

INTRODUCTORY NOTE TO *THE PRISONERS*

EVER since the eighteenth century, criticism of this play has been somewhat overawed by the enthusiastic opinion of the German poet and philosopher Lessing, who pronounced it the most perfect comedy ever to appear on any stage. It is true that it is exceptional among the works of Plautus for its high moral tone – as emphatically advertised in its own Prologue and Epilogue; for its central theme of unselfish heroism, the mutual trust and affection between a master and his slave; and for its complete avoidance of the topic of sexual attraction, whether in a romantic or frivolous context. Commended thus for its suitability for scholastic use, it must often have been the first, and still more often the only Latin play to come to the notice of the young student.

No Greek original can be identified; but wherever Plautus found the story, that he found it a congenial one is proved by his handling of the relationship of Tyndarus and Philocrates, in their 'swapped' characters of master and slave, which he has depicted with a sincerity and sensitivity unapproached anywhere else in his work. The father, Hegio, is also a subtle and convincing creation, in all his changeable moods of geniality, gullibility, and even his impulsive cruelty. Yet beside these merits the play's patent defects can only stand out all the more conspicuously. Its construction abounds in rough edges and loose ends, arbitrary coincidences and inexplicable short cuts. The question, for example – when exactly did the captive master and slave decide to exchange identities? – cannot be satisfactorily answered. It must have been before they met Hegio, and yet after they had heard of his plan to ransom his son; and in any case, when would they have had an opportunity to disguise themselves? Again, the problem of the time required for the double journey between Aetolia and Elis – even granting a mythical topography – admits of no reasonable solution. Not only did the stage convention require the action of the play to be confined to one day, but the activities of Ergasilus draw special attention to this time-limit. Only a little, but not much,

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approach to verisimilitude is gained by supposing the action to begin in the early morning and end late in the evening of a single day.

The best that can be said of these and other discrepancies is that they are of the kind which, in actual performance, can be rendered invisible under the magic influence known as *optique du théâtre*, and only occur to the critic in retrospect. It is less easy to justify the uneven balance of the play as a whole; too much time is given to preparatory explanation, repeated in the Prologue and in Ergasilus's first monologue, and again in the early scenes up to the departure of Philocrates; while, at the other end of the play, the return of Philocrates and the recognition of Tyndarus, not to mention the very unlikely and unexplained discovery of Stalagmus, are crammed into a hurried finale.

While the plot delays and stagnates, the time is filled up, rather too incongruously for our taste, with the comic relief which is almost entirely the province of that particularly tiresome character, the 'parasite'. This character, a kind of professional diner-out and jester, seems, both as a social institution and as a stage type, to have been a source of inexhaustible amusement to the Roman public. But his translation into English is an unsatisfactory business; the word *parasite*, for us either a biological term or an insult, is no longer applicable, even if there were any contemporary type of person to whom it could be applied. 'Table-companion' is the nearest literal equivalent to the original word and may perhaps stand as an approximation. Whatever we call him, his jests are, of course, mainly based on Roman manners and local topics, regardless of relevance to the Greek scene and action of the play. More unfortunately, a tinge of conventional comicality blurs the portrait of Tyndarus; it is quite out of character for this excellent man, the faithful companion and conscientious guardian of his young master, to utter the comic patter of panic and despair when caught in a tight place. But he is a slave, and that is the sort of language expected of a slave in Plautine comedy. Like any other, this play must be judged by the standards and conventions of its age and kind; it is, in fact, a particularly good example of Plautus's 'impressionistic' method, wherein extreme contrasts of tone are permissible, and any type of speech, joke, or situation is exploited for its own momentary effect, irrespective of strict relevance or consistency.

CHARACTERS

HEGIO	<i>a wealthy Aetolian gentleman</i>
PHILOCRATES	<i>an Elian prisoner of war</i>
TYNDARUS	<i>his slave and companion, also a prisoner</i>
PHILOPOLEMUS	<i>Hegio's son, taken prisoner in Elis</i>
ARISTOPHONTES	<i>another prisoner from Elis</i>
ERGASILUS	<i>a 'parasite', dependent on Philopolemus</i>
STALAGMUS	<i>a former slave of Hegio</i>
A BOY	<i>in Hegio's house</i>
<i>Slave-warders in Hegio's employment</i>	

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*The scene is in a town of Aetolia, outside the house of Hegio.
A Prologue is spoken by an unnamed character.*

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[Outside the house of Hegio two prisoners are standing, shackled together with heavy chains and secured to a ring in the wall. They are young men of about the same age, but TYNDARUS will appear to be the stronger and more serious in demeanour, PHILOCRATES more youthful and light-hearted. Though both are prisoners, Tyndarus is still fairly smartly attired as an officer, his companion being apparently his slave or personal servant.

