

“THE THREE COINS”

By Jonathan HAYES

HENRY PANTALONE: *(Pantalone opens the door of his house, then another door and falls over. He struggles to get up. He opens the shutters, has a look outside, shuts them again, has a drink from his flask. He comes closer to the audience, looks at them)* Ah ! Home ! At last. My name is Pantalone, Henry Pantalone. I live in the City of London. I collect pennies and all sorts of other coins from all over the world. I put them in boxes. So they don't get lost. I don't like to walk in the streets. Nobody likes me. They say nasty things about me. They say I am rich, but I am a miser. A miser, just because I keep my money. A miser, just because I don't spend it all. A miser, just because I love my money. It is not an easy life. Counting all these coins. *(He goes to his table, lights a candle and knocks on his precious box)* Times are hard. *(He empties a few coins into his box from his purse)* More pennies. *(He looks at his coins and polishes them)* Ah, my little lambs... Look ! Listen ! This coin comes from Mexico, and this one from India ! And this dear old penny from England, London ! I love them so much ! They are my precious ones ! *(He slams down the lid of his box on his fingers and shouts in agony. He looks at the audience)* That's not funny ! *(thinks)* Sylvia, my hot chocolate ! Sylvia, don't forget my whisky ! Sylvia, clean the house... Sylvia is my servant... A lazy servant... *(He waits, nothing happens)* Sylviaaaa! Of course, I remember now, she's gone to join the army, as a cook or a nurse. And what about me? I'm all alone. Poor me ! Nobody to take care of me. *(He opens his box again)* At least, you are here, my precious ones. You are my food...No it's not possible! *(He checks again, starts shaking like a leaf, closes the box on his finger again)* Gone! Vanished... Stolen! Three coins are missing from my box. *(He goes into the audience)* Thief ! Robber! Pickpocket ! Who is it ? It's you! No you. No wait a minute...It's Sylvia ! My servant. *(Pantalone is on all fours looking for his money)* She's the thief. I'll set my dogs on you, you scoundrel. You'll go to prison. *(He bangs his head under the table)* Ouch! Impossible, Sylvia is in the army. *(looks at the audience again)* Who is it, then? *(He starts shaking)* The door is locked, I have the keys. The windows are locked as well. Who? *(He hears a bell, which makes him jump. He sees a letter on the floor)* A letter ! at this time of the night ! My three coins ??? *(He takes the envelope, shakes it)* No ! *(He sits down, opens it and reads the letter)* Well !

Dear Mr HENRY PANTALONE,

Before I begin, sit down.

PANTALONE: I am sitting down. Stop wasting ink, it's expensive !

I have to inform you of the tragic death of Sylvia, your heroic servant. She was killed in action while saving my life. We are terribly sorry. The army needs your help to pay for her funeral, and for the flowers.

Captain George Longbottom

PANTALONE: Heroic! Flowers ! What a waste of MY money ! First, my three missing coins and now I must pay for all of this. Dead, you cost me more than when you were alive. All they want is my money. Pay this, pay that ! What can I do? I have no money ! And now no servant ! *(He is standing on his chair shaking his fist in the air)* You think I am going to give the army a single penny ? Never. Sylvia, you were a stupid naughty girl. You were not allowed to get killed. This is ridiculous ! I need someone to cook my meals, wash the dishes, clean the house. What a calamity, what a disaster. Three coins gone forever. Now I am bankrupt ! *(He blows out the candle and goes to sleep, his hands resting on his box. He hears a ghastly laugh and cautiously looks up).* What was that? *(A masked ghost comes towards Pantalone, stops and looks at him. The ghost tries to take his box, but each time Pantalone moves his box in his sleep, he starts snoring. (You haven't said he is asleep)_The ghost touches him with its wand, Pantalone scratches himself, the ghost repeats this several times. The ghost gets much closer to him. Pantalone opens his eyes wide and sees the ghost. He starts shaking all over. He tries to get away but the ghost stops him.)* Aah! Who are you?

THE GHOST: Don't you know who I am ? I am Sylvia, Sylvia's ghost.

PANTALONE: *(suspicious).* Go away.

THE GHOST: How about a "Hello" at least?

PANTALONE: Leave my house. Go back to your grave

THE GHOST: You horrible little miser *(very angry).* Don't speak to me like that. It's very dangerous, you know. *(Pantalone is scared by this burst of anger, he starts trembling again. The ghosts laughs)* What shall I do with this poor little human? *(The ghost draws a knife from under her cloak. Pantalone lets out a stifled cry)* Have you lost your tongue ?

