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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

COMEDIES

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Comedies >

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The Comedy of Errors

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Theme

posted Aug 6, 2013, 11:53 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 6, 2013, 11:53 PM]**

Isolation

Isolation is the central tenet of *The Comedy of Errors*. It's not something the characters talk about explicitly, but it's the subtext that threads through most of the play and motivates the action. The most important forms of isolation presented are isolation from family and from knowledge of one's self. Ending isolation is a motivating force for S. Antipholus and his father, Egeon. The main character, S. Antipholus, has been separated from his family, and seemingly, this isolation may be at the root his feelings of isolation from himself. He lacks self-knowledge and is constantly seeking something outside of himself to fill his inner void. On the other hand, Egeon is isolated from his family, which leads him to feelings of hopelessness. There's also emotional isolation occurring between a married couple when the man seems to be cheating on his wife. The cause and consequence of the isolation differ in each case, but together these variations on the same theme ground the play. All characters who feel isolation expect that ending their solitude (physical or emotional) will lead to happiness. Indeed, overcoming isolation becomes the means to a happy (and comical) resolution of the play.

Suffering

Suffering in *The Comedy of Errors* oscillates in type between emotional and physical suffering. Both are very present in the play, and all of the characters are long-suffering in one way or another. Adriana and E. Antipholus have a marriage which lacks trust and good communication; Egeon and Aemilia suffer loneliness from being separated from their spouses

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VENUS AND ADONIS

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JULIUS CAESAR
KING LEAR
MACBETH

and children; Luciana suffers in not having a husband; S. Antipholus suffers personally for his self-isolation; and the Dromios are constantly physically beaten, leading them to feel put upon physically and mentally. Each of these kinds of suffering grounds each of the characters in the comedy, which allows them a negative circumstance to overcome in order to find happiness, towards a resolution of the play.

Appearances

Appearances are the primary source of the comedy in *The Comedy of Errors*. Appearances can almost always be relied on to be false in this play – the twins (the Antipholi and the Dromios) are constantly being mistaken for each other, and though their actions and their temperaments differ, they are mostly identified by their appearance, which is a method prone to folly. It's not only the twins' physical appearance that matters in the play – Adriana worries that her beauty is waning, leading her husband to no longer care for her, and Egeon is convinced that his son won't recognize him because he's physically altered by his miserable state. The theme of appearances, however, extends to the appearance of a situation as well. The situation in Ephesus is so strange that it appears to be of supernatural origin. But what appears to be supernatural intervention is actually just confusion based on appearance (of the twins). Appearance is filtered through different means in the play, but it's constantly a basis by which characters judge the people around them, and their own situations. The play reaches a resolution only when the characters realize that how things appear does not necessarily reflect on reality.

Identity

Much of *The Comedy of Errors* is about mistaken identity, and the search for true identity. The most significant identity search belongs to S. Antipholus, who feels incomplete for any number of reasons. He seeks to fill the void about who he is by getting a family, a wife, or returning to a familiar place, but ultimately it seems he's seeking to be defined by things outside of himself. This is particularly dangerous because of the issue of mistaken identity. Characters in the play are so positive about the identity of others that they ignore all the hints pointing to how they're mistaken. Interestingly, this habit of being mistaken leads some of the characters to question their notions of their own identity.

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The Supernatural

The supernatural figures in *The Comedy of Errors* are purely an excuse to ignore the complexity of reality. There is no single occurrence that cannot be explained by some perfectly natural (if bizarre) reasoning, but characters are quick to point to the fates, dreaming, madness, and general supernatural stuff (devils, sorcery, witchcraft) in order to explain the strangeness of their situations. The supernatural stands in as a convenient explanation for what seems inexplicable, given the implausible truth that under-girds the entire play.

