



Volpone

by Ben Jonson

**VOLPONE;
OR THE FOX by Ben Jonson**

Volpone, a Magnifico
Mosca, his Parasite
Voltore, an Advocate
Corbaccio, an old gentleman
Bonario, his son
Corvino, a merchant
Celia, his wife
Nano, a dwarf
Castrone, an eunuch
Androgino, a hermaphrodite and fool
Sir Politic Would-be, a knight
Lady Would-be, his wife
Her waiting woman
Peregrine, a gentleman traveller
Avvocati, three Magistrates
Mercatori, three merchants
Commendatore, an officer of justice
Notaro, the clerk of the court
Servitore, a servant
Grege, the mob

1.1

Enter VOLPONE and MOSCA

VOLPONE Good morning to the day; and next, my gold!
Open the shrine that I may see my saint.

MOSCA reveals the treasure

Hail the world's soul, and mine. More glad than is
The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun
Peep through the horns of the celestial ram,
Am I, to view thy splendour darkening his:
That lying here, amongst my other hoards,
Show'st like a flame by night; or like the day
Struck out of chaos, when all darkness fled
Unto the centre.

Picks up a coin

O, thou son of Sol,
(But brighter than thy father) let me kiss
With adoration, thee, and every relic
Of sacred treasure in this blessed room.
Well did wise poets, by thy glorious name,
Title that age which they would have the best;
Thou being the best of things - and far transcending
All style of joy, in children, parents, friends,
Or any other waking dream on earth.
Thy looks, when they to Venus did ascribe,
They should have given her twenty thousand Cupids;
Such are thy beauties and our loves! Dear saint,
Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues:
That canst do naught, and yet mak'st men do all things;
The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot,
Is made worth heaven! Thou art virtue, fame,
Honour, and all things else. Who can get thee,
He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise —

MOSCA And what he will, sir. Riches are in fortune
A greater good than wisdom is in nature.

VOLPONE True, my beloved Mosca. Yet I glory
More in the cunning purchase of my wealth
Than in the glad possession; since I gain
No common way. I use no trade, no venture;
I wound no earth with ploughshares; fat no beasts
To feed the shambles; have no mills for iron,
Oil, corn, or men, to grind 'em into powder;
I blow no subtle glass; expose no ships
To threat'nings of the furrow-faced sea;
I turn no moneys in the public bank,
Nor usure private —

MOSCA No sir, nor devour
Soft prodigals. You shall have some will swallow
A melting heir as glibly as your Dutch
Will pills of butter, and ne'er purge for 't;
Tear forth the fathers of poor families
Out of their beds, and coffin them, alive,

In some kind of clasping prison, where their bones
May be forthcoming when the flesh is rotten.
But your sweet nature doth abhor these courses;
You loathe the widow's, or the orphan's tears
Should wash your pavements, or their piteous cries
Ring in your roofs, and beat the air, for vengeance —

VOLPONE Right, Mosca, I do loathe it.

MOSCA And besides, sir,
You are not like a thresher that doth stand
With a huge flail, watching a heap of corn,
And, hungry, dares not taste the smallest grain.
Nor like the merchant, who hath filled his vaults
With Romagna and rich Candian wines,
Yet drinks the lees of Lombard's vinegar.
You will not lie in straw, whilst moths and worms
Feed on your sumptuous hangings and soft beds.
You know the use of riches, and dare give, now,
From that bright heap, to me, your poor observer —

VOLPONE Hold thee, Mosca,

Gives him money

Take of my hand: thou strik'st on truth in all,
And they are envious term thee parasite.
Call forth my dwarf, my eunuch, and my fool,
And let 'em make me sport.

Exit MOSCA

What should I do
But cocker up my genius, and live free
To all delights my fortune calls me to?
I have no wife, no parent, child, ally,
To give my substance to; but whom I make
Must be my heir - and this makes men observe me.
This draws new clients daily to my house,
Women and men of every sex and age
That bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels,
With hope that when I die (which they expect
Each greedy minute) it shall then return
Tenfold upon them; whilst some, covetous
Above the rest, seek to engross me, whole,
And counterwork the one unto the other,
Contend in gifts, as they would seem in love.
All which I suffer, playing with their hopes,
And am content to coin 'em into profit,
And look upon their kindness, and take more,
And look on that; still bearing them in hand,
Letting the cherry knock against their lips,
And draw it by their mouths, and back again.
How now!

1.2

*Re-enter MOSCA with NANO, ANDROGINO and CASTRONE presenting
a dramatic entertainment to VOLPONE*

NANO Now, room for fresh gamesters, who do will you to know,
They do bring you neither play, nor university show;
And therefore do entreat you, that whatsoever they rehearse,
May not fare a whit the worse for the false pace of the verse.
If you wonder at this, you will wonder more ere we pass,
For know, here is enclosed the soul of Pythagoras.

He points to ANDROGINO

That juggler divine, as hereafter shall follow;
Which soul (fast and loose, sir) came first from Apollo,
And was breathed into Aethalides, Mercurius his son,
Where it had the gift to remember all that ever was done.
From thence it fled forth, and made quick transmigration
To goldy-locked Euphorbus, who was killed in good fashion
At the siege of old Troy, by the cuckold of Sparta.
Hermotimus was next (I find it in my charta)
To whom it did pass, where no sooner it was missing
But with one Pyrrhus of Delos it learned to go a-fishing,
And thence did it enter the sophist of Greece.
From Pythagore, she went into a beautiful piece,
Hight Aspasia, the meretrix; and the next toss of her
Was again of a whore - she became a philosopher.
But I come not here to discourse of that matter,
Or his one, two, or three, or his great oath, 'By Quatre!'
His musics, his trigon, his golden thigh,
Or his telling how elements shift; but I
Would ask, how of late thou best suffered translation,
And shifted thy coat in these days of reformation?

ANDROGINO Like one of the reformed, a fool, as you see,
Counting all old doctrine heresy.

NANO But not on thine own forbid meats hast thou ventured?

ANDROGINO On fish, when first a Carthusian I entered.

NANO Why then, thy dogmatical silence hath left thee?
ANDROGINO Of that an obstreperous lawyer bereft me.

NANO O wonderful change! What body then took thee?

ANDROGINO A good dull mule.

NANO And how! By that means,
Thou wert brought to allow of the eating of beans?

ANDROGINO Yes.

NANO Now quit thee, for heaven, of that profane nation;
And gently report thy next transmigration.

ANDROGINO To the same that I am.

NANO A creature of delight?
And, what is more than a fool, a hermaphrodite?
Now pray thee, sweet soul, in all thy variation,

Which body would'st thou choose, to keep up thy station?

ANDROGINO Troth, this I am in, even here would I tarry.

NANO 'Cause here the delight of each sex thou canst vary?

ANDROGINO Alas, those pleasures be stale and forsaken;
No, 'tis your fool wherewith I am so taken,
The only one creature that I can call blessed:
For all other forms I have proved most distressed.

NANO Spoke true, as thou wert in Pythagoras still.
This learned opinion we celebrate will,

VOLPONE Now very, very pretty! Mosca, this
Was thy invention?

MOSCA If it please my patron, not else.

VOLPONE It doth, good Mosca.

MOSCA Then it was, sir.

NANO, CASTRONE *and ANDROGINO sing*

*Fools, they are the only nation
Worth men's envy, or admiration;
Free from care or sorrow-taking,
Selves and others merry making.
He's the grace of every feast,
And sometimes the chiefest guest;
Hath his trencher and his stool,
When wit waits upon the fool.
O, who would not be
He, he, he?*

Knocking within

VOLPONE Who's that? Away!

Exeunt NANO, CASTRONE and ANDROGINO

Look, Mosca. Fool begone.

MOSCA 'Tis Signor Voltore, the advocate;
I know him by his knock.

VOLPONE Fetch me my gown,
My furs and nightcap; say my couch is changing,
And let him entertain himself awhile
Without i' the gallery.

Exit MOSCA

Now, now, my clients
Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite,
Raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey
That think me turning carcass, now they come —
I am not for 'em yet.

Re-enter MOSCA with VOLPONE's gown, furs and night-cap

How now? The news?

MOSCA A piece of plate, sir.

VOLPONE Of what bigness?

MOSCA Huge,
Massy, and antique, with your name inscribed,
And arms engraven.

VOLPONE Good! And not a fox
Stretched on the earth, with fine delusive sleights,
Mocking a gaping crow? Ha, Mosca?

MOSCA Sharp, sir. (*Laughs*)

VOLPONE Give me my furs. Why dost thou laugh so, man?

MOSCA dresses VOLPONE

MOSCA I cannot choose, sir, when I apprehend
What thoughts he has, without, now as he walks:
That this might be the last gift he should give;
That this would fetch you; if you died today,
And gave him all, what he should be tomorrow;
What large return would come of all his ventures;
How he should worshipped be, and reverenced;
Ride with his furs, and foot-cloths; waited on
By herds of fools and clients; have clear way
Made for his mule, as lettered as himself;
Be called the great and learned advocate:
And then concludes, there's naught impossible.

VOLPONE Yes, to be learned, Mosca.

MOSCA O no: rich
Implies it. Hood an ass with reverend purple,
So you can hide his two ambitious ears,
And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor.

VOLPONE My cap, my cap. Good Mosca, fetch him in.

MOSCA Stay, sir, your ointment for your eyes.

VOLPONE That's true.

MOSCA anoints VOLPONE's eyes

Dispatch, dispatch. I long to have possession
Of my new present.

MOSCA That, and thousands more,
I hope to see you lord of.

VOLPONE Thanks, kind Mosca.

MOSCA And that, when I am lost in blended dust,

And hundred such as I am, in succession —

VOLPONE Nay, that were too much, Mosca.

MOSCA You shall live,
Still, to delude these harpies.

VOLPONE Loving Mosca.

Looks in a mirror

'Tis well: my pillow now, and let him enter.
He jumps into bed. MOSCA exits

Now, my feigned cough, my phthisic, and my gout,
My apoplexy, palsy, and catarrhs,
Help, with your forced functions, this my posture,
Wherein, this three year, I have milked their hopes.
He comes, I hear him — Uh! uh! uh! uh! Oh —

1.3

Re-enter MOSCA with VOLTORE carrying a piece of plate

MOSCA You still are what you were, sir. Only you,
Of all the rest are he commands his love;
And you do wisely to preserve it thus,
With early visitation and kind notes
Of your good meaning to him, which, I know,
Cannot but come most grateful. *(to VOLPONE)* Patron, sir!
Here's Signor Voltore is come —

VOLPONE What say you?

MOSCA Sir, Signor Voltore is come this morning
To visit you.

VOLPONE I thank him.

MOSCA And hath brought
A piece of antique plate, bought of St Mark,
With which he here presents you.

VOLPONE He is welcome.
Pray him to come more often.

MOSCA Yes.

VOLTORE What says he?

MOSCA He thanks you, and desires you see him often.

VOLPONE Mosca.

MOSCA My patron?

VOLPONE Bring him near, where is he?
I long to feel his hand.

MOSCA The plate is here, sir.

VOLTORE How fare you, sir?

VOLPONE I thank you, Signor Voltore.
Where is the plate? Mine eyes are bad.

VOLTORE (*gives plate to VOLPONE*) I'm sorry,
To see you still thus weak.

MOSCA (*aside*) That he is not weaker.

VOLPONE You are too munificent.

VOLTORE No, sir, would to heaven
I could as well give health to you, as that plate.

VOLPONE You give, sir, what you can. I thank you. Your love
Hath taste in this, and shall not be unanswered.
I pray you see me often.

VOLTORE Yes, I shall sir.

MOSCA (*aside to VOLTORE*) Do you observe that, sir?

VOLPONE Harken unto me still; it will concern you.

MOSCA (*aside to VOLTORE*) You are a happy man, sir, know your good.

VOLPONE I cannot now last long —

MOSCA (*aside to VOLTORE*) You are his heir, sir.

VOLTORE Am I?

VOLPONE I feel me going — Uh! uh! uh! uh!
I'm sailing to my port — Uh! uh! uh! uh!
And I am glad I am so near my haven.

MOSCA Alas, kind gentleman, we must go —

VOLTORE But, Mosca —

MOSCA Age will conquer.

VOLTORE Pray thee hear me.
Am I inscribed his heir for certain?

MOSCA Are you?
I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe
To write me i' your family. All my hopes
Depend upon your worship. I am lost,
Except the rising sun do shine on me.

VOLTORE It shall both shine, and warm thee, Mosca.

MOSCA Sir,

I am a man that hath not done your love
All the worst offices: here I wear your keys,
See all your coffers and your caskets locked,
Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,
Your plate and moneys, am your steward, sir,
Husband your goods here.

VOLTORE But am I sole heir?

MOSCA Without a partner, sir, confirmed this morning;
The wax is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry
Upon the parchment.

VOLTORE Happy, happy, me!
By what good chance, sweet Mosca?

MOSCA Your desert, sir;
I know no second cause.

VOLTORE Thy modesty
Is not to know it; well, we shall requite it.

MOSCA He ever liked your course sir - that first took him.
I oft have heard him say how he admired
Men of your large profession that could speak
To every cause, and things mere contraries
Till they were hoarse again, yet all be law;
That, with most quick agility could turn,
And re-turn, make knots, and undo them,
Give forked counsel, take provoking gold
On either hand, and put it up; these men,
He knew, would thrive with their humility.
And, for his part, he thought he should be blessed
To have his heir of such a suffering spirit,
So wise, so grave, of so perplexed a tongue,
And loud withal, that would not wag, nor scarce
Lie still, without a fee; when every word
Your worship but lets fall is a sequin!

Another knocks

Who's that? One knocks; I would not have you seen, sir.
And, gentle sir, when you do come to swim in golden lard,
Up to the arms in honey, that your chin
Is born up stiff, with fatness of the flood,
Think on your vassal: but remember me,
I have not been your worst of clients.

VOLTORE Mosca —

MOSCA When will you have your inventory brought, sir?
Or see a copy of the will?

More knocking

 Anon!

(To VOLTORE) I will bring them to you, sir. Away, be gone.

Exit VOLTORE

VOLPONE Excellent Mosca!
Come hither, let me kiss thee.

MOSCA Keep you still, sir.
Here is Corbaccio.

VOLPONE Set the plate away.
The vulture's gone, and the old raven's come.

MOSCA Betake you to your silence, and your sleep.

Adds plate to collection

Stand there and multiply. Now, shall we see
A wretch who is indeed more impotent
Than this can feign to be; yet hopes to hop
Over his grave.

1.4

Enter CORBACCIO carrying a bag of coins

 Signor Corbaccio!
You're very welcome, sir.

CORBACCIO How does your patron?

MOSCA Troth, as he did, sir, no amends.

CORBACCIO What? Mends he?

MOSCA No, sir - he's rather worse.

CORBACCIO That's well. Where is he?

MOSCA Upon his couch sir, newly fallen asleep.

CORBACCIO Does he sleep well?

MOSCA No wink, sir, all this night.
Nor yesterday, but slumbers.

CORBACCIO Good! He should take
Some counsel of physicians: I have brought him
An opiate here, from mine own doctor —

MOSCA He will not hear of drugs.

CORBACCIO Why? I myself
Stood by while 'twas made, saw all the ingredients,
And know it cannot but most gently work.
My life for his, 'tis but to make him sleep.

VOLPONE (*aside*) Ay, his last sleep, if he would take it.

MOSCA Sir,
He has no faith in physic.

CORBACCIO Say you? Say you?

MOSCA He has no faith in physic: he does think
Most of your doctors are the greater danger,
And worse disease t' escape. I often have
Heard him protest that your physician
Should never be his heir.

CORBACCIO Not I his heir?

MOSCA Not your physician, sir.

CORBACCIO O, no, no, no,

MOSCA No, sir, nor their fees
He cannot brook: he says they flay a man
Before they kill him.

CORBACCIO Right, I do conceive you.

MOSCA And then they do it by experiment;
For which the law not only doth absolve 'em,
But gives them great reward, and he is loath
To hire his death so.

CORBACCIO How does his apoplex?
Is that strong on him still?

MOSCA Most violent.
His speech is broken, and his eyes are set,
His face drawn longer than 'twas wont —

CORBACCIO How? How?
Stronger then he was wont?

MOSCA No, sir; his face
Drawn longer than 'twas wont.

CORBACCIO O, good!

MOSCA His mouth
Is ever gaping, and his eyelids hang.

CORBACCIO Good.

MOSCA A freezing numbness stiffens all his joints,
And makes the colour of his flesh like lead.

CORBACCIO 'Tis good.

MOSCA His pulse beats slow and dull.

CORBACCIO Good symptoms, still.