PANTALONE: No ! Please forgive me. You gave me such a fright. I thought that... well...
hmm that you were a ...

THE GHOST: Ghost !

PANTALONE: Aah... yes. No, no ghosts don't exist. I am having a nightmare *(He pinches himself)*. Too much emotion. Too much fear. *(The ghost is still there)*. Henry tries to leave

THE GHOST: Where are you going ? *(aside)* Look at him ! Shaking like a leaf ! Well, what's all this fuss about three missing coins? You will never change, will you ? Money always comes first, doesn't it? What about spending occasionally for the good of humanity, Hey ? And not one penny for my funeral?

PANTALONE: *(aside)* You will get nothing from me. I don't have any money left. It is all gone... *(Pantalone is doing his best to hide his box under his cloak, but his trembling makes the coins in his box rattle. The ghost looks at his cloak)*.

THE GHOST: Silence ! Give me that box!

PANTALONE: No, absolutely not.

THE GHOST: Very well then. *(The ghost removes its magic wand and hypnotises Pantalone who starts a little dance, reveals the box under his cloak and hands it to the ghost. The ghost opens the box, takes out a few coins and throws them on the floor)*.

PANTALONE: *(This wakes Pantalone who weeps as he starts picking up the coins, he looks at the ghost but sees no reaction. He pretends to have a heart attack)*. Oh, my poor heart. *(still no reaction)* That box is all I have.

THE GHOST: You liar. Look at him grovel. He has boxes and boxes of coins, thousands... millions of coins hidden in this house. Money, money, money - thats all that counts for you. You should be sad.

PANTALONE: Sad? Who for?

THE GHOST: *(The ghost threatens him)* For me!

PANTALONE: My eyes are red and full of tears. My knees hurt from endless hours of praying. *(aside)* For what it's worth. Counting what pennies I have left is a way of consoling myself for such a terrible loss *(He weeps)*

THE GHOST: Enough of this nonsense. Now listen *(Pantalone is polishing his coins)* I said listen. Maybe I can help you find those missing coins...

PANTALONE: You stole them then?

THE GHOST: If I had been the thief I would have stripped the whole house, before cutting you up into little pieces to feed to the rats. Oh, that's a good idea! Right, let's get this over and done with now.

PANTALONE: *(worried)* Get what over and done with?

THE GHOST: You. Don't move I will cut off your...

PANTALONE: What? *(unable to move)*

THE GHOST: Head. *(The ghost draws his knife)*

PANTALONE : *(Pantalone on his knees and shaking all over)* No, not my head please! I like my head. Oh most kind ghost, Oh your Eminence, Oh Monarch of all the ghosts. What can I do to calm your anger?

THE GHOST: I am very hungry. Go and prepare me a feast, and hurry...

PANTALONE: Excuse me, I did not know that ghosts can eat.

THE GHOST: *(Hesitates)* Well ... All us ghosts enjoy a good meal. With our magical powers everything is possible. If you don't hurry up you will be my dinner!

PANTALONE: Poor rats.

THE GHOST: Go now, and if the feast is really delicious, you might find your missing coins. But if you fail, your life will be a nightmare. I shall wake all the devils and they will come and haunt you each night, pulling your toes and never letting you sleep.

PANTALONE: Not my toes... *(the ghost keeps the pressure on Pantalone)*

THE GHOST: Quiet ! To the kitchen ! *(The ghost points the knife at him. Pantalone leaves. The ghost waits a moment and then slowly removes the mask, sighs and starts to laugh)*

SYLVIA: I can't believe it, me Sylvia, Henry Pantalone's servant, has scared the living daylight out of him. That was a great trick ! He thought I went to join the army. No, I hid up in the attic. I found this mask and the costume to fool him. Someone helped me - you might see him later. So far so good, fingers crossed. The first part of my plan has worked. I have his precious box. All these pennies for all those days, months and years of hard, hard work, but never a penny for me. Now these pennies are mine.

Once upon a time, a long time ago, it was raining in London, and I was down by the river Thames, watching the boats coming up the river with the handsome sailors. I was looking for work. I had no home, no job and no food. I saw a little, crooked old man pulling a very big trunk. It was bigger than he was. He was talking to himself. "This is the end for me ! My servant has gone and I am alone again. Never trust servants. They are lazy and all they want is MY MONEY ! Now I shall throw myself into the river. Farewell..." "No ! Wait, I will be your servant, I need a job", I said. He looked at me. "I am Henry Pantalone. Carry my trunk to my house". I dragged his big, heavy trunk from the South of London to the North. And then up and up and up the stairs to his room. No time to rest. I had to cook his dinner, then wash the dishes, wash the floor, wash his clothes, wash, wash, wash here and there and everywhere and every day. And never a penny for my work. So you see, after all these years of work, this box is mine. I shall be able to get away from this dark house. I want to laugh, dance, see places, see colours and fall in love with a handsome young man. But now, for my dinner served by Henry Pantalone. *(We hear the sound of dogs barking and Pantalone's voice. Sylvia puts the mask back on. Pantalone comes in)*

PANTALONE: Dinner is served.