The speaker of the PROLOGUE enters, looks the prisoners over, and addresses the audience.]

PROLOGUE:

Friends – the two prisoners you see standing there
Are standing there . . . because . . . well, standing there
Because they can't sit down . . . as you'll agree!
This house [*showing the scene*] . . . belongs to Hegio; and he
Is father of *this* prisoner [*showing Tyndarus*]. But how,
You well may ask . . . and I shall tell you now . . .
If you will kindly listen and behave . . .

How comes this man to be his father's slave?
There were *two* sons; this one, when four years old,
Was stolen by a wicked slave and sold,
In Elis; and the man he sold him to

Was *this* man's [*showing Philocrates*] father . . . [*He breaks off.*]
Have you got all that? . . . Good . . . What? Oh dear, a man at the
back says he can't hear me . . . Come nearer, then! . . . No seat for
you? Then go and take a walk outside! . . . Do you want to make a
poor actor lose his job? I'm not going to rupture myself to suit you,
don't think it. [*To the front stalls*] I'll tell the rest of my tale to you
gentlemen of property . . . I'll pay my debts to you . . . I don't like
not paying my debts. As I was saying . . .

The child was stolen by an absconding slave
And sold to *this* man's father; who then gave

The child – having bought him – to his little son
 As personal servant and companion;
 Their ages were about the same, you see.
 Now, after many years, we find that *he* [*showing Tyndarus*]
 (See how the gods make playthings of us men!)
 The missing son, at last comes home again
 Unknown to his own father Hegio,
 To be his slave and prisoner. Now you know
 How this one son was lost. But furthermore,
 Aetolia and Elis being at war,
 An elder son was taken prisoner too
 And sold, in Elis, to be servant to
 A doctor named Menarchus. Hegio, then,
 Hoping to get that lost son back again
 (Not knowing the other is here) has now begun
 To buy up Elian prisoners, seeking one
 Fit to be offered for his son's return.
 And yesterday he had the luck to learn
 That here, a prisoner, there was one young man,
 A knight, of an exalted Elian clan.
 To save his son, no price could be too high;
 This was the way to get him home – to buy
 Two Elian prisoners from the auctioneer,
 The young knight, and his slave – whom you see here.

Meanwhile these two, the master and the man,
 Have been devising an ingenious plan;
 The slave intends to let his master go
 As envoy to his father's home; and so
 They interchange their names and clothes; and thus
 Philocrates [*touching him*] . . . is now called Tyndarus;
 And Tyndarus [*touching him*] . . . is called Philocrates . . .
 Complete exchange of personalities!
 So now the slave – that's Tyndarus – will contrive
 To let his master get back home alive,
 And, by the same stroke, set his brother free
 And bring him back to home and liberty
 And father, all unknowing. Such is chance –

More good is often done in ignorance
 Than by design. As you will see, these two
 Have plotted more astutely than they knew;
 The scheme devised by their inventive brains
 Will now ensure that Tyndarus remains
 In his own father's house, a slave, unknown,
 Unknowing, unrecognized among his own.
 Man is a thing of nought, you well may say,
 As we perform, and you attend, our play.

[*He appears to have ended his formal prologue, but adds the following afterthoughts:*]

There's one other point I'd like to add for your information. You will find this play worth your close attention; it is something quite new – not a rehash of old ideas; and it contains no smutty lines that you would be ashamed to repeat. There is no double-crossing pimp in this play – nor loose woman – nor bragging soldier. Yes, I did mention that Aetolia and Elis are at war; but don't let that frighten you; the battles all take place off stage. Well, it would be practically cheating, wouldn't it, for a comedy company to present you with a tragedy without warning? So if anyone wants a battle, he had better go and pick his own quarrel somewhere else . . . and woe betide him if he picks on an opponent stronger than himself . . . that's the last he'll want to see of battle scenes!
 Well, that's all. Good health to you – judges as incorruptible in the field of peace as you are invincible fighters in the field of war.
 [*Exit.*]

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[*ERGASILUS, the 'parasite', enters from the town.*]

ERGASILUS: My name – that is, the nickname given to me by our young people – is The Harlot. Why? Because at their tables I am *employed*, not *invited*. I know some superior people think this a rather far-fetched joke; but I see the point: When a lover throws the dice after dinner, he employs the name of his harlot to bring him luck; so you can say she is employed. And the term certainly applies to us professional table-companions; nobody ever *invites* us – nor, for that matter, do they call upon us to bring them luck!