Women and Femininity

Women are very present in *The Comedy of Errors* as vocal forces. Though they have a lot of opinions and many speaking lines, it seems their main reason for existing in the play is to talk about and react to men. Adriana, the play's most vocal female character, is a strong woman, but she's undermined by her husband's faithlessness, which causes her self-doubt. The other women of the play, most notably Luciana, the Courtesan, the Abbess, and even the kitchen maid, Nell, are significant only insofar as they lack the companionship of men. Luciana must learn how to deal with men; the Courtesan and Nell are undervalued by men; and even the Abbess was forced to confine herself to a nunnery when she lost her man. These women don't seem to know what to do without men, but they don't know what to do with them, either. While the women are independent characters, they seem relatively incomplete without men to occupy them.

Marriage

Marriage serves a variety of functions in *The Comedy of Errors*. It's the stuff of heartache through separation (as with the separation of Egeon and Aemilia), but staying together in marriage can be as much of a heartache as being kept apart. Adriana and E. Antipholus struggle in a marriage that they value, but have to work hard to keep afloat. Adriana is suspicious of E. Antipholus (given her husband's fondness for a courtesan), who is quick to fly into a rage against her. Marriage is definitely difficult, and how either gender should operate in marriage is the subject of much conversation. The dominant and only present marriage of the play, between Adriana and E. Antipholus, seems to be managed by careful compromise. A more idealized version of marriage is suggested in the potential match between Luciana and S.

Antipholus. Luciana's main concern is learning to submit, properly and entirely, to her husband, and S. Antipholus is looking for someone to guide him and complete him.

Duty

Duty in *The Comedy of Errors* is the stuff of wives, husbands, servants, citizens, parents, and children. Basically, everyone owes some duty to someone else, and each struggles to anticipate the others' needs and do what's expected. In the most explicit sense, the women and servants are subjected to the men, and it is their duty to serve the men's needs. Beyond the duty of subordinates, marriage charges men with the duty to be faithful husbands. Egeon, the lost and despairing father, illustrates the duty men have toward their families. Egeon's inability to protect and keep together his family is enough to make him feel like a worthless man. When characters feel they are not fulfilling their duty, self-doubt and shame result.

Rules and Order

Law and order frame the action of the play. Rather than be the foundation for what happens in the play, law and order are significant because of their impotence. The play is about forces greater than law – family, identity, isolation and more are outside the bounds of what's traditionally dealt with by the law. Law is present, but it is relatively powerless in the face of all the confusion of the play. The law can't keep marriages together, or reunite families, and as those are the areas where justice needs to be served, the law is inapplicable, though it is present as a powerless force.

Analysis

posted Aug 6, 2013, 11:50 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 6, 2013, 11:50 PM]**

The Comedy of Errors is light, frothy entertainment, driven by coincidence and slapstick humor, its events confined within a single day. There are hints of Shakespeare's later forays into deeper character development, especially in the early laments of Antipholus of Syracuse for his missing twin, but the story remains largely on the surface. Characters are mistaken for one

another, but they do not pretend to *be* other than what they are--there are no disguises here, only resemblances. The plot, so concerned with outward appearances, appropriately turns on the exchange of material objects--a Courtesan's ring, a gold chain, and the thousand marks that Egeon needs to save his life. Virtually all interior life is absent, and the action is entirely physical.

There are intimations of disturbing, even tragic issues in the story, of course--the plot depends on an initial threat of execution, and the play is filled with unsettling subjects. There are broken families, a troubled marriage, slavery, grief and anger, frequent violence, and a beheading lying in wait at the end of the day. But the play is not *about* these issues--it touches them briefly before skating on to happier, funnier subjects. The audience's moments of unease are brief and quickly give way to laughter.

And indeed, because this play is a comedy, everything that threatens the laughter is eliminated at the end. It is not only the characters' confusion that is relieved by the final scene, in which the "errors" are explained and resolved; all the darker, unpleasant issues are resolved, as well. Duke Solinus begins the play as a figure of unbending, almost tyrannical legalism; he ends it as a forgiving father figure. The broken halves of Egeon's family have been separated for more than 20 years; now they are put back together, and wife and husband fall into one another's arms as if time and distance had not intervened between them. The marriage of Antipholus of Ephesus and Adriana is threatened by mutual jealousy; their reconciliation, once their misapprehensions have been cleared away, is the work of a few moments. And even the poor, abused slaves, the Dromios, quickly forget their beatings and bruises and embrace. The ease with which these problems are overcome points to the central theme of the play: Love and felicity will triumph over all.

