

Carlo Goldoni (Venice, 1707-Paris, 1793)

The Servant of Two Masters (Arlecchino Servitore di Due Patroni)
(Pisa, 1745)

Dramatic Personae

Pantalone de' Bisognosi, an elderly Venetian merchant
Clarice, his daughter, in love with Silvio
Doctor Lombardi, a lawyer, graduate of the University of Bologna
Silvio, his son, in love with Clarice
Beatrice, young woman from Torino, disguised as her brother
 Federigo Rasponi
Florindo, of Torino, loved by Beatrice
Brighella, an innkeeper
Smeraldina, Clarice's maid
Truffaldino Balocchio, of Bergamo, servant of Beatrice, and later
 also servant of Florindo
A Servant of Brighella; a Servant of Pantalone; two Porters

Scene: Venice

ACT I

Clarice, daughter of the Venetian merchant Pantalone, and Silvio, son of the lawyer Doctor Lombardi, are betrothed in the presence of their fathers, Clarice's maid Smeraldina, and the innkeeper Brighella. Originally, Clarice had been promised to Pantalone's agent in Torino, Federigo Rasponi. Federigo, however, has been reported killed in a duel with his sister Beatrice's suitor, Florindo. Beatrice has fled Torino dressed as a man and carrying letters of credit belonging to her brother. In Verona on her journey, she has engaged Truffaldino as her servant. Truffaldino enters and reports that his master Federigo (really Beatrice in disguise) is about to arrive in Venice for a visit. If that is true, then Clarice's betrothal to Silvio is invalid. The two lovers are dismayed. Meanwhile, Smeraldina has her eye on Truffaldino; the attraction is mutual.

Beatrice, pretending to be her brother Federigo, enters and claims the hand of Clarice, upsetting everyone by her unexpected "resurrection" from the dead. But Pantalone accepts the situation and agrees to lend money to Beatrice, who has left Torino with only the letters of credit. Beatrice will stay at Brighella's inn. Brighella, who had known Beatrice and her brother back in Torino, recognizes Beatrice but promises to keep her secret and help her.

Florindo arrives with a Porter carrying his trunk and engages Truffaldino, already servant to Beatrice, as his servant. This dual service will henceforth produce the confusion and mistaken identity in the comedy as Truffaldino pretends to Florindo that there is a second servant named Pasqual (actually himself) serving Beatrice. Truffaldino helps another Porter to carry in Beatrice's trunk. He has letters to give to Florindo, but being illiterate, gives him one instead that is addressed to Beatrice. Florindo reads the letter and is astonished to find that both Beatrice and also Federigo (supposedly) are now in Venice. So Truffaldino then reseals the letter with moistened bread and takes it to Beatrice. He also surrenders to Florindo the purse of money that Pantalone had lent to Beatrice.

Pantalone insists to Clarice that she must forgo Silvio and honor the earlier arrangement to marry Federigo. Beatrice reveals to Clarice and Smeraldina that she is not her brother after all and swears both of them to secrecy until she finds Florindo.

ACT II

The lawyer Lombardi insists to Pantalone that his son Silvio has the legal right to Clarice. Silvio enters and challenges Pantalone to a duel for supporting Federigo's claim. But Beatrice intervenes and overcomes Silvio at swordplay. She "spares" Silvio, who now rejects Clarice as faithless even though she insists that she truly loves him. She threatens to kill herself with his sword, but Smeraldina interferes and chides Silvio for spurning Clarice. Silvio says that Clarice has just been putting on an act, and he still threatens to kill Federigo (Beatrice). Florindo is beginning to despair of finding Beatrice. He gives the purse back to Truffaldino to secure it in his trunk and exits. But Beatrice enters, takes the purse from Truffaldino, and gives him a letter of credit for 40,000 scudi to put in her trunk. From Brighella, Truffaldino orders two separate dinners for his two masters. To show how the various dishes should be arranged on the table, he tears pieces of paper from the letter of credit and places the scraps of paper on the table. Truffaldino and Smeraldina have a big wooing scene when she brings in a letter from Clarice to Beatrice. Beatrice beats Truffaldino for having opened her letter, and Florindo beats him for having let Beatrice beat him. Each master orders Truffaldino to unpack his trunk and air out his clothes,

ACT III

Truffaldino is unpacking the two trunks when Florindo enters. Truffaldino helps Florindo put on his coat, except that in his confusion he gives Florindo a coat from the wrong trunk. The coat is Beatrice's, and Florindo finds his own portrait in one of the pockets. Then Truffaldino tries to get out of the mess by explaining that the trunk had once belonged to a recently deceased master of his whose body "Pasqual" had mailed home in a coffin. A distraught Florindo exits. Beatrice, entering with Pantalone, asks Truffaldino to fetch her notebook from her trunk. Truffaldino tries to get out of trouble, after handing her papers mistakenly from Florindo's trunk by resorting to the deceased "master" trick again. Beatrice reveals to Pantalone and Truffaldino that she is a woman, now bereaved of her Florindo.

Pantalone explains to Doctor Lombardi that Federigo is definitely deceased, and so Silvio can have Clarice for his bride. But Lombardi now will not accept her "at second hand" for his son. Silvio enters to challenge Pantalone again, but Pantalone explains that the supposed rival was really the woman, Beatrice. Unseen by each other, the despondent Beatrice and Florindo enter, ready to stab themselves with daggers but each restrained by a servant. When they see each other alive, however, they embrace rapturously. Truffaldino asks both masters, separately, to allow him to marry Smeraldina. Clarice enters, along with her father followed by an anxious Silvio and his father. Silvio pleads with Clarice, but she continues to berate him until finally she forgives him and falls into his arms. Truffaldino admits that he has been the servant of two masters and that his having been so has been the cause of so much confusion. He is forgiven, and, like the other two pairs of lovers, he and Smeraldina will also wed.