MOSCA And from his brain —

CORBACCIO Not his brain?

MOSCA Flows a cold sweat, with a continual rheum,
Forth the resolved corners of his eyes.

CORBACCIO Is't possible? Yet I am better, ha!
How does he with the swimming of his head?

MOSCA O, sir, 'tis past the scotomy; he now
Hath lost his feeling, and hath left to snort:
You hardly can perceive him that he breathes.

CORBACCIO Excellent, excellent! Sure I shall outlast him.
This makes me young again, a score of years.

MOSCA I was a-coming for you, sir.

CORBACCIO Has he made his will?
What has he given me?

MOSCA No, sir.

CORBACCIO Nothing? Ha?

MOSCA He has not made his will, sir.

CORBACCIO Oh, oh, oh!
What then did Voltore, the lawyer, here?

MOSCA He smelt a carcass, sir, when he but heard
My master was about his testament —
CORBACCIO He came unto him, did he? I thought so.

MOSCA Yes, and presented him this piece of plate.

CORBACCIO To be his heir?

MOSCA I do not know, sir.

CORBACCIO Well,
I shall prevent him, yet. See, Mosca, look,
Here, I have brought a bag of bright sequins,
Will quite weigh down his plate.

MOSCA (*taking the bag*) Yea, marry, sir!
This is true physic, this your sacred medicine,
No talk of opiates, to this great elixir!

CORBACCIO 'Tis *aurum palpabile*, if not *potabile*.

MOSCA It shall be ministered to him, in his bowl?

CORBACCIO Ay, do, do, do.

MOSCA (*pouring coins into the bowl*) Most blessed cordial!
This will recover him.

CORBACCIO Yes, do, do, do.

MOSCA I think it were not best, sir.

CORBACCIO What?

MOSCA To recover him.

CORBACCIO O, no, no, no; by no means.

MOSCA Why, sir, this
Will work some strange effect if he but feel it.

CORBACCIO 'Tis true, therefore forbear; I'll take my venture.
Give me it again.

MOSCA At no hand, pardon me.
You shall not do yourself that wrong, sir. I
Will so advise you, you shall have it all.

CORBACCIO How?

MOSCA All, sir, 'tis your right, your own; no man
Can claim a part. 'Tis yours, without a rival,
Decreed by destiny.

CORBACCIO How, how, good Mosca?

MOSCA I'll tell you sir. This fit he shall recover —

CORBACCIO I do conceive you.

MOSCA And, on first advantage
Of his 'gained sense, will I reimpartune him
Unto the making of his testament
And show him this. (*Indicating bowl of coins*)

CORBACCIO Good, good.

MOSCA 'Tis better yet,
If you will hear, sir.

CORBACCIO Yes, with all my heart.

MOSCA Now would I counsel you, make home with speed;
There, frame a will, whereto you shall inscribe
My master your sole heir.

CORBACCIO And disinherit
My son?

MOSCA This will sir, you shall send unto me.
Now, when I come to enforce (as I will do)
Your cares, your watchings, and your many prayers,
Your more than many gifts, your this day's present,
And last, produce your will; where (without thought,
The stream of your diverted love hath you thrown
Upon my master, and made him your heir;
He cannot be so stupid, or stone-dead,
But, out of conscience, and mere gratitude —

CORBACCIO He must pronounce me his?

MOSCA 'Tis true.

CORBACCIO This plot
Did I think on before.

MOSCA I do believe it.

CORBACCIO Do you not believe it?

MOSCA Yes, sir.

CORBACCIO Mine own project.

MOSCA Which, when he hath done, sir —
CORBACCIO Published me his heir?

MOSCA And you so certain to survive him —

CORBACCIO Aye.

MOSCA Being so lusty a man —

CORBACCIO 'Tis true.

MOSCA You have not only done yourself a good —

CORBACCIO But multiplied it on my son?

MOSCA 'Tis right, sir.

CORBACCIO Still, my invention.

MOSCA 'Las, sir, heaven knows,
It hath been all my study, all my care,
(I e'en grow grey withal) how to work things —

CORBACCIO I do conceive, sweet Mosca.

MOSCA You are he,
For whom I labour here.

CORBACCIO Aye, do, do, do:
I'll straight about it.

MOSCA (*aside*) Rook go with you, raven.

CORBACCIO I know thee honest.

MOSCA (*aside*) You do lie, sir.

CORBACCIO And —

MOSCA (*aside*) Your knowledge is no better than your ears, sir.

CORBACCIO I do not doubt, to be a father to thee.

MOSCA (*aside*) Nor I to gull my brother of his blessing.

CORBACCIO I may have my youth restored to me, why not?

MOSCA (*aside*) Your worship is a precious ass.

CORBACCIO What say'st thou?

MOSCA I do desire your worship to make haste, sir.

CORBACCIO 'Tis done, 'tis done, I go.

Exit CORBACCIO

VOLPONE (*leaping up*) O, I shall burst!
Let out my sides, let out my sides —

MOSCA Contain
Your flux of laughter, sir: you know this hope
Is such a bait, it covers any hook.

VOLPONE O, but thy working, and thy placing it!
I cannot hold; good rascal, let me kiss thee:
I never knew thee in so rare a humour.

MOSCA Alas sir, I but do as I am taught;
Follow your grave instructions; give them words;
Pour oil into their ears, and send them hence.

VOLPONE 'Tis true, 'tis true. What a rare punishment
Is avarice to itself.

MOSCA Ay, with our help, sir.

VOLPONE So many cares, so many maladies,
So many fears attending on old age,
Yea, death so often called on, as no wish
Can be more frequent with 'em: their limbs faint,
Their senses dull, their seeing, hearing, going,
All dead before them, yea their very teeth,
Their instruments of eating failing them.
Yet this is reckoned life! Nay, here was one
Is now gone home, that wishes to live longer!
Feels not his gout, nor palsy, feigns himself
Younger by scores of years, flatters his age
With confident belying it, hopes he may,
With charms, like Aeson, have his youth restored;
And with these thoughts so battens, as if fate
Would be as easily cheated on as he,
And all turns air!

Another knocks

Who's that there, now? A third?

MOSCA Close, to your couch again; I hear his voice.
It is Corvino, our spruce merchant.

VOLPONE (*lying down*) Dead.

MOSCA Another bout, sir, with your eyes.
Annointing them

Who's there?

1.5

Enter CORVINO carrying a pearl and a diamond

MOSCA Signor Corvino! Come most wished for! Oh,
How happy were you, if you knew it, now!

CORVINO Why? What? Wherein?

MOSCA The tardy hour is come, sir.

CORVINO He is not dead?

MOSCA Not dead, sir, but as good;
He knows no man.

CORVINO How shall I do then?

MOSCA Why, sir?

CORVINO I have brought him here a pearl.

MOSCA Perhaps he has
So much remembrance left as to know you, sir;
He still calls on you, nothing but your name
Is in his mouth. Is your pearl orient, sir?

CORVINO Venice was never owner of the like.

VOLPONE (*faintly*) Signor Corvino.

MOSCA Hark.

VOLPONE Signor Corvino.

MOSCA He calls you, step and give it him. (*to VOLPONE*) He's here, sir,
And he has brought you a rich pearl.

CORVINO (*giving the pearl to VOLPONE*) How do you, sir?
(*to MOSCA*) Tell him it doubles the twelfth carat.

MOSCA Sir,
He cannot understand, his hearing's gone;
And yet it comforts him to see you —

CORVINO Say,
I have a diamond for him, too.

MOSCA Best show it, sir,
Put it into his hand; 'tis only there
He apprehends - he has his feeling, yet.
See how he grasps it!

CORVINO 'Las, good gentleman!
How pitiful the sight is!

MOSCA Tut, forget, sir.
The weeping of an heir should still be laughter
Under a visor.

CORVINO Why? Am I his heir?

MOSCA Sir, I am sworn, I may not show the will
Till he be dead. But here has been Corbaccio,
Here has been Voltore, here were others too,
I cannot number 'em, they were so many
All gaping here for legacies; but I,
Taking the vantage of his naming you,
'Signor Corvino', 'Signor Corvino', took
Paper and pen and ink, and there I asked him,
Whom he would have his heir? 'Corvino.' Who
Should be executor? 'Corvino.'

CORVINO O, my dear Mosca!

They embrace

Does he not perceive us?

MOSCA No more than a blind harper. He knows no man,
No face of friend, nor name of any servant,
Who 'twas that fed him last, or gave him drink;
Not those he hath begotten or brought up
Can he remember.

CORVINO Has he children?

MOSCA Bastards,
Some dozen, or more, that he begot on beggars,
Gipsies, and Jews, and black-moors, when he was drunk.
Knew you not that, sir? 'Tis the common fable.
The dwarf, the fool, the eunuch, are all his;
He's the true father of his family,
In all, save me - but he has given 'em nothing.

CORVINO That's well, that's well. Art sure he does not hear us?

MOSCA Sure, sir? Why, look you, credit your own sense:
(*He shouts in VOLPONE's ear*) The pox approach and add to your diseases,
If it would send you hence the sooner, sir,
For your incontinence, it hath deserved it
Thoroughly, and thoroughly, and the plague to boot -
(*to CORVINO*) You may come near, sir - (*to VOLPONE*) Would you would once
close
Those filthy eyes of yours that flow with slime,
Like two frog-pits; and those same hanging cheeks,
Covered with hide instead of skin - (*to CORVINO*) Nay help, sir -
That look like frozen dish-clouts, set on end.

CORVINO Or like an old smoked wall, on which the rain
Ran down in streaks.

MOSCA Excellent, sir, speak out;
You may be louder yet: a culverin
Discharged in his ear would hardly bore it.

CORVINO His nose is like a common sewer, still running.

MOSCA 'Tis good! And what his mouth?

CORVINO A very draught.

MOSCA (*picking up a pillow*) O, stop it up —

CORVINO By no means.

MOSCA Pray you, let me.
Faith I could stifle him rarely with a pillow.

CORVINO Do as you will, but I'll begone.

MOSCA Do so:
It is your presence makes him last so long.

CORVINO I pray you, use no violence.

MOSCA No, sir? Why?
Why should you be thus scrupulous, pray you, sir?

CORVINO Nay, at your discretion.

MOSCA Well, good sir, be gone.

CORVINO I will not trouble him now, to take my pearl.

MOSCA Puh, nor your diamond. What a needless care
Is this afflicts you? Is not all here yours?
Am not I here, whom you have made your creature?
That owe my being to you?

CORVINO Grateful Mosca!
Thou art my friend, my fellow, my companion,
My partner, and shalt share in all my fortunes.
MOSCA Excepting one.

CORVINO What's that?

MOSCA Your gallant wife, sir.

Exit CORVINO

Now is he gone: we had no other means
To shoot him hence but this.

VOLPONE My divine Mosca!
Thou hast today outgone thyself.

Another knocks

Who's there?
I will be troubled with no more. Prepare
Me music, dances, banquets, all delights;

The Turk is not more sensual in his pleasures,
Than will Volpone.

Exit MOSCA

Let me see, a pearl?
A diamond! Plate! Sequins! Good morning's purchase;
Why, this is better than to rob churches yet;
Or fat, by eating once a month, a man.

Re-enter MOSCA

Who is't?

MOSCA The beauteous lady Would-be, sir.
Wife to the English knight, Sir Politic Would-be,
(This is the style, sir, is directed me)
Hath sent to know how you have slept tonight,
And if you would be visited.

VOLPONE Not now.
Some three hours hence —

MOSCA I told the squire so much.

VOLPONE When I am high with mirth and wine; then, then.
'Fore heaven, I wonder at the desperate valour
Of the bold English, that they dare let loose
Their wives to all encounters!

MOSCA Sir, this knight
Had not his name for nothing: he is politic
And knows, how e'er his wife affect strange airs,
She hath not yet the face to be dishonest.
But had she Signor Corvino's wife's face —

VOLPONE Has she so rare a face?

MOSCA O, sir, the wonder,
The blazing star of Italy! A wench
O' the first year! A beauty ripe as harvest!
Whose skin is whiter than a swan all over!
Than silver, snow, or lilies! A soft lip,
Would tempt you to eternity of kissing!
And flesh that melteth in the touch to blood!
Bright as your gold, and lovely as your gold!

VOLPONE Why had not I known this before?

MOSCA Alas, sir,
Myself but yesterday discovered it.

VOLPONE How might I see her?

MOSCA O, not possible.
She's kept as warily as is your gold,
Never does come abroad, never takes air
But at a window. All her looks are sweet,
As the first grapes or cherries, and are watched
As near as they are.

VOLPONE I must see her.

MOSCA Sir,
There is a guard of spies ten thick upon her,
All his whole household, each of which is set
Upon his fellow, and have all their charge,
When he goes out, when he comes in, examined.

VOLPONE I will go see her, though but at her window.

MOSCA In some disguise, then.

VOLPONE That is true. We'll think.

Exeunt

2.1

Enter SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE and PEREGRINE

SIR POLITIC Sir, to a wise man, all the world's his soil.
It is not Italy, nor France, nor Europe,
That must bound me, if my fates call me forth.
Yet, I protest, it is no salt desire
Of seeing countries, shifting a religion,
Nor any disaffection to the state
Where I was bred and to which I owe my dearest plots hath brought me out;
much less,
That idle, antique, stale, grey-headed project
Of knowing men's minds and manners, with Ulysses;
But a peculiar humour of my wife's
Laid for this height of Venice, to observe,
To quote, to learn the language, and so forth —
I hope you travel, sir, with license?

PEREGRINE Yes.

SIR POLITIC I dare the safelier converse. How long, sir,
Since you left England?

PEREGRINE Seven weeks.

SIR POLITIC So lately!
You have not been with my lord ambassador?

PEREGRINE Not yet, sir.

SIR POLITIC Pray you, what news, sir, vents our climate?
I heard last night a most strange thing reported
By some of my lord's followers, and I long
To hear how 'twill be seconded.

PEREGRINE What was't, sir?

SIR POLITIC Marry, sir, of a raven that should build
In a ship royal of the King's.

PEREGRINE (*aside*) This fellow,
Does he gull me, trow? Or is gulled? (*To Sir Politic*) Your name, sir?

SIR POLITIC My name is Politic Would-be.

PEREGRINE (*aside*) O, that speaks him.
(*to Sir Politic*) A knight, sir?

SIR POLITIC A poor knight, sir.

PEREGRINE Your lady
Lies here in Venice for intelligence
Of tires, and fashions, and behaviour
Among the courtesans? The fine Lady Would-be?

SIR POLITIC Yes, sir, the spider and the bee, oft-times
Suck from one flower.

PEREGRINE Good Sir Politic!
I cry you mercy; I have heard much of you.
'Tis true, sir, of your raven.

SIR POLITIC On your knowledge?

PEREGRINE Yes, and your lion's whelping, in the Tower.

SIR POLITIC Another whelp!

PEREGRINE Another, sir.

SIR POLITIC Now heaven!
What prodigies be these? The fires at Berwick!
And the new star! These things concurring, strange!
And full of omen! Saw you those meteors?

PEREGRINE I did, sir.

SIR POLITIC Fearful! Pray you, sir, confirm me,
Were there three porpoises seen above the bridge,
As they give out?

PEREGRINE Six, and a sturgeon, sir.

SIR POLITIC I am astonished.

PEREGRINE Nay, sir, be not so;
I'll tell you a greater prodigy than these.

SIR POLITIC What should these things portend?

PEREGRINE The very day
(Let me be sure) that I put forth from London,
There was a whale discovered in the river
As high as Greenwich, that had waited there
Few know how many months, for the subversion
Of the Stade fleet.

SIR POLITIC Is't possible? Believe it,
'Twas either sent from Spain, or the Archdukes!
Spinola's whale, upon my life, my credit! Will they not leave these plots?
Worthy sir, some other news.

PEREGRINE Faith, Stone the fool is dead;
And they do lack a tavern fool extremely.

SIR POLITIC Is Mas' Stone dead?

PEREGRINE He's dead sir. Why, I hope
You thought him not immortal? (*aside*) O, this knight
(Were he well known) would be a precious thing
To fit our English stage; he that should write
But such a fellow should be thought to feign
Extremely, if not maliciously.

SIR POLITIC Stone dead!

PEREGRINE Lord! How deeply sir you apprehend it!
He was no kinsman to you?

SIR POLITIC That I know of.
Well! That same fellow was an unknown fool.

PEREGRINE And yet you knew him, it seems?

SIR POLITIC I did so, sir.
I knew him one of the most dangerous heads
Living within the state, and so I held him.

PEREGRINE Indeed, sir?