Major Characters

posted Aug 6, 2013, 11:48 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 6, 2013, 11:48 PM]**

The Dromios

Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus are not terribly complex in their thoughts or speeches, but they play a very special role in the play nevertheless. The Dromios are as deeply entangled in the identity confusion as their masters, the Antipholi. Unlike their masters,

however, they experience and reflect on the madness they experience with a lighter, more jovial touch. For example, E. Dromio delights in the mischief of being locked out of dinner, and encourages E. Antipholus to break down the door. Much like his twin in humor, S. Dromio makes gleefully naughty jokes at the appearance of the Courtesan, which is decidedly less serious than S. Antipholus's fearful condemnation of her as a manifestation of the Devil.

The Dromios' performance has the power to highlight the absurd and delightful aspects of the play. In so doing, they provide comic relief for their masters' stern severity. The Dromios are basically the comic anchors of the play. They seem to unquestioningly submit to the abuse they receive from their masters but they aren't above complaining about it in amusing ways. In fact, the Dromios have a habit of playing with words and ideas so they can diffuse even the most tense of situations. Basically, the Dromios are in it to ride the wave, and the audience can take a cue from them and just relax and just enjoy the show, rather than figure out all the sensible details.

The Dromios must also be considered for the roles they play relative to each of their masters. For the most part, the relationship between each Dromio and his Antipholus is not that distinct. The Dromios definitely are servants to the Antipholi, but they are also constant companions, and, to some extent, we get the feeling that these guys are also partners in crime. Though S. Antipholus went out seeking a brother, through the duration of the play, it's clear that the Antipholus-Dromio pairs operate like brothers. Sure, it's not exactly a loving relationship, but it's congenial and fraternal, where they hit each other because they love each other, obviously, not because one of them is adopted. It's clear the Antipholi don't have a brotherly relationship with *each other*, but that doesn't mean they have no fraternal relationships at all. Though the Antipholi and the Dromios are separated by class distinction, the time they spend together, and the camaraderie they share, suggests that each Antipholi actually has a brotherly relationship with his respective Dromio. It's an interesting entry point to think about the meaning of family, class, and even blood ties in the play.

A final note on the Dromios: the whole action of the play is pivoted around S. Antipholus's search for his brother, so you'd think the conclusion of the play would celebrate S. Antipholus's reunion with E. Antipholus. Instead, the Dromios are the ones playing the final notes of the whole affair, leaving the audience with a feeling of how the future will go. In the final scene, the Antipholi don't seem terribly interested or excited about each other. In fact, they don't even really exchange words. By contrast, the Dromios are shocked and amazed at their discovery of each other. Better still, they playfully talk about how they'll go forward from here. They were brothers by birth, and they seem committed to being brothers for the rest of their lives. They choose to go side-by-side in a jolly and warm, but most importantly, an equal way. This might nod to the fact that they've finally found *true* brotherhood. While they definitely had semi-brotherly relationships with the Antipholi, they can now finally be involved in a relationship

where they're allowed to be equals in both social standing and affection.

Antipholus of Ephesus

Antipholus of Ephesus is twin brother to Antipholus of Syracuse, son to Egeon and Aemilia, and generally a man about the town in Ephesus. E. Antipholus is more of a set-piece and plot device than a character in this play – we hear of him early on through Egeon and S. Antipholus, but we don't actually meet E. Antipholus until the third act of the play. What we do know about E. Antipholus is that he has an entirely established life in Ephesus – he lives with his wife Adriana, his sister-in-law Luciana, and he seems to know everybody there is to know in the city. Indeed, all of the comforts offered to S. Antipholus that he finds so enchanting (literally) stem from the reputation his brother has worked to build. E. Antipholus is mainly important as a contrast to S. Antipholus. E. Antipholus, unlike his brother, pays no attention to his lost family because he is absorbed entirely by the new life he's built. Where S. Antipholus is discontent, E. Antipholus would be content. Where S. Antipholus is lonely, E. Antipholus is surrounded by people. S. Antipholus is quick to have faith that he's in an enchanted place, while the more reasonable E. Antipholus is quick to grow angry and condemn all of the madness happening in this usually familiar place.

