

# Classical Comedy

*Edited with an Introduction by*

ERICH SEGAL

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PLAUTUS

THE BROTHERS  
MENAECHMUS

## PREFACE

Plautus is known to have written only one comedy of errors. His Greek predecessors wrote so many (Menander at least four) that 'Miss Understanding' (*Agnoia*), a personification who speaks one of his prologues, has rightly been called the presiding deity of New Comedy. Plautus usually preferred wit to ignorance, shrewd deceptions to naive blunders. People in a comedy of errors are mere puppets; Plautus admired puppeteers, creative plotters, slaves like Palaestrio in *The Braggart Soldier* and Tranio in *The Haunted House*. Not to mention Pseudolus, the cleverest of them all.

The fine, if untypical, Plautine comedy *The Brothers Menaechmus* has enjoyed unceasing popularity over the ages. And not only in famous adaptations such as Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and Rodgers and Hart's *Boys from Syracuse*. It has always been the most performed play of Plautus. Clearly, it has a very special appeal – both in its songs and snappy patter, and its atmosphere of carnival release from everyday rules. Moreover, it presents more simply than any comedy before or since the greatest of all wish-fulfilments: the surrogate self, the alter ego with no super-ego, the man who can get his pleasure free in every sense, because he is 'Jack in town and Ernest in the country'. Indeed, Plautus' twin-brother comedy might be aptly subtitled 'The Importance of Being Menaechmus'.

The two houses on stage represent the conflicting forces in the comedy. They are not unlike the statues of Artemis and Aphrodite which frame the setting of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. In both dramas the action takes place in a magnetic field between

poles of restraint and release. It is no coincidence that the house of Menaechmus I stands at the exit nearer the forum. For the local twin is bound by the business of everyday life, restrained by legal, financial and social ties, especially by a wife who is constantly 'at work'.

Across the stage, and nearer the harbour whence visitors come, dwells a lady of pleasure aptly named Erotium. Throughout the play, Plautus associates the word *industria* ('work') with Mrs Menaechmus (e.g. 123). To emphasize the contrast, he constantly refers to Erotium as *voluptas* ('pleasure'). It should be noted that his lawfully wedded spouse has no name at all; Plautus merely calls her 'wife'. Shakespeare, in his adaptation, reverses this, making the courtesan the lady with no name.

But it is especially interesting to see why Menaechmus I needs a twin in order 'to win', and since this is a comedy the hero gets away with it all. The local married brother is the unwitting victim of his twin's sudden appearance. Plautus gives him the larger and more lyrical role (Shakespeare, on the other hand, emphasizes the visiting twin). We first meet Menaechmus I in the midst of a domestic battle, describing himself as a hardened soldier in the war called marriage (127, 129). He craves rest and recreation from this campaign. And this is, in fact, what the play is all about. He takes several steps in the direction of pleasure, that is, towards the other side of the stage, where passion lives incarnate. He orders a banquet: the bill of fare emphasizes various delicacies which were *forbidden* to the Romans (209ff.). Plautus even concocts comic names for these illegal dishes, to stress how much Menaechmus is savouring the prospect of his breaking-of-the-rules banquet. And dessert will be Erotium. The plans are elaborate, explicit and titillating. Why, then, does Menaechmus I leave the stage and head for – of all places – the forum, not to return till the party is over?

The very moment the local brother exits towards the business district, his long-lost twin enters from the harbour. This boy from Syracuse belongs to a great comic tradition: the lowly stranger who arrives in town, is mistaken for someone else of greater importance and receives the cardinal comic joys: food, sex and money. This is a comedy of errors and it really starts

to gain momentum as the mistakes begin, when his twin brother arrives from nowhere, literally nowhere in the world, for Plautus' geography is cock-eyed to say the least. Xanthias in Aristophanes' *Frogs* is an earlier such type; a later one is Gogol's *Inspector General*, Klestakhow, the lowly government clerk who is mistaken for the Inspector-General. Like the Russian hero, Menaechmus II has come to town virtually penniless. As Messenio, his loyal slave, expresses it, 'We're travelling for summer – very, very light' (255). The sudden bounty seems too good to be true. But this hunter ultimately finds his prey – not before he enjoys a banquet of the senses being prepared for his brother. Certainly Erotium gives the visitor a lyrical welcome, in an aria which concludes: 'Since dinner's ready, come and dine! / As soon as suits you, come ... recline' (367–8).

Some time later Menaechmus II emerges drunk and garlanded from Erotium's palace of pleasure. 'I've wined, I've dined, I've concubined, and robbed her blind – / No one but me will own this dress after today!' (473–7). He also receives some of Erotium's jewellery, which, like the dress, has been stolen by Menaechmus I from his wife. Two comic fantasies are here fulfilled. Not only does someone else pick up the tab for the banquet, but the whore ends up paying the customer for sex!<sup>1</sup>

But what has kept our protagonist off-stage? He arrives, in fact, just in time to be too late, and though he sings elaborately of what has detained him, the cause may be summarized in a single word: business. While he was in the forum, a client stopped him and forced him to act as advocate in a complicated lawsuit. He sings of his frustration. He was obliged to do his (Roman) duty:

So I just was delayed, forced to give legal aid, no evading  
this client of mine who had found me.

I wanted to do you know what – and with whom – but he  
bound me and tied ropes around me. (585–9)

Menaechmus' punishment – for going to work on a day selected for play – is not yet complete. He is about to have an

unpleasant encounter with his nameless wife, who will lock him out of his house, after which Erotium too will bolt her door. He is then *exclusissimus*, the most 'kicked-out' (698; see note 30) man in the world. To add diagnosis to other injuries, he is then pronounced insane by a psychiatrist *gloriosus*, a hilarious quack whose professional questions are not unlike those posed by 'Socrates' in Aristophanes' *Clouds*.

When one Menaechmus is at the acme of delight, the other is at the nadir of despair. The counterbalance is neatly crafted and helps to explain the meaning of the entire comedy. The local Menaechmus is married to a real harridan. Any sensible man would seek to avoid her even if he were not going to Erotium's pleasure-dome. His confrontation typifies Plautus' attitude towards wives in general. He is wont to scold her for her constantly intrusive behaviour. When he leaves the house in the morning their confrontation is typical:

And if you act up once again, the way you've acted up today,  
I'll have you packed up – back to Daddy as a divorcee.

...

I don't have a wife, I have a customs office bureaucrat,  
For I must declare the things I've done, I'm doing, and all that!

(116–18)

This image of the Roman wife is hardly appealing. But then it is characteristic of Plautus' attitude to women. Cleostrata, the shrill, strident and aggressive wife in the *Casina*, is another example. She is referred to literally as a bitch. His slave remarks sarcastically, 'you're a real hunter, master, because you spend all your time with a bitch.'<sup>22</sup>

The hero of *The Brothers* is a married man, a solid citizen of the town, who longs to go on a wild revel. In point of fact, somebody named Menaechmus does enjoy all the forbidden delights of which the hero dreams. But it is another Menaechmus, who, although a mirror image (1062), is still different in three vital aspects: he is unmarried, unattached and a non-citizen. In these three non-capacities, unmarried Menaechmus II can enjoy sex without 'sin', play without

neglecting duty (he has no clients), and he can even eat whatever he wants – foreigners are exempt from local dietary restrictions. In brief, Menaechmus II is *free*.

He is also non-existent. He is the creature of someone's imagination – specifically, Menaechmus I's. The fantasy fulfilled is that of a workaday Roman, caught up in the forum, dreaming of getting away – from everything and with everything. *The Brothers Menaechmus* is Roman comedy par excellence, and demonstrates once again that even when he departs slightly from his usual comic domain, Plautus never loses sight of his public's desires. Here he has given them exactly what they and Menaechmus I have longed for: a Roman holiday.

#### NOTES

1. We recall the Braggart Soldier at the height of his *alazomeia*, drunk with joy at the prospect of being paid for his sexual attentions, 1059ff.
2. Plautus, *Casina* 319–20.

## CHARACTERS

CHIEF ACTOR  
PENICULUS, a parasite  
MENAECHMUS I  
MENAECHMUS II, his twin brother (born Sosicles)  
MESSENIO, slave to Menaechmus II  
EROTIUM, a lady of pleasure  
CYLINDRUS, a cook in Erotium's employ  
MAID, also in Erotium's employ  
WIFE of Menaechmus  
OLD MAN, father-in-law of Menaechmus  
DOCTOR

The scene is a street in Epidamnum.<sup>1</sup> There are two houses. On the right (from the audience's view) is MENAECHMUS' house; on the left, EROTUM's house. The forum is off-stage to the audience's right. The harbour is off-stage to the audience's left.

Enter the CHIEF ACTOR to speak the prologue

Now first and foremost, folks, I've this apostrophe:

May fortune favour all of you – and all of me.

I bring you Plautus. [Pause] Not in person, just his play.

So listen please, be friendly with your ears today.

Now here's the plot. Please listen with your whole attention

span;

I'll tell it in the very fewest words I can.

[A digression] Now comic poets do this thing in every

play:<sup>2</sup>

'It all takes place in Athens, folks,' is what they say.

So that way everything will seem *more Greek* to you.

But I reveal the real locations when I speak to you.

This story's Greekish, but to be exact,

It's not Athenish, it's Sicilyish, in fact.

[Smiles] That was a prelude to the prologue of the plot.

I now intend to pour a lot of plot for you.

Not just a cupful, fuller up, more like a pot.

Such is our storehouse, brimming full of plot!

[Finally, to business] There was at Syracuse a merchant old

and worn

To whom a pair of baby boys – two twins – were born.

The babies' looks were so alike their nurse confessed

She couldn't tell to which of them she gave which breast.

Nor even could their own real mother tell between them.

I've learned about all this from someone who has seen

them.

I haven't seen the boys, in case you want to know.

Their father, 'round the time the boys were seven or so,

Packed on a mighty ship much merchandise to sell –

The father also packed one of the twins as well.

They went to Tarentum to market, with each other,

And left the other brother back at home with mother.  
A festival chanced to be on there when they docked there,  
And piles of people for the festival had flocked there.

30

The little boy, lost in the crowd, wandered away.  
An Epidamnian merchant, also there that day,

Made off with him to Epidamnus – there to stay.

The father, learning that he'd lost the lad,

Became depressed, in fact he grew so very sad  
A few days later he was dead. It was that bad.

When back to Syracuse this news was all dispatched,

The grandpa of the boys learned one was snatched,  
And word of father's death at Tarentum then came.

40

The grandpa took the other twin and changed his name.  
He so adored the other twin, who had been snatched,  
He gave the brother still at home a name that matched:  
Menaechmus. That had been the other brother's name.

It was the grandpa's name as well, the very same.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, it's not a name you quickly can forget,  
Especially if you're one to whom he owes a debt.<sup>4</sup>

I warn you now, so later you won't be confused:  
[emphatically] for both of the twin brothers one same  
name is used.

[Starts to cross the stage]

Metre by metre<sup>5</sup> to Epidamnus now I must wend,  
So I can chart this map unto its perfect end.

50

If any of you wants some business handled there,  
Speak up, be brave, and tell me of the whole affair.  
But let him give me cash, so I can take good care.  
If you don't offer cash, then you're a fool, forget it.  
You do – [smiles] then you're a bigger fool, and you'll  
regret it.

I'll go back whence I came – still standing on this floor –  
And finish up the story I began before:

That Epidamnian who snatched the little lad,  
He had no children; lots of cash was all he had.<sup>6</sup>  
So he adopted him he snatched, became his dad.  
And gave his son a dowried female for his bride.  
And then – so he could make the boy his heir – he died.

By chance, out in the country in a rain severe,  
He tried to cross a rapid stream – not far from here.  
The rapid river rapt the kidnapper, who fell,  
Caught in the current, heading hurriedly to hell.

The most fantastic riches thus came rolling in  
To him who lives right in the house – the kidnapped

twin.  
But now, from Syracuse where he had always been,  
With trusty slave, in search of long-lost brother-twin.

