THE BROTHERS MENAECHMUS

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:* '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.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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 Epidamnus. There are two houses. On the right (from the audience's view) is Menaechmus' house; on the left, Erotium's house. The forum is off-stage to the audience's right. The harbour is off-stage to the audience's left.
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. 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. In fact, it’s not a name you quickly can forget, especially if you’re one to whom he owes a debt.*

[Starts to cross the stage]

Metre by metre to Epidamnus now I must wend,*
So I can chart this map unto its perfect end.
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.*
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.
This is the sort of guy he is: the greatest eater,
His feasts are festivals. He piles the table so,*
And plants so many platters in the neatest 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 Menaechmus, still (acing indoors. berating
someone. We will soon see that he is hiding a
lady's dress under his usual garments

Menaechmus [singing, in anger at his wife in the house]. If
you weren't such a shrew, so uncontrolled, ungrateful
too,*
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!
Menaechmus [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 guts,
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?
Menaechmus. 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. Oh, you—my Lucky
Charm, my Nick-of-Time!
Greetings. [Rushes to him; they shake hands vigorously]
Peniculus. Greetings.
Menaechmus. Whatcha doing?
Peniculus. Shaking hands with my good-luck charm.
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.  
MENAECMUS. 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?  
MENAECMUS. Just look.  
[He strikes a pose, showing off his dress  
Notice something similar?  
PENICULUS. What kind of crazy dress is that?  
PENICULUS [very fey]. Tell me that I’m so attractive.  
PENICULUS. Tell me when we’re going to eat.  
PENICULUS. [a breath]. Also witty. Very witty.  
PENICULUS. More!  
PENICULUS. No more, by Hercules, until I know  
what’s in it for me.  
Since you’re warring with your wife, I must be wary and  
beware.  
MENAECMUS. 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.  
MENAECMUS. You delay me by interrupting—  
PENICULUS. Knock my eyeball through my ankle,  
Mangle me, Menaechmus, if I fail to heed a single word.  
MENAECMUS. Move—we’re much too near my house.  
[Tiptoes to centre stage, motions to PENICULUS  
PENICULUS [follows MENAECMUS]. Okay.  
PENICULUS [moves more, motions]. We’re still too near.  
PENICULUS [follows]. How’s this?  
PENICULUS. Bolder, let’s go further from the bloody  
mountain lion’s cave.  

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

*Grand entrance of Ero tüm from her house*

Ero tüm [to Menaechmus].Greetings, O my only soul! And me?

Pénículus. Not on my list at all.

Menaechmus [to Ero tüm]. Darling, at your house today, prepare a little battleground.

Ero tüm. So I will.

Menaechmus. We'll hold a little drinking duel, *indicating Pénículus* 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!

Ero tüm [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.

Ero tüm. You're on top, you outtop all the other men who try for me.*

Pénículus [aside]. Sluts can talk so sweet, while they see something they can snatch from you.

*To Ero tüm* 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.

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

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

Pénículus. Not more than you.

Take it off—if you won't dance.

Menaechmus [To Ero tüm].

What risks I ran in stealing this!

Hercules in labour number nine was not as brave as I, When he stole the girdle from that Amazon Hippolyta.
Take it, darling, since you do your duties with such diligence.*

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

Pénículus [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.

Pénículus [to the audience]. Well, there goes two hundred drachmae down the drain, by my accounts.

Menaechmus [to Ero tüm]. Want to know what I would like prepared?

Ero tüm. 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 chopettes, or anything along those lines.*

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

Also hurry up.

Ero tüm. 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.

Ero tüm. When you feel like it, come. It will be all prepared.

Menaechmus. And quickly too.

*To Pénículus* Follow me—

Pénículus. 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 Pénículus exit toward the forum

Ero tüm. Someone call inside and tell my cook Cylindrus to come out.
THE BROTHERS MENAECHMUS

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—accompained 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—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, 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'.

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.

Re-enter cook Cylindrus, his basket full of goodies

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!*
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...

Menaechmus II. God love you—God knows who you are.
Cylindrus [thinks it's a joke]. 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.

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,* the sacrificial kind?

Cylindrus. Not much.

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—[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?
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 MESSNIO]. 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.*
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 MESSNIO]. 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.
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?
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.
Epidamnus.

MESSENIO. Epidamnus, 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.

[Give 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.
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.

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!

Epidamnus, where he's never set a foot, 380
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.

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... mmmm?

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?

MENAECHMUS II. Where Agathocles was king, and then in turn, King Phintia,*
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—

MENAECHMUS II [getting excited]. Hercules, I shouldn't keep refusing her.

MESSENIO. Oh, don't you dare!

MENAECHMUS II. Now you shut up!

Things are going well. Whatever she suggests—I'll just agree.

Why not get a little... hospitality? [to EROTIUM] 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?

MENAECHMUS II. I don't give a damn. Why should we wait for him? Now if he comes, 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.

