

**MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE**  
*a comedy of errors*  
done in the style of *Commedia dell'Arte*  
written by Carla du Preez

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CHARACTERS:

<i>Pantalone</i>	-	a wealthy widower
<i>Orazio</i>	-	<i>Pantalone's</i> son, in love with <i>Flaminia</i>
<i>Isabella</i>	-	<i>Pantalone's</i> daughter, a spoilt brat
<i>Columbina</i>	-	<i>Isabella's</i> clever servant
<i>Pulcinello</i>	-	<i>Pantalone's</i> clumsy but loyal servant
<i>Il Dottore</i>	-	<i>Pantalone's</i> stingy neighbour
<i>Flaminia</i>	-	<i>Il Dottore's</i> daughter, in love with <i>Orazio</i>
<i>Flavio</i>	-	<i>Il Dottore's</i> son, in love with <i>Isabella</i>
<i>Captain Spavento</i>	-	a suave traveller
<i>Arlecchino</i>	-	<i>Spavento's</i> grudge-bearing servant

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1. THE INTRODUCTION

- *Arlecchino* (*Captain Spavento's* clever servant) and *Pulcinello* (*Pantalone's* hapless servant) come on stage as narrators
- they give background on the families and draw the houses on two screens
- behind the screens, in a shadow play, we see the different households
- in *Pantalone's* house there is great activity as they prepare for *Isabella's* birthday party that night
- in the doctor's house there is great consternation - he owes *Pantalone* money
- in-between we see *Orazio* and *Flaminia* in a fiery embrace, oblivious to everything around them

2. THE DOCTOR'S PLAN

- still in a shadow play, we see the doctor counting money and making plans to get money to pay his debt to *Pantalone*
- he has a brilliant idea and writes a letter to *Captain Spavento*, asking him to kidnap *Isabella* so they can get ransom money from *Pantalone*
- he tells *Flavio* to deliver the letter to the captain

### 3. THE CAPTAIN'S ARRIVAL

- *Spavento* arrives in the harbour with his servant (*Arlecchino*) rowing him to shore in a little boat
- *Flavio* awaits him and hands over the letter
- while *Spavento* reads the letter, *Arlecchino* reads over his master's shoulder and realizes what the plans are
- *Arlecchino* has an old grudge against his master and decides to reveal the doctor's plans, which in turn will make the captain very unpopular indeed

### 4. THE ROMANTIC STROLL

- *Isabella* enters on *Flavio*'s arm, strolling along the harbour
- she notices the very charming *Captain Spavento* and allows him to kiss her hand
- enthralled by his attention, she drops her parasol into the water
- *Flavio* jumps in after it, almost drowning in his attempts to save the soggy umbrella

### 5. THE KIDNAPPING

- during the commotion, the captain grabs *Isabella* and throws her into his boat
- he rows them out to sea, towards a tiny island where he plans to keep her hostage
- there he writes a ransom letter to *Pantalone*, puts it in a bottle and drops it in the sea
- the letter reads: "*Sir, I have kidnapped your daughter. I want \$ 1 million for her safe return. Signed, Captain ... Otnevaps!*"

### 6. THE SERVANTS'S SCHEME

- *Arlecchino* helps *Flavio* out of the water and draws his attention away from the kidnapped *Isabella* by starting a conversation
- they start walking towards the market where they meet *Columbina*
- *Arlecchino* notices the striking resemblance between *Columbina* and *Isabella* and has a brilliant idea
- he shares his plan with *Columbina* who immediately agrees to help

### 7. THE PARTY

- we are at *Pantalone*'s house where *Isabella*'s birthday party will take place shortly
- behind a screen, in a shadow play, *Columbina* disguises herself as *Isabella* in the hope that they will unmask the kidnappers
- in front of the screen *Pantalone* makes a final inspection before the guests arrive
- the doctor and *Spavento* arrive together, sharing their evil secret
- *Columbina* enters as *Isabella*, wearing a mask to disguise her identity
- *Spavento* and the doctor are shocked at "*Isabella*'s" arrival and start quarreling - who is lying to whom?

## 8. THE DANCE

- *Spavento* asks "*Isabella*" to dance in the hope that he may discover her true identity
- he repeatedly pulls her hair, thinking it's a wig (which it isn't)
- "*Isabella*" slaps him, turns away and bumps into *Pulcinello*
- *Pulcinello* stumbles over *Orazio* and *Flaminia* while they are in a breathless embrace
- *Pulcinello* accidentally pulls off "*Isabella*'s" mask and leaves everyone gasping at *Columbina*'s pretty face
- a terrible fight ensues with chase scenes and slapsticks
- *Orazio* attempts to propose marriage to *Flaminia* but she can't hear him
- she screams at everyone to stop fighting
- they all stop and run towards the harbour to rescue or recapture the true *Isabella*
- *Orazio* and *Flaminia* continue their courting
- *Pulcinello* remains holding the mask

## 9. THE RESCUE

- in various little boats the groups row out to sea towards the tiny island
- it's a race against time - if *Spavento* gets there first he will certainly murder the fair *Isabella*
- *Flavio* and *Arlecchino* get to *Isabella* just in time to release her
- *Spavento* arrives and *Flavio* has to ward him off
- a sword fight ensues
- meanwhile *Pantalone* and the doctor are also at each other's throats
- eventually *Spavento* and the doctor end up fighting each other while *Pantalone*, *Isabella*, *Flavio*, *Columbina* and *Arlecchino* escape

## 10. THE END

- *Pulcinello* arrives at the harbour, still perplexed at all the activity around him
- a bottle drifts past him
- he leans over, opens it, reads the letter and bursts out crying: "*But I don't have a daughter!*"