No, we're like mice, always nibbling at other people's food. When the vacation comes, and everybody goes off to the country, then our teeth have to take a vacation too. Like snails in the hot season, hiding in their shells, living on their own juice for lack of dew – so we poor table-companions, in holiday time, have to creep into our holes and live off our own juice, while the people we batten on enjoy their *fêtes champêtres*. In the off season we are as lean as greyhounds; when business reopens, we are house-dogs, fat and fed and a devil of a nuisance. And by God, in this town people of our sort have to put up with having their ears boxed and pots broken on their heads; if they don't like that, they can always go and earn a living as baggage-porters outside the Triple Gate. And that is where, by the look of things, I am very likely to find myself before long. Now that my lord and master has fallen into the enemy's hands . . . in this war between Aetolia and Elis . . . *this* is Aetolia, where we are now, and Philopolemus, my patron, is a prisoner over there in Elis . . . and he's the son of old Hegio, who lives in this house here – now a house of misery as far as I'm concerned; I can't look at it without weeping. Anyway, this old gentleman, out of concern for his son's welfare, has got himself involved in a rather undignified business, quite out of keeping with his own character. He is buying up prisoners of war, in the hope of finding one of suitable rank to be offered as an exchange for his captured son. And don't I jolly well hope he succeeds! If he doesn't recover his son, there's no hope of recovery for me. The young men of today are no use at all – far too self-centred. Hegio's boy was one of the old type; I could get anything out of him by just stroking his cheek. Fortunately his father is of the same decent sort. So now I am going to pay a call on him . . . *[He approaches the house]* How many times have I stepped out of this door well wine and dined! . . . *[He listens at the keyhole, and hears a movement]* . . . and here's someone coming out now . . . *[He retires to a corner.]*

[A GUARD comes out of the house to inspect the prisoners; he is followed shortly by HEGIO, who calls the Guard to him.]

HEGIO: Come here, you. Listen: those two prisoners I bought yesterday out of the spoils of war are to be given separate handcuffs, not chained together with heavy irons as they are now; take them off. And let them walk about as they wish, in the house or outside.

But see that they are carefully watched, of course. A prisoner given partial liberty is like a wild bird; the first chance of escape, he's off, and you'll never catch him again.

GUARD: I'm sure we'd all rather be free than slaves.

HEGIO: But not you, it seems.

GUARD: As I haven't got the money to give you for my freedom, what do you expect me to give you – the slip?

HEGIO *[amiably]*: Just you try it, and I shall have something to give you.

GUARD: I might turn myself into a wild bird, as you were saying.

HEGIO: Yes, you might; if you do, I shall have to put you in a cage.

But that's enough of that – just do what I told you, and then you can go. I am going round to my brother's, to have a look at my other prisoners, in case there has been any trouble in the night. I'll be back very soon.

[The GUARD removes the prisoners into the house.]

ERGASILUS: Poor old man, it really is a shame to see him become a dealer in prisoners, all because of the sad loss of his son. However, if it will help to get the boy back, I'd be content to see him cut their throats with his own hand.

HEGIO *[stopping on his way out]*: Did I hear someone speak?

ERGASILUS: It's me – what's left of me, for I'm pining and starving and wasting and fading away with grief and sympathy for you.

I'm worn to a shadow, nothing but skin and bone. I can't seem to enjoy anything I eat at home, though every mouthful I take elsewhere does me a power of good.

HEGIO: Well, good morning to you, Ergasilus.

ERGASILUS *[with exaggerated sympathy]*: May the gods be kind to you, Hegio.

HEGIO: Cheer up; there's nothing to weep about.

ERGASILUS: Nothing to weep about? Can I help weeping for the fate of your dear boy, such a fine fellow as he was?

HEGIO: Of course I have always known what a good friend you were to him; and he to you, I believe.

ERGASILUS: Ah yes; a man never knows the value of what he possesses, until he has lost it. Only since your son fell into enemy hands have I realized what he meant to me, and now I miss him terribly.

HEGIO: And how do you think a father feels, at losing his only son, if his loss can so affect a stranger?

ERGASILUS: A stranger? I a stranger to him? Oh, Hegio, don't say that; don't think that; as he is your only son, so he was my only - my more than only - friend.

HEGIO: It is good of you indeed to feel your friend's misfortune as your own. But come, don't give way to grief.

ERGASILUS: Oh, but it hurts me so . . . [*clutching his stomach*] this is where it hurts. All my eating equipment has been put out of commission.

