

Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1. Volpone's house. 9:00 AM

For the past year, Volpone and his servant Mosca have perpetrated a swindle in which Volpone feigns mortal illness to extort extravagant gifts from a trio of legacy-seeking scavengers, promising that each would be named his heir. Having amassed a considerable fortune, Volpone and Mosca plan to leave for Genoa in the evening.

After Volpone is visited in turn by the lawyer Voltore, Corvina, and Cornaccio, each bearing gifts, he decides to advance the scheme further. Volpone asks Mosca to have Corvina disown her son Bonario and name himself as her heir, and to arrange a sexual rendezvous with Cornaccio's wife, Celia.

Scene 2. A bridge. 11:00 AM

Mosca succeeds: Corvina agrees to bring her revised will to Volpone, and Cornaccio agrees to bring Celia to Volpone later.

When Bonario happens by, Mosca tells him about his mother's plans to disown him and deliver the revised will to Volpone that afternoon. He's shocked at first but vows to prove Mosca wrong.

Erminella, the proprietress of a brothel in Paris, alone in the square, searches for clues to the whereabouts of the baby she abandoned there 30 years earlier.

Scene 3. Volpone's house. 12:00 Noon

Bonario arrives at Volpone's house, followed by Cornaccio and Celia. When Volpone tries to seduce Celia, she screams bring Bonario who accuses Volpone of attempted rape. Corvina rushes in with the revised will, and a shouting match erupts. The police round up everyone and take them to court.

Scene 4. The courtroom. 1:00 PM

Through Voltore's lawyerly machinations, the guilty parties are exonerated, and Bonario and Celia are thrown in jail, to be sentenced later that afternoon. As Voltore, Corvina and Cornaccio celebrate their victory, Volpone collapses and dies.

ACT II

Scene 1. Volpone's house. 9:00 AM

Not surprisingly, Volpone only faked his death, plotting to sign his will to Mosca so he can witness the anger of the trio when they realize that none of them were named his heir.

After this is achieved, Volpone asks Mosca to prepare for Genoa. But Mosca has other plans. Now that Volpone is "dead" and Mosca holds the will naming himself as heir, he kicks Volpone out of his house and revels in his new station.

Scene 2. The bridge. 3:00 PM

Volpone encounters Erminella and realizes that the identity of the child she is searching for is Mosca. He offers to bring her to her son if she assists him in a scheme.

Scene 3. A Prison. 3:50 PM

Celia and Bonario, locked in separate cells, express their newfound love.

Scene 4. The courtroom, 4:00 PM; and on a boat approaching Genoa, several days later.

Celia and Bonario restate their innocence. Cornaccio, Corvina, and Voltore enter and accuse Mosca of deception. Mosca enters and exposes everyone's guilt, perjuring himself in the process.

Volpone enters in disguise as a French lawyer named "Moncul"*, accompanied by Erminella, whom he presents as Volpone's widow and rightful heir. Mosca learns that Erminella is his mother.

Erminella recognizes the judges as clients of her brothel in Paris and blackmails them, rescuing Mosca and sending everyone else off to jail. On a boat approaching Genoa, Erminella, Volpone, and Mosca dream of a new life... and some new schemes... together.

*"Moncul" is politely translated as "my buttocks."

Cast

Volpone (the fox). *Bass-baritone*, 40-50 years old. Volpone is the master of the household that includes his manservant, Mosca, and lesser servants. Castrato, Epicene and Nano. Volpone is a voluptuary; he delights in all things warm and sensual, whether it is gold or sex. He also has a quick sense of humor and genuinely enjoys exposing the hypocrites around him for what they are. He has a somewhat paternal relationship with Mosca. Volpone's appearance should be somewhat vulpine—red hair and red beard—and when he rises up in bed to pounce on Celia, his fur coverlet even gives him a tail.

Mosca (the fly) *Tenor*, 30 years old. Mosca is Volpone's manservant and the real brains behind their scheme. Mosca is extremely quick, bright, and ahead of everyone else around him, with a sharp Intellect. He is also a cold opportunist who lacks heart and has no familial or amorous feelings. Or so it seems. Physically, he is small, wiry, very athletic; precise and taut.

Voltore (the vulture). *Baritone*, 60 years old. Voltore is an oily lawyer and the shrewdest of the avian trio. Physically, he is very tall, very thin and bony with grey hair and scraggly grey beard, and his posture is permanently stooped like a vulture ready to spring.

Corvina (the raven). *Soprano*. 50-60 years old. Corvina is Bonario's mother, yet she would quickly trade her mother's milk for an ounce of gold. She is tall, imposing and overbearing, not all that bright and not all that pleasant.

Cornaccio (the crow). *Tenor*, 50-60 years old. Cornaccio recently married Ceila and guards her virginity in a perverse way, although not above pimping her for an ounce of gold. Physically, Cornaccio should be short and stout, much like a crow, and should walk with a corvine waddle.

Bonario, *Tenor*. 20-25 years old. The moralistic son of Corvina, hell-bent on heroism. Bonario should be very handsome. the kind of face that might appear on a coin, with Byronically long hair. He has a strong—if somewhat wooden—physical presence.

Celia. *Soprano*. 20-25 years old. Innocent wife of Cornaccio, a former nun, who resorts to praying when any situation overwhelms her (that's most). She is young and very beautiful—the warm light from a candle always seems to light her face.

Erminella (the ermine), *Mezzo-Soprano*. 40-50 years old. Erminella returns to Venice to find the baby she left with an elderly couple some 30 years ago. She is now the operator of a highly successful and elite brothel in Paris, and as such knows many secrets about her clients. It's clear that Erminella was a ravishing beauty in her youth, and in spite of some age and a few pounds, is still very attractive. She is a very warm person and wise.

Nano/Judge 3 - *Bass*

Castrato/Judge 1 - *Soprano*

Epicene/Prison Matron - *Mezzo-soprano*

Judge 2/Police Captain - *Baritone*

2 Policemen (non-singing roles)