THE GHOST: *(taken by surprise)* Good ! ... But... There is no food!

PANTALONE: *(He chuckles with delight)* Surely you can recognize a meal for a ghost.

THE GHOST: *(aside)* What ? Oh, yes, I was joking.

PANTALONE: It looks so tasty and smells so good.

THE GHOST: Now let me enjoy my meal. *(Pantalone gets closer)(Pantalone sniffs the air then starts flapping his cloak. The ghost starts eating as if it was for real)* Delicious. *(aside)* You miser.

PANTALONE: I beg your pardon.

THE GHOST: Wise, it was a wise decision to cook me such a meal. *(aside)* You swine.

PANTALONE: What did I hear!

THE GHOST: No wine ?

PANTALONE: *(worried)* I am so sorry. I shall go down to the cellar and fetch you a bottle of my best wine.

THE GHOST: No, bring two bottles and hurry! *(Pantalone leaves to fetch the wine)* This is not going as planned. *(Pantalone tiptoes back and discovers Sylvia's trickery)* He's no fool, but I'm so hungry. I would give anything for a lovely big sticky chocolate ...

PANTALONE: Cake? *(He takes out his stick (wand???) Do a search if necessary) and chases Sylvia round the table)* What a dirty trick. You gave me such a fright, my poor heart. I may die. That's what you want. You want me to die, so you can steal MY MONEY ! I, who welcomed you into this house and gave you a job, clean clothes - for you had no clothes - and gave you food. Those days are over now. *(He starts waving his stick in the air)*

SYLVIA: Not the stick again *(to the audience)* Help! *(Pantalone runs after Sylvia)*

PANTALONE: *(Pantalone quickly hides his stick)* Kneel and pray for your sins, for they are many. I can still save you from the flames of hell. Now stand up... no kneel... stand... kneel... stand *(He repeats this little game several times)*. Had enough? There's more to come. You wanted to join the army, didn't you. Well, go and fetch the broomstick. By the right, quick march. *(Sylvia fetches the broomstick)* Left, right, left, right, Stand to attention! Salute you captain. *(Sylvia looks around)* What are you doing soldier?

SYLVIA: Looking for my captain.

PANTALONE: He's here.

SYLVIA: Where ? *(Sylvia looks to the other side. Pantalone changes sides, Sylvia looks to the other side)* I still can't see him.

PANTALONE: Here!

SYLVIA: Where?

PANTALONE: Look at me. I am your captain.

SYLVIA: *(Sylvia steps back)* You!

PANTALONE: Yes, me.

SYLVIA: *(She has an idea)* All right ! If you are a captain, you must know how to use a sword. *(She fetches two sticks and throws one to Pantalone)*. 'Take guard'! *(Pantalone takes hold of Sylvia)* No, no, no. Draw your sword *(She draws her sword and salutes him)* Take guard.

PANTALONE: You want a duel. *(He puts the stick in his belt, then tries to draw it like a sword, but can't. It seems stuck)*. I am a real terror with a sword in my hands. *(He finally draws his sword, but loses his balance and falls over. Sylvia helps him up)*

SYLVIA: Show me then. *(Pantalone thrusts, Sylvia moves to the side and blocks him, her sword point inches from his throat – Sword fight)*

PANTALONE: Not bad. *(A bit out of breath he leans on his sword like a walking stick. Sylvia knocks the stick out of his hands and he falls over. He gets up and attacks Sylvia from behind. She blocks his thrust and disarms him. They exchange blows until Sylvia points her sword this time at his heart)*. All right, I'm a bit rusty and you are young. You know, when I was a soldier...

SYLVIA: Roll up, roll up. Here we go again. Pantalone's war.