SIR POLITIC While he lived, in action.
He has received weekly intelligence,
Upon my knowledge, out of the Low Countries,
For all parts of the world, in cabbages;
And those dispensed again to ambassadors,
In oranges, musk-melons, apricots,
Lemons, pome-citrons, and such-like; sometimes
In Colchester oysters and your Selsey cockles.

PEREGRINE You make me wonder.

SIR POLITIC Sir, upon my knowledge.
Nay, I have observed him, at your public ordinary,
Take his advertisement from a traveller
(A concealed statesman) in a trencher of meat;
And instantly, before the meal was done,
Convey an answer in a toothpick.

PEREGRINE Strange!
How could this be, sir?

SIR POLITIC Why, the meat was cut
So like his character, and so laid, as he
Must easily read the cipher.

PEREGRINE I have heard,
He could not read, sir.

SIR POLITIC So 'twas given out
In polity, by those that did employ him;
But he could read, and had your languages,
And to't, as sound a noddle.

PEREGRINE Heart!
(*aside*) This sir Pol will be ignorant of nothing.
(*to Sir Politic*) It seems, sir, you know all?

SIR POLITIC Not all sir. But
I have some general notions. I do love
To note and to observe; though I live out,
Free from the active torrent, yet I'd mark
The currents and the passages of things
For mine own private use, and know the ebbs
And flows of state.

PEREGRINE Believe it, sir, I hold
Myself in no small tie unto my fortunes
For casting me thus luckily upon you,
Whose knowledge, if your bounty equal it,
May do me great assistance.

SIR POLITIC Why, came you forth
Empty of rules for travel?

PEREGRINE Faith, I had
Some common ones, from out that vulgar grammar,
Which he that cried Italian to me taught me.

SIR POLITIC Why this it is, that spoils all our brave bloods;
Trusting our hopeful gentry unto pedants:
Fellows of outside, and mere bark —

PEREGRINE (*seeing people approach*) Who be these, sir?

2.2

Enter MOSCA, NANO and ANDROGINO disguised as mountebank's attendants and carrying materials for a stage

MOSCA Under that window, there 't must be.

They start to assemble a stage with a banner at the front; a crowd gathers

SIR POLITIC Fellows, to mount a bank! Did your instructor
Never discourse to you of the Italian mountebanks?

PEREGRINE Yes, sir.

SIR POLITIC Why, here shall you see one.

PERGRINE They are quacksalvers;
Fellows, that live by venting oils and drugs.

SIR POLITIC Was that the character he gave you of them?

PERGRINE As I remember.

SIR POLITIC Pity his ignorance.
They are the only knowing men of Europe!
Great general scholars, excellent physicians,
And cabinet counsellors to the greatest princes;

PERGRINE And, I have heard, they are most lewd impostors;
Selling that drug for two-pence, ere they part,
Which they have valued at twelve crowns before.

SIR POLITIC Sir, calumnies are answered best with silence.
Yourself shall judge. Who is it mounts, my friends?

MOSCA Scoto of Mantua, sir.

SIR POLITIC Is't he? Nay, then
I'll proudly promise, sir, you shall behold
Another man than has been fant'sied to you.

I wonder yet, that he should mount his bank,
Here in this nook, that has been wont to appear
In face of the Piazza! Here, he comes.

Enter VOLPONE disguised as a mountebank

CROWD Follo, follo, follo, follo!

VOLPONE Most noble gentlemen, and my worthy patrons! It may seem strange, that I, your Scoto Mantuano, who was ever wont to fix my bank in face of the public Piazza, should now, after eight months' absence from this illustrious city of Venice, humbly retire myself into an obscure nook such as this.

SIR POLITIC Did not I now object the same?

PERGRINE Peace, sir.

VOLPONE Let me tell you: I am not, as your Lombard proverb saith, cold on my feet; or content to part with my commodities at a cheaper rate, than I accustomed: look not for it. Nor that the calumnious reports of that impudent detractor, and shame to our profession, (Alessandro Buttone, I mean,) who gave out, in public, I was condemn'd for poisoning the cardinal Bembo's--cook, hath at all attached, much less dejected me. No, no, worthy gentlemen; to tell you true, I cannot endure to see the rabble of these ground ciarlitani, these turdy-facy-nasty-paty-lousy-fartical rogues, with one poor groat's-worth of unprepared antimony, finely wrapt up-well, let them go - I protest, I, and my six servants, are not able to make of this precious liquor, so fast as it is fetch'd away from my lodging by gentlemen of your city, O health! health! the blessing of the rich, the riches of the poor! who can buy thee at too dear a rate, since there is no enjoying this world without thee? Be not then so sparing of your purses, honourable gentlemen, as to abridge the natural course of life -

PERGRINE You see his end.

SIR POLITIC Ay, is't not good?

VOLPONE For, when a humid flux, or catarrh, by the mutability of air, falls from your head into an arm or shoulder, or any other part; take you a ducat, or your chequin of gold, and apply to the place affected: see what good effect it can work. No, no, 'tis this blessed unguento, (*holds up oil*) this rare extraction, that hath only power to disperse all malignant humours, that proceed either of hot, cold, moist, or windy causes--

PERGRINE I would he had put in dry too.

SIR POLITIC 'Pray you, observe.

VOLPONE To fortify the most indigest and crude stomach, applying only a warm napkin to the place, after the unction for the vertigine in the head, putting but a drop into your nostrils, likewise behind the ears; a most sovereign and approved remedy. The mal caduco, cramps, convulsions, paralyties, epilepsies, tremor-cordia, retired nerves, ill vapours of the spleen, stopping of the liver, the stone, the strangury, hernia ventosa, iliaca passio; stops a disenteria immediately;

easeth the torsion of the small guts: and cures melancholia hypocondriaca, being taken and applied according to my printed receipt.

(Holds up his bill)

For, this is the physician, this the medicine; this counsels, this cures; this gives the direction, this works the effect; and, in sum, both together may be termed an abstract of the theorick and practick in the Aesculapian art. 'Twill cost you eight crowns. And,--Zan Fritada, prithee sing a verse extempore in honour of it.

SIR POLITIC How do you like him, sir?

PERGRINE Most strangely, !!

SIR POLITIC Is not his language rare?

PERGRINE But alchemy,
I never heard the like.

NANO [SINGS.] Had old Hippocrates, or Galen,
That to their books put med'cines all in,
But known this secret, they had never
(Of which they will be guilty ever)
Been murderers of so much paper,
Or wasted many a hurtless taper.

PERGRINE All this, yet, will not do, eight crowns is high.

VOLPONE You all know, honourable gentlemen, I never valued this ampulla, or vial, at less than eight crowns, but for this time, I am content, to be deprived of it for six; six crowns is the price; and less, in courtesy I know you cannot offer me; take it, or leave it. I ask you not as the value of the thing, for then I should demand of you a thousand crowns; but I despise money. Only to shew my affection to you, honourable gentlemen I present you with the fruits of my travels.--Tune your voices once more to the touch of your instruments, and give the honourable assembly some delightful recreation.

NANO [SINGS.]
Would you be ever fair and young?
Stout of teeth, and strong of tongue?
Tart of palate? quick of ear?
Sharp of sight? of nostril clear?
Moist of hand? and light of foot?
Or, I will come nearer to't,
Would you live free from all diseases?
Do the act your mistress pleases;
Yet fright all aches from your bones?
Here's a med'cine, for the nones.

VOLPONE Well, I am in a humour at this time to make a present of the small quantity my coffer contains; to the rich, in courtesy, and to the poor for God's sake. Wherefore now mark: I ask'd you six crowns, and six crowns, at other times, you have paid me; you shall not give me six crowns, nor five, nor four, nor three, nor two, nor one; nor half a ducat. Sixpence it will cost you, expect no lower price. Therefore, now, toss your handkerchiefs, cheerfully, cheerfully; and be advertised, that the first heroic spirit that deignes to grace me with a handkerchief, I will give it a little remembrance of something, beside.

PERGRINE Will you be that heroic spark, sir Pol?

CELIA at a window above, throws down her handkerchief

O see! the window has prevented you.

VOLPONE Lady, I kiss your bounty; and for this timely grace you have done your poor Scoto of Mantua, I will return you, over and above my oil, a secret that made Venus a goddess (given her by Apollo,) that kept her perpetually young, clear'd her wrinkles, firm'd her gums, fill'd her skin, colour'd her hair --

Enter CORVINO

CORVINO Blood o' the devil, and my shame! come down here!

Come down! No House but mine to make your scene?

Exit CELIA from the window

No windows on the whole Piazza here
To make your properties but mine? But mine?
Heart! ere to-morrow, I shall be new-christen'd,
And call'd the Pantalone di Besogniosi,
About the town, Away.

PERGRINE What should this mean, sir Pol?

SIR POLITIC Some trick of state, believe it. I will home.

PERGRINE It may be some design on you:

SIR POLITIC I know not.
I'll stand upon my guard.

PERGRINE It is your best, sir.

SIR POLITIC This three weeks, all my advices, all my letters,
They have been intercepted.

PERGRINE Indeed, sir!
Best have a care.

SIR POLITIC Nay, so I will.

SIR POLITIC exits

PERGRINE This knight,
I may not lose him, for my mirth, till night.

Exit

2.3

Enter VOLPONE and MOSCA

VOLPONE O, I am wounded!

MOSCA Where, sir?

VOLPONE Not without;
Those blows were nothing, I could bear them ever.
But angry Cupid, bolting from her eyes,
Hath shot himself into me like a flame;
Where, now, he flings about his burning heat,
As in a furnace an ambitious fire,
Whose vent is stopped. The fight is all within me.
I cannot live, except thou help me, Mosca;
My liver melts, and I, without the hope
Of some soft air from her refreshing breath,
Am but a heap of cinders.

MOSCA 'Las, good sir,
Would you had never seen her.

VOLPONE Nay, would thou
Hadst never told me of her!

MOSCA Sir 'tis true;
I do confess I was unfortunate,
And you unhappy, but I'm bound in conscience,
No less than duty, to effect my best
To your release of torment, and I will, sir.

VOLPONE Dear Mosca, shall I hope?

MOSCA Sir, more than dear,
I will not bid you to despair of aught
Within a human compass.

VOLPONE O, there spoke
My better angel.

MOSCA I doubt not but
To bring success to your desires.

VOLPONE Nay, then,
I'll not repent me of my late disguise.

MOSCA If you can horn him, sir, you need not.

VOLPONE True:
Besides, I never meant him for my heir.
Is not the colour of my beard and eyebrows,
To make me known?

MOSCA No jot.

VOLPONE I did it well.

MOSCA So well, would I could follow you in mine,
With half the happiness.

VOLPONE But, were they gulled
With a belief that I was Scoto?

MOSCA Sir,
Scoto himself could hardly have distinguished!

I have not time to flatter you now; we'll part;
And as I prosper, so applaud my art.

Exeunt

2.4

Enter CORVINO and CELIA

CORVINO Death of mine honour, with the city's fool?
A juggling, tooth-drawing, prating mountebank?
And at a public window? Where, whilst he,
With his strained action, and his dole of faces,
To his drug-lecture draws your itching ears,
A crew of old, unmarried, noted lechers,
Stood leering up like satyrs - and you smile
Most graciously! And fan your favours forth,
To give your hot spectators satisfaction!
What, was your mountebank their call? Their whistle?
Or were you enamoured with his copper rings?
Or his embroidered suit, with the cope-stitch,
Made of a hearse-cloth? Or his old tilt-feather?
Or his starched beard? Well, you shall have him, yes.
He shall come home, and minister unto you
The fricace for the mother. I'm a Dutchman, !!
For if you thought me an Italian,
You would be damned, ere you did this, you whore!
Thou'dst tremble to imagine that the murder
Of father, mother, brother, all thy race,
Should follow as the subject of my justice.
CELIA Good sir, have patience.

CORVINO (*draws a dagger*) What couldst thou propose
Less to thyself, than in this heat of wrath,
And stung with my dishonour, I should strike
This steel into thee, with as many stabs,
As thou wert gazed upon with goatish eyes?

CELIA Alas, sir, be appeased! I could not think
My being at the window should more now
Move your impatience than at other times.

CORVINO No? Not to seek and entertain a parley
With a known knave, before a multitude?
You were an actor with your handkerchief;
Which he most sweetly kissed in the receipt,
And might, no doubt, return it with a letter,
And point the place where you might meet: your sister's,
Your mother's, or your aunt's might serve the turn.

CELIA Why, dear sir, when do I make these excuses,
Or ever stir abroad, but to the church?
And that so seldom —

CORVINO Well, it shall be less;
And thy restraint before was liberty,
To what I now decree, and therefore mark me:
First, I will have this bawdy light dammed up;

And till 't be done, some two or three yards off
I'll chalk a line, o'er which if thou but chance
To set thy desperate foot, more hell, more horror
More wild, remorseless rage shall seize on thee
Than on a conjurer, that had heedless left
His circle's safety ere his devil was laid.
Then, here's a lock, which I will hang upon thee.

Holds up a chastity belt

And, now I think on't, I will keep thee backwards;
Thy lodging shall be backwards; thy walks backwards;
Thy prospect - all be backwards; and no pleasure
That thou shalt know but backwards. Nay, since you force
My honest nature, know it is your own
Being too open, makes me use you thus.

Knocking within

One knocks.

Away, and be not seen, pain of thy life;
Nor look toward the window: if thou dost —

CELIA starts to leave

Nay, stay, hear this: let me not prosper, whore,
But I will make thee an anatomy,
Dissect thee mine own self, and read a lecture
Upon thee to the city, and in public. Away!

Exit CELIA. Enter Servant

Who's there?

SERVANT 'Tis Signor Mosca, sir.

CORVINO Let him come in.

Exit SERVANT

His master's dead: there's yet
Some good to help the bad.

Enter MOSCA

My Mosca, welcome!
I guess your news.

MOSCA I fear you cannot, sir.

CORVINO Is't not his death?

MOSCA Rather the contrary.

CORVINO Not his recovery?

MOSCA Yes, sir,

CORVINO I am cursed,
I am bewitched, my crosses meet to vex me.
How? How? How? How?

MOSCA Why, sir, with Scoto's oil!
Corbaccio and Voltore brought of it,
Whilst I was busy in an inner room —

CORVINO Death! That damned mountebank! But for the law
Now, I could kill the rascal. It cannot be
His oil should have that virtue. Have not I
Known him a common rogue, come fiddling in
To the *osteria*, with a tumbling whore,
And, when he has done all his forced tricks, been glad
Of a poor spoonful of dead wine, with flies in't?
It cannot be. All his ingredients
Are a sheep's gall, a roasted bitch's marrow,
Some few sod earwigs pounded caterpillars,
A little capon's grease, and fasting spittle;
I know 'em to a dram.

MOSCA I know not, sir,
But some on't, there, they poured into his ears,
Some in his nostrils, and recovered him;
Applying but the fricace.

CORVINO Pox o' that fricace.

MOSCA And since, to seem the more officious
And flattering of his health, there they have had,
At extreme fees, the college of physicians
Consulting on him, how they might restore him;
Where one would have a cataplasm of spices,
Another a flayed ape clapped to his breast,
A third would have it a dog, a fourth an oil,
With wild cats' skins; at last, they all resolved
That to preserve him was no other means,
But some young woman must be straight sought out,
Lusty, and full of juice, to sleep by him;
And to this service - most unhappily,
And most unwillingly - am I now employed,
Which here I thought to pre-acquaint you with,
Because I would not do that thing might cross
Your ends, on whom I have my whole dependence, sir:
Yet, if I do it not, they may delate
My slackness to my patron, work me out
Of his opinion; and there all your hopes,
Ventures, or whatsoever, are all frustrate.
I do but tell you, sir. Besides, they are all
Now striving, who shall first present him. Therefore
I could entreat you, briefly conclude somewhat;
Prevent 'em if you can.

CORVINO Death to my hopes!
This is my villainous fortune! Best to hire
Some common courtesan?

MOSCA Ay, I thought on that, sir.
But they are all so subtle, full of art, we may perchance,
Light on a quean may cheat us all.

CORVINO 'Tis true.

MOSCA No, no; it must be one that has no tricks, sir,
Some simple thing, a creature made unto it,
Some wench you may command. Ha' you no kinswoman?
God'so - Think, think, think, think, think, think, think, sir.
One o' the doctors offered there his daughter.

CORVINO How?

MOSCA Yes, Signor Lupo, the physician.
CORVINO His daughter?

MOSCA And a virgin, sir. Why? Alas,
He knows the state of 's body, what it is;
That naught can warm his blood sir, but a fever,
Nor any incantation raise his spirit
(A long forgetfulness hath seized that part.)
Besides sir, who shall know it? Some one or two —

CORVINO I pray thee give me leave.