HEGIO [*joining pleasantly in the joke*]: Haven't you been able to find anyone in the meantime to recommission it for you?

ERGASILUS: What do you think? Since dear Philopolemus was taken prisoner, the commission he held is going begging; not a soul will touch it.

HEGIO: I am not surprised that no one will undertake his commission. You need such an enormous army to keep you going; you need a bakery corps, and that includes breadmakers and pastry cooks; you need a flying squad, to catch your game and poultry; and marines to look after the fishing.

ERGASILUS [*delighted with the old man's wit*]: What genius lurks in unsuspected places! Here's a born commander unemployed.

HEGIO: But don't be downhearted, my dear fellow. I am confident that I shall have him back home in a few days. As you see, I've got a young Elian prisoner here, a son of a very rich and aristocratic family. I count on being able to exchange him -

ERGASILUS: I hope you will, with the help of heaven. But now, sir, are you invited out anywhere for dinner today?

HEGIO: Not so far as I know. Why do you ask?

ERGASILUS: Because this is my birthday; and it would give me great pleasure to . . . be invited to dinner with you.

HEGIO: Ha, ha! That was sharp of you. Well, all right, if you can put up with simple fare.

ERGASILUS: Not too simple, I hope; I get plenty of that at home. Right, then - going, going, gone . . . 'subject to the purchase price being satisfactory to the vendor and his associates' . . . I'm for sale, you see, like a plot of land.

HEGIO: A plot of land? More like a yawning pit, I should say. But if you're coming, come in time.

ERGASILUS: I'm ready now.

HEGIO: You'd do better to go and catch your hare; at present you've only got a hedgehog. It's stony ground I live on.

ERGASILUS: Ah, no, you can't put me off like that, Hegio. I shall come with my teeth well shod.

HEGIO: They'll have rough work to do.

ERGASILUS: Why, do you eat brambles?

HEGIO: No, but I live off the soil.

ERGASILUS: Pork, then? That lives off the soil.

HEGIO: I use a lot of herbs.

ERGASILUS: You ought to be a doctor. Well . . . I'll see you, then?

HEGIO: Don't be late.

ERGASILUS: As if I needed telling! [*He goes away.*]

HEGIO: I must go and look at my accounts, and see how much money I've got in the bank. After that I shall be going to my brother's, as I said. [*He goes into the house.*]

[*The GUARD now comes out again, with one or more assistants, parading several prisoners of war; among them are TYNDARUS and PHILOCRAATES, now not linked together, but more lightly chained.*]

GUARD: Now, you men . . . if it's God's will that you have to be the unlucky ones, the best thing you can do is to take it patiently; that way, it won't seem so hard. You were free men at home, I dare say; now you're slaves, and if you're wise you'll accept that, and accept your master's orders, and use your commonsense to make your position as comfortable as possible. What your master orders is right, even if it seems to you wrong.

[*The prisoners weep and groan.*]

And there's no need to weep and groan. We can see you're unhappy without that. When in trouble, keep your pecker up; that's the best way.

TYNDARUS: We can't help feeling sorry for ourselves, chained up like this.

GUARD: The master would feel sorry for himself, wouldn't he, if he let you off your chains, let you go loose after paying good money for you?

TYNDARUS: What is he afraid of? We know our duty, and would respect it, if he let us go unchained.

GUARD: Ho, would you? I know what you're up to; you're planning an escape.

PHILOCRATES: We escape? Where should we escape to?

GUARD: Back to where you live, I expect.

PHILOCRATES: Oh rubbish; we're not the sort of men to behave like runaways.

GUARD: Well, I wouldn't be the one to discourage you – if you got the chance.

TYNDARUS [*approaching the Guard confidentially*]: Just do us one favour, will you?

GUARD: What's that?

TYNDARUS: Let me and my friend have a word together where you and these others can't hear us.

GUARD: Certainly. [*To the other prisoners*] Move away, you men. [*To his assistants*] We'll go over here . . . But make it short.

TYNDARUS: That's what I meant to do. [*To Philocrates*] Come this way.

GUARD [*to some prisoners still remaining*]: Clear off, you; leave them alone.

TYNDARUS: Thank you; we are both very grateful to you for giving us this opportunity to . . . do what we want to do.

PHILOCRATES [*quietly to Tyndarus*]: I think we had better go farther off, don't you? We don't want any of them overhearing our talk, or the whole scheme will be out.

[*They remove themselves as far as possible from the rest.*]

A clever trick is no trick at all unless it's neatly executed; it's sheer murder if the secret gets out. Now, you are pretending to be my master, and I am pretending to be your slave; all right; but we've still got to keep our eyes open and go carefully, if we want to bring this off coolly, without a hitch, and without giving the game away. We've taken on a big thing; we can't afford to go to sleep on it.