PANTALONE: Ahem. Those were the good old days, when battles were won by blood, sweat and tears. *(Pantalone mimes the scene)* Many years ago, I was a young soldier, full of courage and ambition. In no time, I was promoted captain. Going to war was not a laughing matter. You were faced with freezing conditions, famine, plague and the enemy. You had to be on your guard all the time. Marching in the rain, across muddy fields, winter was terrible. Our hands and toes were frozen, and if you weren't lucky they would drop off. It never stopped snowing. We woke up every morning covered in snow. One morning, my frozen nose peeped out from under the snow, and I saw the dreadful sight of dead bodies piled up on top of each other. No time for tears. Cannon balls were whizzing past our ears. Then THE ENEMY came at us in their thousands... savages armed with razor-sharp swords, yelling their war cry. We were surrounded! My frozen hands could not draw my sword or hold my pistol. Death was just round the corner. Suddenly, I saw the cannon that would save us.

SYLVIA: A cannon ? What cannon ?

PANTALONE: Hush ! Crawling on all fours ...

SYLVIA: Why ?

PANTALONE: I'm trying to win the war. Be kind enough to let me continue. I was wounded. Ouch !

SYLVIA: Poor captain Pantalon. Go to the hospital then.

PANTALONE: Stop interrupting! The enemy were throwing knives, shooting and biting us when they could. At last my hands touched the cannon. I had to act fast.

SYLVIA: You know how to fire a cannon ?

PANTALONE: Oh blast! You and your stupid questions. I picked up the biggest cannon ball I could find,...

SYLVIA: Duck!

PANTALONE: A duck... Where?

SYLVIA: Duck your head! Cannon ball straight ahead! *(running from one side to the other side, trying to avoid three cannon balls, with the last one sending them head over heels)*

PANTALONE: Silence fell, the smoke cleared, the sun was shining and the birds were singing. I had won the war. Victory at last ! I was a hero.

SYLVIA: A hero, you ? *(Sylvia laughs)* That is not the true story.

PANTALONE: Shut up ! Do not listen to her...

SYLVIA: *(Sylvia interrupts him again)* The true story is : Yes, you did join the army to look after the soldiers' money. You've never seen a battle or held a sword. And you ran away with all the money while the soldiers were fighting the enemy.

PANTALONE: Lies, lies, nothing but lies. All right then, pack up your bags and go, leave this house, now, and never come back.

SYLVIA : Right ! Good bye ! *(Sylvia takes off her apron, throws it at Pantalone and walks out. Pantalone takes out his handkerchief blows his nose)* Good luck with the cooking, shopping, cleaning, washing, ironing, dusting and sweeping... Bye bye !

PANTALONE: *(aside)* I don't want to be alone. Hum ! A shame, as today I was going to pay you. *(Sylvia is back in a flash, holds out a hand)* What are you waiting for ?

SYLVIA: My money. You said you were going to pay me. Today ! Now ! *(Pantalone changes his mood and comes closer, he gets closer and closer to her, she turns round).*

PANTALONE: *(Pantalone stops)* Ahem. We will settle that matter later. *(Pantalone touches her)* First, help me find my three missing coins.

SYLVIA : *(She steps back)* All my wages, paid to me... Today... Now ? *(holding out her hand)*

PANTALONE: *(Pantalone rests his chin on her hand)* Why the hurry?

SYLVIA: Before you change your mind and find another excuse.

PANTALONE: I would not dream of it. *(Pantalone tries to grab hold of her. Sylvia wards him off with the broomstick)*

SYLVIA: Keep your distance. Pay me first, then I will help. All right?

PANTALONE: All right.

SYLVIA: Promise?

PANTALONE: *(He crosses his fingers)* I Promise.

SYLVIA: Swear it.

PANTALONE: *(He crosses his legs)* I swear it. Start looking and I will see to your wages. *(He is about to retrieve his precious box)*

SYLVIA: *(Sylvia stops him and starts to charm him)* Why don't we look for your poor lost pennies together? *(They both start looking, Pantalone is more and more interested in Sylvia, he starts to parade like a cockerel. Sylvia is on all fours. Pantalone pinches her.)* I beg your pardon!

PANTALONE: I... I am so sorry. It's these hands. I can't seem to control them. *(He talks to his hands)* You naughty hands, behave yourselves. *(Pantalone starts looking but he pinches her again)*

SYLVIA: I warned you, stop it.

PANTALONE: Well stop tempting me then. I feel dizzy and confused.

SYLVIA: *(aside)* Why the dirty old rat. You look over there and I will look here. *(Both search. Pantalone is tempted again but decides to stay in his corner. Sylvia stands up again she is furious, yet this time Pantalone has done nothing)* That's it, I warned you...

PANTALONE: This is ridiculous, I was here.

SYLVIA: You are lucky this time. I believe you for once. *(Both continue searching)*

PANTALONE: *(Pantalone searches off stage)* Oh....Oh... Is that you ? Oh cheeky, cheeky. Come and sit on my knee. Cheeky Sylvia !