Most importantly, where S. Antipholus is thoughtfully melancholy, E. Antipholus has no time for such reflection. (S. Antipholus has no fewer than six asides and soliloquies, while E. Antipholus has none.) Arguably, this isn't because E. Antipholus is such a bad guy. After all, his entire world has just been turned upside down. We only see him in the play when his life is at the height of confusion – his wife is denying him, his friends are calling him a liar, and he's been arrested to boot. No man would be in top form under these circumstances. Ephesus used to be a paradise for E. Antipholus, and the arrival of S. Antipholus (and the subsequent confusion) has transformed Ephesus into E. Antipholus's own personal hell. S. Antipholus experiences all of the glamorous confusion of a traveler greeted by strangers clamoring to be familiars. E. Antipholus, by turn, is the one who pays for that confusion, experiencing denial, betrayal, and wrongful punishment. We don't get to see much in the way of personal development from him in the play, as we're too focused on S. Antipholus and the trouble S. Antipholus is inadvertently causing his brother. In the final scene though, we get a hint that now that the confusion has cleared, both S. Antipholus *and* E. Antipholus can return to some normalcy.

Egeon

In *The Comedy of Errors*, Egeon plays the doting father of the lost twins. The man only appears in the first and final acts, but Egeon is incredibly important as a device to frame the action of the play. Though the play is a comedy, Egeon grounds the action in tragedy. He opens the play in a very grave position: He'd welcome death if it would free him from his woes, which are many.

Egeon's death sentence (which isn't revisited until his final would-be death scene) casts a shadow over the rest of the action of the play, which is otherwise very merry. In the bulk of the play, silly things happen, and all the misunderstandings seem inconsequential enough, but the central action is bookended by the fairly dire situation of Egeon.

It seems Egeon can only function briefly in the play because he is such a tragic figure. He has lost both of his children, the servant boys he was intending to raise, and his wife, and we get the sense (from the stories of his travels) that he has wandered the world unsuccessfully seeking out his family as a reason to live. If we had to pity him throughout the whole play, it would detract from the mirth we should feel as we follow the comical errors of the main players. Still, when it comes time to have a resolution, Egeon's character reminds us of how serious the issues in the play are – isolation, loss, suffering, nihilism, and aging are all central to appreciating Egeon. Egeon's presence elevates the play to a kind of tragicomedy, adding dimensions that otherwise would be entirely missing.

One final note of interest on Egeon is how he is played in performance. Some productions deny the play any gravity. Accordingly, Egeon's plight, which is really rather serious, is often made to seem comical by presenting him as a doddering, senile, and melodramatic old man. While the play has enough slapstick to float it as a frothy work, taking Egeon's speeches seriously opens up a new breadth to the action. Life (as the play) may be really silly at times, but it's the big grave questions (as they are presented by Egeon) that make it meaningful. We think Shakespeare might've agreed with us on this one – he gave Egeon some of the most moving and thoughtful speeches of the play, in spite of the fact that the guy does lack face-time.

Adriana

Adriana is E. Antipholus's wife and Luciana's sister. She spends much of the play worrying that her husband loves another woman. Adriana is most notable for her observations about a woman's role in marriage, her lamentations over her lost love, and her obdurate loyalty in the face of what she believes to be adultery.

As a wife, Adriana is not the stereotypical shrewish and nagging woman. In the Plautus play that Shakespeare drew on to write *The Comedy of Errors*, Adriana's equivalent character is so known for her shrewishness that she doesn't even get a name – that alone is enough to characterize her. This stereotypical wife – jealous, possessive, and naggy – was one that Shakespeare's audience would've been used to, so Shakespeare's decision to turn Adriana into a more fully fleshed out woman (with a name) is significant.