This town is Epidamnus, while the play is on.

But when we play another play, its name will change  
Just like the actors living here, whose roles can range  
From pimp to papa, or to lover pale and wan,

To pauper, parasite, to king or prophet, on and on.

[And on and on and on . . .]<sup>7</sup>

[Enter the parasite PENICULUS. He speaks directly to the  
audience]

PENICULUS:

By local boys I'm called Peniculus the sponge,  
For at the table, I can wipe all platters clean.

[A philosophical discourse] The kind of men who bind their  
prisoners with chains,

Or clap the shackles on a slave that's run away,  
Are acting very foolishly – in my own view.

80

If you compound the wretchedness of some poor wretch,  
Why, all the more he'll long to flee and do some wrong.  
For one way or another, he'll get off those chains.

The shackled men will wear the ring down with a file,  
Or smash the lock. This kind of measure is a joke.

But if you wish to guard him so he won't run off,  
You ought to chain the man with lots of food and drink.

Just bind the fellow's beak right to a well-stocked table,  
Provide the guy with eatables and drinkables,  
Whatever he would like to stuff himself with every day.  
He'll never flee, though wanted for a murder charge.  
You'll guard with ease by using chains that he can chew.  
The nicest thing about these chains of nourishment –

60

90

The more you loosen them, the more they bind more  
tightly.

[*End of discourse*] I'm heading for Menaechmus; he's the  
man to whom

I've had myself condemned. I'm hoping that he'll chain me.  
He doesn't merely feed men, he can breed men and  
Indeed men are reborn through him. No doctor's better.

This is the sort of guy he is: the greatest eater,  
His feasts are festivals.<sup>8</sup> He piles the table so,

And plants so many platters in the nearest piles  
To reach the top, you have to stand up on your couch.

And yet we've had an intermission for some days  
And tabled at my table, I've expended it.

I never eat or drink – except expensively.

But now my army of desserts has been deserting me.  
I've got to have a talk with him. But wait – the door!

Behold, I see Menaechmus himself now coming out.

[Enter MENAECHEMUS, still facing indoors, berating someone. We will soon see that he is hiding a lady's dress under his usual garments]

MENAECHEMUS [singing, in anger at his wife in the house]:  
If you weren't such a shrew, so uncontrolled, ungrateful

too,<sup>9</sup>  
Whatever thing your husband hated, you'd find hateful  
too.

And if you act up once again, the way you've acted up  
today,  
I'll have you packed up – back to Daddy as a divorcée.  
However often I try to go out you detain me, delay me,  
demand such details as

Where I'm going, what I'm doing, what's my business all  
about,  
Deals I'm making, undertaking, what I did when I was out.  
I don't have a wife, I have a customs office bureaucrat,  
For I must declare the things I've done, I'm doing, and all  
that!

All the luxuries you've got have spoiled you rotten. I want  
to live for what I give:

Maids and aides, a pantry full,  
Purple clothing, gold and wool:

You lack for nothing money buys.  
So watch for trouble if you're wise;

A husband hates a wife who spies.  
But so you won't have watched in vain, for all your

diligence and care,  
I'll tell you: 'Wench to lunch today, lovely dinner off

somewhere.'

PENICULUS:

The man now thinks he hurts his wife; it's me he hurts:  
By eating dinner somewhere else, he won't give me my just  
desserts!

MENAECHEMUS [looks into house, satisfied, then turns to  
audience with a big grin]:

My word barrage has put the wife in full retreat. It's  
victory!

Now where are all the married 'lovers'? Pin your medals  
right on me.

Come honour me *en masse*. Look how I've battled with  
such gurs,

And look, this dress I stole inside – it soon will be my little  
slut's.

I've shown the way: to fool a guard both hard and shrewd  
takes aptitude.

Oh, what a shining piece of work! What brilliance, glitter,  
glow and gloss!

I've robbed a rat – but lose at that, for my own gain is my  
own loss!

[Indicates the dress] Well, here's the booty – there's my  
foes, and to my ally – now it goes.

PENICULUS:  
Hey, young man! Does any of that stolen booty go to  
me?

MENAECHEMUS:  
Lost – I'm lost – and caught in crime!

PENICULUS:  
Oh, no, you're found – and found in time.

MENAECHMUS:  
Who is that?

PENICULUS:  
It's me.

MENAECHMUS:  
Greetings. [Rushes to him; they shake hands vigorously]

PENICULUS:  
Greetings.

MENAECHMUS:  
Oh, you — my Lucky Charm, my Nick-of-Time!

PENICULUS:  
Whatcha doing?

MENAECHMUS:  
Shaking hands with my good-luck charm.

140 MENAECHMUS:  
Say — you couldn't come more rightly right on time than  
you've just come.

PENICULUS:  
That's my style: I know exactly how to pick the nick of  
time.

MENAECHMUS:  
Want to see a brilliant piece of work?

PENICULUS:  
What cook concocted it?

Show me just a titbit and I'll know if someone bungled it.

MENAECHMUS:  
Tell me, have you ever seen those frescos painted on the

wall —  
Ganymede snatched by the eagle, Venus . . . likewise . . .  
with Adonis?

PENICULUS:  
Yes, but what do those damn pictures have to do with me?

MENAECHMUS:  
Just look.

[He strikes a pose, showing off his dress]  
Notice something similar?

PENICULUS:  
What kind of crazy dress is that?

MENAECHMUS [*very fey*]:

Tell me that I'm so attractive.

PENICULUS:  
Tell me when we're going to eat.

MENAECHMUS:  
First you tell me —

PENICULUS:  
Fine, I'll tell you: you're attractive. So attractive.

MENAECHMUS:  
Don't you care to add a comment?

PENICULUS [*a breath*]:  
Also witty. Very witty.

MENAECHMUS:  
More!

PENICULUS:  
No more, by Hercules, until I know what's in it for

150 me.  
Since you're warring with your wife, I must be wary and  
beware.

MENAECHMUS:  
Hidden from my wife we'll live it up and burn this day to

ashes.

PENICULUS:  
Now you're really talking sense. How soon do I ignite the

pyre?

Look — the day's half dead already, right to near its belly  
button.

MENAECHMUS:  
You delay me by interrupting —

PENICULUS:  
Knock my eyeball through my ankle,

Mangle me, Menaechmus, if I fail to heed a single word.

MENAECHMUS:  
Move — we're much too near my house.

[Tiptoes to centre-stage, motions to PENICULUS]  
PENICULUS [*follows MENAECHMUS*]:

Okay.

MENAECHMUS [*moves more, motions*]:

We're still too near.

PENICULUS [*follows*]:

How's this?

MENAECHMUS:

Bolder, let's go further from the bloody mountain lion's

cave.

PENICULUS:

Pollux! You'd be perfect racing chariots – the way you  
act.

MENAECHMUS:

Why?

PENICULUS:

You're glancing back to see if *she*'s there, riding  
after you.

MENAECHMUS:

All right, speak your piece.

PENICULUS:

My piece? Whatever piece you say is fine.

MENAECHMUS:

How are you at smells? Can you conjecture from a simple  
sniff?

PENICULUS:

Sir, my nose knows more than all the city prophets.<sup>10</sup>

MENAECHMUS:

Here now, sniff this dress I hold. What do you smell? You  
shrink?

PENICULUS:

When it comes to women's garments, prudence bids us  
smell the *top*.

Way down there, the nose recoils at certain odours quite  
unwashable.<sup>11</sup>

MENAECHMUS:

All right, smell up here, you're such a fussy one.

PENICULUS:

All right, I sniff.

MENAECHMUS:

Well? What do you smell? Well –

We're still too near.

PENICULUS [*follows*]:

How's this?

MENAECHMUS:

I hope so too ...

Now I'll take this dress to my beloved wench, Erotium,  
With the order to prepare a banquet for us both.

PENICULUS:

Oh, good!

MENAECHMUS:

Then we'll drink, we'll toast until tomorrow's morning star  
appears.

PENICULUS:

Good, a perfect plan! May I proceed to pound the portals?

MENAECHMUS:

Pound.

PENICULUS:

No no – wait!

PENICULUS:

Why wait? The flowing bowl's more than a mile  
away!

MENAECHMUS:

Pound politely.

PENICULUS:

Why? You think the door is made of pottery?

MENAECHMUS:

Wait wait wait, by Hercules. She's coming out. Oh, see the  
sun!<sup>1</sup>

How the sun's eclipsed by all the blazing beauty from her  
body.

[*Grand entrance of EROTUM from her house*]

EROTUM [*to MENAECHMUS*]:

Greetings, O my only soul!

PENICULUS:

And me?

EROTUM [*to PENICULUS*]:

Not on my list at all.

PENICULUS:

Such is life for us unlisted men – in every kind of war.

PENICULUS [*quickly*]:

Grabbing, grubbing, rub-a-dub dubbing.<sup>12</sup>

Hope I'm right.

MENAECHMUS:

I hope so too ...

Now I'll take this dress to my beloved wench, Erotium,  
With the order to prepare a banquet for us both.

MENAECHMUS [*to EROTUM*]:

Darling, at your house today, prepare a little battleground.

EROTUM:

So I will.

MENAECHMUS:

We'll hold a little drinking duel, [*indicating*

PENICULUS] the two of us.

Then the one who proves the better fighter with the flowing bowl,

He's the one who'll get to join your company for night manoeuvres.

[*Getting more enthusiastic*] Oh, my joy! My wife, my wife!

When I see you – how I hate *her*!

EROTUM [*sarcastically*]:

Meanwhile, since you hate your wife, you wear her clothing, is that it?

What have you got on?

MENAECHMUS:

It's just a dress addressed to you, sweet rose.

EROTUM:

You're on top, you outtop<sup>13</sup> all the other men who try for me.

PENICULUS [*aside*]:

Sluts can talk so sweet, while they see something they can snatch from you.

[*To EROTUM*] If you really loved him, you'd have smooched his nose right off his face.

MENAECHMUS:

Hold this now, Peniculus; religion bids me make redress.

PENICULUS:

Fine, but while you've got a skirt on, why not pirouette a bit?

MENAECHMUS:

Pirouette? By Hercules, you've lost your mind!

PENICULUS:

Not more than you.

Take it off – if you won't dance.

MENAECHMUS [*to EROTUM*]:

What risks I ran in stealing this!

Hercules in labour number nine was not as brave as I,

200

When he stole the girdle from that Amazon Hippolyta.<sup>14</sup>

Take it, darling, since you do your duties with such diligence.<sup>15</sup>

EROTUM:

That's the spirit. Lovers ought to learn from you the way to love.

PENICULUS [*to the audience*]:

Sure, that way to love's the perfect short cut to a bankruptcy.

MENAECHMUS:

Just last year I bought my wife this dress. It cost two hundred drachmae.

PENICULUS [*to the audience*]:

Well, there goes two hundred drachmae down the drain, by my accounts.

MENAECHMUS [*to EROTUM*]:

Want to know what I would like prepared?

EROTUM:

I know, and I'll prepare it.

MENAECHMUS:

Please arrange a feast at your house; have it cooked for three of us.

Also have some very special party foods bought in the forum:

Glandiose, whole-hog and a descendant of the lardly ham.

Or perhaps some pork choperettes, or anything along those lines.<sup>16</sup>

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Let whatever's served be *stewed*, to make me hungry as a hawk.

Also hurry up.

EROTUM:

I will.

MENAECHMUS:

Now we'll be heading to the forum.

We'll return at once and, while the dinner's cooking, we'll  
be drinking.

EROTIUM:

When you feel like it, come. It will be all prepared.  
And quickly too.

[To PENICULUS] Follow me –

PENICULUS:

By Hercules, I'll follow you in every way.

No, I'd lose the gods' own gold before I lose your track  
today.

[MENAECHMUS and PENICULUS exit towards the *forum*]

EROTIUM:

Someone call inside and tell my cook Cylindrus to come  
out.

[CYLINDRUS enters from EROTIUM's house]

Take a basket and some money. Here are several coins for  
you.

CYLINDRUS:

Got 'em.

