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Dramatic Publishing



MOLIÈRE'S
**The Tricks
of Scapin**

One-act comedy adapted by
AURAND HARRIS

The Tricks of Scapin

A superb adaptation for one-act play contests,
classroom study and mini-productions.

Comedy. Adapted by Aurand Harris. From the play by Molière.
Cast: 7m., 3w. The comic tricks of that rascal Scapin, the farcical complications of mistaken identity, and the slapstick elements of commedia dell'arte make this one of Molière's most appealing comedies. In this short adaptation, brisk dialogue, short scenes and mounting climaxes retain the joyous spirit of this French classic. The part of Scapin, an actor's dream, was played originally by Molière himself. *Open stage. Neapolitan costumes of the 17th century. Approximate running time: 40 minutes. Code: TN3*

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THE TRICKS OF SCAPIN

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Introduction

Jean Baptiste Poquelin took the name of “Molière” at the age of twenty-one when he became a founder of a theatre group called *Illustre Théâtre*. Molière, the playwright, became a name known in France and throughout the theatre world as the master of modern comedy.

Molière was born January 15, 1622. He studied Latin and Greek and received a law degree in 1642. Forsaking law, he turned to the theatre and became an actor, director, administrator, and one of the great playwrights of France. In 1659 his play, *The Precious Maidens Ridiculed*, established him as the most popular comic playwright of his day. Following that he wrote a succession of acclaimed satiric comedies, including *A Doctor in Spite of Himself* and *Scapin*. He died at the age of fifty-five. Seven years later, the King, uniting Molière’s theatre company with a rival company, formed a French National Theatre, *The Comédie Française*, which became known as the House of Molière.

French drama, which led the world in the seventeenth century, was dominated by the formal neoclassical tragedies of Corneille and Racine. Molière introduced social satire, which gave comedy respectability equal to tragedy. This was comedy which appealed to the intellect rather than to the emotions. The characters are less real than the situations, as in *A Doctor in Spite of Himself*, where Sganarelle, a realistic woodcutter, becomes an improbable doctor. Molière’s plays evoke, as George Meredith observed, “thoughtful laughter.”

Molière’s plays have elements of *commedia dell’ arte*. He was undoubtedly influenced by an Italian *commedia* troupe, directed by Tiberio Fiorelli, which at one time shared the *Théâtre du Petit Bourbon* with Molière’s company. Molière’s plays took the form of Roman comedies which he made into great theatrical farces. As Shakespeare did, Molière used other people’s plots to which he gave his own unique touch. He endowed stock types with contemporary characterizations, developing a genre often called “character comedy.”

Molière’s plays were usually written in the formal Alexandrine couplets and adhered to the unities of time, place and action. Plays written

in such graceful poetry are often difficult to translate into English prose.

A Doctor in Spite of Himself was first performed August 6, 1666. The idea for it was suggested by a medieval painting, *The Rascally Apothecary*. The script evolved from an earlier Molière farce, *The Shuttlecock Doctor*. The play, an immediate success, is a joyous comedy, with only an occasional satirical thrust at the medical profession.

In *Scapin*, Molière returned to pure farce. It was first performed in Paris at the *Théâtre du Palais-Royal*, May 24, 1671. Molière himself played the title role, where “on his own stage he was one of the marvels of his time.”

CAST

ARGANTE, *father of Octavio and Zerbinetta*

GERONTE, *father of Leander and Hyacintha*

OCTAVIO, *son of Argante and lover of Hyacintha*

LEANDER, *son of Geronte and lover of Zerbinetta*

ZERBINETTA, *a gypsy girl, later recognized as the daughter of
Argante*

HYACINTHA, *daughter of Geronte and lover of Octavio*

SCAPIN, *servant of Leander*

SILVESTER, *servant to Octavio*

NURSE, *companion to Hyacintha*

CARLE, *a rogue*

SCENE: *A street in Naples, Italy*

The Tricks of Scapin

(A street in Naples, Italy. SILVESTER, servant of Octavio, enters. OCTAVIO, a rich, handsome young gentleman, enters.)

OCTAVIO: Silvester! Silvester!

SILVESTER: Yes, my master.

OCTAVIO: Is it true the news I hear from the harbor? Is it true that my father is coming back today?

SILVESTER: It is true.

OCTAVIO: And he is arriving this very morning?

SILVESTER: This very morning.

OCTAVIO: And he is bringing with him a young lady?

SILVESTER: A very PRETTY young lady!

OCTAVIO: The daughter of Signor Geronte?

SILVESTER: The daughter of Signor Geronte.

OCTAVIO: And—my father intends that I shall marry her?

SILVESTER: You shall marry her.