EROTIUM. Therefore take it with you when you leave.

MENAECHMUS II. Of course, of course, of course. Let's go in.

MENAECHMUS II. I'll follow you. [Indicates MESSENIO] I want a little chat with him.

MESSENIO. Hey, Messenio, come here!

MENAECHMUS II. What's up?

MESSENIO. Just hop to my command.

MENAECHMUS II. Can I help?

MESSENIO. 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.
But—what's this? Menaechmus with a garland, coming from the house?
Party's over, I'm arriving just in time to be too late!
First, I'll spy how he behaves and then I'll go accost the man.

MENAECHMUS II wobbles happily out of EROTIUM'S house, wearing a garland, and carrying the dress earlier delivered by his brother

MENAECHMUS II [to EROTIUM]. 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 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 [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. 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.

MENAECHMUS II. 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. My dear young man, 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?

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.
Then all these present insults will rebound on you.
You’ve gobbled up my dinner—and I’ll be revenged!
MENAECMUS II. If you ever get it—give it.
MAID [frustrated, she bows]. I'm at your service.

[Exit]

MENAECMUS 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.*

[Exit]

From MENAECMUS’ house enter PENICULUS
and MENAECMUS’ 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? 560

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?

PENICULUS. The very same as always: make him miserable.
But let's step over here—and spread a net for him. 570

Enter MENAECMUS I

MENAECMUS [singing]. We have this tradition, we have this
tradition,*
An irksome tradition, and yet it's the best
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.

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

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]. Aha, you're scared.

MENAECHMUS. What could I be scared of?

PENICULUS. Of a dress—and of a dressing-down.

You'll be sorry for that secret feast. [To wife] Go on, attack again!
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.

 Didn’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.*

Asking what you know.

MENAECHMUS. Why do I ask, then?

PENICULUS. What an evil man! 640

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! 650

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.*

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 to her.

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?

MENAECHMUS [cowed]. Yes, I’ll... get it back.

WIFE. 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?
I'm glad to help you out—when someone steals a dress from you.

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

I can very clearly see I've been expelled from this whole house.

He storms off

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.

You 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.

Who has asked for me?

A man who loves you more than his own self.

Dear Menaechmus, why stand here outside? Come in.

Wait just a minute.

Can you guess what brings me here?

I know—you'd like some . . . joy with me.

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.

But I gave it to you for embroidery a moment back,

With a bracelet you would bring the goldsmith for remodelling.

What—you gave me dress and bracelet? No, you'll find that isn't true.

I first gave you the dress, then went directly to the forum.

Now's the very second I've returned.

Just because I put them in your hands—you're out to swindle me.

Swindle you? By Pollux, no! Why, didn't I just tell you why?

Everything's discovered by my wife!

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!

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

[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.*

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.

A slight pause [musical interlude?]. Then enter

Menaechmus II from the opposite side of the stage. He still carries the dress
MENAECMUS 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.

MENAECMUS 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?

MENAECMUS 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?

MENAECMUS II. Whatever have I done that would forbid my talking?

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

MENAECMUS II [with quiet sarcasm]. Madam, do you have any notion why the Greeks
Referred to Hecuba as... female dog?

WIFE. I don't.

MENAECMUS 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.

MENAECMUS 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.

MENAECMUS 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?

MENAECMUS 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.

MENAECMUS II. You're sick!
All what disgracefulness?

WIFE. A dress—and golden bracelet.
You rob your legal wife at home and then you go bestow it on your mistress. Do I 'babble' truth?

MENAECMUS 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!*

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.

MENAECMUS II [ironically]. Of course, a friend of Agamemnon. *
I first met him the day I first met you—today.

WIFE. You claim that you don't know me, or my father?

MENAECMUS II. 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,*
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. 733-4

[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. 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.
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.*
WIFE. But he loves a fancy woman right next door.
OLD MAN. He's very wise! 790
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,
I'll attack him ten times harder than I'm now attacking
you.
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.

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.

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

Menaechmus II. 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.
MENAECHMUS II ['hearing']. 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.*
[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 fogy, Chop his innards into little pieces, till I reach the bone?
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? 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

MENAECHMUS. Pollux, what a day for me: perverted and inverted too.
Everything I plotted to be private's now completely public. 900
My own parasite has filled me full of fearful accusations!
My Ulysses, causing so much trouble for his royal patron!* 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 slutitude.
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 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?

MENAECMHS. 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.
[To MENAECHMUS, again]. Tell me now, Menaechmus.

MENAECMHS. Tell what?

DOCTOR. Just answer what I ask.
Do you drink white wine or red?
MENAECMHS. And why don't you go straight to hell?

DOCTOR. Hercules, I notice teeny traces of insanity.

MENAECMHS. 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!
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?

MENAECMHS. What? You think you're talking to a lobster, do you, rotten man!

DOCTOR [unfazed]. Tell me, have you ever noticed your intestines making noise?

