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Harlequin Holds the Bag

by

DAVID and SUSAN GROTE

Freely adapted from a sketch by
Beaumarchais



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(HARLEQUIN HOLDS THE BAG)

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Harlequin Holds the Bag

A One-Act Comedy

For 4m. and 2w.

CHARACTERS

PANTALONE Isabelle's father, a businessman, old,
short and a miser
ISABELLE..... pretty young girl in love with Leander
LEANDER..... handsome young man in love with Isabelle
HARLEQUIN Pantalone's valet, a bumpkin
SCAPINO Leander's valet
COLUMBINE..... Isabelle's attractive young neighbor

TIME: Anytime.

PLACE: A street in Paris.

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Harlequin Holds the Bag

SCENE: *A street in a suburban neighborhood of Paris, in front of PANTALONE's house. COLUMBINE enters in front of the curtain and addresses the audience.*

COLUMBINE. HURRY! HURRY! HURRY! “Harlequin Holds the Bag!” is about to begin. Step right up, ladies and gentlemen, step right up. Don’t miss this show of shows: “Harlequin Holds the Bag.” You’ve heard about it, you’ve dreamed about it, and now you can see it with your very own eyes! You don’t want to miss a single exciting moment. Step right up, ladies and gentlemen, step right up!

Now, there are those actors—and you know the kind I mean—who would stand out here and swear to you that their company had performed before the crowned heads of Europe and Asia. We could say that, but why should we? The play’s the thing! We leave such false claims to the charlatans who try to sell pretty packages with nothing in them. We provide the real thing.

And just to prove our honest intentions, we’ll give you a taste of our company. My name is Columbine. (*More casual.*) Actually, I don’t have much of a part in this one, I play a neighbor. It’s important, but not nearly as big as I deserve. Nor, I might add, as big as it was before our (*Sarcastic.*) “leading lady” saw how good I was in it. Listen, I could tell you some things ...

(*SCAPINO enters.*)

SCAPINO. Let's get on with it.

COLUMBINE. Very well. (*Returning to her announcing voice.*) This, of course, is Scapino, (*He gives a big bow.*) world-renowned for his wit and invention, (*Aside.*) and who would have been my boyfriend if *someone* hadn't cut the script to shreds ...

(*SCAPINO exits and HARLEQUIN enters and bows.*)

COLUMBINE (*cont'd, announcing*). And this is Harlequin, who will play our bumpkin servant ... (*HARLEQUIN bows. Aside.*) a real case of typecasting, I can tell you. (*HARLEQUIN glares and exits. Announcing.*) And then there's our Hero, Monsieur Leander ...

(*LEANDER enters, bows.*)

COLUMBINE (*cont'd*). ... a young man whose talents are only exceeded by his looks. (*LEANDER exits. Aside.*) Which gives you some idea of his talent. (*Announcing.*) And then the father, our very own Pantalone ...

(*PANTALONE enters, bows.*)

COLUMBINE (*cont'd*). ... an actor without peer in his profession. (*Aside.*) Or so it would appear. (*PANTALONE glares and exits. Announcing.*) And last but not least, (*With a particularly phony smile.*) there's our Leading Lady, the beautiful Isabelle,

(*ISABELLE enters, bows.*)

COLUMBINE (*cont'd*). ... a beauty beyond compare. (*ISABELLE bows again, blows a few kisses, perhaps winks, and then exits.*) And an actress beyond the powers of description. If you didn't see her with your own eyes, you'd never

believe it. I am asked to remind you that this is the very same Isabelle who attracted so much attention in Sweden, in Persia, and even in Bavaria, before she came here. But what she was doing there, we must of course leave to your imagination and discretion. (*Aside.*) Heaven knows, she wasn't taking acting lessons.

But enough of that. You can see for yourselves when we present myself—and all our company—in our world famous production of “Harlequin Holds the Bag.” And you'll miss it all if you stand around out here. So step right up, get your tickets, now, before they're all gone. And take your places for the one, the only, the finest, “Harlequin Holds the Bag.”

(COLUMBINE steps behind curtain, then curtain opens and we see her walking down the street. ISABELLE enters from the house.)

COLUMBINE. Isabelle! What are you doing out this morning? It's practically dawn.