OCTAVIO: Oh, what a desperate, desperate situation I am in.

SILVESTER: You should have thought of that before WE got into it.

(SCAPIN, servant to Leander, enters. He is a clever, likeable rascal.)

OCTAVIO: *(Sees and points at Scapin.)* Scapin.

SILVESTER: Scapin?

OCTAVIO: He is the cleverest scamp in Italy. He can get us out of this trouble.

SILVESTER: Or – get us into more trouble!

OCTAVIO: My dear Scapin. I am in despair.

SCAPIN: Despair?

SILVESTER: We are done for.

SCAPIN: Done for what?

OCTAVIO: My father is bringing the daughter of Signor Geronte back to Naples. He intends for me to marry her.

SCAPIN: And what is there so terrible in that?

OCTAVIO: Oh, you little know my big trouble.

SCAPIN: (*Eager for gossip.*) You have only to tell me.

OCTAVIO: Two months ago Signor Geronte –

SCAPIN: My master.

OCTAVIO: Your master and my father set out on a voyage together. Silvester was to look after me –

SCAPIN: And I was to look after young Leander.

OCTAVIO: Soon afterwards Leander met a young gypsy girl –

SCAPIN: (*Romantically.*) And fell in love¹ with her.

OCTAVIO: And I met a young girl – a stranger in Naples – alone with only her old nurse with her. A sweet, beautiful girl.

SCAPIN: Ah, now we are coming to the point.

SILVESTER: He married her three days ago.

SCAPIN: Married her!

OCTAVIO: So you see, I cannot marry Signor Geronte's daughter.

SILVESTER: Pst. Pst. Oh, master, look. She comes.

OCTAVIO: My dear.

SCAPIN: His dear?

SILVESTER: His wife.

HYACINTHA: (*She enters. She is beautiful, feminine, and proper. She is followed by NURSE, who stands aside.*) Octavio!

OCTAVIO: Hyacinth! (*They rush to each other.*)

HYACINTHA: Oh, is it true, as my Nurse tells me, that your father is back and that he intends you to marry someone else?

OCTAVIO: It is true, dear Hyacintha.

HYACINTHA: Oh, what a dreadful shock for me!

OCTAVIO: Surely you do not doubt my love?

HYACINTHA: Not you. It is your father I fear.

OCTAVIO: He cannot make me give you up. I have never seen the girl he brings for me to marry, but I hate her already. Do not cry, Hyacintha.

HYACINTHA: What are we to do?

OCTAVIO: Help is at hand.

HYACINTHA: So soon?

OCTAVIO: Scapin!

SCAPIN: No, no, no, no. I have sworn that I will never meddle again in other people's business. But—if you both ask very nicely—perhaps—

OCTAVIO: I IMPLORE you. Help us!

SCAPIN: And you?

HYACINTHA: I beseech you. Help us.

SCAPIN: Well— I am persuaded. Go—I will do what I can.

HYACINTHA: Oh, thank you. (*To Octavio.*) Good bye. (*Turns.*) Oh dear. (*Exits, followed by NURSE.*)

OCTAVIO: (*Looking after her.*) My dear.

SCAPIN: Now! First you must prepare yourself to meet your father.

OCTAVIO: I tremble at the thought.

SCAPIN: You must stand firm. Come, pull yourself together. Hold your head up . . . stand tall . . . look fierce.

OCTAVIO: (*Trying.*) Like this?

SCAPIN: We will rehearse. I will be your father and I am coming home. (*Walks and talks like Father.*) “Ah, there you are, you scoundrel, you good for nothing. You have disgraced your father. Stop! How dare you come near me after what you have done. Is this the way you obey me.” (*OCTAVIO opens his mouth but no words come out.*) “Is this the way you show your respect for me?” (*OCTAVIO works his jaw but no sound comes. SCAPIN whispers.*) Speak—speak up. (*OCTAVIO nods and takes a deep breath. SCAPIN imitates Father again.*) “Have you married without your father’s consent?”

OCTAVIO: I—I—I—

SCAPIN: “Answer me, you rogue!”

OCTAVIO: I—I—I—I—I—

SCAPIN: What is wrong?

OCTAVIO: You sound so much like my father I cannot speak.

SCAPIN: Try again. Be brave. Be commanding!

OCTAVIO: Yes, I will put on a bold front. (*Strikes a pose.*)

SCAPIN: Are you sure?

OCTAVIO: Very sure.

SCAPIN: Good. Because here comes your father!

OCTAVIO: Heaven help me. I am done for! (*Exits.*)

SCAPIN: Stop, Octavio. Be firm. Be— He is gone. Well, WE will meet the old man. Come, Silvester.