Adriana speaks often in the play, and serves as a balance to her idealistic sister about the very real travails of love and marriage. She worries that her husband has gone wandering in love

from her, but she accedes that this might be her own fault. Here, she embodies all the very real concerns of a faithful wife – perhaps she is no longer attractive to her husband, and while he might be at fault for his roving, she still loves him, and would do anything in her power to keep him. She isn't totally rolled over, though; she says awful things about her husband, but she admits they're only inspired by her distress over losing him. Adriana definitely knows more about love's darker side than her sister, Luciana, but it doesn't detract at all from the depth of love for her husband. Even when she thinks E. Antipholus is both unfaithful and insane, she says she'd like to have him come home because it's a wife's duty to take care of her man.

Despite our sympathy, we recognize that Adriana is still shrewish to some extent. When the Abbess talks to Adriana about how she needs to reign in E. Antipholus, Adriana admits that she has taxed her husband's ear unendingly about his faithlessness. The Abbess catches her here: any man that is so complained against is bound to be unhappy. Though Adriana seems to know a lot about love and marriage, she doesn't actually know enough to *not* nag her husband. In general, though, she's a faithful and loving (even if concerned) wife, and she is one of Shakespeare's few characters who embodies the real trials of love in marriage. Most of Shakespeare's comedies end with marriages, but Adriana is a more realistic portrayal of what actually happens after the marriage takes place. Adriana, even in this farcical play, can be seen as Shakespeare's nod to a difficult reality.

Antipholus of Syracuse

Antipholus of Syracuse is the younger half of a set of long-separated twins. He was raised with his father, Egeon, in Syracuse, and separated from his mother, Aemilia, and brother, Antipholus. S. Antipholus's only traveling companion is his "bondsman," S. Dromio, a servant boy his father purchased to be his companion and attendant when both were newborn babies.

The conceit of the play rests on S. Antipholus's decision to leave home. We learn from Egeon that as soon as S. Antipholus turned eighteen, he became "inquisitive" about his missing twin brother, and, along with S. Dromio, left his father to go find their respective other halves. S. Antipholus seems to have a wandering and inquisitive spirit. In addition to his wanderlust, he's characterized by a grave loneliness. The first scene we meet S. Antipholus in he proclaims that he'll go lose himself in the strange Ephesian city – which seems the habit of people that are used to being alone or anonymous. Then, S. Antipholus explains his loneliness to us almost immediately. He describes his lack of fulfillment when he says he feels like a drop of water that's fallen into the ocean to look for one other drop of water. He feels alone without knowing his mother and brother, but he seems to seek them to form some part of his identity. He admits that in his search for them, he's lost his own identity, but we also get the feeling the boy never really felt complete (or he might not have set out looking for his twin in the first place).

These traits are particularly interesting given S. Antipholus's interaction with Luciana. He's convinced that she's unearthly, but rather than being wary or afraid of her, he pleads with her to teach him about himself. Just as he wanders geographically, he also wanders emotionally; it seems that in his love for Luciana he sees a chance to be grounded in a way that truly matters to him. It's also important that he concedes that Luciana might herself be an enchantment. S. Antipholus's explanation for much of the strangeness that occurs in Ephesus is magic. He's willing to assume that explanation always lies outside of himself, either in dreams or in witches, because he has no true knowledge of himself.

Luciana

OK, this may seem a little far from Shakespeare, but bear with us for a second; we're setting something up. If you saw any of the previews over the last couple of years for historical romantic comedies like *Becoming Jane* or *Pride and Prejudice* (the one with Keira Knightley, not the awesome BBC miniseries), you know that advertisers have decided that the best way to sell women in Ye Olde Englande to a modern audience is to bill them as "ahead of their time" – headstrong, opinionated women wanting to marry for love instead of family duty. Any Harlequin Romance writer knows that, to attract a contemporary audience to a woman character from before 1900, the author *cannot* make her old-fashioned, because it's tough for a lot of modern readers to identify with a lady who really is just as quiet, obedient, and dutiful as her society might have expected her to be. This is pretty much the problem facing Luciana, one of the two primary women characters in *The Comedy of Errors*.

The thing is, Luciana's sister Adriana totally upstages her all the time: Adriana storms onto the scene in Act I mad as hell at her husband for spending all his time with the Courtesan – and, literally, stepping out on her. Adriana has all the best lines: "Why should [men's] liberty than ours be more?" and (again, on the subject of dutiful women) "There's none but asses will be bridled so!"