ISABELLE. My goodness! So that's what the dawn looks like. It is kind of pretty, isn't it? But I still don't think it's worth losing sleep for. I know they say it's the early bird that gets the worm, but who wants to eat worms? (*Giggles.*) I mean, a girl has to get her beauty sleep, doesn't she? If she doesn't she's going to end up catching some worm after all, because that's the best she can do.

COLUMBINE. Oh, Isabelle, don't you think of anything else?

ISABELLE. Why should I? As my sainted mother used to say, “If a girl doesn't have what it takes, she has to take what she can get.” Well, I know what I've got, and I intend to get the most from it, I can tell you. Any bags you see under these eyes will come from the bank, not from lack of sleep.

COLUMBINE. If that's how you feel about it, what're you doing out here at this hour of the morning?

ISABELLE. That's just it. All of a sudden, I just can't sleep a wink.

COLUMBINE. Oh, poor Isabelle. Love is definitely not a bowl of cherries.

ISABELLE. You can say that again. Just when I thought I had everything under control, Love walked right in and knocked on my heart so hard that I couldn't stand it any more. So I opened up the door, and who do you think was there? Leander!

COLUMBINE. I can't believe it. Not the Boy Next Door?

ISABELLE. Have you seen him since he went off to the army? Let me tell you, he may have been a boy when he left, but he was certainly no boy when he got back.

COLUMBINE (*laughing*). What is that, the fifth big romance this year? This too shall pass, just like the others did

ISABELLE. You know, that's what I thought, too. Then Leander came along, and he looked so cu-uu-te! I just jumped right in, feet first. What's a girl to do? And the worst part of it is, he feels the same way, too.

COLUMBINE. Then what's the problem, dear?

ISABELLE (*demurely*). Well, you know. (*COLUMBINE shakes her head "no."*) You see, there he is, so handsome and so wonderful, and there I am, so beautiful and so wonderful. How long can a girl resist temptation like that? And then, as if things weren't bad enough already, Daddy gets all weird on me. He can't stand Leander.

COLUMBINE. But why!?

ISABELLE. Who knows? Thinks he's a bad influence, or something. He starts locking me up in my room everyday, like I'm one of his bags of silver. If he had his way, I'd never see so much as the hair of a man young enough to have his own hair.

COLUMBINE. If that's the case, how'd you get out here this morning?

ISABELLE. You know how Daddy is. He's always got some deal cooking. But this one must be something really special, 'cause when he went out, he forgot to lock the door.

COLUMBINE. So what're you gonna do?

ISABELLE. I don't know. I sit up all night worrying about it—do I give in to Leander and make Daddy mad, or do I give in to Daddy and lose my Leander? I love my Daddy, so I want to do what he wants. But I love my Leander, and want to do what he wants, too. And thinking about it is sooo hard! My face is turning into Bag City. So now I've got to find Leander and make him do something before Daddy gets home and locks me back up. If Leander really wants me, he'll find some way out of this mess.

COLUMBINE. And if he doesn't?

ISABELLE. Don't even think something like that. I couldn't bear it (*Looking off.*) Here he comes now. And isn't he the cutest thing?

(LEANDER and SCAPINO enter.)

COLUMBINE (*fixing her hair*). Say, you're right. He's not bad!

ISABELLE. Get hold of yourself. This one's mine. (*COLUMBINE crosses with ISABELLE and smiles at LEANDER. To COLUMBINE.*) Isn't there something you need to be doing?

COLUMBINE. Oh, all right. (*She exits down the street, glancing back at LEANDER before she goes. LEANDER rushes to ISABELLE.*)

LEANDER. Isabelle!

ISABELLE. Leander! (*They hug.*)

LEANDER (*to SCAPINO*). You stand over there and keep watch, in case someone comes along and sees us. And so we can talk privately.

SCAPINO. Right! Of course! You can depend on me. Just like always—I'm the bodyguard, while you take care of the body.

LEANDER. Watch it! There's a lady here. Get moving. (*SCAPINO exits, and LEANDER and ISABELLE hug again. Breaking the hug and looking around.*) But where's your father?

ISABELLE. Gone, I don't know where.

LEANDER. My valet Scapino told me that he had gone off to Paris, but I didn't believe him. When's he coming back?

ISABELLE. I don't know that either.

LEANDER. Then what are we waiting for? How often do we get a chance like this? (*He takes her hand as if to lead her off, but she resists.*)

ISABELLE. Just a minute. There's something we have to discuss here.