SILVESTER: (*Shaking.*) What shall I tell my master?

SCAPIN: Leave the talking to me. Just back me up.

SILVESTER: I will be right behind you. (*SCAPIN stands bravely. SILVESTER hides behind him. ARGANTE enters. He is old and rich and a miser.*)

ARGANTE: Disaster! Ruin! Oh, such a calamity should happen to me!

SCAPIN: He has already heard.

ARGANTE: Such a fool thing to do!

SCAPIN: Let us listen to what he says.

ARGANTE: I'd like to know excuses he will make about this marriage.

SCAPIN: (*Aside.*) We are trying to think of something.

ARGANTE: Will he try to deny it?

SCAPIN: (*Aside.*) No, we never thought of that.

ARGANTE: Or will he try to justify it?

SCAPIN: (*Aside.*) We might do that.

ARGANTE: Or fool me with some made-up story?

SCAPIN: (*Aside.*) That is what we will do!

ARGANTE: He can tell what tale he likes. I will not believe him.

SCAPIN: (*Aside.*) We shall see about that!

ARGANTE: As for that scoundrel Silvester, I will have the hide off him.

SILVESTER: (*Aside.*) I knew I would not come out alive!
(*SILVESTER with high steps starts off. ARGANTE turns and sees him.*)

ARGANTE: Ha, there you are! You are a fine fellow to leave in charge of a family. (*SILVESTER freezes.*)

SCAPIN: Signor Argante! I am happy to see you have returned.

ARGANTE: Good day, Scapin. (*In front of Scapin, speaks sarcastically to Silvester.*) You have carried out my orders nicely, haven't you! My son has behaved well in my absence, hasn't he!

SCAPIN: (*Taps Argante on shoulder.*) You seem in good health, Signor.

ARGANTE: Fairly well, thank you. (*To Silvester.*) You don't say a word. You don't open your mouth.

SCAPIN: (*Taps Argante on shoulder.*) Did you have a pleasant journey?

ARGANTE: Yes, a very pleasant journey! Do let me work off my temper!

SCAPIN: Work off your temper?

ARGANTE: Yes, work off my temper!

SCAPIN: On whom, sir?

ARGANTE: On that scoundrel there! (*Turns to Silvester.*)

SCAPIN: (*Taps Argante on shoulder.*) But why?

ARGANTE: Haven't you heard what has happened while I was away? My son married without my consent!

SCAPIN: But have you heard the whole story?

ARGANTE: The whole story?

SCAPIN: He could not escape from marrying her?

ARGANTE: Escape? Why was he involved?

SCAPIN: Remember he is not as wise as you. Remember he is young, and the young do foolish things. For example, my master, young Leander, he has – in spite of all my teaching – he has done something much worse than your son.

ARGANTE: (*Gloating.*) Young Leander is in trouble?

SCAPIN: Oh, far worse than Octavio. But let me tell you what happened to your son, Octavio. He sees this young lady who takes a liking to him – for he takes after you, who are a favorite with the ladies – he finds her charming, goes to see her, sighs sweet words – and then suddenly he is taken by surprise by her kinsmen and made – by brute force – to promise to marry her.

ARGANTE: Made to by force?

SCAPIN: Would you want him to let them kill him? It is better to be married than to be dead.

ARGANTE: A threat on his life! The law will dissolve this marriage.

SCAPIN: Oh, no!

ARGANTE: They used violence against my son.

SCAPIN: He will never admit it.

ARGANTE: Never admit it?

SCAPIN: Never. He would never admit he was a coward, unworthy of his brave father.

ARGANTE: I will disinherit him!

SCAPIN: Oh, no!

ARGANTE: Who is going to stop me?

SCAPIN: You will.

ARGANTE: I?

SCAPIN: You are too fond of him.

ARGANTE: No, I'm not.

SCAPIN: Oh, yes, you are.

ARGANTE: I tell you, I am not.

SCAPIN: Everyone knows you are a sweet tempered, forgiving, good-natured gentleman.

ARGANTE: I am not a bit good-natured. I can be as ill-natured as anyone. (*Points at Silvester.*) You! Go! Go and find my son, while I go and see Signor Geronte and tell him that his daughter can never marry my son.

SCAPIN: Signor, if I can be of help to you, I am at your service.

ARGANTE: Thank you. Ah, why is he my only child? Why could Heaven not have spared me my little daughter – that I could leave my money to her! (*Exits.*)

SCAPIN: (*Happily.*) Ah, we have started to help.

SILVESTER: Help? You have helped to make him angry.