But next to this outspoken lady (dare we say Adriana's *ahead of her time*?), there's meek Luciana, who tries to soothe her sister with the line, "[men] are masters to their females, and their lords" – and fat chance *that's* going to work on Adriana's righteous rage. If Adriana's an early campaigner for women's rights, Luciana is out there lobbying for the men, assuring her sister that when "[Luciana] learns love, [she]'ll practice to obey" her husband. We find it kind of hard to identify with her when she claims that, if she had a cheating husband, she would wait patiently "until he comes home again." It basically sounds like she's advocating for a doormat model of womanhood that some modern audiences could find pretty difficult to swallow.

So, Act I has this pitched argument between the two sisters, with Adrianna standing for equality of the sexes (at least in marriage) and Luciana arguing for a definite order – men on top, women

subservient. Fast forward to Act III, when Luciana finally reappears, and we get to see a second dimension of her character. The man whom she and Adriana have mistaken for Adriana's husband, (but who is, in fact, S. Antipholus) proposes marriage to Luciana.

So this poor woman, who has confessed to fears of "the marriage bed" but who really wants to get hitched, gets a proposal – from the man she thinks is her brother-in-law. To Luciana's credit, she doesn't hesitate for a second to refuse him: "And may it be," she reproaches him, "that you have quite forgot/ A husband's office?" She scolds him for being so obvious about cheating on Adriana ("Keep it on the down low!" she seems to be arguing). When Antipholus of Syracuse keeps insisting that he loves her, and that he doesn't owe Adriana a thing, Luciana immediately goes to tell her sister that he's been trying to hook up with her.

Of course, it's S. Antipholus who proposes to Luciana, not is E. Antipholus who's married to her sister, so they can finally get engaged when all has been revealed. But here's the thing about Luciana: that sense of duty to men that she preaches in the first act is still with her in the fifth act. However, it's totally secondary to the responsibility she feels to her sister, which leads her to confess Antipholus's advances even though she's really attracted to him. So Luciana may believe wholeheartedly in obedience to her husband, but she's willing to give up a man's proposal for the sake of her sister's happiness. That hierarchy she set up earlier, with man above woman? Well, above that, for Luciana, is family loyalty – and that's pretty hard not to like, for modern and old-fashioned audiences alike.

Characters

posted Aug 6, 2013, 11:43 PM by alaa hagag **[updated Aug 6, 2013, 11:43 PM]**

Antipholus of Syracuse

The twin brother of Antipholus of Ephesus and the son of Egeon; he has been traveling the world with his slave, Dromio of Syracuse, trying to find his long-lost brother and mother.

Antipholus of Ephesus

The twin brother of Antipholus of Syracuse and the son of Egeon; he is a well-respected merchant in Ephesus and Adriana's husband.

Dromio of Syracuse

The bumbling, comical slave of Antipholus of Syracuse. He is the twin brother of Dromio of

Ephesus.

Dromio of Ephesus

The bumbling, comical slave of Antipholus of Ephesus. He is the Syracusan Dromio's twin brother.

Adriana

The wife of Antipholus of Ephesus, she is a fierce, jealous woman.

Luciana

Adriana's unmarried sister and the object of Antipholus of Syracuse's affections.

Solinus

The Duke of Ephesus; a just but merciful ruler.

Egeon

A Syracusan merchant, husband of the Abbess (Emilia), and the father of the two Antipholi. He is, like his Syracusan son, in search of the missing half of his family; he has been sentenced to death as the play begins.

Abbess

Emilia, the long-lost wife of Egeon and the mother of the two Antipholi.

Balthasar

A merchant in Syracuse.

Angelo

A goldsmith in Syracuse and a friend to Antipholus of Ephesus.

Merchant

An Ephesian friend of Antipholus of Syracuse.

Second Merchant

A tradesman to whom Angelo is in debt.

Doctor Pinch

A schoolteacher, conjurer, and would-be exorcist.

Luce

Also called Nell. Antipholus of Ephesus' prodigiously fat maid and Dromio of Ephesus' wife.