TYNDARUS: I won't disappoint you, sir.

PHILOCRATES: I hope you won't.

TYNDARUS: And I don't need to tell you that to save your dear life I'm offering to sell my own dear life for a song.

PHILOCRATES: I know it.

TYNDARUS: You won't forget it, I hope, when you've got what you want. It's a way most men have, to be on their best behaviour when they're asking for something they want, and as soon as they've got

it turn as nasty and deceitful as a man can be. So I hope *you* won't disappoint *me*. And what I say to you, I'd say to my own father.

PHILOCRATES: I could almost call *you* my own father, if I dared. You have always been a second father to me.

TYNDARUS: Yes, I have.

PHILOCRATES: That is why I can't remind you too often of our new roles; I am not your master any longer; I am your slave. This is the one important thing; I must beg and implore you – since the gods have seen fit to make me, your former master, now your fellow-slave, so that instead of ordering you as I had a right to do before, I must now beseech you – remember our dangerous position, remember that we are both slaves here, as a result of the fortune of war, remember my father's kindness to you, remember your duty to me now as well as when you were my slave; and above all, while remembering who you were, remember who you are now.

TYNDARUS: I've got all that clear, sir; for the present I am you and you are me.

PHILOCRATES: Good; as long as you never forget that, there is hope of success for our scheme.

[*HEGIO comes out again.*]

HEGIO [*to someone within*]: I'll be back in a minute; I want to ask these men something . . . But where are they?

[*The other prisoners have by now been removed from the scene,*

TYNDARUS and PHILOCRATES remaining in a secluded corner, with one guard keeping an eye on them.]

Where are the men I had brought out here?

PHILOCRATES [*coming forward*]: You're taking good care we don't get far away, master, chained as we are and watched on every side.

HEGIO [*in a cheerful humour*]: No care is too much care for a man who is taking care not to be duped; as often as not, a man who thinks he has taken care enough, with all his caution finds himself caught out. Don't you think I have good reason to have you carefully watched, eh? . . . after paying an enormous price for you in ready cash?

PHILOCRATES: Oh certainly, sir, we have no right to think ill of you for looking after us – nor you of us, if we should happen to escape, given the chance.

there will depend on your treatment of me here; he will reward kindness with kindness, I am sure; and unkindness with its like.

You long to see your son again; so does my father long to see me.

HEGIO: I do not forget that. Now do you confirm what your servant has told me?

TYNDARUS: I confirm that my father is a wealthy man in our country, and that our family is one of the highest. But I must beg you, sir, not to let my wealth tempt you into fantastic expectations; although I am his only son, my father might see fit to leave me here, well fed and clothed at your expense, rather than reduce himself to poverty at home, where he would have to bear the brunt of the disgrace.

HEGIO: Oh, as to that, I am as well off as I need to be, thanks to the gods and my forebears. Nor do I consider every bit of profit an unmixed blessing to a man. I am quite sure that many a man has been corrupted by profit; there are even times when a loss can be more beneficial than a gain. I have no good word for gold; it has too often tempted too many people into wrongdoing. Just you listen to me, then we shall both know what I have in mind. My son is a prisoner and a slave in your land of Elis; you get him back for me, and you needn't give me a penny of ransom more than that; I shall let you and your servant go free on those terms – but on no others.

TYNDARUS: That is a most fair and honourable proposition, sir; it is the offer of a gentleman. Can you tell me whether your son is a slave in private ownership or in the public service?

HEGIO: He is the property of a doctor named Menarchus.

PHILOCRATES [*breaking in impulsively*]: Well! He is one of my master's clients! [*To Tyndarus*] Sir, this'll be as easy as falling off a log!

[*TYNDARUS gives him a stern look, and he moves away again.*]

HEGIO: Then you can use your influence to get my son ransomed.

TYNDARUS: I'll do that, sir. But there is one thing –

HEGIO: What? I'll do anything to help you, provided it is not against my own interests.

TYNDARUS: I'll explain, sir. I don't, of course, expect you to let me go before your son arrives back here. But I would like you to let me send my servant, on bail, to my father, so that he can arrange for your son's ransom.

HEGIO: No . . . I think I would rather send one of my own men, as soon as we have an armistice, who could get in touch with your father and be relied on to carry out your instructions exactly.