EROTIUM:

Do your shopping. See that there's enough for three of  
us,

Not a surplus or a deficit.

CYLINDRUS:

What sort of guests, madam?

EROTIUM:

I, Menaechmus, and his parasite.

CYLINDRUS:

That means I cook for *ten*:

By himself that parasite can eat for eight with greatest ease.

EROTIUM:

That's the list. The rest is up to you.

CYLINDRUS:

Consider it as cooked already.

Set yourself at table.

EROTIUM:  
Come back quickly.

CYLINDRUS [starting to trot off]:  
I'm as good as back.

[He exits. From the exit nearer the harbour enters the boy  
from Syracuse – MENAECHMUS II – accompanied by his  
slave MESSENIO. As chance [i.e. the playwright] would  
have it, the twin is also wearing the exact same outfit  
as his long-lost brother. Several sailor types carry their  
luggage]

MENAECHMUS II:

Oh, joy, no greater joy, my dear Messenio,  
Than for a sailor when he's on the deep to see  
Dry land.

MESSENIO:

It's greater still, if I may speak my mind,  
To see and then arrive at some dry land that's *home*.

But tell me, please<sup>17</sup> – why have we come to Epidamnus?

Why have we circled every island like the sea?

MENAECHMUS II [pointedly, melodramatically]:

We are in search of my beloved long-lost twin.

MESSENIO:

But will there ever be a limit to this searching?  
It's six entire years since we began this job.

Through Istria, Iberia, Illyria,

The Adriatic, up and down, exotic Greece,<sup>18</sup>

And all Italian towns. Wherever sea went, *we* went!

I frankly think if you were searching for a needle,

You would have found it long ago, if it existed.

We seek and search among the living for a dead man.

We would have found him long ago if he were living.

MENAECHMUS II:

But therefore I search on till I can prove the fact;

If someone says he knows for sure my brother's dead,  
I'll stop my search and never try an instant further.

But otherwise, I'll never quit while I'm alive,

For I alone can feel how much he means to me.

MESSENIO:

You seek a pin in haystacks. Let's go home –  
Unless we're doing this to write a travel book.

MENAECHMUS II [*losing his temper*]:  
Obey your orders, eat what's served you, keep from  
mischief!

And don't annoy me. Do things *my* way.

MESSENIO:

Yessir, yessir.

I get the word. The word is simple: I'm a slave.  
Concise communication, couldn't be much clearer.

[*A chastened pause, then back to harping at his master*]

But still and all, I just can't keep from saying this:  
Menaechmus, when I inspect our purse, it seems

We're travelling for summer – very, very light.  
By Hercules, unless you go home right away,

While you search on still finding *no* kin ... you'll be  
'bro-kin'.<sup>19</sup>

Now here's the race of men you'll find in Epidamnus:

The greatest libertines, the greatest drinkers too,  
The most bamboozlers and charming flatterers

Live in this city. And as for wanton women, well –  
Nowhere in the world, I'm told, are they more dazzling.

Because of this, they call the city Epidamnus,  
For no one leaves unscathed, 'undamaged', as it were.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Oh, I'll have to watch for that. Give me the purse.

MESSENIO:

What for?

MENAECHMUS II:

Because your words make me afraid of you.  
MESSENIO:

Of me?

MENAECHMUS II:

That you might cause ... Epidamnation for me.  
You love the ladies quite a lot, Messenio.  
And I'm a temperamental man, extremely wild.  
If I can hold the cash, it's best for both of us.  
Then you can do no wrong, and I can't yell at you.

MESSENIO [*giving the purse*]:  
Take it, sir, and guard it; you'll be doing me a favour.

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CYLINDRUS:

Where are the other guests?

MENAECHMUS II:  
What kind of other guests?

CYLINDRUS:  
Your parasite, that is.

MENAECHMUS II:  
My parasite? [To MESSENIO] The man is simply raving  
mad.

MESSENIO:  
I told you there were great bamboozlers in this town.

MENAECHMUS II [*to CYLINDRUS, playing it cool*]:  
Which parasite of mine do you intend, young man?

CYLINDRUS:  
The Sponge.

MENAECHMUS II [*jocular, points to luggage*]:  
Indeed, my sponge is here inside my bag.

CYLINDRUS:  
Menaechmus, you've arrived too early for the dinner.

Look, I've just returned from shopping.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Please, young man,

What kind of prices do you pay for sacred pigs,<sup>22</sup>

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CYLINDRUS:

I've shopped quite well, and just the sort of things I like.  
I know I'll serve a lovely dinner to the diners.

But look – I see Menaechmus. Now my back is dead!<sup>21</sup>  
The dinner guests are strolling right outside our door  
Before I even finish shopping. Well, I'll speak.

[*Going up to MENAECHMUS II*]

Menaechmus, sir ...

CYLINDRUS [*thinks it's a joke*]:  
God love you – God knows who you are.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Who am I? Did you really say you don't know me?

MENAECHMUS II:  
By Hercules, I don't.

CYLINDRUS:

Where are the other guests?

MENAECHMUS II:  
What kind of other guests?

CYLINDRUS:  
Your parasite, that is.

MENAECHMUS II:  
My parasite? [To MESSENIO] The man is simply raving  
mad.

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CYLINDRUS:

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Which parasite of mine do you intend, young man?

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Indeed, my sponge is here inside my bag.

CYLINDRUS:  
Menaechmus, you've arrived too early for the dinner.

Look, I've just returned from shopping.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Please, young man,

What kind of prices do you pay for sacred pigs,<sup>22</sup>

290      The sacrificial kind?

CYLINDRUS:

Not much.

MENAECHMUS II:

Then take this coin,  
And sacrifice to purify your mind at my expense.

Because I'm quite convinced you're absolutely raving mad  
To bother me, an unknown man who doesn't know you.

CYLINDRUS:

You don't recall my name? Cylindrus, sir, Cylindrus!

MENAECHMUS II:

Cylindrical or Cubical, just go away.

Not only don't I know you, I don't *want* to know you.

CYLINDRUS:

Your name's Menaechmus, sir, correct?

MENAECHMUS II:

As far as *I* know.

You're sane enough to call me by my rightful name.  
But tell me how you know me.

CYLINDRUS:

How I know you? ... Sir -

300      [Discreetly, but pointedly] You have a mistress ... she  
owns me ... Erotium?

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, I haven't – and I don't know you.

CYLINDRUS:

You don't know me, a man who many countless times  
Refilled your bowl when you were at our house?

MESSENIO:

Bad luck!

I haven't got a single thing to break the fellow's skull with.  
[To CYLINDRUS] Refilled the bowl? The bowl of one who  
till this day

Had never been in Epidamnus?

CYLINDRUS [to MENAECHMUS II]:

You deny it?

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, I do.

CYLINDRUS [*points across stage*]:  
And I suppose that house  
Is not your house?

MENAECHMUS II:

God damn the people living there!

CYLINDRUS [*to audience*]:  
Why, *he's* the raving lunatic – he cursed himself!

Menaechmus –

MENAECHMUS II:

Yes, what is it?

CYLINDRUS:

Do take my advice,

And use that coin you promised me a while ago,  
And since, by Hercules, you're certainly not sane,  
I mean, Menaechmus, since you just now cursed  
yourself –

Go sacrifice that sacred pig to cure yourself.

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, you talk a lot – and you annoy me.

CYLINDRUS [*embarrassed, to audience*]:

He acts this way a lot with me – he jokes around.

He can be very funny if his wife is gone.

[To MENAECHMUS] But now, what do you say?

MENAECHMUS II:

To what?

CYLINDRUS [*showing basket*]:

Is this enough?  
I think I've shopped for three of you. Do I need more  
For you, your parasite, your girl?

MENAECHMUS II:

What girls? What girls?  
What parasites are you discussing?

MESSENIO [*to CYLINDRUS*]:

And what madness

Has caused you to be such a nuisance?

CYLINDRUS [*to MESSENIO*]:

What do you want now?

I don't know you. I'm chatting with a man I know.

MESSENIO [to CYLINDRUS]:

By Pollux, it's for sure you're not exactly sane.

CYLINDRUS [*abandons the discussion*]:

Well then, I guess I'll stew these up. No more delay.

Now don't you wander off too far from here.

[*Bowing to MENAECHMUS*] Your humble servant.

MENAECHMUS II [*half aside*]:

If you *were*, I'd crucify you!

CYLINDRUS:

Oh, take a cross yourself – cross over and come in –

Whilst I apply Vulcanic arts to all the party's parts.<sup>23</sup>

I'll go inside and tell Erotium you're here.

Then she'll convince you you'll be comfier inside.

[*Exit*]

MENAECHMUS II [*stage whisper to MESSENIO*]:

Well – has he gone?

MESSENIO:

He has.

MENAECHMUS II:

Those weren't lies you told.

There's truth in every word of yours.

MESSENIO [*his shrewd conclusion*]:

Here's what I think:

I think the woman living here's some sort of slut.  
That's what I gathered from that maniac who left.

MENAECHMUS II:

And yet I wonder how that fellow knew my name.

MESSENIO:

Well, I don't wonder. Wanton women have this way:  
They send their servants or their maids to port  
To see if some new foreign ship's arrived in port.

340 To ask around, 'Where are they from? What are their

names?' Right afterward, they fasten on you hard and fast.  
They tease you, then they squeeze you dry and send you home.

Right now, I'd say a pirate ship is in *this* port  
And I would say we'd better both beware of it.

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, you warn me well.

MESSENIO:

I'll know I have

If you stay well aware and *show* I've warned you well.

MENAECHMUS II:

Be quiet for a minute now; the door just creaked.

Let's see who comes out now.

MESSENIO:

I'll put the luggage down.

[*To the sailors*] Me hearties, if you please, please guard this

stuff for us.

[*EROTIUM appears, in a romantic mood, singing*]

EROTIUM:

Open my doors, let my welcome be wide,

Then hurry and scurry – get ready inside.

See that the incense is burning, the couches have covers.

Alluring decor is exciting for lovers.

Lovers love loveliness, we don't complain; their loss is

our gain.

But the cook says someone was out here – [*looks*] I see!  
It's that man of great worth – who's worth so much to

me.  
I ought to greet him richly – as he well deserves to be.  
Now I'll go near, and let him know I'm here.

[*To MENAECHMUS*] My darling-darling, it's a mite amazing  
To see you standing out-of-doors by open doors.

You know full well how very much my house is yours.  
All you ordered we're supplied with,  
All your wishes are complied with.

So why stay here, why delay here? Come inside with ...  
me.  
Since dinner's ready, come and dine,  
As soon as suits you, come ... recline.

[*To say the very least, MENAECHMUS II is stunned. After a slight pause, he regains his powers of speech*]  
MENAECHMUS II [to MESSENIO]:  
Who's this woman talking to?

EROTIUM:  
To you.

MENAECHMUS II:  
To me?

What have we - ?  
  
370 EROTIUM:

By Pollux, you're the only one of all my lovers  
Venus wants me to arouse to greatness. You deserve it, too.  
For, by Castor, thanks to all your gifts, I've flourished like a  
flower.

MENAECHMUS II [*aside to MESSENIO*]:

She is surely very mad or very drunk, Messenio.

Speaking to a total stranger like myself so . . . sociably.

MESSENIO:

Didn't I predict all this? Why, these are only falling leaves.  
Wait three days and I predict the trees themselves will drop  
on you.

Wanton women are this way, whenever they can sniff some  
silver.

Anyway, I'll speak to her. [To EROTIUM] Hey, woman -

there.

EROTIUM [*with hauteur*]:

Yes, can I help you?

MESSENIO:

Tell me where you know this man from.

EROTIUM:

Where? Where he knows *me* for years.

380

Epidamus.

MESSENIO:

Epidamus, where he's never set a foot,  
Never been until today?

EROTIUM [*laughing*]:

Aha - you're making jokes with me.  
Dear Menaechmus, come inside, you'll see that things . . .

will pick up right.  
MENAECHMUS II [*to MESSENIO*]:  
Pollux, look, the creature called me by my rightful name as  
well.