He walks aside

If any man
But I had had this luck - the thing in 'tself,
I know, is nothing - wherefore should not I
As well command my blood and my affections
As this dull doctor? In the point of honour,
The cases are all one of wife and daughter.

MOSCA (*aside*) I hear him coming.

CORVINO (*aside*) She shall do't: 'Tis done.
'Slight! If this doctor, who is not engaged,
Unless 't be for his counsel (which is nothing)
Offer his daughter, what should I, that am
So deeply in? I will prevent him. Wretch!
Covetous wretch! (*To MOSCA*) Mosca, I have determined.

MOSCA How, sir?

CORVINO We'll make all sure. The party you wot of
Shall be mine own wife, Mosca.

MOSCA Sir, you have cut all their throats.
Why, 'tis directly taking a possession!
And in his next fit, we may let him go.
'Tis but to pull the pillow from his head,
And he is throttled; 't had been done before,
But for your scrupulous doubts.

CORVINO Aye, a plague on't,
My conscience fools my wit. Well, I'll be brief,
And so be thou, lest they should be before us.
Go home, prepare him, tell him with what zeal
And willingness I do it; swear it was
On the first hearing (as thou mayst do, truly)
Mine own free motion.

MOSCA Sir, I warrant you,

I'll so possess him with it, that the rest
Of his starved clients shall be banished all,
And only you received. But come not, sir,
Until I send, for I have something else
To ripen for your good, you must not know it.

CORVINO But do not you forget to send now.

MOSCA Fear not.

Exit MOSCA

CORVINO Where are you, wife? My Celia? Wife?

Enter CELIA

What, blubbing?
Come, dry those tears. I think thou thought'st me in earnest?
Ha? By this light I talked so but to try thee.
Methinks the lightness of the occasion
Should have confirmed thee. Come, I am not jealous.

CELIA No?

CORVINO Faith I am not I, nor never was:
It is a poor unprofitable humour.
Do not I know, if women have a will,
They'll do 'gainst all the watches of the world?
And that the fiercest spies are tamed with gold?
Tut, I am confident in thee, thou shalt see't.
And see I'll give thee cause too, to believe it.
Come kiss me. Go, and make thee ready straight,
In all thy best attire, thy choicest jewels,
Put them all on, and with them thy best looks:
We are invited to a solemn feast
At old Volpone's, where it shall appear
How far I am free from jealousy or fear.

Exeunt

3.1

Enter MOSCA

MOSCA I fear I shall begin to grow in love
With my dear self, and my most prosp'rous parts,
They do so spring and burgeon. I can feel
A whimsy in my blood; I know not how,
Success hath made me wanton. I could skip
Out of my skin, now, like a subtle snake,
I am so limber. O! Your parasite
Is a most precious thing, dropped from above,
Not bred 'mongst clods, and clodpoles, here on earth.
I muse the mystery was not made a science,
It is so liberally professed! Almost
All the wise world is little else in nature
But parasites, or sub-parasites. And yet,
I mean not those that have your bare town-art,
To know who's fit to feed 'em; have no house,
No family, no care, and therefore mould
Tales for men's ears, to bait that sense; or get
Kitchen-invention, and some stale receipts
To please the belly and the groin; nor those,
With their court dog-tricks, that can fawn and flear,
Make their revenue out of legs and faces,
Echo my lord, and lick away a moth;
But your fine, elegant rascal, that can rise
And stoop, almost together, like an arrow;
Shoot through the air as nimbly as a star;
Turn short as doth a swallow; and be here,
And there, and here, and yonder, all at once;
Present to any humour, all occasion;
And change a visor swifter than a thought!
This is the creature had the art born with him;
Toils not to learn it, but doth practise it
Out of most excellent nature; and such sparks
Are the true parasites, others but their zanies.

3.2

Enter BONARIO

MOSCA Who's this? Bonario? Old Corbaccio's son?
The person I was bound to seek. Fair sir,
You are happ'ly met.

BONARIO That cannot be by thee.

MOSCA Why, sir?

BONARIO Nay, pray thee know thy way, and leave me;
I would be loath to interchange discourse
With such a mate as thou art.

MOSCA Courteous sir,
Scorn not my poverty.

BONARIO Not I, by heaven.
But thou shalt give me leave to hate thy baseness.

MOSCA Baseness!

BONARIO Aye. Answer me, is not thy sloth
Sufficient argument? Thy flattery?
Thy means of feeding?

MOSCA Heaven, be good to me.
These imputations are too common, sir,
And easily stuck on virtue when she's poor.
You are unequal to me, and howe'er
Your sentence may be righteous, yet you are not,
That ere you know me, thus proceed in censure;
St. Mark bear witness 'gainst you; 'tis inhuman.

He weeps

BONARIO (*aside*) What? Does he weep? I do repent me I was so harsh.

MOSCA 'Tis true that, swayed by strong necessity,
I am enforced to eat my careful bread
With too much obsequy; 'tis true beside
That I am fain to spin mine own poor raiment
Out of my mere observance, being not born
To a free fortune. But that I have done
Base offices in rending friends asunder,
Dividing families, betraying counsels,
Whispering false lies, or mining men with praises,
Trained their credulity with perjuries,
Corrupted chastity, or am in love
With mine own tender ease, but would not rather
Prove the most rugged, and laborious course,
That might redeem my present estimation,
Let me here perish, in all hope of goodness.

BONARIO (*aside*) This cannot be a personated passion.
(*To MOSCA*) I was to blame so to mistake thy nature;
Pray thee, forgive me, and speak out thy business.

MOSCA Sir, it concerns you; and though I may seem
At first to make a main offence in manners,
And in my gratitude unto my master,
Yet for pure love, and hatred of wrong,
I must reveal it: This very hour your father is in purpose
To disinherit you —

BONARIO How!

MOSCA And thrust you forth
As a mere stranger to his blood. 'Tis true, sir,

BONARIO This tale hath lost thee much of the late trust
Thou hadst with me; it is impossible.
I know not how to lend it any thought,
My father should be so unnatural.

MOSCA It is a confidence that well becomes
Your piety; and formed, no doubt, it is
From your own simple innocence, which makes

Your wrong more monstrous and abhorred. But, sir,
I now will tell you more. If you shall be but pleased to go with me,
I'll bring you, but where
Your ear shall be a witness of the deed;
Hear yourself written bastard; and professed
The common issue of the earth.

BONARIO I'm 'mazed!

MOSCA Sir, if I do it not, draw your just sword,
And score your vengeance on my front and face:
Mark me your villain. You have too much wrong,
And I do suffer for you, sir. My heart
Weeps blood in anguish —

BONARIO Lead. I follow thee.

Exeunt

3.3

Enter VOLPONE, NANO, CASTRONE and ANDROGINO

VOLPONE Mosca stays long, methinks. Bring forth your sports
And help to make the wretched time more sweet.

NANO Dwarf, fool, and eunuch, well met here we be.
A question it were now, whether of us three,
Being all the known delicacies of a rich man,
In pleasing him, claim the precedency can?

CASTRONE I claim for myself.

ANDROGINO And so doth the fool.

NANO 'Tis foolish indeed: let me set you both to school.
First for your dwarf, he's little and witty,
And every thing, as it is little, is pretty;
Else why do men say to a creature of my shape,
So soon as they see him, 'It's a pretty little ape'?
And why a pretty ape? But for pleasing imitation
Of greater men's actions, in a ridiculous fashion.
Beside, this feat body of mine doth not crave
Half the meat, drink, one of your bulks will have.
And though that do feed him, it's a pitiful case,
His body is beholding to such a bad face.

Knocking within

VOLPONE Who's there? My couch! Away, look! Nano, see!
Give me my cap first. Go, enquire.

Exeunt NANO, ANDROGINO and CASTRONE

Now, Cupid,

Send it be Mosca, and with fair return.

Enter NANO

NANO It is the beauteous madam —

VOLPONE Would-be? Is it?

NANO The same.

VOLPONE Now torment on me; squire her in,
For she will enter, or dwell here forever.
Nay, quickly, that my fit were past.

Exit NANO

I fear
A second hell too, that my loathing this
Will quite expel my appetite to the other:
Would she were taking now her tedious leave.
Lord, how it threatens me what I am to suffer!

3.4

Enter NANO with LADY WOULD-BE

LADY POLITIC (*to NANO*) I thank you, good sir.
(*Examining herself in a mirror*)
This band shows not my neck enough. (*to NANO*) I trouble you, sir,
Let me request you bid my woman come hither to me.

Exit NANO

In good faith, I am dressed
Most favorably today! It is no matter,
'Tis well enough. (*Noticing something*) Look, see these petulant
Things! How have they done this?

VOLPONE (*aside*) I do feel the fever
Ent'ring in at mine ears; O for a charm
To fright it hence.

Enter NANO and Waiting Woman

LADY POLITIC Come nearer: is this curl
In his right place? Or this? Why is this higher
Then all the rest? You ha' not washed your eyes yet?
Or do they not stand even i' your head? I pray you, view
This tire, forsooth - are all things apt, or no?

WOMAN One hair a little, here, sticks out, forsooth.

LADY POLITIC Does't so, forsooth? And where was your dear sight
When it did so, forsooth? What now?
Bird-eyed? Pray approach and mend it.
Now, by that light, I muse you are not ashamed!
I, that have preached these things so oft unto you,
Read you the principles, argued all the grounds,
Disputed every fitness, every grace,
Called you to counsel of so frequent dressings —

NANO (*aside*) More carefully than of your fame or honour.

LADY POLITIC — Made you acquainted what an ample dowry
The knowledge of these things would be unto you,
Able, alone, to get you a noble husband
At your return; and you thus to neglect it?
Besides you seeing what a curious nation
Th' Italians are, what will they say of me?
'The English lady cannot dress herself.'
Here's a fine imputation to our country!
Well, go your ways, and stay i' the next room.
Good sir, you'll give her entertainment?

Exeunt NANO and Waiting Woman

VOLPONE (*aside*) The storm comes toward me.

LADY POLITIC How does my Volp?

VOLPONE Troubled with noise, I cannot sleep; I dreamt
That a strange fury entered now my house,
And, with the dreadful tempest of her breath,
Did cleave my roof asunder.

LADY POLITIC Believe me, and I
Had the most fearful dream, could I remember't —

VOLPONE (*aside*) Out on my fate! I ha' given her the occasion
How to torment me: she will tell me hers.

LADY POLITIC Methought, the golden mediocrity,
Polite and delicate —

VOLPONE Oh, if you do love me,
No more; I sweat, and suffer, at the mention
Of any dream: feel, how I tremble yet.

LADY POLITIC Alas, good soul! The passion of the heart.
Seed-pearl were good now, boiled with syrup of apples,
Tincture of gold, and coral, citron-pills,
Your elicampane root, myrobalanes —

VOLPONE (*aside*) Aye me, I have ta'en a grass-hopper by the wing.

LADY POLITIC Burnt silk and amber. You have muscatel
Good i' the house?

VOLPONE You will not drink, and part?

LADY POLITIC No, fear not that. Shall I, sir, make you a poultice?

VOLPONE No, no, no;
I'm very well: you need prescribe no more.

LADY POLITIC I have a little studied physic; but now,
I'm all for music, save, i' the forenoons,
An hour or two for painting. I would have
A lady, indeed, t' have all letters and arts,
Be able to discourse, to write, to paint,
But principal (as Plato holds) your music -

And so does wise Pythagoras, I take it -
When there is consent in face,
In voice, and clothes - and is, indeed,
Our sex's chiefest ornament.

VOLPONE The poet
As old in time as Plato, and as knowing,
Says that your highest female grace is silence.

LADY POLITIC Which o' your poets? Petrarch, or Tasso, or Dante?
Guarini? Ariosto? Aretine? Cieco d' Adria? I have read them all.

VOLPONE (*aside*) Is everything a cause to my destruction?
LADY POLITIC I think I have two or three of them about me.

VOLPONE (*aside*) The sun, the sea, will sooner both stand still
Than her eternal tongue; nothing can 'scape it.

LADY POLITIC Here's *Pastor Fido* —

VOLPONE (*aside*) Profess obstinate silence,
That's now my safest.

LADY POLITIC All our English writers,
(I mean such as are happy in th' Italian)
Will deign to steal out of this author mainly,
Almost as much, as from Montaignie:
He has so modern and facile a vein,
Fitting the time, and catching the court-ear.
Your Petrarch is more passionate, yet he,
In days of sonetting, trusted them with much.
Dante is hard, and few can understand him.
But, for a desperate wit, there's Aretine!
Only, his pictures are a little obscene —
You mark me not?

VOLPONE Alas, my mind's perturbed.

LADY POLITIC Why, in such cases, we must cure ourselves,
Make use of our philosophy —

VOLPONE (*aside*) *Ohime.*

LADY POLITIC And as we find our passions do rebel,
Encounter 'em with reason, or divert 'em,
By giving scope unto some other humour
Of lesser danger - as in politic bodies,
There's nothing more doth overwhelm the judgment,
And cloud the understanding, than too much
Settling and fixing, and (as 't were) subsiding
Upon one object. For the incorporating
Of these same outward things, into that part,
Which we call mental, leaves some certain faeces
That stop the organs, and, as Plato says,
Assassinates our knowledge.

VOLPONE (*aside*) Now, the spirit
Of patience help me!

LADY POLITIC Come, in faith, I must
Visit you more a-days, and make you well;
Laugh and be lusty.

VOLPONE (*aside*) My good angel save me!
LADY POLITIC There was but one sole man in all the world,
With whom I e'er could sympathise; and he
Would lie you often three, four hours together
To hear me speak; and be sometimes so rapt,
As he would answer me quite from the purpose,
Like you, and you are like him, just. I'll discourse -
An't be but only, sir, to bring you asleep -
How we did spend our time and loves together,
For some six years.

VOLPONE O, o, o, o, o, o!

LADY POLITIC For we were *coaetanei*, and brought up —

VOLPONE (*aside*) Some power, some fate, some fortune rescue me!

Enter MOSCA

MOSCA God save you, madam.

LADY POLITIC Good sir.

VOLPONE Mosca! Welcome,
Welcome to my redemption.

MOSCA Why, sir?

VOLPONE (*aside*) O,
Rid me of this my torture, quickly, there;
My madam, with the everlasting voice:
The bells, in time of pestilence, ne'er made
Like noise, or were in that perpetual motion.
The cockpit comes not near it. All my house,
But now, steamed like a bath with her thick breath.
A lawyer could not have been heard; nor scarce
Another woman, such a hail of words
She has let fall. For hell's sake, rid her hence.

MOSCA Has she presented?

VOLPONE O, I do not care,
I'll take her absence, upon any price,
With any loss.

MOSCA Madam —

LADY POLITIC I have brought your patron
A toy, a cap here, of mine own work.

MOSCA 'Tis well.
I had forgot to tell you, I saw your knight,
Where you'd little think it —

MOSCA Sir, here concealed, you may hear all. But pray you
Have patience, sir —

Knocking within

— the same's your father knock;
I am compelled to leave you.

BONARIO Do so.

Exit MOSCA

Yet
Cannot my thought imagine this a truth.

He hides. Re-enter MOSCA with CORVINO and CELIA

MOSCA Death on me! You are come too soon, what meant you?
Did not I say I would send?

CORVINO Yes, but I feared
You might forget it, and then they prevent us.

MOSCA (*aside*) Prevent? Did e'er man haste so for his horns?
A courtier would not ply it so, for a place.
(*To CORVINO*) Well, now there's no helping it, stay here;
I'll presently return.

Goes to where BONARIO hides

CORVINO Where are you, Celia?
You know not wherefore I have brought you hither?

CELIA Not well, except you told me.

CORVINO Now, I will:
Hark hither.

They whisper apart

MOSCA Sir, your father hath sent word,
It will be half an hour ere he come;
And therefore if you please to walk the while
Into that gallery. At the upper end
There are some books to entertain the time.
BONARIO Yes, I will stay there. (*Aside*) I do doubt this fellow.

Exit BONARIO

MOSCA (*aside*) There, he is far enough; he can hear nothing.
And, for his father, I can keep him off.

CORVINO Nay, now, there is no starting back; and therefore
Resolve upon it; I have so decreed.
It must be done.

CELIA Sir, let me beseech you,
Affect not these strange trials; if you doubt
My chastity, why, lock me up for ever:

Make me the heir of darkness. Let me live
Where I may please your fears, if not your trust.

CORVINO Believe it, I have no such humour, I.
All that I speak I mean; yet I'm not mad.
Nor horn-mad, see you? Go to, show yourself
Obedient, and a wife.

