

LOVE & MONEY

BY A.R. GURNEY



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*For Maureen Anderman,
with love and appreciation*

The world premiere of LOVE & MONEY was presented as a co-production of Signature Theatre (James Houghton, Founding Artistic Director; Erika Mallin, Executive Director) and Westport Country Playhouse (Mark Lamos, Artistic Director; Michael Ross, Managing Director), on August 15, 2015, at the Pershing Square Signature Center in New York City. It was directed by Mark Lamos, the scenic designer was Michael Yeagan, the costume designer was Jess Goldstein, the lighting designer was Stephen Strawbridge, the sound designer was John Gromada, and the production stage manager was Matthew Melchiorre. The cast was as follows:

CORNELIA CUNNINGHAM Maureen Anderman
HARVEY ABEL Joe Paulik
AGNES MUNGER Pamela Dunlap
WALKER “SCOTT” WILLIAMS Gabriel Brown
JESSICA WORTH Kahyun Kim

CHARACTERS

CORNELIA CUNNINGHAM, a lady of a certain age.

HARVEY ABEL, a youngish lawyer.

AGNES MUNGER, Cornelia's housekeeper.

WALKER "SCOTT" WILLIAMS, a college drop-out.

JESSICA WORTH, an acting student.

SET

The play takes place today, in an elegant living room on the second floor of a brownstone town house on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The room is crowded with good antique furniture. On the furniture there are red, yellow, and white tags. Somewhere upstage, on a hanger under plastic, might be a beautiful mink coat, also with a tag on it. Possibly, too, and also tagged are a number of accoutrements of a bygone age: a leather golf bag with old clubs, a wooden tennis racquet in its press, a tall pair of leather riding boots. To one side, there is a covered and tagged piano with a bench and a few pieces of old sheet music on its rack. On the walls, various framed landscape paintings of some worth have stickers on their frames. A couple of windows reveal other buildings, probably brownstones, across the way. A door opens onto the hall, with banisters suggesting the staircase leading down to the first floor.

LOVE & MONEY

At rise: Morning light. Cornelia is at her desk, horn-rimmed reading glasses on, carefully making out checks from a large, leatherbound checkbook. After a moment or two, the sound of front-door chimes is heard coming up from below. Cornelia gets up from her desk, goes to doorway, calls downstairs.

CORNELIA. (*Calling down.*) I know who it is, Agnes! Let them in and send them up. (*She returns to her desk, puts on her glasses, and goes back to work. After a moment, Harvey appears in the doorway. He is a nice-looking guy in his early or mid-thirties. He wears a good gray suit and regimental tie and carries a leather briefcase.*)

HARVEY. (*In the doorway; with a slight bow.*) Mrs. Cunningham?

CORNELIA. Who are you?

HARVEY. (*Holding out his hand.*) Harvey Abel.

CORNELIA. (*Shaking hands.*) Forgive me, but you don't look like a real estate agent.

HARVEY. I'm your lawyer, Mrs. Cunningham.

CORNELIA. I already have a lawyer.

HARVEY. The firm has asked me to take charge. Don't you remember? I called yesterday and asked for an appointment to stop by.

CORNELIA. Of course you did. And I'm getting so vague I forgot to write it down. (*A moment.*) No, that's a big, fat lie. I didn't write it down because I don't want any more arguing with lawyers. Especially at 9:30 in the morning.

HARVEY. There's no need to argue, Mrs. Cunningham. Our firm just felt you might respond more easily to a younger man.

CORNELIA. (*Looking him over.*) That's certainly an attractive possibility. And your name is Able?

HARVEY. A-B-E-L. My dad is Latvian.

CORNELIA. Latvian! Oh my!

HARVEY. We're considered stubborn. Maybe that's why they asked me to run with the ball.

CORNELIA. Uh-oh. (*A moment.*) But good heavens, where are my manners, letting you stand in the doorway like the Fuller Brush man! Come in, come in. (*Harvey comes farther into the room.*) Now tell me. Are you one of those young... what is the word? They used to hang around hospitals. Now they're all over the place.

HARVEY. Interns?