How I wonder what it's all about.

MESSENIO:  
The perfume from your purse.

That's the answer.

MENAECHMUS II:

And, by Pollux, you did warn me rightfully.

[*Gives purse back to MESSENIO*]  
Take it then. I'll find out if she loves my person or my  
purse.

EROTIUM:

Let's go in, let's dine.

MENAECHMUS II [*declining*]:  
That's very nice of you. Thanks just the same.

EROTIUM:

Why on earth did you command a dinner just a while  
ago?

MENAECHMUS II:  
I commanded dinner?

EROTIUM:

Yes. For you, and for your parasite.

MENAECHMUS II:

What the devil parasite? [Aside] This woman's certainly  
insane.

EROTIUM:

Your old sponge, Peniculus.

MENAECHMUS II:

A sponge - to clean your shoes, perhaps?

EROTIUM:

No, of course - the one that came along with you a while  
ago.

EROTIUM:

When you brought the dress you'd stolen from your wife to  
give to me.

MENAECHMUS II:

Are you sane? I gave a dress I'd stolen from my wife to  
you?

[*To MESSENIO*] Like some kind of horse this woman's fast  
asleep still standing up.

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EROTIUM:

Do you get some pleasure making fun of me, denying  
things,  
Things completely true?

MENAECHMUS II:

What do you claim I've done that I deny?

EROTIUM:

Robbed your wife and gave the dress to me.

MENAECHMUS II:

*That* I'll deny again!

Never have I had or do I have a wife, and never have I  
400 Ever set a single foot inside that door, since I was born.  
I had dinner on my ship, then disembarked and met you –

EROTIUM:

Oooh!

Pity me – what shall I do? What ship is this?

MENAECHMUS II:

A wooden one,  
Much repaired, re-sailed, re-beamed, re-hammered and  
re-nailed and such.

Never did a navy have so numerous a nail supply.

EROTIUM:

Please, my sweet, let's stop the jokes and go inside together  
... mmm?

MENAECHMUS II:

Woman, you want someone else. I mean ... I'm sure you  
don't want me.

EROTIUM:

Don't I know you well, Menaechmus, know your father's  
name was Moschus?

You were born, or so they say, in Syracuse, in Sicily,  
410 Where Agathocles was king, and then in turn, King  
Phintia,<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, King Liparo, after whom King Hiero got the  
crown.

Now it's still King Hiero.

MENAECHMUS II [to MESSENIO]:  
Say, that's not inaccurate.

MESSENIO:

By Jove –  
If she's not from Syracuse, how does she know the facts so  
well?

MENAECHMUS II [*getting excited*]:

Hercules, I shouldn't keep refusing her.

MESSENIO:

Oh, don't you dare!

Go inside that door and you're a goner, sir.

MENAECHMUS II:

Now you shut up!  
Things are going well. Whatever she suggests – I'll just  
agree.

Why not get a little ... hospitality? [To EROTUM] Dear  
lady, please –  
I was impolite a while ago. I was a bit afraid that  
[indicating MESSENIO] He might go and tell my wife ...

about the dress ... about the dinner.

Now, when you would like, we'll go inside.

EROTIUM:

But where's the parasite?  
I don't give a damn. Why should we wait for him? Now if  
he comes,

MENAECHMUS II:

Don't let him inside at all.

EROTIUM:

By Castor, I'll be happy not to.  
Yet [*playfully*] there's something I would like from

you.

MENAECHMUS II:

Your wish is my command.

EROTIUM:

Bring the dress you gave me to the Phrygian embroiderer.  
Have him redesign it, add some other frills I'd like him to.

MENAECHMUS II:

Hercules, a good idea. Because of all the decoration,  
When my wife observes you in the street, she won't know  
what you're wearing.

430

EROTIUM:  
Therefore take it with you when you leave.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Of course, of course, of course.

EROTIUM:  
Let's go in.

MENAECHMUS II:  
I'll follow you. [Indicates MENENIO]

I want a little chat with him.

[Exit EROTIUM]

Hey, Messenio, come here!

MESSENIO:  
What's up?

MENAECHMUS II:

Just hop to my command.

MESSENIO:  
Can I help?

MENAECHMUS II:

You can. [Apologetically] I know you'll criticize -

MESSENIO:  
Then all the worse.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Booty's in my hands. A fine beginning. You continue, fast -  
Take these fellows [*indicating sailors*] back to our lodging  
tavern, quicker than a wink,  
Then be sure you come to pick me up before the sun goes  
down.

MESSENIO [*protesting*]:

Master, you don't know about these sluts -

MENAECHMUS II:

Be quiet! Just obey.

If I do a stupid thing, then I'll be hurting, not yourself.  
Here's a woman stupid and unwitting, from what I've just  
seen.

Here's some booty we can keep.

MESSENIO:

I'm lost. [Looks] Oh, has he gone? He's lost!  
Now a mighty pirate ship is towing off a shipwrecked skiff.

I'm the fool as well. I tried to argue down the man who  
owns me.

But he bought me only as a sounding board, not to sound  
off.

Follow me, you men [*to the sailors*], so I can come on time  
- as I've been ordered.

[They exit. Stage empty for a moment [musical interlude?].

Enter PENICULUS - all upset]

PENICULUS:  
More than thirty years I'm on this earth and during all that  
time

Never till today have I done such a damned and dopey  
deed!

Here I had immersed my whole attention in a public  
meeting.

While I stood there gaping, that Menaechmus simply stole  
away,

Went off to his mistress, I suppose, and didn't want me  
there.

Curse the man who was the first to manufacture public  
meetings,

All designed to busy men already busy with their business.  
They should choose the men who have no occupation for  
these things,

Who, if absent when they're called, would face fantastic  
fines - and fast.

Why, there's simply gobs of men who only eat just once a  
day,

Who have nothing else to do; they don't invite, they're not  
invited.

Make *these* people spend their time at public meetings and  
assemblies.

If this were the case today, I'd not have lost my lovely  
feast.

Sure as I'm alive, that man had really wished to feed me  
well.

Anyhow, I'll go. The thought of scraps left over lights my  
soul.

PENICULUS [*in a fury*]:  
Well, speak up!

You lighter than a feather, dirty, rotten person,  
You evil man, you tricky, worthless individual!  
What did I ever do to you that you'd destroy me?  
You stole away from me, when we were in the forum;  
You dealt a death blow to the dinner in my absence!  
How could you dare? Why, I deserved an equal part!

MENAECHMUS II [to EROTUM]:

Now, now, relax, you'll get this dress today for sure,  
Returned on time, with lovely new embroidery.  
I'll make the old dress vanish – it just won't be seen.

PENICULUS [*indignant, to the audience*]:

He'll decorate the dress now that the dinner's done,  
The wine's been drunk, the parasite left in the cold.

No, Hercules, I'm not myself, if not revenged,  
If I don't curse him out in style. Just watch me now.

MENAECHMUS II [*drunk with joy – and a few other things*]:

By all the gods, what man in just a single day  
Received more pleasures, though expecting none at all:  
I've wined, I've dined, I've concubined, and robbed her  
blind –

No one but me will own this dress after today!

PENICULUS:  
I just can't bear to hide and hear him prate like this.  
Smug and satisfied, he prates about *my* party.

MENAECHMUS II:  
She says I gave her this – and tells me that I stole it.  
I stole it from *my wife!* [*Confidentially*] I knew the girl was

480 wrong,  
Yet I pretended there was some affair between us two.  
Whatever she proposed, I simply said, 'Yes, yes,  
Exactly, what you say.' What need of many words?  
I've never had more fun at less expense to me.

PENICULUS:  
Now I'll accost the man, and make an awful fuss.  
MENAECHMUS II:  
Now who's this fellow coming toward me?

PENICULUS:  
Well, speak up!  
You lighter than a feather, dirty, rotten person,  
You evil man, you tricky, worthless individual!  
What did I ever do to you that you'd destroy me?  
You stole away from me, when we were in the forum;  
You dealt a death blow to the dinner in my absence!  
How could you dare? Why, I deserved an equal part!

MENAECHMUS II:  
Young man, please indicate precisely what you want from me.  
And why you're cursing someone you don't know at all.  
Your dressing-down of me deserves a beating-up!

PENICULUS:  
By Pollux, you're the one who beat me out, just now.  
Now please, young man, do introduce yourself at least.

PENICULUS:  
And now insult to injury! You don't know *me*?

MENAECHMUS II:  
By Pollux, no, I don't, as far as I can tell.  
I've never seen you, never met you. Whoever you are –  
At least behave, and don't be such a nuisance to me.

PENICULUS:  
Wake up, Menaechmus!

MENAECHMUS II:  
I'm awake – it seems to me.

PENICULUS:  
And you don't recognize me?

MENAECHMUS II:  
Why should I deny it?

PENICULUS:  
Don't recognize your parasite?

MENAECHMUS II:  
My dear young man,

PENICULUS:  
It seems to me your brain is not so very sane.

PENICULUS:  
Just answer this: did you not steal that dress today?

It was your wife's. You gave it to Erotium.

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, I have no wife. Erotium?

510

I gave her nothing, didn't steal this dress. You're mad.

PENICULUS [to audience]:

Total disaster! [To MENAECHMUS II] But I saw you wear  
that dress

And, wearing it, I saw you leave your house.

MENAECHMUS II:

Drop dead!

You think all men are fags because *you* are?  
You claim I actually put on a woman's dress!

PENICULUS:

By Hercules, I do.

MENAECHMUS II:

Oh, go where you belong!

Get purified or something, raving lunatic!

PENICULUS:

By Pollux, all the begging in the world won't keep me  
From telling every single detail to your wife.

520

Then all these present insults will rebound on you.

You've gobbled up my dinner – and I'll be revenged!

[He storms into MENAECHMUS' house]

MENAECHMUS II:

What's going on? Everyone I run across  
Makes fun of me ... but why? Oh, wait, the door just  
creaked.

[Enter EROTIUM's MAID, a sexy little thing. She carries a  
bracelet]

MAID:

Menaechmus, your Erotium would love a favour –  
Please, while you're at it, take this to the goldsmith for  
her

And have him add about an extra ... ounce ... of gold,  
So that the bracelet is remodelled, shining new.

MENAECHMUS II [*ironically*]:

I'm happy to take care of both these things for her,  
And any other thing that she'd like taken care of.

MAID:

You recognize the bracelet?

MENAECHMUS II:

Uh – I know it's gold.

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This very bracelet long ago was once your wife's,  
And secretly you snatched it from her jewel box.

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, I never did.

MAID:

You don't recall?  
Return the bracelet, if you don't remember.

MENAECHMUS II:

Wait!

I'm starting to remember. Why, of course I gave it.  
Now where are those two armlets that I gave as well?

MAID:

You never did.

MENAECHMUS II:

Of course, by Pollux – this was all.

MAID:

Will you take care of things?

MENAECHMUS II [*ironically*]:

I said I'd take good care.  
I'll see that dress and bracelet are both carried back  
together.

MAID [*the total coquette*]:

And, dear Menaechmus, how about a gift for me?  
Let's say four drachmae's worth of jingly earrings?

Then when you visit us, I'll really welcome you.  
MENAECHMUS II:

Of course. Give me the gold, I'll pay the labour costs.

MAID:

Advance it for me, afterwards I'll pay you back.

MENAECHMUS II:

No, you advance it, afterwards I'll double it.

MAID:

I haven't got it.

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MENAECHMUS II:

If you ever get it – give it.

MAID [*frustrated, she bows*]:

I'm at your service.

[Exit]

MENAECHMUS II:

I'll take care of all of this

As soon as possible, at any cost – I'll sell them.

Now has she gone? She's gone and closed the door behind

her.

The gods have fully fostered me and favoured me

unfailingly!

But why do I delay? Now is the perfect chance,

The perfect time to flee this prostitutish place.

Now rush, Menaechmus, lift your foot and lift the pace!

I'll take this garland off, and toss it to the left,

So anyone who follows me will think I'm thataway.