Courtesan

An expensive prostitute and friend of Antipholus of Ephesus.

Summary

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Egeon, a merchant from Syracuse, is spending time in the city of Ephesus. Being in Ephesus means Egeon's life is about to get complicated. Because of some recent strife between the cities of Ephesus and Syracuse, any citizen of either locale caught in the enemy territory is sentenced to death (unless he can pay 1000 marks as a ransom for his life). The Duke of Ephesus explains all of this to Egeon as he hands him a death sentence for trespassing on Ephesian soil. Egeon is eager to get the death sentence – execution is no big deal because his life is pretty crappy – he'll even explain why.

A long time ago, Egeon was making a lot of money as a merchant. When his agent died, he went on a business trip with his pregnant wife, who gave birth to identical twin boys while they were away from home. At the same exact time, a poor woman in the same inn also gave birth to identical twin boys. The poor woman sold her boys to Egeon to be servants for his twins. On their way home to Syracuse, a terrible storm overtook the ship that Egeon and his family were sailing in. During the storm, Egeon looked after one of his twin sons and one of the twin servants, as did his wife. However, during the storm, the boat was destroyed and the husband and wife, along with the boys, were separated. Egeon's wife and one set of boys were rescued by a Corinthian ship, and Egeon and the two boys with him were picked up by a ship bound for Epidaurus. Thus separated, Egeon never saw his wife or lost son again.

Egeon named his set of boys after their missing twin brothers. He raised the boys until they were 18, at which point his biographical son got inquisitive about his lost brother. Egeon's son set off with his servant to find their lost halves. Since then, Egeon has wandered around looking for them. Egeon has now lost all hope, and he welcomes the Duke's death sentence. The Duke gives Egeon until sunset to beg or borrow the money to ransom his life.

Meanwhile, the son that Egeon raised in Syracuse has shown up in Ephesus, the very place his dad came to look for him. His name is Antipholus, and his servant's name is Dromio (but we'll call them S. Antipholus and S. Dromio, as they're from Syracuse, and their initials will help us

avoid confusion as the play progresses). S. Antipholus sends S. Dromio to go get them a room at a local inn called the Centaur.

Just then, Dromio of Ephesus (who we'll call E. Dromio) happens upon S. Antipholus and mistakes the Syracusian for his master, Antipholus of Ephesus (who we'll call E. Antipholus). E. Dromio bids S. Antipholus to come home to dinner with E. Antipholus's wife. S. Antipholus is reasonably confused, and ends up beating E. Dromio. E. Dromio runs away.

E. Dromio goes back to his master's house. Adriana, E. Antipholus' wife, is angry that her husband hasn't returned.

S. Dromio, back at the marketplace, meets up with S. Antipholus. S. Antipholus beats S. Dromio for fooling around earlier and telling him weird messages about his "wife" wanting him home for dinner. (But we know that S. Antipholus was talking with E. Dromio earlier, not S. Dromio.) Then the two men are accosted by Adriana (E. Antipholus's wife), with Luciana (Adriana's sister) in tow. The two women add to the confusion, and they insist S. Dromio and S. Antipholus come home to dinner with them, as they mistake the men for their Ephesian counterparts. S. Antipholus is confused, but he decides to go with the flow and follow this woman who claims to be his wife. S. Dromio is left to play the keeper of the gate at E. Antipholus's house and allow nobody inside.

Next, we finally meet the real E. Antipholus, who's been busy with Angelo the goldsmith, making a gold necklace for Adriana. E. Antipholus goes back to his house with E. Dromio, Angelo, and a merchant named Balthazar. The men all arrive expecting to eat dinner, but they get home to find the gate is locked. S. Dromio, who can't see the men through the gate, is taking his gate porter duties really seriously, refusing to let them in.

The mayhem only increases, but E. Antipholus and E. Dromio eventually decide to have dinner elsewhere. E. Antipholus asks Angelo the goldsmith to bring him the gold necklace during dinner.