MENAECMHS. 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. 929-30

But listen you, you

Question-asker, you be damned by Jupiter and all the gods! 931-3

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

[To OLD MAN] Take care!

OLD MAN. He speaks like a Nestor now, 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!

Yes, I saw you do it. Yes, and I insist you did it, too. 939-40

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

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.
THE LOWLY, LAZY LOUTS GET WHIPS AND CHAINS,
AND MILLSTONES, GREAT STARVATION, FREEZING COLD.
THE PRICE FOR ALL THEIR MISBEVIOURS: 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 SPROWLED 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.
BUT I HAVEN'T MUCH TO FEAR; THE TIME IS NEAR FOR SOMETHING
NICE.*
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.
MENAECMUS [NOTICES THE CHARGING 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 MENAECMUS
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!
MEN. BY THE IMMORTAL GODS, WHAT AM I SEEING WITH MY
VERY EYES?
SOME UNKNOWN MEN ARE LIFTING MASTER IN THE AIR. OUT-
RAGEOUSLY!
MENAECMUS. WON'T SOMEONE DARE TO HELP?
MEN. ME, ME! I'LL DARE TO HELP WITH DERRING-DOW!
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!
MENAECMUS [TO MEN]. WHOEVER YOU MAY BE, PLEASE
HELP ME OUT!
DON'T ALLOW THIS AWFUL OUTRAGE TO BE PERPETRATED ON ME.
MEN. 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 MENAECMUS] 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 MÉLÉE ENSUES
MENAECMUS [WHILE FIGHTING, TO MEN]. HEY, I'VE GOT HIS
EYE.
MEN. THEN MAKE THE SOCKET IN HIS HEAD APPEAR!
EVIL PEOPLE! PEOPLE SNATCHERS! BUNCH OF PIRATES!
SLAVES [TOGETHER]. WOE IS US!
HERCULES! NO—PLEASE!
MEN.
MENAECMUS.
WHAT SORT OF HANDIWORK IS THIS?
FACE A FESTIVAL OF FISTS.
MEN.
MEN. GO ON, BE GONE, AND GO TO HELL!
[KICKING THE SLOWEST SLAVE] YOU TAKE THAT AS YOUR REWARD
FOR BEING LAST TO GET AWAY.

[THEY ARE ALL GONE. MEN. TAKES A DEEP BREATH OF SATISFACTION
Well, I've really made my mark—on every face I've faced today.
Pollux, Master, didn't I come just in time to bring you aid! 1020
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.
MESSENIO. If that's true, by Pollux, then do right by me and free me, Master.
MENAECHMUS. Free you? I?
MESSENIO. Of course. Because I saved you, Master.
MENAECHMUS. Listen here, you're Wand'ring from the truth—
MESSENIO. I wander?
MENAECHMUS. Yes, I swear by Father Jove I am not your master.
MESSENIO [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.
MESSENIO. 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.
MESSENIO. Am I really authorized?
MENAECHMUS. If I've authority for you. 1030
MESSENIO [dialogue with himself]. 'Greetings, patron.'—'Ah, Messenio, the fact that you're now freeMakes 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.
MENAECHMUS [doesn't want some strange person in his house].
Not at all, no thank you.
MESSENIO [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 toward 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 EROTIUM'S house]

Enter MENAECHMUS II and MESSENIO

MENAECHMUS II [angry with MESSENIO]. 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.
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.

MENAECMUS II. Free? I said you could go free?

MESSENIO. For sure.

MENAECMUS II. Now look, for super-sure I would rather make myself a slave than ever set you free.

MESSENIO [suddenly seeing double]. By the gods, what do I see?

MENAECMUS II. What do you see?

MESSENIO. Why—your reflection!

MENAECMUS II. What?

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

MENAECMUS II. Pollux—he's not unlike me... I notice... similarities.

MENAECMUS I [to MESSENIO]. Hey, young man, hello! You saved my life—whatever you may be.

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

MENAECMUS I. Nothing you could ask would be too much since you have helped me so. My name is Menaechmus.

MENAECMUS II. Oh, by Pollux, so is mine as well!

MENAECMUS I. Syracuse-Sicilian—

MENAECMUS II. That's my city, that's my country too!

MENAECMUS I. What is this I hear?

MENAECMUS II. Just what is true.

MESSENIO [to MENAECMUS II]. I know you—you're my master!

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

[To MENAECMUS 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.

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


MENAECMUS I. So am I!

MENAECMUS II. What joke is this?

You're Menaechmus?

MENAECMUS I. That I say I am. My father's name was Moschus.

MENAECMUS II. You're the son of my own father?

MENAECMUS 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 unhoped-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—

MENAECMUS I and II [together]. Yes?

MESSENIO. Not both of you. Which of you two travelled with me on the ship?

MENAECMUS I. It wasn't me.

MENAECMUS 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
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. 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.*
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—
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: 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 EROTIUM’s house]
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!

THE HAUNTED HOUSE
(Mostellaria)