up the wedding without saying a single word!

Virginio acts besotted with Brighella's inner beauty and virtue, Brighella first responds with threats, than freaks out and runs away., with Virginio in pursuit.

Brighella and Virginio exit

Scene 6

Dottore and Spinetta enter

Dottore is enraged and swears that there will be a wedding one way or another, and he will get a dowry out of Pantalone somehow. Spinetta very reasonably points out that there are no other children in either household - so who will marry whom? Dottore eyes Spinetta and says that if worst comes to worst he will marry her off, but the wedding will go on – now, it's a matter of principle. Spinetta argues that she is a woman, and, if he marries her off to Isabella, he will lose a dowry, and a house servant. Dottore responds that, in this case Spinetta will disguise herself as a man, and the dowry is as good as his. While Spinetta, shocked, digests all of this,

Virginio enters

Virginio declares his love for Brighella, and wants to marry. Dottore decides he will get the dowry out of Pantalone one way or the other, and agrees to marriage. Tells Spinetta “I told you so!” and sends still shocked Spinetta to Pantalone's house to make the arrangements.

Spinetta exits
Dottore and Virginio exit

Scene 7

Isabella and Pantalone enter

Pantalone tries to convince Isabella to return the really expensive shoes, Isabella is inconsolable about the cancelled wedding, and is keeping the shoes, as the remembrance of her romance.

Spinetta enters

Spinetta relays the marriage proposal from Virginio to “a virtuous maiden” in Pantalone’s household. Isabella is all excited, until Spinetta mentions Brighella, and then Isabella is shocked.

Brighella enters

Isabella is kicking and screaming, starts a catfight, knocks Brighella down to the ground, and calls him a bunch of names (bitch, slut, whore, etc), blames him for stealing her true love and swears (Spinetta hides the broom) that she will get Virginio back.

Isabella exits

Pantalone is upset that Brighella is secretly a woman, Brighella protests. Brighella asks Spinetta for help. Spinetta realizes, that this marriage is a good way to get back at Brighella, for all his schemes, and that the addition of another servant to the household will half her work, and insists that Brighella is female.

Pantalone is upset, that Brighella is secretly a woman – she is dirty, slovenly, lazy, and spends too much time at Beatrice's, more than is appropriate for a woman of his household. Spinetta asks what amount of time is appropriate.

Brighella protests that he's a male.

Pantalone drags him to Dottore for a physical. Brighella claims he has witnesses, and demands a testimony from a character witness – a.k.a. Beatrice.

Pantalone sends Spinetta to bring Beatrice to Dottore’s house for a testimony.

Spinetta exits
Pantalone and Brighella exit

Scene 8

Pantalone and Brighella enter
Dottore and Virginio enter

Pantalone demands a physical for Brighella, Dottore, who “minored in women's studies” in addition to medicine, is happy to oblige. Dottore performs a physical and declares Brighella a healthy girl, either because it plays into his plans, or maybe because he truly doesn't know any better. Brighella, in desperation, unties/drops his pants/starts undressing, yelling “don't you know the difference?!", but only earns disinterested glances from Pantalone and Dottore, who are busy discussing the wedding plans. Virginio comments that “she” shouldn't take “her” clothes off before her marriage, as it is unbecoming a lady, plus, if “she” gets naked, there really would be no way to tell her from a man – men wear pants, and women skirts, and that’s how you tell them apart, you know.

Spinetta and Beatrice enter

Brighella begs Beatrice to confirm that he's a man, as she has plenty of empirical knowledge. Beatrice declares Brighella a woman, and an illegitimate daughter of Pantalone and Beatrice, secretly smuggled out of the brothel, and into the Pantalone's household, for a proper upbringing, disguised in man's clothing to protect her virtue and protect her from unwelcome advances.

All rejoice, except Brighella, who is dumbstruck and just stares at Beatrice. Pantalone hugs his newfound daughter, and declares that the wedding is on!

Virginio asks Beatrice how old she is then, if she is Brighella's mother. Beatrice explains that “Beatrice” is actually a hereditary title, and it all happened long before her time, and the secret of Brighella’s birth has been passed on, from Beatrice to Beatrice, until the time was right to reveal it.

Brighella’s protestations and confessions, that he is a man and a criminal are ignored by all except Virginio, who extols Brighella’s extreme modesty.

Spinetta, Dottore and Virginio leave to prepare for the wedding.

Dottore, Virginio and Spinetta exit

Scene 9

Isabella enters

Pantalone urges Isabella to greet her newly found sister. Another catfight ensues.
Pantalone leaves, dragging out Isabella

Pantalone and Isabella exit

Brighella demands to know why Beatrice sold him out. She replies that she didn't, yet, but that is her intent. Beatrice takes out a bunch of unpaid bills Brighella incurred for her services. Brighella is horrified, and says he has no money: he intended to swindle money out of Pantalone, but with the upcoming wedding, he has been especially tight fisted. Beatrice says she knows all of that, but she

needs her money, and Brighella's dowry would do nicely. Brighella swears he will do whatever she asks as long as he doesn't have to marry Virginio.

Both exit

Scene 10

All are present for the wedding, except Beatrice and Brighella

Virginio and Dottore are upset because the bride is late, and Isabella is overjoyed.

Beatrice and Brighella enter

Brighella is silent and is wearing a nun's habit.

Beatrice declares that the virtuous Brighella is way too virtuous for a marriage, and would rather join a convent at St. Beatrice's, where she would spend her days in quiet contemplation, as she doesn't care for Pantalone's and Virginio's money, and renounces it all other than the customary convent fees. The customary convent fees are to be paid by Brighella's father, Pantalone, to Beatrice, who as the abbess of St. Beatrice's will handle all the formalities.

Pantalone is surprised that Beatrice also runs a convent, Dottore is not surprised because he sees nuns there all the time.

Virginio is heartbroken at the loss of his virtuous bride, but Isabella steps right up, in really spiffy wedding shoes, and, Virginio happily agrees to the marriage, which proceeds.

All exit

THE END