TYNDARUS: I'm afraid it will be useless to send a stranger to my father; you would only be wasting your time. Why not send my man, sir? He'll settle the whole business, once he gets there. I assure you, no man you could send would be more reliable or more likely to be trusted by my father; there isn't a slave in the world he thinks more highly of, or to whom he would more readily entrust his own son. To set your mind at rest, sir, I'll answer with my life for his fidelity; I know I can depend on him, because he knows I am his good friend.

HEGIO: Very well . . . if that is what you wish, I will send him, on bail, and on your recognizance.

TYNDARUS: It is what I wish; and I wish it to be done as soon as possible.

HEGIO: And if he doesn't come back – would you agree to paying me a forfeit of, say, two thousand drachmas?

TYNDARUS: Fair enough.

HEGIO [*to a Guard*]: Release this man at once – in fact release both of them. [*Their chains are removed, Tyndarus's first.*]

TYNDARUS: May the gods give you every blessing, sir, for treating me so honourably, and for letting me off the chain. [*Aside*] I feel better already, with that collar off my collarbone.

HEGIO: It does a good man good to do a good turn to another good man. Now, if you're going to send your lad home, you had better have a word with him, give him his instructions and tell him what you want him to say to your father. Shall I send him to you?

TYNDARUS: Please do.

[*PHILOCRATES has been having his chains removed; HEGIO goes over to him.*]

HEGIO: Now, young man; in an enterprise which we hope will be to the benefit of myself, my son, and you two men, I order you, as your new master, to pay careful attention to the instructions of your former master. I have put you at his disposal, on a bail of two thousand drachmas, and he proposes to send you on an errand to his father, with the object of ransoming my son from his captivity

in your country, and so effecting a mutual exchange of sons between us.

PHILOCRATES: I am your willing servant, sir, and his; use me as your wheel; I will spin this way or that, as you require.

HEGIO: I am glad to see that you accept your servitude in the proper spirit; and you will find that your willingness will be to your own advantage as much as anyone else's. Come this way. [*To Tyndarus*] He's yours.

TYNDARUS: Thank you, sir; it is good of you to grant my request and let me send this man back to my parents; he will be able to give my father a full account of what I am doing here and what I want him to do for me there. [*To Philocrates*] Listen ... Tyndarus; the gentleman and I have agreed that I am to send you home to my father, on bail; if you fail to return, I am to pay a forfeit of two thousand drachmas.

PHILOCRATES: I think that's an excellent arrangement, sir. Your father will be expecting to hear from us, either by me or some other messenger.

TYNDARUS: Yes; well now, listen carefully to the message I want you to take home to my father, a message from us here to my father at home.

PHILOCRATES: Sir ... Philocrates ... you can depend on me to do my very best to promote your interests, as I have always done, wherever we have been, in the past; to that end I shall strive with all my heart and mind and attention.

TYNDARUS: That is what I should expect of you. Listen to this then: in the first place, give my greetings to mother and father, and our family, and any other kind friends you may meet; say that I am in good health here, and that the master whom I serve is one of the best and is treating me - has always treated me - with the utmost consideration.

PHILOCRATES: No need to remind me of that, sir; I shall never forget it.

TYNDARUS: Well, it's true. Except for having a guard at hand, I feel just like a free man. Then tell my father about the agreement this gentleman and I have come to about the exchange of his son.

PHILOCRATES: You needn't repeat that either, sir. I shall remember.

TYNDARUS: He is to ransom Hegio's son and send him back here in exchange for us two.

PHILOCRATES: I know.

HEGIO: But it must be soon; at the earliest possible moment; that is what we should both desire.

PHILOCRATES: You may be sure, sir, he is as anxious to see his son again as you are.

HEGIO: Of course, I love my son, as every father does.

PHILOCRATES: Are there any other messages for your father, sir?

TYNDARUS: Only ... that I am quite well; and ... don't be afraid to speak up for yourself, Tyndarus ... say that you and I have always hit it off well together, that you have never misbehaved yourself, nor had I any occasion to be hard with you; that you have been a good servant to me in all that we have been through ... a slave who has never failed his master, in act or thought, in any danger or adversity. I am sure, Tyndarus, when my father hears this - when he hears of your devotion to his son and to himself - even his hard heart will not be able to deny you the free gift of your freedom; in any case, if I get safely back from here, I shall use all my efforts to make him agree to give it to you. It is thanks to your efforts, your kindness, your courage - yes, and your cleverness, in revealing to our master the truth about my family and my wealth - that I now have this chance to return to my parents; your cleverness, in fact, has delivered your master from his bonds.

PHILOCRATES: It was, as you say, sir, my doing; and I am glad you do not forget it. But I have done no more than you deserve. Oh ... Philocrates ... if I were to speak again of all your many kindnesses to me, night would end the day before I had finished; you could not have done more for me if you had been my slave.