I'll go at once and find my slave, if possible,

And tell him everything the gods have given me today.<sup>25</sup>

[Exit. *From MENAECHMUS' house enter PENICULUS and MENAECHMUS' WIFE]*

WIFE [*melodramatic, a big sufferer*]:

Must I keep suffering this mischief in my marriage?

Where husband sneaks and steals whatever's in the house

And takes it to his mistress?

PENICULUS:

Can't you quiet down?

You'll catch him in the act, if you just follow me.

He's drunk and garlanded – at the embroiderer's,

Conveying that same dress he stole from you today.

Look – there's the garland. Do I tell you lies or truth?

He's gone in that direction; you can follow clues.

But wait – what perfect luck – he's come back right now!

Without the dress.

WIFE:

What should I do? How should I act with him?

I never had seen someone more clearly caught in the act:

PENICULUS:

The very same as always: make him miserable.

But let's step over here – and spread a net for him.

[Enter MENAECHMUS I]

MENAECHMUS [*singing*]:

We have this tradition, we have this tradition,<sup>26</sup>

An irksome tradition, and yet it's the best

Who love this tradition much more than the rest.

They want lots of clients, all want lots of clients.

Who cares if they're honest or not – are they rich?

Who cares if they're honest, we'll take them with zest –

If they're rich.

If he's poor but he's honest – who cares for him?  
He's dishonest but rich? Then we all say our prayers for  
him.

So it happens that lawless, corrupting destroyers

Have overworked lawyers.

Denying what's done and delivered, this grasping and

fraudulent sort

Though their fortunes arise from exorbitant lies

They're all anxious to step into court.<sup>27</sup>

When the day comes, it's hell for their lawyer as well,

For we have to defend things unjust and unpretty

To jury, to judge, or judicial committee.

So I just was delayed, forced to give legal aid, no evading  
this client of mine who had found me.

I wanted to do you know what – and with whom – but he

bound me and tied ropes around me.

Facing the judges just now, I had countless despicable deeds

to defend.

Twisting torts with contortions of massive proportions,  
I pleaded and pleaded right down to the end.

But just when an out-of-court settlement seemed to be

sealed – *my client appealed!*

For each of his crimes there were three who could speak to the fact!

By all the heavens, cursed be he  
Who just destroyed this day for me.

And curse me too, a fool today,  
For ever heading forum's way.

The greatest day of all - destroyed.  
The feast prepared, but not enjoyed.

The wench was waiting too, indeed.  
The very moment I was freed

I left the forum with great speed.  
She's angry now, I'm sure of it.

The dress I gave will help a bit,

Taken from my wife today . . . a token for Erotium.

[*A pause. MENAECHMUS catches his breath, still not noticing his WIFE or the PARASITE, who now speaks*]

PENICULUS:

Well, what say you to that?

WIFE:

That I've married a rat.

PENICULUS:

Have you heard quite enough to complain to him?

WIFE:

Quite enough.

MENAECHMUS:

Now I'll go where the pleasures will flow.

PENICULUS:

No, remain. Let's be flowing some *pain* to him.

WIFE:

You'll be paying off at quite a rate for this!

PENICULUS [*to wife*]:

Good, good attack!

WIFE:

Do you have the nerve to think you'd get away with secret smuggling?

MENAECHMUS:  
What's the matter, Wife?

WIFE:  
You're asking me?

MENAECHMUS [*indicating PENICULUS*]:  
Should I ask him instead?

WIFE:  
Don't turn on the charm.

PENICULUS:  
That's it!

MENAECHMUS:  
But tell me what I've done to you.

WIFE:  
Why are you so angry?

WIFE:  
You should know.

PENICULUS:  
He knows - and can't disguise it.

MENAECHMUS:  
What's the matter?

WIFE:  
Just a dress.

MENAECHMUS:  
A dress?

WIFE:  
A dress.

PENICULUS [*to MENAECHMUS*]:

MENAECHMUS:  
Aha, you're scared.

PENICULUS:  
What could I be scared of?

MENAECHMUS:  
Of a dress - and of a dressing-down.

PENICULUS:  
You'll be sorry for that secret feast. [To WIFE] Go on,

attack again!

MENAECHMUS:  
You be quiet.

PENICULUS:  
No, I won't. He's nodding to me not to speak.

MENAECHMUS:

Hercules, I've never nodded to you, never winked at you!

PENICULUS:

Nothing could be bolder: he denies it while he's doing it!

MENAECHMUS:

By Jove and all the gods I swear – is that enough for you, dear Wife? –

PENICULUS [sarcastically]:

Never did I nod to him. Oh, she believes you. Now go back!

MENAECHMUS:

Go back to what?

PENICULUS:

Go back to the embroiderer's – and get the dress!!

MENAECHMUS:

Get what dress?

PENICULUS:

I won't explain, since he forgets his own . . . affairs.

WIFE:

What a woeful wife I am.

MENAECHMUS [*playing very naive*]:

Woeful wife? Do tell me why?

620 Has a servant misbehaved, or has a maid talked back to you?

Tell me, dear, we'll punish misbehavers.

WIFE:

Oh, is *that* a joke.

MENAECHMUS:

You're so angry. I don't like to see you angry.

WIFE:

*That's* a joke!

MENAECHMUS:

Someone from the household staff has angered you.

WIFE:

Another joke!

MENAECHMUS:

Well, of course, it isn't me.

WIFE:

Aha! At last he's stopped the jokes!

MENAECHMUS:

Certainly I haven't misbehaved.

WIFE:

He's making jokes again!

MENAECHMUS:

Tell me, dear, what's ailing you?

PENICULUS:

He's giving you a lovely line.

MENAECHMUS:

Why do you annoy me? Did I talk to you?

630 WIFE [*Throws a punch at PENICULUS*]

PENICULUS [to MENAECHMUS]:

Don't raise your hand!

PENICULUS [to WIFE]:

Let him have it! [To MENAECHMUS] Now go eat your little feast while I'm not there.

Go get drunk, put on a garland, stand outside, and mock me now!

MENAECHMUS:

Pollux! I've not eaten any feast today – or been in there.

PENICULUS:

You deny it?

MENAECHMUS:

I deny it all.

PENICULUS:

No man could be more brazen.

Did'n't I just see you here, all garlanded, a while ago?

Standing here and shouting that my brain was not exactly sane?

And you didn't know me – you were just a stranger here in town!

MENAECHMUS:

I've been absolutely absent, since the second we set out.

PENICULUS:

I know you. You didn't think that I could get revenge on you.

All has been recounted to your wife.

MENAECHMUS:

What 'all'?

PENICULUS:

Oh, I don't know.

Ask her for yourself.

MENAECHMUS:

Dear Wife, what fables has this man been telling?

What's the matter? Why are you so silent? Tell me.

WIFE:

You're pretending,<sup>28</sup>

Asking what you know.

MENAECHMUS:

Why do I ask, then?

PENICULUS:

What an evil man!

How he fakes. But you can't hide it, now the whole affair is out.

Everything's been publicized by me.

MENAECHMUS:

But *what*?

WIFE:

Have you no shame?

Can't you tell the truth yourself? Attend me and please pay attention:

I will now inform you what he told, and why I'm angry at you.

There's a dress been snatched from me.

MENAECHMUS:

There's a dress been snatched from me?

PENICULUS:

Not from *you*, from *her*. [To WIFE] The evil man resorts to every dodge.

[To MENAECHMUS] If the dress were snatched from you, it really would be lost to us.

MENAECHMUS:

You're not anything to me. [To WIFE] Go on, my dear.

WIFE:

A dress is gone.

MENAECHMUS:

Oh – who snatched it?

WIFE:

Pollux; who'd know better than the man himself?

MENAECHMUS:

Who is this?

WIFE:

His name's Menaechmus.

MENAECHMUS:

Pollux, what an evil deed!

MENAECHMUS:

What Menaechmus could it be?

WIFE:

Yourself.

MENAECHMUS:

Myself?

WIFE:

Yourself.

MENAECHMUS:

Who says?

WIFE:

*I* do.

PENICULUS:

I do, too. And then you gave it to Erotium.

MENAECHMUS:

*I* did?

WIFE:

You, you, you!

PENICULUS:

Say, would you like an owl for a pet – Just to parrot 'you you you'? The both of us are all worn out.

MENAECHMUS:

By Jove and all the gods, I swear – is that enough for you, dear Wife? –

No, I didn't give it to her.<sup>29</sup>

PENICULUS:  
No, we know we tell the truth.

MENAECHMUS [*Backing down*]:  
Well . . . that is to say . . . I didn't *give* the dress. I loaned it here?

WIFE:  
Oh, by Castor, do I give your tunics or your clothes away – Even as a loan? A woman can give women's clothes away. Men can give their own. Now will you get that dress back home to me?

WIFE:  
Yes, I'll . . . get it back.

MENAECHMUS [*Cowed*]:  
I'd say you'd better get it back, or else.

Only with that dress in hand will you re-enter your own house.  
Now I'm going in.

PENICULUS [*To wife*]:  
But what of me – what thanks for all my help?

WIFE [*sweetly bitchy*]:  
I'll be glad to help you out – when someone steals a dress from you.

PENICULUS:  
That'll never happen. I don't own a single thing to steal.

Wife and husband – curse you both. I'll hurry to the forum now.  
I can very clearly see I've been expelled from this whole house.

[*He storms off*]  
MENAECHMUS:  
Hah – my wife thinks that she hurts me, when she shuts the door on me.

But, as far as entering, I've got another, better place.  
[*To wife's door*] You don't like me. I'll live through it since Erotium here does.

She won't close me out, she'll close me tightly in her arms, she will.

I'll go beg the wench to give me back the dress I just now gave, Promising another, better one. [Knocks] Is there a doorman here? Open up! And someone ask Erotium to step outside.  
[EROTIUM steps outside her house]

EROTIUM:  
Who has asked for me?

MENAECHMUS:  
A man who loves you more than his own self.

EROTIUM:  
Dear Menaechmus, why stand here outside? Come in.

MENAECHMUS:  
Wait just a minute.

Can you guess what brings me here?

EROTIUM:  
I know – you'd like some . . . joy with me.

MENAECHMUS:  
Well . . . indeed, by Pollux. But – that dress I gave to you just now.

Please return it, since my wife's discovered all in full detail. I'll replace it with a dress that's twice the price, and as you like it.

EROTIUM:  
But I gave it to you for embroidery a moment back, With a bracelet you would bring the goldsmith for remodelling.

MENAECHMUS:  
What – you gave me dress and bracelet? No, you'll find that isn't true.  
No – I first gave you the dress, then went directly to the forum.

Now's the very second I've returned.

EROTIUM:

Aha – I see what's up.  
Just because I put them in your hands – you're out to swindle me.

MENAECHMUS:

Swindle you? By Pollux, no! Why, didn't I just tell you  
why?  
Everything's discovered by my wife!

EROTIUM [*exasperated*]:  
I didn't ask you for it.

No, you brought it to me of your own free will – and as a  
gift.

Now you want the dress right back. Well, have it, take it,  
wear it!

You can wear it, or your wife – or lock it in your money  
box.

But from this day on you'll never set a foot inside my  
house.

After all my loyal service, suddenly you find me hateful,  
So you'll only have me now by laying cash right on the line.  
Find yourself some other girl to cheat the way you've  
cheated me!

MENAECHMUS:

Hercules, the woman's angry! Hey – please wait, please  
listen to me –

[EROTIUM exits, slamming her door]

Please come back! Please stay – oh, won't you do this  
favour for me?

Well, she's gone – and closed the door. I'm universally  
kicked out.<sup>30</sup>

Neither wife nor mistress will believe a single thing I say.  
What to do? I'd better go consult some friends on what  
they think.

[Exit MENAECHMUS. A slight pause [musical interlude?].  
*Then enter MENAECHMUS II from the opposite side of the  
stage. He still carries the dress]*

MENAECHMUS II:

I was a fool a while ago to give that purse  
With all that cash to someone like Messenio.