SCAPIN: Don't you see – the plot is laid. Signor Argante will now meet one of the bride's kinsmen, a fierce, fighting, frightening –

SILVESTER: But she has no kinsmen. She arrived in Naples with only an old nurse.

SCAPIN: We will invent a kinsman. Someone about your height . . . your size . . . your strength . . . you!

SILVESTER: Mel

SCAPIN: You – disguised with a big hat, a big cape, a deep voice –

SILVESTER: No. Leave me out of this.

SCAPIN: You are already in it.

SILVESTER: It will mean three years in the galleys!

SCAPIN: Now, stand straight . . . hand on your sword . . . frown . . . scowl . . . sneer . . . strut like a scoundrel. (*SILVESTER tries.*) Perfect. We will disguise your face and voice, and no one will recognize you. Come. (*SCAPIN marches off, followed by SILVESTER, who imitates him. ARGANTE enters, followed by GERONTE.*)

ARGANTE: Ah, Signor Geronte, my son has made an old man of me. He is already married—behind my back—when my one wish was for him to marry your daughter.

GERONTE: (*He is rich, old, and a miser.*) It is said, bad behavior in a young man can be the result of bad upbringing.

ARGANTE: What are you getting at?

GERONTE: What am I getting at?

ARGANTE: Yes.

GERONTE: Perhaps if you had brought your son, Octavio, up properly, he would never have played you such a trick.

ARGANTE: Oh, and I suppose you have brought Leander, your son, up better?

GERONTE: I have. Leander would never treat me the way your son has disgraced you.

ARGANTE: Oh, he wouldn't? Well, I hear that your precious son whom you have brought up so well, has done something far worse than mine.

GERONTE: What are you saying. Have you heard something about MY son? What? Speak out.

ARGANTE: Ask your servant Scapin.

GERONTE: Scapin?

ARGANTE: He can give you the full details. Good bye. I am off to see my lawyer and find out what I can do with my son! (*Exits.*)

GERONTE: What can he mean? My son has done something worse than his son? What can be worse than to marry without your father's consent! Ah, here comes my son now. I shall find out. Leander!

LEANDER: (*Enters. He is a rich young man, handsome, virile, and impulsive.*) Why, father! Welcome home.

GERONTE: Not so fast. We have something to settle first.

LEANDER: What is it?

GERONTE: That is what I want to know. What has been going on here? What have you been doing while I have been away?

LEANDER: Nothing.

GERONTE: Nothing? That is not what Scapin says.

LEANDER: Scapin?

GERONTE: Ah, ha! That gives you a fright.

LEANDER: He has told you something about me?

GERONTE: We will settle this at home. Be off. And if you have disgraced me, I'll disown you, disinherit you! (*Exits.*)

LEANDER: So Scapin has told my father my secrets. What a rascal he is! But I swear he shall pay for this!

(*OCTAVIO enters, followed by SCAPIN.*)

OCTAVIO: My dear Scapin, I am most grateful. Your plan is excellent. My father will give his consent to the marriage—and he will also give me the money I need.

LEANDER: Ah, Scapin. I am delighted to see you—Signor Troublemaker!

SCAPIN: At your service, master.

LEANDER: Oh, you will make a joke of it, will you? I will teach you to joke with me! (*Hand on dagger.*)

SCAPIN: (*On knees.*) Oh, master—

OCTAVIO: Leander!

LEANDER: No, Octavio, don't interfere.

SCAPIN: But, master—

LEANDER: Just let me get my hands on him!

SCAPIN: But, master, what have I done to you?

LEANDER: What have you done? Traitor! (*Tries to strike.*)

OCTAVIO: Stop—stop!

LEANDER: No, Octavio, I will make him confess. I know what tricks you have been up to. You thought I wouldn't find out, but I have. Now, confess, or I will run you through with my blade!

SCAPIN: Something I have done, master?

LEANDER: Yes.

SCAPIN: I confess I can't think of anything.

LEANDER: (*Threatens.*) You can't think of anything?

SCAPIN: Oh, yes, master. I remember. I confess that one evening you sent me with a watch to the young gypsy girl you are in love with, and I came with my clothes torn and bloody, and I told you that I had been robbed of the watch. It was me, master—I kept the watch for myself.

LEANDER: I am glad to know the truth about that. But—that is not what I mean.

SCAPIN: It isn't?

LEANDER: It is something more serious—and I am going to have it out of you!

SCAPIN: I can't think of anything else, master.

LEANDER: You can't think of anything else? (*Twists his ear.*)

SCAPIN: Ouch!

LEANDER: There is something else. Confess—confess what you just told my father about me.

SCAPIN: Your father?

LEANDER: Yes, my father!

SCAPIN: I have not even seen him since he returned.