HEGIO: God bless me, what fine young men they are, and so devoted to each other; it brings tears to my eyes ... to hear a slave speak so highly of his master.

PHILOCRATES [*perhaps inadvertently forgetting which is the slave*]: The compliments he has paid me, sir, are not a hundredth part of what he himself deserves.

HEGIO [*not noticing the lapse, if it was one*]: Anyway, my man, now is your chance to crown your good record with this supreme benefaction, if you perform your errand faithfully.

PHILOCRATES: My wish to see it done, sir, will be equalled by my zeal in doing it. To assure you - I swear, as Jove Almighty is my witness, that I will never forget my duty to Philocrates.

HEGIO: Spoken like a man.

PHILOCRATES: And that there is nothing I would not do for him as I would do it for myself.

TYNDARUS: All I ask is that you confirm those words in act and deed. But there is one thing more that I would wish to say - and I hope you will not take it ill ... Tyndarus. In case I have not sufficiently impressed upon you what I expect of you ... remember this above all: you are being allowed to go home, on bail, on my responsibility; I remain here, staking my life on your return. You will not forget me, I hope, as soon as you are out of my sight ... you will not forget me, left here to slave it out for your sake ... while you count yourself a free man, breaking your bond, and never giving another thought to your task of saving me by bringing this man's son home. There is a price of two thousand drachmas on your head, remember. Be true to one who has always been true to you; let nothing shake you from your duty. I am sure my father will do what is right by us; it is for you to make me your friend for ever, and gain a new friend in our friend here [*indicating Hegio*]. So then ... your hand in mine ... I ask you again, be as true to me as I have been to you ... Now off you go; all my life and hope goes with you; from now on you are my master, my protector ... my father.

PHILOCRATES: I understand all you say, sir. Will it do if I come back with all your wishes accomplished?

TYNDARUS: That'll do.

PHILOCRATES: I shall come back with a prize that will satisfy you, and (*to Hegio*) you, sir. Is that all, then?

TYNDARUS: Only come back as soon as you can.

PHILOCRATES: Of course.

HEGIO: Come with me to my banker's, and I will give you money for your journey; at the same time we'll get you a passport from the praetor.

TYNDARUS: A passport?

HEGIO: He'll have to show it to the army authorities, in order to obtain permission to leave the country. You can go in, Philocrates

TYNDARUS: Good luck - Tyndarus!

PHILOCRATES: Goodbye - Philocrates!

[*TYNDARUS goes into the house.*]

HEGIO: Well, I certainly did the right thing for myself when I bought those two prisoners of war. Now, God, willing, I have rescued my son from captivity. And yet for some time I was in two minds whether to buy them or not. [*To the Guards*] You men, kindly keep a careful watch on that man inside; he is not to be allowed out anywhere without a guard. I shall be back very soon; I'm only going to have a look at my other prisoners at my brother's house. I might inquire at the same time whether there is anyone there who knows this man I've got. [*To Philocrates*] But the first thing to be done is to see you safely off. Come along, my boy. [*They go.*]

★

[*An hour later. ERGASILUS comes from the town, tired and dejected.*]

ERGASILUS: Pity the man who has to go looking for food for himself and has a hard job finding it. And pity still more the man who has a hard job looking for it and doesn't find it! There's nothing worse than having an empty stomach and nothing to put in it. Curse this day! I'd like to give it a bash in the eye ... it's given everybody an extra allowance of uncharitableness towards me ... I've never seen a more extravagantly stingy day ... a more bloatedly barren day ... a more hopelessly unsuccessful and disappointed day. My throat and stomach have been celebrating a festival of starvation. So much for the parasitical profession - to hell with it! Young people nowadays turn their backs on the hungry humorist; they have no use for us hardy Spartans, the long-suffering bottom-benchers, traditional knock-takers, who have no money in the bank and no food in our larders - nothing but our witty conversation to live on. They only want the guests who are ready to return hospitality in their own homes. The young men even do their own shopping nowadays - which always used to be our job. And on the way back from town, they'll call in to bargain with a pimp, bold as you please and as straight-faced as a juryman pronouncing a verdict of guilty. No, they don't give tuppence for us jokers - they're far too fond of themselves.