CORNELIA. That's it!

HARVEY. I'm no intern, Mrs. Cunningham. I got my law degree six years ago from Harvard and have been with the firm ever since. I'm what they call a Senior Associate.

CORNELIA. And your specialty is difficult old ladies?

HARVEY. My specialty is Trusts and Estates.

CORNELIA. I once knew a lawyer whose specialty was Murders and Impositions.

HARVEY. I think you mean Mergers and Acquisitions, Mrs. Cunningham.

CORNELIA. Oh, is that what I mean? Well, sir, difficult though I may be, I'm also polite. As the stewardesses used to say on Eastern Airlines, "Coffee, tea, or milk?"

HARVEY. Not a thing, thanks.

CORNELIA. (*Indicating his briefcase.*) I guess that means you want to get right at it?

HARVEY. It does.

CORNELIA. I suppose you have great stacks of complicated documents for you to explain and me to sign.

HARVEY. Nothing is ready for signature yet, Mrs. Cunningham. But there is a new element in your case.

CORNELIA. A new element? Mercy! What could it be?

HARVEY. I'll get to that. (*Patting his briefcase.*) First I want to be sure you understand exactly what you're doing.

CORNELIA. I'm doing the right thing, that's what I'm doing. I'm expiating my crime before I die.

HARVEY. "Expiating," Mrs. Cunningham?

CORNELIA. Atoning. Compensating. Making amends. That's why I just finished writing a check to Amnesty International.

HARVEY. To our knowledge, you've committed no "crime," Mrs. Cunningham.

CORNELIA. Oh yes I have. I've committed the major crime of having too much money.

HARVEY. That's hardly a crime, Mrs. Cunningham. Especially these days. Especially in this country. Especially in New York.

CORNELIA. It becomes a crime when millions of people elsewhere in the world have hardly a plug nickel. That's why I'm also about to write a check to the International Rescue Committee.

HARVEY. Mrs. Cunningham...

CORNELIA. Please call me Cornelia.

HARVEY. I'm afraid that would be unprofessional.

CORNELIA. There. You see? You're "afraid." That's what money does. It immediately creates these foolish fears and silly barriers. What's your first name, in Latvian?

HARVEY. Just Harvey.

CORNELIA. I'll call you Harvey. You call me Cornelia.

HARVEY. (*Opening his briefcase.*) Let's table that issue for a moment, and stay focused on your will.

CORNELIA. Fair enough. Shoot.

HARVEY. (*Taking out a document.*) All right. Now, according to our notes, you want the major part of your estate, namely your stocks, bonds, along with your personal trusts and the monies derived from the sale of this house, its furnishings, its paintings, as well as your silver and jewelry, all to go to a charitable organization in Fairfield, Connecticut.

CORNELIA. Exactly! The whole shebang all goes to Save the Children.

HARVEY. Are they aware of this?

CORNELIA. The children?

HARVEY. The organization.

CORNELIA. Not yet. I want to give them a big surprise.

HARVEY. They should be overwhelmed.

CORNELIA. Oh goodie.

HARVEY. Well now here's the problem, Mrs. Cunningham. Your plan may be contested.

CORNELIA. Contested?

HARVEY. Challenged.

CORNELIA. How can someone challenge a plan?

HARVEY. Family members can. They can say that it is the misguided disposition of an elderly lady not quite in her right mind.

CORNELIA. They may have a point.

HARVEY. (*More documents.*) Yes, well for that reason it's wise to modify your plan with a few adjustments.

CORNELIA. Maybe so. (*Heading for her desk.*) But first I have to finish what I was up to...

HARVEY. We have an immediate problem, Mrs. Cunningham.

CORNELIA. (*Sitting at her desk.*) Sorry, but I can't suddenly shift gears. I could easily lose momentum. (*Starts writing checks again, then looks up.*) You're making me nervous. Please find something to do. Did you bring along a book?

HARVEY. No.

CORNELIA. What? Always bring along a book. (*Indicating ample bookshelves.*) You're welcome to take one of mine.

HARVEY. (*Looking.*) It's an impressive library.