I'm sure by now the fellow's 'oozing' in some dive.  
[WIFE enters from her house]

WIFE:

I'll stand on watch to see how soon my husband comes.  
Why, here he is – I'm saved! He's bringing back the dress.

MENAECHMUS II:

I wonder where Messenio has wandered to . . .

WIFE:

I'll go and greet the man with words that he deserves.  
[To MENAECHMUS II] Tell me – are you not ashamed to  
show your face,

Atrocious man – and with that dress?

MENAECHMUS II:

I beg your pardon,

What seems to be the trouble, madam?

WIFE:

Shame on you!

You dare to mutter, dare to speak a word to me?

MENAECHMUS II:

Whatever have I done that would forbid my talking?

WIFE:

You're asking me? Oh, shameless, brazen, wicked man!

MENAECHMUS II [*with quiet sarcasm*]:

Madam, do you have any notion why the Greeks  
Referred to Hecuba as . . . female dog?<sup>31</sup>

WIFE:

I don't.

MENAECHMUS II:

Because she acted just the way you're acting now.  
She barked and cursed at everyone who came in sight,  
And thus the people rightly called her . . . female dog.

WIFE:

I simply can't endure all this disgracefulness –  
I'd even rather live my life . . . a divorcée  
Than bear the brunt of this disgracefulness of yours.

MENAECHMUS II:

What's it to me if you can't stand your married life –  
Or ask for a divorce? Is it a custom here  
To babble to all foreigners who come to town?

WIFE: 'To babble? I won't stand for that. I won't! I won't!

I'll die a divorcée before I'd live with you.'

MENAECHMUS II:

As far as I'm concerned you can divorce yourself,

And stay a divorcée till Jupiter resigns his throne.

WIFE:

Look – you denied you stole that dress a while ago,

And now you wave it at me. Aren't you ashamed?

MENAECHMUS II:

By Hercules, you are a wild and wicked woman!

You dare to claim this dress I hold was stolen from you?

Another woman gave it to me for . . . repairs.

WIFE:

By Castor – no, I'd better have my father come,  
So I can tell him all of your disgracefulness.

[Calls in to one of her slaves] Oh, Decio – go find my  
father, bring him here.

And tell my father the entire situation.

[To MENAECHMUS II] I'll now expose all your  
disgracefulness.

MENAECHMUS II:

You're sick!

WIFE:  
All what disgracefulness?

A dress – and golden bracelet.

740 You rob your legal wife at home and then you go  
Bestow it on your mistress. Do I 'babble' truth?

MENAECHMUS II:

Dear Madam, can you tell me please what I might drink  
To make your bitchy boorishness more bearable?

I've not the slightest notion who you think I am.  
I know you like I know the father-in-law of Hercules!<sup>32</sup>

WIFE:

You may mock me, by Pollux, but you can't mock *him*.  
My father's coming. [To MENAECHMUS II] Look who's  
coming, look who's coming;  
You do know *him*.

WIFE:

Of course, a friend of Agamemnon.<sup>33</sup>  
I first met him the day I first met you – today.

WIFE:

You claim that you don't know me, or my father?  
And how about your grandpa – I don't know him either.

MENAECHMUS II:

You don't know me, or my father?  
And how about your grandpa – I don't know him either.

WIFE:

By Castor, you just never change, *you never change!*

[Enter the OLD MAN, MENAECHMUS' father-in-law, groaning and wheezing]

OLD MAN [to the audience, in halting song]:

Oh, my old age, my old age, I lack what I need,  
I'm stepping unlively, unfast is my speed,  
But it isn't so easy, I tell you, not easy indeed.  
For I've lost all my quickness, old age is a sickness.  
My body's a big heavy trunk, I've no strength.  
Oh oh, old age is bad – no more vigour remains.  
Oh, when old age arrives, it brings plenty of pains.  
I could mention them all but I won't talk at length.  
But deep in my heart is this worry:

My daughter has sent for me now in a hurry.  
She won't say what it is,  
What it is I've not heard.

She just asked me to come, not explaining a word.

And yet I've a pretty good notion at that:  
That her husband and she are involved in a spat.

Well, that's how it is always with big-dowry wives,<sup>34</sup>  
They're fierce to their husbands, they order their lives.  
But then sometimes the man is . . . let's say . . . not so  
pure.

There's limits to what a good wife can endure.  
And, by Pollux, a daughter won't send for her dad.  
Unless there's some cause, and her husband's been bad.  
Well, anyway I can find out since my daughter is here.  
Her husband looks angry. Just what I suspected, it's  
clear.

[*The song ends. A brief pause*]  
I'll address her.

WIFE:

I'll go meet him. Many greetings, Father dear.

OLD MAN:

Same to you. I only hope I've come when all is fine and dandy.

Why are you so gloomy, why does he stand off there, looking angry?

Has there been some little skirmishing between the two of you?

Tell me who's at fault, be brief. No lengthy arguments at length.

WIFE:

780 I've done nothing wrong, dear Father, you can be assured of that. But I simply can't go on and live with him in any way. Consequently – take me home.

OLD MAN:

What's wrong?

WIFE:

I'm made a total fool of.

OLD MAN:

How and who?

WIFE:

By him, the man you signed and sealed to me as husband.

OLD MAN:

Oh, I see, disputing, eh? And yet I've told you countless times

Both of you beware, don't either one approach me with complaints.

WIFE:

How can I beware, when he's as bad as this?

OLD MAN:

You're asking me?

WIFE:

Tell me.

WIFE:

I'll address her.

OLD MAN:

Oh, the countless times I've preached on duty to your husband:

Don't check what he's doing, where he's going, what his business is.<sup>35</sup>

WIFE:

But he loves a fancy woman right next door.

OLD MAN:

He's very wise!

Thanks to all your diligence, I promise you, he'll love her more.

WIFE:

But he also boozes there.

OLD MAN:

You think you'll make him booze the less, If he wants to, anywhere he wants? Why must you be so rash?

Might as well go veto his inviting visitors to dine, Say he can't have guests at home. What do you women want from husbands?

*Servitude?* Why, next you'll want him to do chores around the house! Next you'll order him to sit down with the maids and card the wool!

WIFE:

Father dear, I called you to support my cause, not help my husband.

You're a lawyer prosecuting your own client.

OLD MAN:

If *he's* wrong, Father dear, I called you to support my cause, not help my husband.

I'll attack him ten times harder than I'm now attacking you. 800 Look, you're quite well dressed, well jewelled and well supplied with food and maids.

Being well off, woman, why, be wise, leave well enough alone.

WIFE:  
But he filches all the jewels and all the dresses from the house.

Stealing on the sly, he then bestows the stuff on fancy women.

OLD MAN:  
Oh, he's wrong if he does that, but if he doesn't, then

you're wrong,  
Blaming blameless men.

WIFE:

He has a dress this very moment, Father,  
And a bracelet he's brought from her because I've found  
him out.

OLD MAN:  
Well, I'll get the facts, I'll go accost the man, and speak to

him.

[*He puffs over to MENAECHMUS II*]

Say, Menaechmus, tell me why you're muttering. I'll  
understand.

810 Why are you so gloomy? Why is she so angry over  
there?

MENAECHMUS II:

Whatever your name is, old man, and whoever you are, I  
swear by Jove supreme,

Calling all the gods to witness –

OLD MAN:  
Witness for what, about what in the world?

MENAECHMUS II:  
Never ever did I hurt this woman now accusing me of  
Having sneaked into her house and filched this dress.

WIFE:

He's telling lies!

MENAECHMUS II:  
If I've ever set a single foot inside that house of hers,  
Anxiously I long to be the very saddest man on earth.

OLD MAN:

No, you can't be sane too long for that, to claim you've not  
set foot

In the house you live in. Why, you're the very *maddest* man  
on earth!

What was that, old man? You claim I live right here and in  
this house?

OLD MAN:  
You deny it?  
MENAECHMUS II:

I deny it.  
OLD MAN:

Your denial isn't true.  
That's unless you moved away last night. Daughter, come  
over here.

[*Father and daughter walk aside; OLD MAN whispers confidentially*]  
Tell me – did you move away from here last night?

WIFE:  
Where to? What for?

OLD MAN:  
I don't know, by Pollux.

WIFE:  
He's just mocking you – or don't you get it?

OLD MAN:  
That's enough, Menaechmus, no more joking, now let's  
tend to business.

MENAECHMUS II:

Tell me, sir, what business do you have with me? Just who  
*are* you?  
What have I to do with you or – [*points to WIFE*] that one,  
who is such a bother?

WIFE:

Look – his eyes are getting green, a greenish colour's now  
appearing  
From his temples and his forehead. Look, his eyes are  
flickering!

MENAECHMUS II [*aside, to the audience*]:  
Nothing could be better. Since they both declare that I'm

raving mad  
I'll pretend I am insane, and scare them both away from me.

[MENAECHMUS begins to 'go berserk']

WIFE:

What a gaping mouth, wide open. Tell me what to do, dear Father.

OLD MAN:

Over here, dear Daughter, get as far as possible from him.

MENAECHMUS II [caught up in his own act, 'hearing' divine words]:

Bacchus! Yo-ho, Bacchus, in what forest do you bid me hunt?

Yes, I hear you, but I can't escape from where I am just now:

On my left I'm guarded by a very rabid female dog.

Right behind her is a goat who reeks of garlic, and this goat has

Countless times accused a blameless citizen with perjury.<sup>36</sup>

OLD MAN [enraged]:

You you you, I'll –

MENAECHMUS II ['bearing']:

What, Apollo? Now your oracle commands me:

Take some hotly blazing torches, set this woman's eyes on fire.

WIFE:

Father, Father – what a threat! He wants to set my eyes on fire!

MENAECHMUS II [aside, to audience]:

They both say I'm crazy; I know they're the really crazy ones!

OLD MAN:

Daughter –

WIFE:

Yes?

OLD MAN:

Suppose I go, and send some servants here at once.

Let them come and take him off, and tie him up with ropes at home.

Now – before he makes a bigger hurricane!

MENAECHMUS II:

I'm caught!

I'll be taken off unless I find myself a plan right now.

[*'Hearing oracle', aloud*] Yes, Apollo, 'Do not spare thy fists in punching in her face?

That's unless she hurries out of sight and quickly goes to hell!'

Yes, Apollo, I'll obey you.

OLD MAN:

Run, dear Daughter – quickly home!

Otherwise, he'll pound you.

WIFE:

While I run, please keep an eye on him.

See he doesn't get away. [A final groan] What wifely woe to hear such things!

[Exit]

MENAECHMUS II:

Hah, not bad, I got *her* off. And now I'll get *this* – poisoned person,

White-beard, palsied wreck. Tithonus was a youth compared to him.<sup>37</sup>

[To 'Apollo'] What's my orders? Beat the fellow limb from limb and bone from bone?

Use the very stick he carries for the job?

OLD MAN:

I'll punish you –

If you try to touch me, if you try to get much closer to me!

MENAECHMUS II [to 'Apollo']:

Yes, I'll do thy bidding: take a double axe and this old fogey,

Chop his innards into little pieces, till I reach the bone?

OLD MAN [panicked]:

Goodness, now's the time for me to be on guard and very wary.

I'm afraid he'll carry out his threats and cause some harm to me.

MENAECHMUS II [to 'Apollo' again]:

Dear Apollo, you command so much. I now must hitch up  
horses,  
Wild, ferocious horses, and then mount up in my chariot,  
Then to trample on this lion – creaking, stinking, toothless  
lion?

Now I'm in the chariot, I've got the reins, I've got the whip.  
Up up up, ye steeds, now let us see the sound of horses'  
hoofbeats.<sup>38</sup>

Quickly curve your course with splendid speed and swiftly  
swoop of steps.

OLD MAN:

Threatening me with hitched-up horses?

MENAECHMUS II:

Yea, Apollo, once again,

Now you bid me charge and overwhelm the man who's  
standing here.