Meanwhile, things aren't any prettier inside E. Antipholus's house. S. Antipholus (who is wifeless, as far as he knows) is trying to woo Luciana, his lost-brother's wife's sister. (High drama.) Luciana, unsure of how to respond, deflects his offers and runs off.

The situation is getting uncomfortable, so S. Antipholus instructs S. Dromio to go find a ship, so they can get out of this bewitched city. Before he leaves Adriana's house, S. Antipholus is stopped by Angelo the goldsmith. Angelo mistakes S. Antipholus for E. Antipholus, and gives him the golden necklace and refuses payment, saying he knows he'll get paid later. S. Antipholus wants to get out of this place ASAP, but doesn't mind taking such a nice gift.

Later in the day at the marketplace, Angelo the goldsmith sees E. Antipholus and approaches his client for payment for the necklace. E. Antipholus, as he never received the necklace, says Angelo must be talking madness. Poor E. Antipholus gets arrested for avoiding paying his debt.

The wrongly imprisoned E. Antipholus is furious. S. Dromio approaches and tells E. Antipholus he's secured the ship that S. Antipholus asked for. Since E. Antipholus didn't ask for a ship, he figures Dromio is crazy, too. Wanting to be freed from jail, he sends S. Dromio to Adriana to get bail money. When S. Dromio reaches Adriana and tells her what happened, Adriana sends the servant off with bail money.

S. Dromio, rushing back to the marketplace to bail out E. Antipholus, runs into S. Antipholus. S. Dromio tries to give his real master the bail money, but S. Antipholus is confused, and just asks about the ship he sent S. Dromio for a long time ago.

E. Antipholus, still arrested, is met by E. Dromio, who knows nothing of his master's arrest. The servant was just receiving a beating when Adriana, Luciana, and a schoolmaster named Pinch arrive. Adriana, thinking her husband is possessed, begs the schoolmaster (who is apparently a part-time exorcist) to cure her husband of whatever demon has possessed him. E. Antipholus is angry and tries to attack Adriana. Ultimately, E. Antipholus and E. Dromio are tied up, and taken to Adriana's house.

After the men have been taken away, the women try to clear up E. Antipholus's debt (and figure out its origin) with the arresting officer. As they're puzzling it out, they're encountered by S. Antipholus and S. Dromio. The Syracusians mistake Adriana and company for witches, and run at them with swords drawn. Everyone scampers off.

Angelo the goldsmith shows up again and sees that S. Antipholus is wearing the necklace that E. Antipholus denied receiving. S. Antipholus says he never denied anything. The squabble is getting tense and the men are ready to duke it out. Adriana and Co. enter just as the men are

about to fight. S. Antipholus and S. Dromio take the opportunity to slip into a conveniently located priory (or religious place) nearby.

The Abbess (a religious lady of the priory) comes out, and asks exactly what all the fuss is about. Adriana begs the Abbess release her husband, but the Abbess refuses, as it would violate their sanctuary in the priory.

Just then, the Duke shows up on a merry jaunt to have Egeon beheaded. Adriana wants the Duke to make the Abbess release her husband, but her request is interrupted by a messenger. The messenger says that E. Antipholus and E. Dromio have escaped their bonds, singed Pinch's beard, and are now headed towards the priory to rage against Adriana and Co.

Just then, E. Antipholus arrives and pleads for the Duke to deliver justice against his wife, who has much abused him. The Duke throws his hands up and declares everyone is insane. To add to the craziness, Egeon takes this moment to pipe up that he recognizes Antipholus is the son he raised in Syracuse. Of course, E. Antipholus says he's never seen his father in all his life, causing Egeon to despair.

This fine kettle of fish is FINALLY de-fishified when the Abbess re-enters the scene with S. Antipholus and S. Dromio in tow. Everyone sees the four men, in two identical sets, face to face. Then they realize what's been going on the whole time. S. Antipholus recognizes his dad, and the Abbess reveals that she's actually Aemilia, Egeon's long lost wife. S. Antipholus takes the opportunity to reiterate his offer of marriage to Luciana. The Duke even frees Egeon! Instead of death and disorder, the play ends with the Abbess calling everybody into the abbey, so they can share the stories of their lives since their separation.