CORNELIA. Do you want it?

HARVEY. Do I want your library?

CORNELIA. Some little man is showing up tomorrow morning to cart it away. Take whatever you want before he arrives.

HARVEY. (*Jokingly.*) What if I take this spectacular, leatherbound... (*Takes out a book, opens it.*) ... illustrated set of the complete works of Charles Dickens.

CORNELIA. It's yours.

HARVEY. I was just kidding, Mrs. Cunningham.

CORNELIA. I wasn't. Are you married?

HARVEY. Not now...

CORNELIA. Divorced? (*He nods.*) Welcome to the club.

HARVEY. Actually, I'm now involved with a lovely lady who wants to move in with me.

CORNELIA. Does she love you?

HARVEY. I hope so.

CORNELIA. Just hope?

HARVEY. There's an economic issue here, Mrs. Cunningham. She wants me to pay the rent so she can quit her job and write a book...

CORNELIA. What does she do?

HARVEY. She's a college guidance counselor at a private school.

CORNELIA. And she wants to write one of those preppy novels?

HARVEY. No, she wants to write about how our country is becoming an oligarchy.

CORNELIA. Yippee! Good for her!

HARVEY. She deals primarily with rich parents, dedicated to the proposition that their children get even richer.

CORNELIA. She sounds right on target! Marry her immediately. I'll give you my set of Dickens as a wedding present. He writes beautifully about the dangers of money...

HARVEY. Seriously, don't you want to keep Dickens?

CORNELIA. I won't have room for him when you move me into that nursing home, my geriatric gymnasium. I'll bring along books, of course. Books I've read. Or think I've read. Or pretend I've read. But no Dickens. He takes up too much space, in every sense of the word.

HARVEY. You sound sorry.

CORNELIA. Oh well. I'm fast learning to leave things behind. (*Indicating all the tagged furniture.*) Red tags go to the Goodwill. Yellow to the Salvation Army. White means consignment to an antique furniture dealer. As for the paintings, who knows? There's an original drawing of a brook trout by Winslow Homer somewhere in the pile. Take that, too, if you can find it.

HARVEY. Mrs. Cunningham... (*A telephone rings at her desk; she looks at it. It rings again.*) Don't you want to answer that?

CORNELIA. No.

HARVEY. No?

CORNELIA. I don't believe in talking on the telephone with other people in the same room. It's totally against my religion. What are you supposed to do while I'm talking?

HARVEY. Read Dickens.

CORNELIA. (*Laughing.*) You're learning fast. (*Phone rings again.*) Agnes will get it downstairs. (*The telephone stops in the middle of a ring.*) See?

HARVEY. Then perhaps we might return to the challenge to your plan.

CORNELIA. Oh all right. But let's make it snappy.

HARVEY. The first thing we have to consider is what it might cost you legally if some member in your family decided to... (*Agnes comes in from the stairs. She wears a gray maid's uniform.*)

AGNES. Excuse me.

CORNELIA. Yes, Agnes?

AGNES. The call was from the American Indians... (*Reads from a slip of paper.*) Relief Council.

CORNELIA. (*To Harvey.*) The Indians! I adore them!

AGNES. They're waiting for an answer to their question.

CORNELIA. What question, Agnes?

LOVE & MONEY

by A.R. Gurney

2M, 3W

Determined to donate almost everything she owns before her life of grace and privilege ends, wealthy widow Cornelia Cunningham's plan hits a snag when an ambitious and ingratiating young man arrives to claim his alleged inheritance. Renowned playwright A.R. Gurney paints an incisive and hysterical portrait of the trials of class, family, legacy, race, and the power of a good story.

"... the dialogue is peppered with wit and warmth."

—The New York Times

"[LOVE & MONEY] is a buoyant comedy that also contains some startlingly shrewd observations about wealth, the nature of trust, and the prospect of aging with dignity."

—TheaterMania.com

"[LOVE & MONEY] is filled with the delightful badinage which introduces us to two impeccably written characters... As language is fast disappearing from our everyday life, Mr. Gurney is always welcome and refreshing."

—DCMetroTheaterArts.com

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