LEANDER. Can't it wait? It's not often we get a break like this. (*She still resists.*) But my dearest, my darling, my turtle-dove, opportunity knocks but seldom, and nothing ventured, nothing gained. Thus, while the cat's away, the mice will play, or, perhaps I should say, there's no time like the present. Let's make hay while the sun shines. (*She still resists.*)

ISABELLE. Restrain yourself.

LEANDER. But how can I restrain myself? When I behold you, my heart leaps up. It's like a fever in the blood, and great balls of fire burn within me.

ISABELLE. Oooh! How gallant! (*He takes her hand and leads her off, but she resists again.*) But just hold your horses for a minute.

LEANDER. But the very look of you spurs me on! Just a glance from those flashing eyes, and my heart gallops away. With such a prize in sight, I'm champing at the bit.

ISABELLE (*wavering*). Goodness! How do you think of things like that? You really know how to talk to a girl, that's for sure. But beautiful words aren't enough anymore. It's time for action.

LEANDER (*pulling hand again*). I couldn't agree more.

ISABELLE. Not that kind of action.

LEANDER (*forlorn*). Oh.

ISABELLE. I mean, it's time we settled things once and for all. What are you going to do about my father?

LEANDER. Your father?

ISABELLE. My father. I can't go on like this.

LEANDER. Neither can I.

ISABELLE. Then don't you think you should do something about it?

LEANDER. What do you mean, do something? Haven't I been trying to do something for weeks? That's all I ever do, try to do something. I've asked you to do it, I've told you to do it, I've even begged you on bended knee to do it. And you just say no.

ISABELLE. What do you mean?

LEANDER. What do you mean, what do I mean? How can you forget something like that? If your father will never consent to our marriage, then we must run away together. And I mean it!

ISABELLE. Oh-ho-ho! Not that again! I've heard that song and dance before, and I'm not buying it. (*LEANDER throws up his arms and walks away; she goes to him.*) Now, don't be angry. It's not that I don't like you, and God knows it's not that I don't want to do it, but a girl has to worry about appearances. I'm the number-one catch in the neighborhood, and I have an image to uphold. Everybody around here knows me, and knows you, too, for that matter. How would it look if we both disappeared at the same time?

LEANDER. What would it matter, my sweetheart, my dear, lovely, lovable Isabelle? We could still get married; we'd just get married later, that's all.

ISABELLE. Oh, sure, right! What good will that do? That's as good as coming right out and saying I *have* to get married. I'd

rather Daddy locked me away forever than know that every time I walked down the street, people would be saying that—and worse—behind my back. Besides, what’s the point of a wedding if nobody’s there to feel jealous of you? When this girl goes down the aisle, she goes down the aisle in front of all her friends, and in white. If you expect to do anything at all with me, you better figure out a way for us to do that. And more important, you better figure out a way to do it soon.

LEANDER. Well, if you feel that way about it ...

ISABELLE. I certainly do!

LEANDER. Oh! Right. Well, as we military fellows say, the best defense is a good attack, and you can be sure that I’ll have something figured out in the next 24 hours. Why, nothing’s impossible when I put my mind to it.

(SCAPINO has returned during this speech, and pauses at edge of stage.)

SCAPINO *(aside)*. He means, when he puts *my* mind to it.

ISABELLE *(moving back into a hug)*. That’s more like the Leander I love.

LEANDER. Where love is in the air, nothing is impossible.
(They start to kiss, but are interrupted by SCAPINO.)

SCAPINO. There’s more than Love in the air. Her old man’s on his way.

ISABELLE *(breaking away)*. Oh, no!

SCAPINO. See for yourself if you don’t believe me. He’s coming along the road, skipping along with a smile that would glow in the dark.

ISABELLE. My father? Smiling?

LEANDER. She’s right. That certainly doesn’t sound like the old grouch.

SCAPINO. Well, like it or not, it’s him, and he’s got old Harlequin tagging along behind him, loaded down like a jackass.

ISABELLE. Then you must go.

LEANDER. But Isabelle.

ISABELLE. You must. If Daddy sees us both out here, we're done for. Now leave!

LEANDER. But Isabelle, when will you no longer say such cruel things to me?

ISABELLE. When you've figured out a way to get me out of this mess. I'll be waiting. You know. *(She exits into the house. LEANDER looks off toward street.)*

SCAPINO. Ooops! Too late. Here he comes!