CELIA O heaven!

CORVINO I've told you reasons:
What the physicians have set down; how much
It may concern me; what my engagements are;
My means; and the necessity of those means
For my recovery, wherefore, if you be
Loyal, and mine, be won, respect my venture.

CELIA Before your honour?

CORVINO Honour? Tut, a breath:
There's no such thing in nature - a mere term
Invented to awe fools. What, is my gold
The worse for touching? Clothes for being looked on?
Why, this is no more.

CELIA (*aside*) Lord! What spirit
Is this hath entered him?

CORVINO And for your fame,
That's such a jig! As if I would go tell it,
Cry it on the Piazza! Who shall know it
But he that cannot speak it, and this fellow,
Whose lips are i' my pocket,

CELIA Are heaven and saints then nothing?
Will they be blind, or stupid?

CORVINO How?

CELIA Good sir,
Be jealous still, emulate them; and think
What hate they burn with, toward every sin.

CORVINO I grant you, if I thought it were a sin,
I would not urge you. Should I offer you
To some young Frenchman, or hot Tuscan blood
This were a sin. But here, 'tis contrary,
A pious work, mere charity for physic,
And honest polity to assure mine own.

CELIA O heaven! Canst thou suffer such a change?

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) Thou art mine honour, Mosca, and my pride,
My joy, my tickling, my delight! Go bring 'em.

MOSCA Please you draw near, sir.

CORVINO Come on. What?

You will not be rebellious? By that light —

MOSCA Sir,
Signor Corvino, here, is come to see you.

VOLPONE O.

MOSCA And hearing of the consultation had
So lately, for your health, is come to offer —
Or rather, sir, to prostitute —

CORVINO Thanks, sweet Mosca.

MOSCA Freely, unasked, or unentreated —

CORVINO Well.

MOSCA As the true fervent instance of his love,
His own most fair and proper wife; the beauty
Only of price in Venice —

CORVINO 'Tis well urged.

MOSCA To be your comfortress, and to preserve you.

VOLPONE Alas, I'm past, already! Pray you, thank him
For his good care and promptness; but for that,
'Tis a vain labour e'en to fight 'gainst heaven;
Applying fire to stone — uh, uh, uh, uh! —
Making a dead leaf grow again. I take
His wishes gently, though; will him to pray for me,
And t' use his fortune with reverence,
When he comes t 'it.

MOSCA Do you hear, sir?
Go to him with your wife.

CORVINO Heart of my father!
Wilt thou persist thus? Come, I pray thee, come.
Thou seest 'tis nothing, Celia. By this hand
I shall grow violent. Come, do't, I say.

CELIA Sir, kill me, rather. I will take down poison,
Eat burning coals, do anything —

CORVINO Be damned.
Heart, I'll drag thee hence home by the hair;
Cry thee a strumpet through the streets; rip up
Thy mouth unto thine ears, and slit thy nose,
Like a raw rochet! Do not tempt me, come!
Death! I will buy some slave whom
I will kill, and bind thee to him, alive;
And at my window hang you forth, devising
Some monstrous crime, which I, in capital letters,
Will eat into thy flesh with aqua-fortis,
And burning corsives, on this stubborn breast.
Now, by the blood thou hast incensed, I'll do it.

CELIA Sir, what you please, you may; I am your martyr.

CORVINO Be not thus obstinate, I ha' not deserved it.
Think who it is entreats you. Do but go kiss him.
Or touch him. But for my sake. At my suit.
This once. No? Not? I shall remember this.
Will you disgrace me thus? Do you thirst my undoing?

MOSCA Nay, gentle lady, be advised.

CORVINO No, no.
She has watched her time. God's precious, this is scurvy;
'Tis very scurvy, and you are an arrant locust, by heaven, a locust.
Whore, crocodile, that hast thy tears prepared,
Expecting how thou'lt bid 'em flow.

CELIA Would my life would serve to satisfy —

CORVINO (to MOSCA) S'death! If she would but speak to him,
And save my reputation, 'twere somewhat;
But spitefully to affect my utter ruin!

MOSCA Aye, now you have put your fortune in her hands.
Why i'faith, it is her modesty, I must quit her;
If you were absent, she would be more coming;
I know it, and dare undertake for her.
What woman can, before her husband? Pray you,
Let us depart, and leave her here.

CORVINO Sweet Celia,
Thou may'st redeem all yet; I'll say no more:
If not, esteem yourself as lost. Nay, stay there.

Exit CORVINO and MOSCA

CELIA O God and his good angels! Whither, whither
Is shame fled human breasts? That with such ease,
Men dare put off your honours and their own?
Is that, which ever was a cause of life,
Now placed beneath the basest circumstance?
And modesty an exile made, for money?

3.6

VOLPONE leaps from his couch

VOLPONE Ay, in Corvino, and such earth-fed minds,
That never tasted the true heaven of love.
Assure thee, Celia, he that would sell thee
Only for hope of gain, and that uncertain,
He would have sold his part of Paradise
For ready money, had he met a cope-man.
Why art thou 'mazed to see me thus revived?
Rather applaud thy beauty's miracle;
'Tis thy great work, that hath raised me.
Now art thou welcome.

CELIA Sir!

VOLPONE Nay, fly me not.
Nor let thy false imagination
That I was bed-rid make thee think I am so:

VOLPONE
Thou hast, in place of a base husband, found
A worthy lover: use thy fortune well,
With secrecy and pleasure. See, behold
What thou art queen of (*reveals the treasure*); not in expectation,
As I feed others, but possessed and crowned.
See here, a rope of pearl; and each more orient
Than that the brave Egyptian queen caroused,
Dissolve, and drink 'em. See, a carbuncle
May put out both the eyes of our St Mark;
A diamond, would have bought Lollia Paulina,
When she came in like star-light, hid with jewels
That were the spoils of provinces; take these,
And wear, and lose 'em: yet remains an earring
To purchase them again, and this whole state.
A gem but worth a private patrimony
Is nothing: we will eat such at a meal.
The heads of parrots, tongues of nightingales,
The brains of peacocks, and of ostriches
Shall be our food; and, could we get the phoenix,
Though nature lost her kind, she were our dish.

CELIA Good sir, these things might move a mind affected
With such delights; but I, whose innocence
Is all I can think wealthy, or worth th' enjoying,
And which, once lost, I have naught to lose beyond it,
Cannot be taken with these sensual baits
If you have conscience —

VOLPONE 'Tis the beggar's virtue.
If thou hast wisdom, hear me, Celia.
Thy baths shall be the juice of July-flowers,
Spirit of roses, and of violets,
The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath
Gathered in bags, and mixed with Cretan wines.
Our drink shall be prepared gold and amber,
Which we will take until my roof whirl round
With the vertigo; and my dwarf shall dance,
My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antic,
Whilst we, in changed shapes, act Ovid's tales,
Thou like Europa now, and I like Jove,
Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine,
So of the rest, till we have quite run through
And wearied all the fables of the gods,

CELIA If you have ears that will be pierced - or eyes
That can be opened - a heart that may be touched -
Or any part that yet sounds man about you;
Do me the grace to let me 'scape. If not,
Be bountiful, and kill me. You do know,
I am a creature hither ill betrayed
By one whose shame I would forget it were -
If you will deign me neither of these graces,

Yet feed your wrath, sir, rather than your lust -
(It is a vice comes nearer manliness)
And punish that unhappy crime of nature
Which you miscall my beauty - flay my face,
Or poison it with ointments for seducing
Your blood to this rebellion. Rub these hands,
With what may cause an eating leprosy
E'en to my bones and marrow - anything
That may disfavour me, save in my honour -
And I will kneel to you, pray for you, pay down
A thousand hourly vows, sir, for your health -
Report, and think you virtuous —

VOLPONE Think me cold,
Frozen and impotent, and so report me?
That I had Nestor's hernia, thou wouldst think?
I do degenerate and abuse my nation,
To play with opportunity thus long.
I should have done the act, and then have parleyed.
Yield, or I'll force thee.

CELIA O! Just God!

VOLPONE In vain —

BONARIO leaps out from his hiding place

BONARIO Forbear, foul ravisher, libidinous swine!
Free the forced lady, or thou diest, impostor.
But that I am loath to snatch thy punishment
Out of the hand of justice, thou shouldst, yet,
Be made the timely sacrifice of vengeance,
Before this altar, and this dross, thy idol.
Lady, let's quit this place, it is the den
Of villainy; fear naught, you have a guard:
And he, ere long, shall meet his just reward.

Exeunt BONARIO and CELIA

VOLPONE Fall on me, roof, and bury me in ruin,
Become my grave, that wert my shelter! Oh!
I am unmasked, unspirited, undone,
Betrayed to beggary, to infamy —

3.7

Enter MOSCA bleeding

MOSCA Where shall I run, most wretched shame of men,
To beat out my unlucky brains?

VOLPONE Here, here.
What? Dost thou bleed?

MOSCA O that his well-driven sword
Had been so courteous to have cleft me down
Unto the navel, ere I lived to see
My life, my hopes, my spirits, my patron, all

Thus desperately engaged by my error.

VOLPONE Woe on thy fortune.

MOSCA And my follies, sir.

VOLPONE Thou hast made me miserable.

MOSCA And myself, sir.
Who would have thought he would have harkened so?

VOLPONE What shall we do?

MOSCA I know not; if my heart
Could expiate the mischance, I'd pluck it out.
Will you be pleased to hang me? Or cut my throat?
And I'll requite you, sir. Let's die like Romans,
Since we have lived like Grecians.

Knocking within

VOLPONE Hark! Who's there?
I hear some footing - officers, the *Saffi*,
Come to apprehend us! I do feel the brand
Hissing already at my forehead.

MOSCA To your couch, sir.

VOLPONE jumps into bed. Enter CORBACCIO

MOSCA Signor Corbaccio!

CORBACCIO Why, how now, Mosca?

MOSCA O, undone, amazed, sir.
Your son, I know not by what accident,
Acquainted with your purpose to my patron
Touching your will, and making him your heir,
Entered our house with violence, his sword drawn,
Sought for you, called you wretch, unnatural,
Vowed he would kill you.

CORBACCIO Me?

MOSCA Yes, and my patron.

Enter VOLTORE unseen

CORBACCIO This act shall disinherit him indeed;
Here is the will.

MOSCA 'Tis well, sir.

CORBACCIO Right and well.
Be you as careful now for me.

MOSCA My life, sir,
Is not more tendered, I am only yours.

CORBACCIO How does he? Will he die shortly, thinkst thou?

MOSCA I fear he'll outlast May.

CORBACCIO Today?

MOSCA No, last out May, sir.

CORBACCIO Could'st thou not gi' him a dram?

MOSCA O, by no means, sir.

Exit CORBACCIO

VOLTRE (*aside*) This is a knave, I see.

MOSCA (*seeing VOLTRE*) How, Signor Voltore! (*Aside*) Did he hear me?

VOLTRE
Parasite!

MOSCA Who's that? O, sir, most timely welcome —

VOLTRE Scarce,
To the discovery of your tricks, I fear.
You are his, only? And mine, also? Are you not?

MOSCA Who? I, sir?

VOLTRE You, sir. What device is this
About a will?

MOSCA A plot for you, sir.

VOLTRE Come,
Put not your foists upon me; I shall scent 'em.

MOSCA Did you not hear it?

VOLTRE Yes, I hear Corbaccio
Hath made your patron there his heir.

MOSCA 'Tis true,
By my device, drawn to it by my plot,
With hope —

VOLTRE Your patron should reciprocate?
And you have promised?

MOSCA For your good, I did, sir.
Nay, more, I told his son, brought, hid him here,
Where he might hear his father pass the deed;
Being persuaded to it by this thought, sir:
That the unnaturalness, first, of the act,
And then his father's oft disclaiming in him,
(Which I did mean to help on) would sure enrage him
To do some violence upon his parent;

On which the law should take sufficient hold,
And you be stated in a double hope.
Truth be my comfort, and my conscience,
My only aim was to dig you a fortune
Out of these two old rotten sepulchers —

VOLTORE I cry thee mercy, Mosca.

MOSCA — worth your patience,
And your great merit, sir. And see the change!

VOLTORE Why, what success?

MOSCA Most hapless! You must help, sir.
Whilst we expected the old raven, in comes
Corvino's wife, sent hither by her husband —

VOLTORE What, with a present?

MOSCA No, sir, on visitation
(I'll tell you how anon) and, staying long,
The youth he grows impatient, rushes forth,
Seizeth the lady, wounds me, makes her swear
(Or he would murder her; that was his vow)
T' affirm my patron to have done her rape,
(Which how unlike it is, you see) and hence,
With that pretext he's gone t' accuse his father,
Defame my patron, defeat you —

VOLTORE Where's her husband?
Let him be sent for straight.

MOSCA Sir, I'll go fetch him.

VOLTORE Bring him to the *Scrutineo*.

MOSCA Sir, I will.

VOLTORE This must be stopped.

MOSCA O you do nobly, sir.

Exit VOLTORE

MOSCA Patron, pray for our success.

VOLPONE (*rising from his couch*) Need makes devotion: heaven your labour
bless!

Exeunt

4.1

Enter SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE and PEREGRINE

SIR POLITIC You mentioned me for some instructions.
I will tell you, sir (since we are met here in this height of Venice)
Some few particulars I have set down,
Only for this meridian, fit to be known
Of your crude traveller, and they are these:

SIR POLITIC First, for your garb, it must be grave and serious,
Very reserved and locked; not tell a secret
On any terms, not to your father; scarce
A fable but with caution; make sure choice
Both of your company and discourse; beware
You never speak a truth —

PEREGRINE How!

SIR POLITIC Not to strangers,
For those be they you must converse with most;
And then, for your religion, profess none,
But wonder at the diversity of all;
And for your part protest, were there no other
But simply the laws o' the land, you could content you:
Nick Machiavel and Monsieur Bodin both
Were of this mind. Then must you learn the hour
When you must eat your melons and your figs.

PEREGRINE Is that a point of state too?

SIR POLITIC Here it is.
For your Venetian, if he see a man
Preposterous in the least, he has him straight.
He has; he strips him. I'll acquaint you, sir,
I now have lived here, 'tis some fourteen months;
Within the first week of my landing here
All took me for a citizen of Venice,
I knew the forms so well.

PEREGRINE (*aside*) And nothing else.

SIR POLITIC I had read Contarine, took me a house,
Dealt with my Jews to furnish it with movables -
Well, if I could but find one man, one man
To mine own heart, whom I durst trust, I would —

PEREGRINE What? What, sir?

SIR POLITIC Make him rich; make him a fortune.
He should not think again; I would command it.

PEREGRINE As how?

SIR POLITIC With certain projects that I have.
Which, I may not discover.

PEREGRINE (*aside*) If I had
But one to wager with, I would lay odds now

He tells me instantly.

SIR POLITIC One is, to serve the state
Of Venice, with red herrings, from Rotterdam,
Where I have correspondence. There's a letter,
Sent me from one of the States, and to that purpose;
He cannot write his name, but that's his mark.

PEREGRINE He is a chandler?

SIR POLITIC No, a cheesemonger,
But is now, if my main projects fail.

PEREGRINE Then, you have others?

SIR POLITIC I Think I have my notes to show you -

PEREGRINE Good Sir,

SIR POLITIC My paper is not with me. My first is
Concerning tinder-boxes. You must know,
No family is here without its box.
Now, sir, it being so portable a thing,
Put case, that you or I were ill affected
Unto the state; sir, with it in our pockets,
Might not I go into the *Arsenale*,
Or you, come out again, and none the wiser?

PEREGRINE Except yourself, sir.

SIR POLITIC Go to, then. I therefore
Advertise to the state, how fit it were
That none but such as were known patriots,
Sound lovers of their country, should be suffered
To enjoy them in their houses; and even those
Sealed at some office, and at such a bigness
As might not lurk in pockets.

PEREGRINE Admirable!

SIR POLITIC My next is how to enquire, and be resolved,
By present demonstration, whether a ship,
Newly arrived from *Soria*, or from
Any suspected part of all the Levant,
Be guilty of the plague;

PEREGRINE Indeed, sir?

SIR POLITIC Nay, sir, conceive me. It will cost me in onions,
Some thirty *livres* —

PEREGRINE (*aside*) Which is one pound sterling.

SIR POLITIC Beside my waterworks, for this I do, sir:
First, I bring in your ship 'twixt two brick walls
(But those the state shall venture). On the one
I strain me a fair tarpaulin, and in that
I stick my onions, cut in halves; the other

Is full of loopholes, out at which I thrust
The noses of my bellows; and those bellows
I keep with waterworks in perpetual motion which is the easiest part of a hundred.
Now, sir, your onion, which doth naturally
Attract the infection, and your bellows blowing
The air upon him, will show, instantly,
By his changed colour, if there be contagion;
Or else remain as fair as at the first.
Now it is known, 'tis nothing.