[*Fakes Homeric divine intervention*] But what's this? Who  
takes me by the hair and hauls me from the car?<sup>39</sup>

Look, Apollo, someone's changing your command as spoke  
to me!

OLD MAN:

By Hercules, he's sick, he's very sick. Ye gods!  
And just a while ago, the man was very sane,  
But suddenly this awful sickness fell on him.  
I'll go and get a doctor – fast as possible.  
[Exit at a *semele sprint*]

MENAECHMUS II:

Well, have they disappeared from sight, the two of them,  
Who forced a normal, healthy man to act insane?

I shouldn't wait to reach my ship while things are safe.  
[To the audience] But, everybody, please – if that old man

returns,  
Don't tell him, please, which street I took to get away.  
[He dashes off-stage, towards the harbour. Enter OLD

MAN,<sup>40</sup> tired, annoyed, complaining]

My limbs just ache from sitting and my eyes from looking,

880

900

While waiting for that doctor to leave office hours.

At last, unwillingly, he left his patients. What a bore!

He claims he'd set Asclepius' broken leg.

And then Apollo's broken arm. I wonder if

The man I bring's a doctor or a carpenter!

But here he's strutting now. [Calling off] Why can't you  
hurry up?

[Enter DOCTOR, the superprofessional]

DOCTOR [right to the point]:

What sort of illness does he have? Speak up, old man.  
Is he depressed, or is he frantic?<sup>41</sup> Give the facts.

Or is he in a coma? Has he liquid dropsy?

OLD MAN:

But that's precisely why I've brought you – to tell me –  
And make him well again.

DOCTOR:

Of course. A snap.

He shall be well again. You have my word on that.

OLD MAN:

I want him to be cared for with the greatest care.

DOCTOR:

I'll sigh a thousand sighs, I'll take great pains with him.  
For you – I'll care for him with all the greatest care.

But here's the man himself; let's see how he behaves.

[They step aside to eavesdrop. From the forum side enter

MENAECHMUS, addressing himself in soliloquy]

Pollux, what a day for me: perverted and inverted too.  
Everything I plotted to be private's now completely public.

My own parasite has filled me full of fearful accusations!

My Ulysses, causing so much trouble for his royal patron!<sup>42</sup>

If I live, I'll skin him live. I'll cut off all his livelihood.

What a foolish thing to say. What I call his is really mine.  
My own food and fancy living nurtured him. I'll starve him

now.

And my slut has been disgraceful. Typical of sluttitude.

All I did was ask her to return the dress to give my wife.  
She pretends she gave it to me. Pollux, I'm in a awful shape!

OLD MAN [to DOCTOR]:  
Did you hear his words?

DOCTOR [*nods*]:  
Admits his 'awful shape'.

OLD MAN:  
Go up to him.

DOCTOR [*aloud*]:  
Greetings, dear Menaechmus. Do you realize that your

cloak has slipped?

Don't you know how dangerous that sort of thing is for  
your health?

MENAECHMUS:  
Why not hang yourself?

OLD MAN [*whispers* to DOCTOR]:  
You notice anything?

DOCTOR:  
Of course I do!

This condition couldn't be relieved with tons of hellebore.<sup>43</sup>  
[To MENAECHMUS, *again*] Tell me now, Menaechmus.

MENAECHMUS:  
Tell what?

DOCTOR:  
Just answer what I ask.

Do you drink white wine or red?

MENAECHMUS:  
And why don't you go straight to hell?

DOCTOR:  
Hercules, I notice teeny traces of insanity.

MENAECHMUS:  
Why not ask

Do I favour purple bread, or pink or maybe even mauve?  
Do I eat the gills of birds, the wings of fishes – ?

OLD MAN:  
Oh, good grief!

OLD MAN:  
Listen to his ravings, you can hear the words. Why wait at  
all?

GIVE THE MAN SOME REMEDY BEFORE THE MADNESS TAKES HIM  
fully.

DOCTOR:  
Wait – I have more questions.

OLD MAN:  
But you're killing him with all this blab!

DOCTOR [to MENAECHMUS]:  
Tell me this about your eyes: at times do they get glazed at  
all?

MENAECHMUS:  
What? You think you're talking to a lobster, do you, rotten

man!

DOCTOR [*unfazed*]:  
Tell me, have you ever noticed your intestines making

MENAECHMUS:  
noise?

DOCTOR:  
When I've eaten well, they're silent; when I'm hungry, they  
make noise.

DOCTOR:  
Pollux, that's a pretty healthy answer he just gave to me.  
[To MENAECHMUS] Do you sleep right through till dawn,  
sleep easily when you're in bed?

MENAECHMUS:  
I sleep through if all the debts I owe are paid. But listen  
you, you

DOCTOR:  
Question-asker, you be damned by Jupiter and all the gods!

DOCTOR:  
Now I know the man's insane, those final words are proof.

[To OLD MAN]

Take care!

930

OLD MAN:  
He speaks like a Nestor now,<sup>44</sup> compared to just a while  
ago.

Just a while ago he called his wife a rabid female dog.

MENAECHMUS:  
I said that?

OLD MAN:  
You're mad, I say.

MENAECHMUS:  
I'm mad?

OLD MAN:

And do you know what else? You  
Also threatened that you'd trample over me with teams of  
horses!

940 Yes, I saw you do it. Yes, and I insist you did it, too.

MENAECHMUS [to OLD MAN]:

You, of course, have snatched the sacred crown of Jove,  
that's what I know.

Afterwards, they tossed you into prison for this awful  
crime.

When they let you out, while you were manacled, they beat  
you up.

Then you killed your father. Then you sold your mother as  
a slave.

Have you heard enough to know I'm sane enough to curse  
you back?

OLD MAN:

Doctor, please be quick and do whatever must be done for  
him.

Don't you see the man's insane?

DOCTOR:

I think the wisest thing for you's to  
Have the man delivered to my office.

OLD MAN:

Do you think?

DOCTOR:

Of course.

There I'll treat him pursuant to diagnosis.  
OLD MAN:

As you say.

DOCTOR [to MENAECHMUS]:

950 Yes, I'll have you drinking hellebore for twenty days or so.  
MENAECHMUS:

Then I'll have *you* beaten hanging upside down for thirty  
days.

DOCTOR [to OLD MAN]:

Go and call for men who can deliver him.

OLD MAN:

How many men?

DOCTOR:

From the way he's acting, I'd say four, none less could do  
the job.

OLD MAN [exiting]:

They'll be here. You watch him, Doctor.

DOCTOR [anxious to retreat]:

No, I think I'd best go home.

Preparations are in order for the case. You get the slaves.  
Have them carry him to me.

OLD MAN:

I will.

DOCTOR:

I'm going now.

OLD MAN:

Goodbye.

MENAECHMUS:

Doctor's gone, father-in-law's gone. I'm now alone. By  
Jupiter!—

What does all this mean? Why do these men insist that I'm  
insane?

Really, I have not been sick a single day since I've been  
born.

Nor am I insane, nor have I punched or fought with  
anyone.

Healthy, I see healthy people, only talk with folks I know.

Maybe those who wrongly say I'm mad are really mad  
themselves.

What should I do now? My wife won't let me home, as I  
would like.

[Pointing to EROTUM's house] No one will admit me there.

All's well<sup>45</sup> — well out of hand, that is.

Here I'm stuck. At least by night — I think — they'll let me in  
my house.

[MENAECHMUS sits dejectedly in front of his house, all  
wrapped up in his troubles. From the other side of the

stage, enter MESSENIO singing about How to Succeed in Slavery]

MESSENIO:

If you should seek the proof of whether someone's slave is good,

See, does he guard his master's interest, serve right to the letter

When Master is away – the way he should If Master were at hand – or even better.

For if the slave is worthy, and he's well brought up, He'll care to keep his shoulders empty – not to fill his cup.

His master will reward him. Let the worthless slave be told The lowly, lazy louts get whips and chains, And millstones, great starvation, freezing cold.

The price for all their misbehaviours: pains.

I therefore fully fear this fate and very gladly Remain determined to be good – so I won't turn out badly.

I'd so much rather be bawled out than sprawled out on a pillory,

I'd so much rather eat what's cooked than have some work cooked up for me.

So I follow Master's orders, never argue or protest. Let the others do it their way; I obey; for me, that's best<sup>46</sup> . . .

But I haven't much to fear; the time is near for something nice.<sup>47</sup>

My master will reward his slave for 'thinking with his back' – and thinking twice.

[Enter OLD MAN, leading four burly servants]

OLD MAN:  
Now, by all the gods and men, I bid you all obey my orders.

Be most careful so you'll follow what I've ordered and will order.

Have that man picked up aloft, and carried to the doctor's office.

That's unless you're not a bit concerned about your back and limbs.

Every man beware. Don't pay attention to his threats of violence.

But why just stand? Why hesitate? It's time to lift the man aloft!

[Not very brave himself] And I'll head for the doctor's office. I'll be there when you arrive.

MENAECHMUS [notices the changing mob]:

I'm dead! What's this? I wonder why these men are rushing swiftly toward me?

Hey, men, what do you want? What are you after? Why surround me now?

[They snatch up MENAECHMUS]

Where are you snatching me and taking me? Won't someone help me, please?

O citizens of Epidamnus, rescue me! [To slaves] Please let me go!

MESSENIO:  
By the immortal gods, what am I seeing with my very eyes? Some unknown men are lifting Master in the air.

Outrageously!  
MENAECHMUS:  
Won't someone dare to help?

MESSENIO:  
Me, me! I'll dare to help with derring-do!  
O citizens of Epidamnus, what a dirty deed to Master!  
Do peaceful towns allow a free-born tourist to be seized in daylight?

[To slaves] You let him go!  
MENAECHMUS [to MESSENIO]:

Whoever you may be, please help me out!  
Don't allow this awful outrage to be perpetrated on me.

MESSENIO:  
Why, of course I'll help, and hustle hurriedly to your defence.

Never would I let you down. I'd rather let myself down first.

[To MENAECHMUS] Grab that fellow's eye – the one who's got you by the shoulder now.

I can plough the other guys and plant a row of fists in them.  
[To slaves] Hercules, you'll lose an awful lot by taking him.

Let go!

[*A wild mêlée ensues*]

MENAECHMUS [*while fighting, to MESSENIOS*]:  
Hey, I've got his eye.

MESSENIOS:

Then make the socket in his head appear!  
Evil people! People snatchers! Bunch of pirates!

SLAVES [*together*]:  
Woe is us!

Hercules! No – please!

MESSENIOS:

Let go!

MENAECHMUS:

What sort of handiwork is this?  
Face a festival of fists.

MESSENIOS:

Go on, be gone, and go to hell!

[*Kicking the slowest slave*] You take that as your reward for  
being last to get away.

MESSENIOS:

[*They are all gone. MESSENIOS takes a deep breath of satisfaction*]

Well, I've really made my mark – on every face I've faced  
today.

1020

Pollux, Master, didn't I come just in time to bring you aid!

MENAECHMUS:

Whoever you are, young man, I hope the gods will always  
bring you blessings.  
If it hadn't been for you, I'd not have lived to see the  
sunset.

MESSENIOS:

If that's true, by Pollux, then do right by me and free me,  
Master.

MENAECHMUS:  
Free you? I?

MESSENIOS:  
Of course. Because I saved you, Master.

MENAECHMUS:  
Listen here, you're

Wand'ring from the truth –

MESSENIOS:

I wander?

MENAECHMUS:  
Yes, I swear by Father Jove

I am not your master.

MESSENIOS [*stunned*]:

Why proclaim such things?

MENAECHMUS:

But it's no lie.

Never did a slave of mine serve me as well as you just  
did.

MESSENIOS:

If you're so insistent and deny I'm yours, then I'll go free.

MENAECHMUS:

Hercules, as far as I'm concerned, be free. Go where you'd  
like.

MESSENIOS:

Am I really authorized?

MENAECHMUS:

If I've authority for you.