SYLVIA: Sylvia? But Mr Pantalone I'm here.

PANTALONE: Excuse me, sweet Sylvia. Wait here, I'll be back in a second. *(He comes back on stage, sees Sylvia, then runs off again)* Don't move Sylvia. *(He rushes back on stage and see's Sylvia)* But...

SYLVIA: Who were you talking to? *(Pantalone is perplexed)*

PANTALONE: To you! It was you, wasn't it?

SYLVIA: No, I was here. So who was it?

PANTALONE: *(worried)* I don't know. I think there is someone in the house. Sylvia, go up to the attic and fetch my gun.

SYLVIA: Why don't you go, you will know where to find it.

PANTALONE: My legs are not what they used to be. Your legs are long, strong and agile. I shall hold the fort, and protect your wages against the enemy. You will be back in a flash.

SYLVIA: I'll hurry, but you might be dead by the time I get back. But you can become a real hero, now. Don't get killed ! *(She leaves)*

PANTALONE: I don't want to be a hero, I don't want to be dead... Me! Sylvia come back !
(Trembling, he gets hold of his chair to use as a weapon) Sylvia! (plucking up courage)
Show yourselves I have a big weapon... *(The chair is suddenly wrenched out of his hands)*
Sylvia, hurry up. *(He looks around and picks up the broomstick and starts whirling it around, jabbing here and there. Again the broomstick is pulled out of his hands)* Help! *(He hides behind the table, unable to do anything. Thunder, lightening and smoke. Out of nowhere a ghost appears. Pantalone is frozen on the spot. The Ghost takes the precious box, puts three coins in Pantalone's hand and disappears. Pantalone awakes and discovers the coins in his hand. Overjoyed he dances, rattling his coins and singing.)*

In this life one thing counts,
Large amounts of shiny things.
One penny here, two pennies there,
And three more pennies for me.
O yes, three more pennies for meeee.

Now back we go, from where we came,
Safely warm inside my box.
Here we go, once again,
Three more pennies for me,
O yes, three more pennies for meeee.

(He stops, his box is no longer there)
Sylvia!!! My... my...

SYLVIA: I didn't find the gun. What's wrong ?

PANTALONE: *(pointing to the table)* My precious...

SYLVIA: Box! Your box! What happened?

PANTALONE: You tell me.

SYLVIA: I was up in the attic.

PANTALONE: Heavens above! You were up in the attic, I heard your footsteps.

SYLVIA: And you were here, unless you...

PANTALONE: What do you mean, I was here? That is a fact, but my box has vanished into thin air.

SYLVIA: O yes, it opened its wings and flew away.

PANTALONE: This is no laughing matter, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Well, then, if it's not you and it's not me. Then who? *(They look at each other, then the audience. They whisper to each other)* What about them?

PANTALONE: Good thinking. Come on, which one of you did it?

SYLVIA: It can't be them, they are not in the story

PANTALONE: I wouldn't put it past them. Look at this chap. What are you grinning at?

SYLVIA: Pantalone, do you believe in ghosts?

SYLVIA & PANTALONE: What! A...gho gho... GHOST!!! *(Both of them look round, expecting to see the ghost. They bump into each other back to back. They turn round and see each other). Ah ! (Pantalone jumps into Sylvia's arms, then runs away. Sylvia watches him and laughs)*

SYLVIA: I have never seen the old devil run so fast. "O Sivia my legs are not what they used to be". Money, that's what it is. For money he can surely run fast. He is so deeply in love with his money. Poor Pantalone! Afraid of a ghost! In fact, I was afraid as well, in the attic. All these big hairy spiders, and a huge, fat black rat, with a long tail and eyes as red as the devil's. And what teeth. *(She shivers)*. Thank goodness, it's over. Now it's time to meet my friend! *(Lightening, thunder and smoke. The ghost makes his entrance, he has the box in his hands. Sylvia holds her hands out to take the box but the ghost backs off)* Please ! *(The ghost thinks, looks at the box, then looks at Sivia and hands over the box. Sylvia takes the box, opens it, takes out three coins and gives them to the ghost)* Three coins for you. One

coin for each wish. Three bridges to cross and then you may rest in peace. Farewell and thank you. (*The ghost disappears*). All's well that end's well ! Poor Pantalone, that's what you think. But don't you worry. He has many, many boxes full of pennies, hidden everywhere in the house. And so ends our tale. It was fun playing this little trick. Will it have taught him a lesson? A miser is a miser, but how wiser can a miser become? Thank you all for helping me. Maybe we shall meet again one day for some more adventures with Mr Henry Pantalone.

THE END