PEREGRINE You are right, sir.

SIR POLITIC I hope I have my notes to show you --

Searching his pockets

PEREGRINE 'Faith, so would I, sir.

SIR POLITIC Were I false,
Or would be made so, I could show you reasons
How I could sell this state now, to the Turk;

Searching his pockets again

PEREGRINE Pray you, Sir Pol.

SIR POLITIC I have 'em not about me.

PEREGRINE That I feared.
They are there, sir? (*Indicating a book SIR POLITIC carries*)

SIR POLITIC No, this is my diary,
Wherein I note my actions of the day.

PEREGRINE Pray you let's see, sir. What is here? *Reads* 'Notandum,
A rat had gnawn my spur-leathers; notwithstanding,
I put on new and did go forth, but first
I threw three beans over the threshold.
I went and bought two toothpicks, whereof one
I burst immediately in a discourse
With a Dutch merchant; by the way
I cheapen'd sprats; and at St. Mark's I urined.'
'Faith, these are politic notes!

SIR POLITIC Sir, I do slip
No action of my life, but thus I quote it.

PEREGRINE Believe me, it is wise!

SIR POLITIC Nay, sir, read forth.

4.2

Enter LADY WOULD-BE, NANO and Waiting Woman

LADY POLITIC Where should this loose knight be, trow? Sure he's housed.

NANO Why, then he's fast.

LADY POLITIC Aye, he plays both with me.
I pray you, stay. This heat will do more harm
To my complexion than his heart is worth.
I do not care to hinder, but to take him.

Rubbing her cheeks

How it comes off!

WOMAN My master's yonder.

LADY POLITIC Where?

WOMAN With a young gentleman.

LADY POLITIC That same's the party, the courtesan Mosca
told me of in man's apparel!

SIR POLITIC (*seeing her*) My lady!

PEREGRINE Where?

SIR POLITIC 'Tis she indeed, sir; you shall know her. She is,
A lady of that merit for fashion and behaviour;
And for beauty, nay, and for discourse —

PEREGRINE Being your wife, she cannot miss that.

SIR POLITIC (*introducing PEREGRINE*) Madam,
Here is a gentleman, pray you, use him fairly,
He seems a youth, but he is —

LADY POLITIC None?

SIR POLITIC Yes, one
Has put his face as soon into the world —

LADY POLITIC But today?

SIR POLITIC How's this?

LADY POLITIC Why, in this habit, sir; you apprehend me.
Well, Master Would-be, this doth not become you;
I had thought the odour, sir, of your good name
Had been more precious to you, that you would not
Have done this dire massacre on your honour;
One of your gravity and rank besides!
But knights, I see, care little for the oath
They make to ladies - chiefly, their own ladies.

SIR POLITIC Now by my spurs, the symbol of my knighthood —

PEREGRINE (*aside*) Lord, how his brain is humbled for an oath.

SIR POLITIC I reach you not.

LADY POLITIC (*To PEREGRINE*) Sir, a word with you.
I would be loath to contest publicly

With any gentlewoman; or to seem
Froward, or violent (as *The Courtier* says,
It comes too near rusticity in a lady,
Which I would shun by all means) yet,
To have one fair gentlewoman thus be made
Th' unkind instrument to wrong another,
And one she knows not, aye, and to persevere,
In my poor judgment, is not warranted
From being a solecism in our sex,
If not in manners.

PEREGRINE How is this?

SIR POLITIC Sweet madam,
Come nearer to your aim.

LADY POLITIC Marry, and will, sir.
Since you provoke me with your impudence
And laughter of your light land siren here,
Your Sporus, your hermaphrodite
To a lewd harlot, a base fricatrice,
A female devil in a male outside.

SIR POLITIC (*to PEREGRINE*) Nay,
And you be such a one, I must bid *adieu*
To your delights. The case appears too liquid.

Exit SIR POLITIC

PEREGRINE This is fine, i'faith!
And do you use this often? Is this part
Of your wit's exercise, 'gainst you have occasion?

LADY POLITIC Go to, sir.

She snatches PEREGRINE's shirt as if uncovering a disguise

PEREGRINE Do you hear me, lady?
Why, if your knight have set you to beg shirts,
Or to invite me home, you might have done it
A nearer way, by far.

LADY POLITIC This cannot work you
Out of my snare.

PEREGRINE Why, am I in it, then?
Indeed, your husband told me you were fair,
And so you are; only your nose inclines,
That side, that's next the sun, to the queen-apple.

LADY POLITIC This cannot be endured by any patience!

Enter MOSCA

MOSCA What is the matter, madam?

LADY POLITIC If the Senate

Right not my quest in this, I'll protest 'em
To all the world no aristocracy.

MOSCA What is the injury, lady?

LADY POLITIC Why, the courtesan
You told me of, here I have ta'en disguised.

MOSCA Who? This! What means your ladyship? The creature
I mentioned to you is apprehended now,
Before the Senate; you shall see her —

LADY POLITIC Where?

MOSCA I'll bring you to her. This young gentleman
I saw him land this morning at the port.

LADY POLITIC Is't possible? How has my judgment wandered!
Sir, I must, blushing, say to you I have erred,
And plead your pardon.

PEREGRINE What? More changes yet?

LADY POLITIC I hope you have not the malice to remember
A gentlewoman's passion. If you stay
In Venice here, please you to use me, sir —

MOSCA Will you go, madam?

LADY POLITIC Pray you, sir, use me. In faith,
The more you see me, the more I shall conceive
You have forgot our quarrel.

Exeunt all except PEREGRINE

PEREGRINE This is rare!
Sir Politic Would-be? No, Sir Politic Bawd!
To bring me thus acquainted with his wife!
Well, wise sir Pol, since you have practised thus
Upon my freshmanship, I'll try your salt-head,
What proof it is against a counter-plot.

Exit

4.3

Enter VOLTORE, CORBACCIO, CORVINO and MOSCA

VOLTORE Well, now you know the carriage of the business,
Your constancy is all that is required
Unto the safety of it.

MOSCA Is the lie
Safely conveyed amongst us? Is that sure?
Knows every man his burden?

CORVINO Yes.

MOSCA Then shrink not.
CORVINO (*aside to MOSCA*) But knows the advocate the truth?

MOSCA O, sir,
By no means. I devised a formal tale,
That salved your reputation. But be valiant, sir.

CORVINO I fear no one but him, that this his pleading
Should make him stand for a co-heir —

MOSCA Co-halter!
Hang him. We will but use his tongue, his noise,
As we do croaker's here. (*Indicating CORBACCIO*)

CORVINO Ay, what shall he do?

MOSCA When we ha' done, you mean?

CORVINO Yes.

MOSCA Why, we'll
Sell him for *mumma*. He's half dust already.
(*Aside to VOLTORE*) Do not you smile, to see this buffalo (*indicating CORVINO*)
How he doth sport it with his head?
(*Aside*) I should, if all were well and past.
(*Aside to CORBACCIO*) Sir, only you are he that shall enjoy the crop of all,
And these not know for whom they toil.

CORBACCIO Aye, peace.

MOSCA (*Aside to CORVINO*) But you shall eat it.
(*Aside*) Much! (*Aside to VOLTORE*) Worshipful sir,
Mercury sit upon your thundering tongue,
Or the French Hercules, and make your language
As conquering as his club, to beat along,
As with a tempest, flat, our adversaries.

VOLTORE Here they come, ha' done.

MOSCA I have another witness, if you need, sir.

VOLTORE Who is it?

MOSCA Sir, Lady Would-Be.

4.4

*Enter THE AVVOCATORI, BONARIO, CELIA, NOTARO,
COMMENDATORE*

AVVOCATO 1 The like of this the Senate never heard of.

AVVOCATO 3 The gentlewoman has been ever held
Of unproved name.

AVVOCATO 2 So the young man.

AVVOCATO 1 Appear yet those were cited?

NOTARO All, but the old magnifico, Volpone.

AVVOCATO 1 Why is not he here?

MOSCA Please your fatherhoods,
Here is his advocate. Himself's so weak,
So feeble —

AVVOCATO 1 What are you?

BONARIO His parasite,
His knave, his pander. I beseech the court,
Volpone may be forced to come, that your grave eyes
May bear strong witness of his strange impostures.

VOLTORE Upon my faith and credit with your virtues,
He is not able to endure the air.

AVVOCATO 1 Bring him, however.

AVVOCATO 2 We will see him.

AVVOCATO 3 Fetch him.

Exeunt Commendatore

VOLTORE Your fatherhoods fit pleasures be obeyed.
But sure, the sight will rather move your pities
Than indignation. May it please the court
In the meantime, he may be heard in me.
I know this place most void of prejudice,
And therefore crave it, since we have no reason
To fear our truth should hurt our cause.

AVVOCATO 1 Speak free.

VOLTORE Then know, most honoured fathers, I must now
Discover to your strangely abused ears,
The most prodigious and most frontless piece
Of solid impudence and treachery
That ever vicious nature yet brought forth
To shame the state of Venice. This lewd woman (*indicating CELIA*)
That wants no artificial looks or tears
To help the visor she has now put on,
Hath long been known a close adulteress
To that lascivious youth there (*indicating BONARIO*); not suspected,
I say, but known; and taken in the act
With him; and by this man, the easy husband (*indicating CORVINO*)
Pardoned; whose timeless bounty makes him now
Stand here, the most unhappy, innocent person
That ever man's own goodness made accused.
For these, not knowing how to owe a gift
Of that dear grace, but with their shame
Began to hate the benefit; and, in place
Of thanks, devise t' extirpe the memory
Of such an act. This gentleman, the father, (*indicating CORBACCIO*)
Hearing of this foul fact, along with many others,

And grieved in nothing more than that he could not
Preserve himself a parent, at last decreed
To disinherit him.

AVVOCATO 3 These be strange turns!

AVVOCATO 2 The young man's fame was ever fair and honest.

VOLTRE So much more full of danger is his vice,
That can beguile so under shade of virtue.
But, as I said, my honoured sires, his father
Having this settled purpose and this day
Appointed for the deed; that parricide
(I cannot style him better) by confederacy
Preparing this his paramour to be there,
Entered Volpone's house (who was the man,
Your fatherhoods must understand, designed
For the inheritance) and there sought his father.
But with what purpose sought he him, my lords?
I tremble to pronounce it, that a son
Unto a father, and to such a father,
Should have so foul, felonious intent.
It was, to murder him. When, being prevented
By his more happy absence, what then did he?
Not check his wicked thoughts; no, now new deeds,
An act of horror, fathers! He dragged forth
The aged gentleman that had there lain bed-ridden
Three years and more out of his innocent couch,
Naked upon the floor, there left him; wounded
His servant in the face; and, with this strumpet,
The stale to his forged practice, who was glad
To be so active - (I shall here desire
Your fatherhoods to note but my collections,
As most remarkable) - thought at once to stop
His father's ends, discredit his free choice
In the old gentleman, redeem themselves,
By laying infamy upon this man, (*indicating CORVINO*)
To whom, with blushing, they should owe their lives.

AVVOCATO 1 What proofs have you of this?

BONARIO Most honoured fathers,
I humbly crave there be no credit given
To this man's mercenary tongue.

AVVOCATO 2 Forbear.

BONARIO His soul moves in his fee.

AVVOCATO 3 O, sir.

BONARIO This fellow,
For six *sofs* more, would plead against his Maker.

AVVOCATO 1 You do forget yourself.

VOLTRE Nay, nay, grave fathers,
Let him have scope. Can any man imagine

That he will spare his accuser, that would not
Have spared his parent?

AVVOCATO 1 Well, produce your proofs.

CELIA I would I could forget I were a creature.

VOLTORE Signor Corbaccio!

CORBACCIO comes forward

AVVOCATO 1 What is he?

VOLTORE The father.

AVVOCATO 2 Has he had an oath?

NOTARO Yes.

CORBACCIO What must I do now?

NOTARO Your testimony's craved.

CORBACCIO Speak to the knave?
I'll have my mouth first stopped with earth; my heart
Abhors his knowledge: I disclaim in him.

AVVOCATO 1 But for what cause?

CORBACCIO The mere portent of nature.
He is an utter stranger to my loins.

BONARIO Have they made you to this?

CORBACCIO I will not hear thee,
Speak not, thou viper.

BONARIO Sir, I will sit down,
And rather wish my innocence should suffer
Than I resist the authority of a father.

VOLTORE Signor Corvino!

CORVINO comes forward

AVVOCATO 1 Who's this?

NOTARO The husband.

AVVOCATO 3 Is he sworn?

NOTARO He is.

AVVOCATO 3 Speak, then.

CORVINO This woman, please your fatherhoods, is a whore
Of most hot exercise, more than a partridge, upon record —

AVVOCATO 1 No more.

CORVINO Neighs like a jennet.

NOTARO Preserve the honour of the court.

CORVINO I shall,
And modesty of your most reverend ears.
And yet I hope that I may say, these eyes
Have seen her glued unto that piece of cedar, (*indicating BONARIO*)
That fine well-timbered gallant; and that, here,
The letters may be read, through the horn,
That make the story perfect.

MOSCA (*aside to CORVINO*) Excellent, sir!

CORVINO (*aside to MOSCA*) There's no shame in this now, is there?

MOSCA (*aside to CORVINO*) None.

CORVINO Or if I said, I hoped that she were onward
To her damnation, if there be a hell
Greater than whore and woman; a good Catholic
May make the doubt.

AVVOCATO 2 His grief hath made him frantic.

AVVOCATO 3 Look to the woman. (*She swoons*)

CORVINO Rare! Prettily feigned!

AVVOCATO 2 Stand from about her.

AVVOCATO 3 Give her the air.

AVVOCATO 1 (*to MOSCA*) What can you say?

MOSCA My wound,
May 't please your wisdoms, speaks for me, received
In aid of my good patron, when he missed (*indicating BONARIO*)
His sought-for father, when that well-taught dame
Had her cue given her to cry out a rape

BONARIO O most laid impudence! Fathers —

AVVOCATO 3 Sir, be silent.
You had your hearing free, so must they theirs.

AVVOCATO 1 I do begin to doubt th' imposture here.

AVVOCATO 2 This woman has too many moods.

VOLTRE Grave fathers,
She is a creature of a most professed
And prostituted lewdness. May her feignings
Not take your wisdoms; but this day she baited
A stranger, a grave knight, with her loose eyes,
And more lascivious kisses. This man saw 'em (*indicating MOSCA*)
Together on the water in a gondola.

MOSCA Here is the lady herself, that saw 'em too.

AVVOCATO 1 Produce that lady.

Enter LADY WOULD-BE

MOSCA (*aside to her*) Be resolute, madam.

LADY POLITIC Aye, this same is she. (*Indicating CELIA*)
Out, thou chameleon harlot! Now thine eyes
Vie tears with the hyena. Dar'st thou look
Upon my wronged face? I cry your pardons.
I fear I have forgettingly transgressed
Against the dignity of the court —

AVVOCATO 2 No, madam.

LADY POLITIC And been exorbitant —

AVVOCATO 2 You have not, lady.

AVVOCATO 1 These proofs are strong.

LADY POLITIC Surely, I had no purpose
To scandalize your honours, or my sex's.

AVVOCATO 3 We do believe it.

LADY POLITIC Surely, you may believe it.

AVVOCATO 2 Madam, we do.

LADY POLITIC Indeed, you may; my breeding
Is not so coarse —

AVVOCATO 1 We know it.

LADY POLITIC To offend
With pertinacy —

AVVOCATO 3 Lady —

LADY POLITIC Such a presence;
No surely.

AVVOCATO 2 We well think it.

LADY POLITIC You may think it.

Exit LADY WOULD-BE

AVVOCATO 1 (*To BONARIO*) What witnesses have you
To make good your report?

BONARIO Our consciences.

CELIA And heaven, that never fails the innocent.

AVVOCATO 2 These are no testimonies.

BONARIO Not in your courts,
Where multitude, and clamour overcomes.

AVVOCATO 1 Nay, then you do wax insolent.

VOLPONE (impotent) is brought in by the COMMENDATORE

VOLTORE Here, here,
The testimony comes that will convince,
And put to utter dumbness their bold tongues.
See here, grave fathers, here's the ravisher,
The rider on men's wives, the great impostor,
The grand voluptuary! Do you not think
These limbs should affect ventry? Or these eyes
Covet a concubine? Pray you, mark these hands:
Are they not fit to stroke a lady's breasts?
Perhaps he doth dissemble?