MESSENIOS [*dialogue with himself*]:

'Greetings, patron.' – 'Ah, Messenio, the fact that you're  
now free

Makes me very glad.' – 'Well, I believe that's true.' [To

MENAECHMUS] But, patron dear,

You can have authority no less than when I was a slave.  
I'll be glad to live with you, and when you go, go home  
with you.

1030

MENAECHMUS [*doesn't want some strange person in his*

*house*]:

Not at all, no thank you.

MESSENIOS [*jubilant*]:

Now I'll get our baggage at the inn –  
And, of course, the purse with all our money's sealed up in  
the trunk

With our travel cash. I'll bring it to you.

MENAECHMUS [*eyes lighting up at this*]:

Yes! Go quickly, quickly!

MESSENIO:

I'll return it just exactly as you gave it to me. Wait right here.

[MESSENIO dashes off towards the harbour]

MENAECHMUS [*soliloquizing*]: What unworldly wonders have occurred today in wondrous

ways:

People claim I'm not the man I am and keep me from their houses.

Then this fellow said he was my slave – and that I set him free!

Then he says he'll go and bring a wallet full of money to

me. If he does, I'll tell him he can go quite freely where he'd like –

That's so when he's sane again he won't demand the money back.

[*Musing more*] Father-in-law and doctor said I was insane.

How very strange.

All this business seems to me like nothing other than a dream.

Now I'll go and see this harlot, though she's in a huff with me.

Maybe I'll convince her to return the dress, which I'll take home.

[He enters EROTUM's house. Enter MENAECHMUS II and

MESSENIO]

MENAECHMUS II [*angry with MENENIO*]:

Effrontery in front of me! You dare to claim we've seen each other

Since I gave you orders that we'd meet back here?

MESSENIO:

But didn't I just

Snatch and rescue you from those four men who carried you aloft

Right before this house? You called on all the gods and men for aid.

I came running, snatched you from them, though with fists they fought me back.

For this service, since I saved your life, you made a free man of me.

[Ruefully] Now just when I said I'd get the cash and baggage, you sped up and

Ran ahead to meet me, and deny you've done the things you've done.

MENAECHMUS II:

Free? I said you could go free?

MESSENIO:

For sure.

MENAECHMUS II:

Now look, for super-sure

I would rather make myself a slave than ever set you free.

[MENAECHMUS I is pushed by EROTUM out of her house]

MENAECHMUS I:

If you would like to swear by your two eyes, go right

ahead, but still

You'll never prove that I absconded with your dress and

bracelet – [door slams] hussy!

MESSENIO [*suddenly seeing double*]:

By the gods, what do I see?

MENAECHMUS II:

What do you see?

MESSENIO:

Why – your reflection!

MENAECHMUS II:

What?

MESSENIO:

Your very image just as like yourself as it could be.

MENAECHMUS II:

Pollux – he's not unlike me . . . I notice . . . similarities.

MENAECHMUS I [*to MENENIO*]:

Hey, young man, hello! You saved my life – whoever you may be.

MESSENIO: You, young man, if you don't mind, would you please tell me your name?

MENAECHMUS I:

Nothing you could ask would be too much since you have helped me so.

My name is Menaechmus.

MENAECHMUS II:

Oh, by Pollux, so is mine as well!

MENAECHMUS I:

Syracuse-Sicilian –

MENAECHMUS II:

That's my city, that's my country too!

MENAECHMUS I:

What is this I hear?

MENAECHMUS II:

Just what is true.

MESSENIO [to MENAECHMUS I]:

I know you – *you're* my master!

[To audience] I belong to this man though I thought that I belonged to that man.

[To MENAECHMUS I, *the wrong man*] Please excuse me, sir, if I unknowingly spoke foolishly.

For a moment I imagined he was you – and gave him trouble.

MENAECHMUS II:

Madness, nothing but! [To MESSENIO] Don't you recall that we were both together, Both of us got off the ship today?

MESSENIO [*thinking, realizing*]:

That's right. You're very right.

You're my master. [To MENAECHMUS I] Find another slave, farewell. [To MENAECHMUS II] And you, hello!

[Pointing to MENAECHMUS II] Him, I say, this man's Menaechmus.

MENAECHMUS I:

So am I!

MENAECHMUS II:

What joke is this?  
*You're* Menaechmus?

MENAECHMUS I:

That I say I am. My father's name was Moschus.  
*You're* the son of my own father?

MENAECHMUS I:

No, the son of *my* own father.  
I'm not anxious to appropriate your father or to steal him from you.

MESSENIO:

Gods in heaven, grant me now that hope un hoped-for I suspect.

For, unless my mind has failed me, these two men are both twin brothers.  
Each man claims the selfsame fatherland and father for his own.

I'll call Master over. O Menaechmus!

MENAECHMUS I and II [together]:  
Yes?

MESSENIO:

Not both of you.

Which of you two travelled with me on the ship?

MENAECHMUS I:

It wasn't me.

MENAECHMUS II:

Me it was.

MESSENIO:

Then you I want. Step over here [*motioning*].  
MENAECHMUS II [following MESSENIO to a corner]:

I've stepped. What's up?

MESSENIO:

That man there is either one great faker or your lost twin brother.

Never have I seen two men more similar than you two men:

Water isn't more like water, milk's not more alike to milk

## THE BROTHERS MENAECHMUS

1090 Than that man is like to you. And what's more he named your father.

And your fatherland. It's best to go and question him still further.

MENAECHMUS II:

Hercules, you do advise me well. I'm very grateful to you. Please work on, by Hercules. I'll make you free if you discover

That man is my brother.

MESSENIO:

Oh, I hope so.

MENAECHMUS II:

And I hope so too.

MESSENIO [to MENAECHMUS I]:

Sir, I do believe you've just asserted that you're named

Menaechmus.

MENAECHMUS I:

That is so.

MESSENIO:

Well, his name is Menaechmus, too. You also said

You were born in Sicily at Syracuse. Well, so was he. Moschus was your father, so you said. That was his father, too.

Both of you can do yourselves a favour – and help me as well.<sup>48</sup>

MENAECHMUS I:

Anything you ask me I'll comply with, I'm so grateful to you.

Treat me just as if I were your purchased slave – although I'm free.

MESSENIO:

It's my hope to prove you are each other's brothers, twins in fact, Born of the selfsame mother, selfsame father, on the selfsame day.

MENAECHMUS I:

Wonder-laden words. Oh, would you could make all your words come true.

## MESSENIO:

Well, I can. But, both of you, just give replies to what I ask you.

MENAECHMUS I:

Ask away. I'll answer. I won't hide a single thing I know.

MESSENIO:

Is your name Menaechmus?

MENAECHMUS I:

Absolutely.

MESSENIO [to MENAECHMUS II]:

Is it yours as well?

MENAECHMUS II:

Yes.

MESSENIO:

You said your father's name was Moschus.

MENAECHMUS I:

Yes.

MENAECHMUS II:

The same for me.

MESSENIO:

And you're Syracusan?

MENAECHMUS I:

Surely.

MESSENIO [to MENAECHMUS II]:

You?

MENAECHMUS II:

You know I am, of course.

MESSENIO:

Well, so far the signs are good. Now turn your minds to further questions.

[To MENAECHMUS I] What's the final memory you carry

from your native land?

MENAECHMUS I [reminiscing]:

With my father ... visiting Tarentum for the fair. Then after that . . .

Wandering among the people, far from Father . . . Being snatched –

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MENAECHMUS II [*bursting with joy*]:  
Jupiter above, now help me –!

MESSENIO [*officiously*]:  
What's the shouting? You shut up.

[*Turning back to MENAECHMUS I*] Snatched from father  
and from fatherland, about how old were you?

MENAECHMUS I:  
Seven or so. My baby teeth had barely started to fall out.  
After that, I never saw my father.

MESSENIO:  
No? Well, tell me this:

At the time how many children did he have?

MENAECHMUS I:  
I think just two.

MESSENIO:  
Which were you, the older or the younger?

MENAECHMUS I:  
Neither, we were equal.

MESSENIO:  
Do explain.

MENAECHMUS I:  
We were both twins.

MENAECHMUS II [*ecstatic*]:  
Oh – all the gods are with me now!

MESSENIO [*sternly, to MENAECHMUS II*]:  
Interrupt and I'll be quiet.

MENAECHMUS II [*obedient*]:  
I'll be quiet.

MESSENIO [*to MENAECHMUS I*]:  
Tell me this:

MENAECHMUS I:  
Did you both have just one name?

MENAECHMUS I:  
Oh, not at all. My name is mine,  
As it is today – Menaechmus. Brother's name was  
Sosicles.

MENAECHMUS II [*mad with joy*]:  
Yes, I recognize the signs. I can't keep from embracing  
you!

Brother, dear twin brother, greetings! I am he – I'm  
Sosicles!

MENAECHMUS I:  
How is it you afterward received the name Menaechmus,  
then?

MENAECHMUS II:  
When we got the news that you had wandered off away  
from Father  
And that you were kidnapped by an unknown man, and  
Father died,

Grandpa changed my name. The name you used to have he  
gave to me.

MENAECHMUS I:  
Yes, I do believe it's as you say. [Goes to *embrace him*,  
*suddenly stops*] But tell me this.

MENAECHMUS II:  
Just ask.

MENAECHMUS I:  
What was Mother's name?

MENAECHMUS II:  
Why, Teuximarcha.

MENAECHMUS I:  
That's correct, it fits.

Unexpectedly I greet you, see you after so much time!

MENAECHMUS II:  
Brother, now I find you after so much suffering and toil,  
Searching for you, now you're found, and I'm so very, very  
glad.

[*They embrace*]

MESSENIO [*to MENAECHMUS II*]:  
That's the reason why the slut could call you by your  
rightful name,

Thinking you were he, I think, when she invited you to  
dinner.

MENAECHMUS I:  
Yes, by Pollux, I had ordered dinner for myself today,  
Hidden from my wife – from whom I filched a dress a while  
ago – and

Gave it to her. [*Indicates EROTUM's house*]

MENAECHMUS II:  
Could you mean this dress I'm holding, Brother dear?

1140 MENAECHMUS I:  
That's the one. How did you get it?

MENAECHMUS II:

Well, the slut led me to dinner.  
There she claimed I gave it to her. Wonderfully have I just

dined,  
Wined as well as concubined, of dress and gold I robbed  
her blind.

MENAECHMUS I:

Oh, by Pollux, I rejoice if you had fun because of me!  
When she asked you in to dinner, she believed that you

were me.

MESSENIO [*impatient for himself*]:

Is there any reason to delay the freedom that you promised?

MENAECHMUS I:

Brother, what he asks is very fair and fine. Please do it for  
me.

MENAECHMUS II [*to MESSENIO, the formula*]:

'Be thou free.'

MENAECHMUS I:

The fact you're free now makes me glad, Messenio.

MESSENIO [*broadly hinting for some cash reward*]:

Actually, I need more facts, *supporting* facts to keep me  
free.

MENAECHMUS II [*ignoring MESSENIO, to his brother*]:

Since our dreams have come about exactly as we wished,  
dear Brother,

Let us both return to our homeland.

MENAECHMUS I:

Brother, as you wish.

I can hold an auction and sell off whatever I have here.

Meanwhile, let's go in.

MENAECHMUS II:

That's fine.

MESSENIO [*to MENAECHMUS I*]:  
May I request a favour of you?

MENAECHMUS I:  
What?

MESSENIO:  
Please make me do the auctioneering.

MENAECHMUS I:  
Done.

MESSENIO:  
All right. Then please inform me:  
When should I announce the auction for?

MENAECHMUS I:

Let's say – a week from now.  
[*The brothers go into MENAECHMUS' house, leaving  
MESSENIO alone on stage*]

MESSENIO [*announcing*]:

In the morning in a week from now we'll have  
Menaechmus' auction.

Slaves and goods, his farm and city house, his everything  
will go.

Name your prices, if you've got the cash in hand, it all will  
go.

Yes, and if there's any bidder for the thing – his wife will  
go.

Maybe the entire auction will enrich us – who can tell?  
For the moment, dear spectators, clap with vigour. Fare ye  
well!