LEANDER. I've got to hide! *(They hide.)*

(PANTALONE enters, followed by HARLEQUIN, laden with a valise which appears to be very heavy. When they reach C, PANTALONE stops suddenly, and HARLEQUIN, who has his head down from the weight, runs into him.)

PANTALONE. Hold it, Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN. I'm trying, Monsieur! *(HARLEQUIN struggles desperately with the bag, which has been overbalanced when he collided with PANTALONE. He almost loses control, saves it, loses his balance, tips it onto PANTALONE, who then is almost crushed by the weight, so that HARLEQUIN has to pull it off of him. When HARLEQUIN gets it back up, he is overbalanced again, and an extensive routine develops as he wavers around the stage, leaning too far forward, then too far back, his legs and arms wavering, then stiffening, straining like an over-matched weight lifter, until at long last, with much effort and huffing and puffing and wailing, forced to his knees, he manages to get the bag safely back up on his back where it began.)*

PANTALONE. What are you doing?

HARLEQUIN. You said hold it, Monsieur.

PANTALONE. I meant stop so you could put the bag down. (*HARLEQUIN looks at PANTALONE, mumbles incoherently under his breath, and drops the bag. Naturally, it lands on his foot, and he yells and hops madly around the stage holding on to his toe. PANTALONE looks at him as if he were an idiot, and then sits down to rest on the bag.*) Will you stop this nonsense and come here? I need to talk to you.

HARLEQUIN (*standing still on one leg, holding his toe*).
Couldn't that have waited, Monsieur? I mean, we were practically home.

PANTALONE. Little pitchers have big ears. I want to talk to you where no one could overhear us.

HARLEQUIN. In the middle of the street?

PANTALONE. Where else? (*HARLEQUIN drops his foot, wincing when it hits the ground.*)

HARLEQUIN. Now that you mention it, there's this little tavern around the corner ...

PANTALONE. Why would we need a tavern?

HARLEQUIN (*limping around, looking for a place to sit, glancing pointedly at PANTALONE, who has made himself quite comfortable on the bags*). Well, for one thing, we could sit down.

PANTALONE. I'm quite comfortable here, thank you.

HARLEQUIN. Somehow, I thought you would say that. But we would also be quite alone, no one could hear us. And I could have a drink, while you had a talk, a nice, long talk.

PANTALONE. Oh, there's no need for that. This won't take long. I promise you, I shall be quite short.

HARLEQUIN. That won't be hard for you. (*He laughs, but PANTALONE leaps up angrily, extending himself to his full, minimal height.*) I mean, that would be good. Short is good. I mean, I only meant that it would be nice if you were short, but I didn't mean it would be nice if you were

short, if you see what I mean. (*PANTALONE is not mollified.*) I mean, if you could be short, that would be nice. It doesn't mean that you *are* short. I would never say that, Monsieur. And I never did understand why the late Madame Pantalone kept going on and on and on about it.

PANTALONE (*instantly terrified, looking over his shoulder*).

Please! Don't remind me! Let's let the dead rest in peace.

HARLEQUIN. Oh, don't worry about that. That's the only peace I ever got from her. You can bet I'd be the last one to try to bring her back to life.

PANTALONE. Now, Harlequin, can I trust you?

HARLEQUIN. Of course, Monsieur.

PANTALONE. Well, then, I'll tell you a little secret. Pick up that bag there.

HARLEQUIN. Do I have to?

PANTALONE. Just for a moment. (*HARLEQUIN reluctantly goes to it, and strains to lift it off the ground.*) Now, it might surprise you if I tell you that bag isn't really full of dirty laundry.

HARLEQUIN. Good. I mean, I've heard of heavy winter underwear, but this is ridiculous.

PANTALONE. Well, to be honest, there are a couple of shirts. They were only 15 years old and it seemed silly to throw them out. But the fact of the matter is, that inside that bag are 20,000 golden ecus.

HARLEQUIN (*dropping the bag in surprise*). Twenty thousand ecus! Monsieur! What did you do, rob a bank?

PANTALONE. No, no, they're mine, all perfectly legal. My late cousin, Monsieur Gobillard [*Pronounced: go-bee-YAR.*], left them to me. You know, the Fertilizer King.

HARLEQUIN. Who'd have thought there was so much money in that end of the business?