BONARIO So he does.

VOLTORE Would you have him tortured?

BONARIO I would have him proved.

VOLTORE Best try him then with goads, or burning irons;
Put him to the strappado: I have heard
The rack hath cured the gout, 'faith, give it him.
O, my most equal hearers,
I crave your care of this good gentleman,
Whose life is much endangered by their fable;
And as for them, I will conclude with this:
That vicious persons, when they are hot and fleshed
In impious acts, their constancy abounds:
Damned deeds are done with greatest confidence.

AVVOCATO 1 Take them to custody.

AVVOCATO 3 'Tis pity two such prodigies should live.

AVVOCATO 2 Let the old gentleman be returned with care;

VOLPONE is taken out by the Commendatore

I'm sorry our credulity hath wronged him.

AVVOCATO 1 These are two creatures!

AVVOCATO 3 I have an earthquake in me.

AVVOCATO 2 Their shame, even in their cradles, fled their faces.

AVVOCATO 3 (to VOLTORE) You have done a worthy service to the state, sir,
In their discovery.

AVVOCATO 1 You shall hear, ere night,

What punishment the court decrees upon 'em.

Exeunt AVVOCATI, NOTARO and BONARIO and CELIA

VOLTRE (to MOSCA) How like you it?

MOSCA (to VOLTORE) Rare.
I'd ha' your tongue, sir, tipped with gold for this;
I'd ha' you be the heir to the whole city;
The earth I'd have want men, ere you want living.
They're bound to erect your statue in St Mark's.
(to CORVINO) Signor Corvino, I would have you go
And show yourself, that you have conquered.

CORVINO Yes.

MOSCA It was much better that you should profess
Yourself a cuckold thus, than that the other
Should have been proved.

CORVINO Nay, I considered that:
Now, it is her fault.

MOSCA Then, it had been yours.

CORVINO True. I do doubt this advocate still.

MOSCA I'faith,
You need not; I dare ease you of that care.

CORVINO I trust thee, Mosca.

MOSCA As your own soul, sir.

Exit CORVINO

CORBACCIO Mosca!

MOSCA Now for your business, sir.

CORBACCIO How! Have you business?

MOSCA Yes, yours, sir.

CORBACCIO O, none else?

MOSCA None else, not I.
CORBACCIO Dispatch it.

MOSCA Instantly.

CORBACCIO And look that all,
Whatever, be put in: jewels, plate, moneys,
Household stuff, bedding, curtains.

MOSCA Curtain-rings, sir.
Only the advocate's fee must be deducted.

CORBACCIO I'll pay him now; you'll be too prodigal.
Two sequins is well?

MOSCA No, six, sir.

CORBACCIO That's too much

MOSCA He talked a great while, you must consider that, sir.

CORBACCIO Well, there's three. (*Gives him money*)

MOSCA I'll give it him.

CORBACCIO Do so, and there's for thee.

Exit CORBACCIO

MOSCA (*aside*) Bountiful bones! What horrid strange offence
Did he commit 'gainst nature in his youth, worthy this age?
(*To VOLTORE*) You see, sir, how I work unto your ends.

VOLTORE Thanks, sweet Mosca. I'll leave you.

Exit VOLTORE

MOSCA All is yours - the devil and all,
Good advocate.

Enter LADY WOULD-BE

Madam, I'll bring you home.

LADY POLITIC No, I'll go see your patron.

MOSCA That you shall not. I'll tell you why:
my purpose is to urge my patron to reform his will; and for the zeal you have
shown today, whereas before you were but third or fourth, you shall be now put in
the first, which would appear as begged if you were present
Therefore —

LADY POLITIC You shall sway
me. *EXIT*

5.1

Enter VOLPONE

VOLPONE Well, I am here; and all this brunt is past.
I ne'er was in dislike with my disguise
Till this fled moment. Here 'twas good, in private,
But in public, *cave*, whilst I breathe!
'Fore God, my left leg began to have the cramp,
And I apprehended straight some power had struck me
With a dead palsy. Well, I must be merry,
And shake it off. A many of these fears
Would put me into some villainous disease,
Should they come thick upon me. I'll prevent 'em.
Give me a bowl of lusty wine, to fright
This humour from my heart. Hum, hum, hum! (*He drinks*)
'Tis almost gone already; So, so, so! (*Drinks again*)
This heat is life; 'tis blood by this time! Mosca!

Enter MOSCA

MOSCA How now, sir? Does the day look clear again?
Are we recovered? And wrought out of error
Into our way, to see our path before us?
Is our trade free once more?

VOLPONE Exquisite Mosca!

MOSCA Was it not carried learnedly?

VOLPONE And stoutly.
Good wits are greatest in extremities.

MOSCA It were a folly beyond thought to trust
Any grand act unto a cowardly spirit.
You are not taken with it enough, methinks?

VOLPONE O, more than if I had enjoyed the wench;
The pleasure of all womankind's not like it.

MOSCA Why now you speak, sir. We must here be fixed;
Here we must rest; this is our masterpiece;
We cannot think to go beyond this.

VOLPONE True.
Thou hast played thy prize, my precious Mosca.

MOSCA Nay, sir,
To gull the court —

VOLPONE And quite divert the torrent
Upon the innocent.

MOSCA Yes, and to make
So rare a music out of discords —

VOLPONE Right!
That yet to me's the strangest: how thou hast borne it!
That these, being so divided 'mongst themselves,
Should not scent somewhat, or in me or thee,

Or doubt their own side?

MOSCA True, they will not see't.
Too much light blinds 'em, I think. Each of 'em
Is so possessed and stuffed with his own hopes,
That any thing unto the contrary,
Never so true, or never so apparent,
Never so palpable, they will resist it —

VOLPONE Like a temptation of the devil.

MOSCA Right, sir.
Was not your advocate rare?

VOLPONE O! 'My most honoured fathers'; 'My grave fathers';
'Under correction of your fatherhoods' ! I had much ado
To forbear laughing.

MOSCA It seemed to me you sweat, sir.

VOLPONE In troth, I did a little.

MOSCA But confess, sir,
Were you not daunted?

VOLPONE In good faith, I was
A little in a mist, but not dejected;
Never, but still myself.

MOSCA I think it, sir.
Now, so truth help me, I must needs say this, sir,
And out of conscience, for your advocate:
He's taken pains, in faith, sir, and deserved
(In my poor judgment, I speak it under favour,
Not to contrary you, sir) very richly,
Well, to be cozened.

VOLPONE Troth, and I think so too,
By that I heard him, in the latter end.

MOSCA O, but before, sir, had you heard him first
Draw it to certain heads, then aggravate,
Then use his vehement figures. And doing this
Out of pure love, no hope of gain —

VOLPONE 'Tis right.
I cannot answer him, Mosca, as I would,
Not yet; but for thy sake, at thy entreaty,
I will begin, e'en now, to vex 'em all,
This very instant.

MOSCA Good sir.

VOLPONE Call the dwarf, the fool
And the eunuch forth.

MOSCA Castrone, Nano, Androgino!

Enter CASTRONE, NANO and ANDROGINO

NANO Here.

VOLPONE Go,
Straight give out about the streets, you three,
That I am dead; do it with constancy,
Sadly, do you hear? Impute it to the grief
Of this late slander.

Exeunt CASTRONE, NANO and ANDROGINO

MOSCA What do you mean, sir?

VOLPONE O,
I shall have instantly my Vulture, Crow,
Raven come flying hither on the news
To peck for carrion, my she-wolf, and all
Greedy, and full of expectation —

MOSCA And then to have it ravished from their mouths?

VOLPONE 'Tis true. I will have thee put on a gown,
And take upon thee, as thou wert mine heir.
Show 'em a will. Open that chest, and reach
Forth one of those that has the blanks. I'll straight
Put in thy name.

MOSCA It will be rare, sir.

Gives him the will

VOLPONE Aye,
When they ev'n gape, and find themselves deluded —

MOSCA Yes.

VOLPONE And thou use them scurvily! Dispatch, get on thy gown.

MOSCA (*putting on a gown*) But, what, sir, if they ask
After the body?

VOLPONE Say, it was corrupted.

MOSCA I'll say it stunk, sir; and was fain t' have it
Coffined up instantly, and sent away.

VOLPONE Anything, what thou wilt. Hold, here's my will.
Get thee a cap, a count-book, pen and ink,
Papers afore thee; sit as thou wert taking
An inventory of parcels. I'll get up
Behind the curtain, on a stool, and hearken,
Sometime peep over, see how they do look,
With what degrees their blood doth leave their faces!
O, 'twill afford me a rare meal of laughter!

Knocking within

MOSCA Hark,
There's some already.

VOLPONE Look.

MOSCA It is the Vulture.
He has the quickest scent.

VOLPONE I'll to my place,
Thou, to thy posture.

MOSCA I am set.

VOLPONE But Mosca,
Play the artificer now, torture 'em rarely.

VOLPONE conceals himself

5.2

Enter VOLTORE

VOLTORE How now, my Mosca?

MOSCA (*writing*) 'Turkish carpets, nine—'

VOLTORE Taking an inventory! That is well.

MOSCA 'Two suits of bedding, tissue—'

VOLTORE Where's the will?
Let me read that the while.

Enter CORBACCIO

VOLTORE Is he come now, to trouble us?

MOSCA 'Of cloth of gold, two more—'

CORBACCIO Is it done, Mosca?

MOSCA 'Of several velvets, eight—'

VOLTORE I like his care.

CORBACCIO Dost thou not hear?

Enter CORVINO

CORVINO Ha! Is the hour come, Mosca?

VOLPONE (*aside*) Aye, now, they muster.

CORVINO What does the advocate here,
Or this Corbaccio?

CORBACCIO What do these here?

Enter LADY WOULD-BE

LADY POLITIC
Is his thread spun?

Mosca?

MOSCA 'Eight chests of linen—'

VOLPONE (*aside*) O,
My fine Dame Would-be, too!

CORVINO Mosca, the will,
That I may show it these, and rid them hence.

MOSCA 'Six chests of diaper, four of damask—' There.

Gives them the will which is read by CORVINO, VOLTORE and LADY WOULD-BE

CORBACCIO Is that the will?

MOSCA 'Down-beds, and bolsters—'

VOLPONE (*aside*) Rare!
Be busy still. Now they begin to flutter.
They never think of me. Look, see, see, see!
How their swift eyes run over the long deed
Unto the name, and to the legacies,
What is bequeathed them there —

VOLTORE Mosca the heir?

CORBACCIO What's that?

VOLPONE (*aside*) My advocate is dumb. Look to my merchant,
He has heard of some strange storm, a ship is lost,
He faints. My lady will swoon.

CORBACCIO (*taking the will*) All these
Are out of hope; I'm sure the man.

CORVINO But, Mosca -

MOSCA 'Two cabinets—'

CORVINO Is this in earnest?

MOSCA 'One
Of ebony—'

CORVINO Or do you but delude me?

MOSCA 'The other, mother of pearl—' (*to CORVINO*) I am very busy.
Good faith, it is a fortune thrown upon me — 'Item, one salt of agate—'
(*to CORVINO*) not my seeking.

LADY POLITIC Do you hear, sir?

MOSCA 'A perfumed box—' (*to LADY WOULD-BE*) Pray you forbear,
You see I'm troubled — 'made of an onyx—'

LADY POLITIC How!

MOSCA Tomorrow, or next day, I shall be at leisure
To talk with you all.

CORVINO Is this my large hope's issue?

LADY POLITIC Sir, I must have a fairer answer.

MOSCA Madam,
Marry, and shall: Pray you, fairly quit my house.
Nay, raise no tempest with your looks, but hark you,
Remember what your ladyship offered me,
To put you in an heir; go to, think on't;
And what you said e'en your best madams did
For maintenance, and why not you? Enough!
Go home, and use the poor Sir Pol, your knight, well,
For fear I tell some riddles. Go, be melancholic.

Exit LADY WOULD-BE

VOLPONE (*aside*) O, my fine devil!

CORVINO Mosca, pray you a word.

MOSCA Lord! Will you not take your dispatch hence yet?
Methinks, of all, you should have been the example.
Hear you: do not you know, I know you an ass?
And that you would most fain have been a wittol,
If fortune would have let you? That you are
A declared cuckold, on good terms? This pearl,
You'll say, was yours? Right. This diamond?
I'll not deny it, but thank you. Much here else?
It may be so. Why, think that these good works
May help to hide your bad. I'll not betray you.
Go home, be melancholic too, or mad.

Exit CORVINO

VOLPONE Rare Mosca! How his villainy becomes him!

VOLTORE (*aside*) Certain he doth delude all these for me.

CORBACCIO Mosca the heir?

VOLPONE (*aside*) O, his four eyes have found it.

CORBACCIO I am cozened, cheated, by a parasite slave;
Harlot, thou hast gulled me.

MOSCA Yes, sir. Stop your mouth,
Or I shall draw the only tooth is left.
Are not you he, that filthy covetous wretch
With the three legs, that, here, in hope of prey,
Have, any time this three years, snuffed about
With your most grovelling nose, and would have hired
Me to the poisoning of my patron? Sir?
Are not you he that have today in court
Professed the disinheriting of your son?

Perjured yourself? Go home, and die, and stink.
If you but croak a syllable, all comes out:
Away! Go, go, stink!

Exit CORBACCIO

VOLPONE (*aside*) Excellent varlet!

VOLTORE Now, my faithful Mosca,
I find thy constancy —

MOSCA Sir?

VOLTORE Sincere.

MOSCA 'A table
Of porphyry—' I marvel you'll be thus troublesome.

VOLTORE Nay, leave off now, they are gone.

MOSCA Why? Who are you?
What? Who did send for you? O, cry you mercy,
Reverend sir! Good faith, I am grieved for you,
That any chance of mine should thus defeat
Your (I must needs say) most deserving travails.
But I protest, sir, it was cast upon me,
And I could almost wish to be without it,
But that the will o' the dead must be observed.
Marry, my joy is that you need it not:
You have a gift, sir (thank your education)
Will never let you want, while there are men
And malice to breed causes. Would I had
But half the like, for all my fortune, sir.
If I have any suits (as I do hope,
Things being so easy, and direct, I shall not)
I will make bold with your obstreperous aid:
In meantime, you that have so much law
I know have the conscience
Not to be covetous of what is mine.
Good sir, I thank you for my plate; 'twill help
To set up a young man. Good faith, you look
As you were costive; best go home and purge, sir.

Exit VOLTORE

VOLPONE (*coming out of hiding*) My witty mischief,
Let me embrace thee. O that I could now
Transform thee to a Venus! Mosca, go,
Straight take my habit of *clarissimo*
And walk the streets; be seen, torment them more;
We must pursue, as well as plot. Who would
Have lost this feast?

MOSCA I doubt it will lose them.

VOLPONE O, my recovery shall recover all.
That I could now but think on some disguise
To meet 'em in, and ask 'em questions;

How I would vex them still at every turn!

MOSCA Sir, I can fit you.

VOLPONE Canst thou?

MOSCA Yes, I know
One o' the commendatori, sir, so like you
Him will I straight make drunk, and bring you his habit.

VOLPONE A rare disguise, and answering thy brain!
O, I will be a sharp disease unto them.

MOSCA Sir, you must look for curses —

VOLPONE 'Till they burst;
The Fox fares ever best when he is cursed.

Exeunt

5.3

Enter PEREGRINE disguised and three Merchants

PEREGRINE Am I enough disguised?

MERCHANT 1 I warrant you.

PEREGRINE All my ambition is to fright him only.
Well, gentlemen, when I am in a while,
And that you think us warm in our discourse,
Know your approaches.

MERCHANT 1 Trust it to our care.

Exeunt Merchants. Enter Waiting Woman

PEREGRINE Save you, fair lady! Is Sir Pol within?

WOMAN I do not know, sir.

PEREGRINE Pray you say unto him,
Here is a merchant, upon earnest business,
Desires to speak with him.

WOMAN I will see, sir.

Exit Woman

PEREGRINE I see the family is all female here.

Re-enter Woman

WOMAN He says, sir, he has weighty affairs of state
That now require him whole; some other time
You may possess him.

PEREGRINE Pray you say again,

If those require him whole, these will exact him,
Whereof I bring him tidings.

Exit Woman

What might be
His grave affair of state now?

Re-enter Woman

WOMAN Sir, he says, he knows
By your word 'tidings' that you are no statesman,
And therefore wills you stay.

Exit Woman

PEREGRINE I have not read so many proclamations,
And studied them for words, as he has done,

Enter SIR POLITIC WOULD-BE

SIR POLITIC Sir, I must crave
Your courteous pardon. There hath chanced today
Unkind disaster 'twixt my lady and me;
And I was penning my apology
To give her satisfaction, as you came now.

PEREGRINE Sir, I am grieved I bring you worse disaster:
The gentleman you met at the port today
That told you he was newly arrived —

SIR POLITIC Aye, was
A fugitive punk?

PEREGRINE No, sir, a spy set on you;
And he has made relation to the Senate,
That you professed to him to have a plot
To sell the state of Venice to the Turk.

SIR POLITIC O me!

PEREGRINE For which, warrants are signed by this time
To apprehend you, and to search your study
For papers —

SIR POLITIC Alas, sir, I have none, but notes
Drawn out of play-books. Sir, I but talked so
For discourse sake merely.

Knocking

PEREGRINE Hark! They are here!

SIR POLITIC I am a wretch, a wretch!

PEREGRINE What will you do, sir?
Have you ne'er a currant-butt to leap into?
They'll put you to the rack, you must be sudden.

SIR POLITIC Sir, I have an engine —

MERCHANT 3 (*off*) Sir Politic Would-be?

MERCHANT 2 (*off*) Where is he?

SIR POLITIC — that I have thought upon before time.

PEREGRINE What is it?

SIR POLITIC I shall ne'er endure the torture!
Marry, it is, sir, of a tortoise-shell,
Fitted for these extremities: pray you, sir, help me.
(*Climbing into the tortoise shell*) Here I've a place, sir,
To put back my legs,
Please you to lay it on, sir; with this cap,
And my black gloves. I'll lie, sir, like a tortoise,
'Till they are gone.

PEREGRINE And call you this an engine?

SIR POLITIC Mine own device. Good sir, bid my wife's woman
To burn my papers.

Exit PEREGRINE. The three Merchants rush in

MERCHANT 1 Where's he hid?

MERCHANT 3 We must,
And will, sure find him.

Re-enter PEREGRINE

MERCHANT 1 What
Are you, sir?

PEREGRINE I am a merchant, that came here
To look upon this tortoise.

MERCHANT 3 How?

MERCHANT 1 St Mark!
What beast is this!

PEREGRINE It is a fish.

MERCHANT 2 (*striking the shell*) Come out here!

PEREGRINE Nay, you may strike him, sir, and tread upon him:
He'll bear a cart.

MERCHANT 3 Let's jump upon him.

MERCHANT 2 Can he not go?

PEREGRINE He creeps, sir.

MERCHANT 1 Let's see him creep.

MOSCA O, sir, you are he;
No man can sever you.

VOLPONE Good.

MOSCA But what am I?

VOLPONE 'Fore heaven, a brave *clarissimo*, thou becom'st it!
Pity thou wert not born one. I'll go and see
What news first at the court.

Exit VOLPONE

MOSCA Do so. My Fox
Is out of his hole, and ere he shall re-enter,
I'll make him languish in his borrowed case,
Except he come to composition with me.
Androgino, Castrone, Nano!

Enter ANDROGINO, CASTRONE and NANO

ALL Here.

MOSCA Go, recreate yourselves abroad; go sport.

They go

So, now I have the keys, and am possessed.
Since he will needs be dead afore his time,
I'll bury him, or gain by him. I am his heir,
And so will keep me, till he share at least.
To cozen him of all were but a cheat
Well placed, no man would construe it a sin;
Let his sport pay for it: this is called the Fox-trap.

Exit

5.5

Enter CORBACCIO and CORVINO

CORBACCIO They say, the court is set.

CORVINO We must maintain
Our first tale good, for both our reputations.

CORBACCIO Why, mine's no tale: my son would there have killed me.

CORVINO That's true, I had forgot: mine is, I am sure.

Enter VOLPONE disguised as a Commendatore

VOLPONE Signor Corvino! And Corbaccio! Sir,
Much joy unto you.

CORVINO Of what?

VOLPONE The sudden good,

CORVINO (*aside to CORBACCIO*) The man is mad!

CORBACCIO (*to CORVINO*) What's that?

CORVINO (*to CORBACCIO*) He is
possessed.

VOLTORE (*kneeling*) For which, now struck in conscience, here, I prostrate
Myself at your offended feet for pardon.

AVVOCATO 1 Arise.

CELIA O heaven, how just thou art!

VOLPONE (*aside*) I'm caught
In mine own noose —

CORVINO (*to CORBACCIO*) Be constant, sir: naught now
Can help but impudence.

AVVOCATO 1 (*to VOLTORE*) Speak forward.

NOTARO (*to the Courtroom*) Silence!

VOLTORE It is not passion in me, reverend fathers,
But only conscience, conscience, my good sires,
That makes me now tell truth. That parasite,
That knave, hath been the instrument of all.

AVVOCATO 1 Where is that knave? Fetch him.

VOLPONE I go.

Exit VOLPONE

CORVINO Grave fathers,
This man's distracted; he confessed it now:
For, hoping to be old Volpone's heir,
Who now is dead —

AVVOCATO 3 How?

AVVOCATO 2 Is Volpone dead?

CORVINO Dead since, grave fathers —
BONARIO O sure vengeance!

AVVOCATO 1 Stay,
Then he was no deceiver?

VOLTORE O no, none.
The parasite, grave fathers.

CORVINO He does speak
Out of mere envy, 'cause the servant's made
The thing he gaped for. Please your fatherhoods,
This is the truth; though I'll not justify
The other, but he may be some-deal faulty.

VOLTRE Aye, to your hopes, as well as mine, Corvino,
But I'll use modesty. Pleaseth your wisdoms
To view these certain notes, and but confer them.
(*Gives them papers*) As I hope favour, they shall speak clear truth.

CORVINO The devil has entered him!

BONARIO Or bides in you.

AVVOCATO 3 This same's a labyrinth!

AVVOCATO 1 (*to CORVINO*) Stand you unto your first report?

CORVINO My state,
My life, my fame —

BONARIO Where is it?

CORVINO Are at the stake.

AVVOCATO 1 (*to CORBACCIO*) Is yours so too?

CORBACCIO The advocate's a knave,
And has a forked tongue —

AVVOCATO 2 Speak to the point.

CORBACCIO So is the parasite too.

AVVOCATO 1 This is confusion.

VOLTRE I do beseech your fatherhoods, read but those — (*indicating the papers*)

CORVINO And credit nothing the false spirit hath writ.
It cannot be, but he's possessed grave fathers.

Scene closes

5.7

Enter VOLPONE

VOLPONE To make a snare for mine own neck? And run
My head into it, willfully? With laughter!
When I had newly 'scaped, was free, and clear!
Out of mere wantonness! O, the dull devil
Was in this brain of mine when I devised it,
And Mosca gave it second; he must now
Help to sear up this vein, or we bleed dead.

Enter NANO, ANDROGINO and CASTRONE

How now! Who let you loose? Whither go you now?
What, to buy gingerbread? Or to drown kitlings?

NANO Sir, master Mosca called us out of doors,

ANDROGINO And bid us all go play.

CASTRONE And took the keys.

VOLPONE Did master Mosca take the keys? Why so!
I am farther in. These are my fine conceits!
What a vile wretch was I, that could not bear
My fortune soberly? I must have my crotchets,
And my conundrums! Well, go you, and seek him:
His meaning may be truer than my fear.
Bid him, he straight come to me, to the court;
Thither will I, and, if't be possible,
Unscrew my advocate upon new hopes.
When I provoked him, then I lost myself.

Exeunt

5.8

All as before

AVVOCATO 1 These things can ne'er be reconciled. He, here (*indicating papers*)
Professeth that the gentleman was wronged,
And that the gentlewoman was brought thither,
Forced by her husband, and there left.

VOLTORE Most true.

CELIA How ready is heaven to those that pray!

AVVOCATO 1 But that
Volpone would have ravished her, he holds
Utterly false, knowing his impotence.

CORVINO Grave fathers, he's possessed; again, I say,
Possessed; nay, if there be possession
And obsession, he has both.

AVVOCATO 3 Here comes our officer.

Enter VOLPONE, still disguised

VOLPONE The parasite will straight be here, grave fathers.

AVVOCATO 2 You might invent some other name, sir varlet.

AVVOCATO 1 His coming will clear all.

AVVOCATO 2 Yet, it is misty.

VOLPONE (*whispering to VOLTORE*) Sir, the parasite
Willed me to tell you that his master lives;
That you are still the man; your hopes the same;
And this was only a jest —

VOLTORE How?

VOLPONE Sir, to try
If you were firm, and how you stood affected.

VOLTORE Art sure he lives?

VOLPONE Do I live, sir?

VOLTORE O me!
I was too violent.

VOLPONE Sir, you may redeem it.
They said you were possessed. Fall down, and seem so:
I'll help to make it good.

VOLTORE falls

 God bless the man!
(to *VOLTORE*) Stop your wind hard, and swell. (To *Courtroom*) See, see, see,
see!

He vomits crooked pins! His eyes are set
Like a dead hare's hung in a poulter's shop!
His mouth's running away! (To *CORVINO*) Do you see, signor?
Now 'tis in his belly!

CORVINO Aye, the devil!

VOLPONE Now in his throat.

CORVINO Aye, I perceive it plain!

VOLPONE 'Twill out, 'twill out! Stand clear! See, where it flies!
In shape of a blue toad, with a bat's wings!
(To *CORVINO*) Do you not see it, sir?

CORVINO 'Tis manifest.

VOLPONE Look! He comes to himself!

VOLTORE Where am I?

VOLPONE Take good heart, the worst is past, sir.
You are dispossessed.

AVVOCATO 1 What accident is this?

AVVOCATO 2 Sudden, and full of wonder!

AVVOCATO 3 If he were
Possessed, as it appears, all this (*indicating the papers*) is nothing.

CORVINO He has been often subject to these fits.

AVVOCATO 1 Show him that writing. (To *VOLTORE*) Do you know it, sir?

VOLPONE (*aside to VOLTORE*) Deny it, sir, forswear it, know it not.

VOLTORE Yes, I do know it well, it is my hand;
But all that it contains is false.

BONARIO O practice!

AVVOCATO 2 What maze is this?

AVVOCATO 1 Is he not guilty then,
Whom you there name the parasite?

VOLTORE Grave fathers,
No more than his good patron, old Volpone.

AVVOCATO 3 Why, he is dead.

VOLTORE O no, my honoured fathers,
He lives —

AVVOCATO 1 How? Lives?

VOLTORE Lives.

AVVOCATO 2 This is subtler yet!
AVVOCATO 3 You said he was dead.

VOLTORE Never.

AVVOCATO 3 You said so.

AVVOCATO 1 Here comes the gentleman; make him way.

Enter MOSCA in the dress of a clarissimo

AVVOCATO 3 (*aside*) A proper man! And, were Volpone dead,
A fit match for my daughter.

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) Mosca, I was almost lost; the advocate
Had betrayed all; but now it is recovered.
All's on the hinge again. Say I am living.

MOSCA What busy knave is this? Most reverend fathers,
I sooner had attended your grave pleasures,
But that my order for the funeral
Of my dear patron, did require me —

VOLPONE (*aside*) Mosca!

MOSCA Whom I intend to bury, like a gentleman.

VOLPONE (*aside*) Aye, quick, and cozen me of all.

AVVOCATO 2 Still stranger!
More intricate!

AVVOCATO 3 (*aside*) It is a match, my daughter is bestowed.

MOSCA (*aside to VOLPONE*) Will you give me half?

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) First, I'll be hanged.

AVVOCATO 1 Demand the advocate. Sir, did not you affirm,

Volpone was alive?

VOLPONE Yes, and he is;
This gentleman (*indicating MOSCA*) told me so.
(*Aside to MOSCA*) Thou shalt have half.

MOSCA Whose drunkard is this same? Speak, some that know him:
I never saw his face. (*Aside to VOLPONE*) I cannot now
Afford it you so cheap.

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) No?

AVVOCATO 1 (*to VOLTORE*) What say you?
VOLTORE The officer told me.

VOLPONE I did, grave fathers,
And will maintain he lives, with mine own life.
And that this creature (*indicating MOSCA*) told me.
(*Aside*) I was born with all good stars my enemies.

MOSCA Most grave fathers,
If such an insolence as this must pass
Upon me, I am silent: 'twas not this
For which you sent, I hope.

AVVOCATO 2 No sir, you may leave.

VOLPONE (*aside*) Mosca!

AVVOCATO 3 (*about the Commendatore/VOLPONE*) Let him be whipped —

VOLPONE (*aside to MOSCA*) Wilt thou betray me? Cozen me?

AVVOCATO 3 And taught to bear himself toward a person of this rank.

AVVOCATO 1 Take him away.

VOLPONE is seized

MOSCA I humbly thank your fatherhoods.

VOLPONE (*aside*) Soft, soft. Whipped?
And lose all that I have? If I confess, it cannot be much more.

AVVOCATO 3 (*To MOSCA*) Sir, are you married?

VOLPONE They will be allied anon; I must be resolute.
The Fox shall here uncase. (*He throws off his disguise*)

MOSCA Patron!

VOLPONE Nay, now,
My ruins shall not come alone; your match
I'll hinder sure: my substance shall not glue you,
Nor screw you, into a family.

MOSCA Why, patron!

VOLPONE I am Volpone, and this (*indicating MOSCA*) is my knave;
This (*indicating VOLTORE*) his own knave; this (*indicating CORBACCIO*)
avarice's fool;
This (*indicating CORVINO*) a chimera of wittol, fool, and knave:
And, reverend fathers, since we all can hope
Naught but a sentence, let's not now despair it.
You hear me brief.

CORVINO, VOLTORE, CORBACCIO May it please your fatherhoods —

NOTARY Silence!

AVVOCATO 1 The knot is now undone by miracle.

AVVOCATO 2 Nothing can be more clear.

AVVOCATO 3 Or can more prove
These innocent.

AVVOCATO 1 Give them their liberty.

BONARIO Heaven could not long let such gross crimes be hid.

AVVOCATO 2 If this be held the highway to get riches,
May I be poor.

AVVOCATO 3 Disrobe that parasite.

MOSCA Most honoured fathers! —

AVVOCATO 1 Can you plead aught to stay the course of justice?
If you can, speak.
Stand forth; and first, the parasite. You appear
T' have been the chiefest minister, if not plotter,
In all these lewd impostures; and now, lastly,
Have with your impudence abused the court
And habit of a gentleman of Venice,
Being a fellow of no birth or blood
For which our sentence is, first, thou be whipped,
Then live perpetual prisoner in our galleys.

VOLPONE I thank you for him.

MOSCA Bane to thy wolfish nature!

MOSCA is taken aside

AVVOCATO 2 Thou, Volpone,
By blood and rank a gentleman, canst not fall
Under like censure; but our judgment on thee
Is that thy substance all be straight confiscate
To the hospital of the *Incurabili*;
And, since the most was gotten by imposture,
By feigning lame, gout, palsy, and such diseases,
Thou art to lie in prison, cramped with irons,
Till thou be'st sick and lame indeed.

VOLPONE This is called mortifying of a Fox.

VOLPONE is taken aside

AVVOCATO 1 Thou, Voltore, to take away the scandal
Thou hast given all worthy men of thy profession,
Art banished from their fellowship, and our state.

AVVOCATO 2 Corbaccio! - Bring him near - We here possess
Thy son of all thy state, and confine thee
To the monastery of *San Spirito*
Where, since thou knew'st not how to live well here,
Thou shalt be learned to die well.

CORBACCIO Ha? What said he?

NOTARO (*taking him aside*) You shall know anon, sir.

AVVOCATO 2 Thou, Corvino, shalt
Be straight embarked from thine own house, and rowed
Round about Venice, through the Grand Canal,
Wearing a cap with fair long asses' ears,
Instead of horns; a paper pinned on thy breast —

CORVINO Yes,
And have mine eyes beat out with stinking fish,
Bruised fruit and rotten eggs. 'Tis well. I am glad
I shall not see my shame yet.

AVVOCATO 3 And to expiate
Thy wrongs done to thy wife, thou art to send her
Home to her father, with her dowry trebled.
And these are all your judgments.

ALL Honoured fathers.

AVVOCATO 1 Which may not be revoked. Now you begin,
When crimes are done and past and to be punished,
To think what your crimes are. Away with them!
Let all that see these vices thus rewarded
Take heart, and love to study 'em! Mischiefs feed
Like beasts till they be fat, and then they bleed.

Exeunt. Re-enter VOLPONE for the epilogue

VOLPONE The seasoning of a play, is the applause.
Now, though the Fox be punished by the laws,
He yet doth hope there is no suffering due
For any fact which he hath done 'gainst you;
If there be, censure him; here he doubtful stands.
If not, fare jovially, and clap your hands.

END