I'll tell you – just after I left you, I went up to some young fellows in the forum. 'Good morning, fellows', I said, 'where are we lunching?' Dead silence. 'Any takers? Do I hear someone say "With me"?' All dumb as mutes; not even a smile. 'What about dinner, then?' The gentlemen shake their heads. So I told them a funny story, one of my best, one I could have dined out on for a month in the old days. Nobody laughed. Of course it was a conspiracy – I could see that at once. Laugh? – not one of them could bring himself to show his teeth and grin like a dog. So I left them, seeing that I was being made a laughing-stock of. I went on to another group, then another, then another; same story; all in a plot, like the oil-merchants in the Velabrum. Well, I had enough of being made a fool of down there, so I came away. There were some other poor devils like me prowling about in the forum too, wasting their time. I'll get my own back, though; I'll prosecute them, that's what I'll do, under the law they have in certain foreign countries – I shall bring an action against persons who have conspired to deprive us of life and maintenance, and I shall demand damages – ten dinners each, to be given at the time chosen by me; that'll be when provisions are most expensive. That'll settle them. Now I'll go and try the harbour; that's my only remaining dinner-prospect. If there's nothing doing there, I shall be back here to partake of the old gentleman's hard tack. [*He goes off.*]

[*From the direction of the town, HEGIO now returns, in very good humour; he is followed, at a little distance, by a new prisoner, ARISTOPHONTES, with guards keeping an eye on him, though the prisoner himself is unchained.*]

HEGIO: I must say it makes a man feel pleased with himself, to have done a good stroke of business and contributed to the common good at the same time. That is what I did yesterday when I bought those prisoners. I can't move a yard without someone coming up to congratulate me. But oh dear, it's a fatiguing business being stopped and buttonholed at every turn; I've barely escaped with my life from the ovation. However, I managed to reach the praetor's office and, as soon as I could recover my breath, asked for the passport. They gave it to me without demur; and I gave it to Tyndarus; and he's now on his way home. That done, I made tracks for home too; but first I looked in at my brother's, where

my other prisoners are. I asked if there was anyone among them who knew Philocrates of Elis; and eventually this man spoke up and said he knew him very well. 'I've got him at my house,' I said; whereupon the fellow begged and besought me to let him see his friend. I immediately ordered his release, and here he is. [*He summons Aristophontes*] Now, young man, if you'll come with me, you shall have your wish and meet your friend.

[*A moment earlier, TYNDARUS has peeped out of the house and seen what is happening. By concealing himself in some corner, he manages to escape notice while HEGIO takes ARISTOPHONTES into the house, and is now alone outside.*]

TYNDARUS: Oh my goodness, now I'd much rather be dead than alive! Now all hope and help and support are lost and gone for ever. It's goodbye to life for me today – exit, and no way out of the exit! Not a chance to cheer me up. Not a shred of hope to cover the nakedness of my subtle scheme of deception, or mask the fraudulence of my pretensions; no excuse for my duplicity, no escape for my sins, no asylum for my audacity, no shelter for my shrewdness. The secret is out, the plot uncovered, the cat out of the bag. Nothing is left for me now but to meet ignominious death, taking upon myself my master's doom – and my own. And the cause of my destruction is that man who has just gone in there – Aristophontes; he knows me; he's a friend of Philocrates, and related to him. So now Salvation herself could not save me if she wanted to. There is nothing to be done, unless my brain can invent some further ingenuity. But what? Damn it, what ingenuity? Can I think of anything? Not a thing; it's hopeless; I haven't a chance.

[*HEGIO and ARISTOPHONTES come out again.*]

HEGIO: Where in the world has that fellow got to? He must have just bolted out of the house.

TYNDARUS: Your hour has come, Tyndarus; the enemy are upon you. Is there anything I can say – any story I can tell? Anything I can confess or deny? It's touch and go . . . but what's my luck worth? If only the gods could have removed Aristophontes from the world before he was removed from his country . . . instead of letting him come and upset everything I had set up. If I can't think of one more stupendous lie, this is the end.

[HEGIO has been searching around, in and out of the house, and now discovers Tyndarus.]

HEGIO: Why, here he is. [To Aristophontes] Come along, here's your friend; go and speak to him.

TYNDARUS: Who'd be in my shoes now? [He attempts to avoid Aristophontes.]

ARISTOPHONTES: Well, Tyndarus! What's all this? Why are you trying to avoid my sight, turning your back on me as if I were a stranger – as if you'd never seen me before? I know we're both slaves now; but I was a free man at home, while you have been a slave in Elis ever since you were a boy.

HEGIO: Tyndarus? I'm not surprised he doesn't want to meet you, or look at you, or have anything to do with you, if you call him Tyndarus when his name is really Philocrates.

TYNDARUS [in a flash of desperate inspiration]: Please, sir, don't take any notice of his ramblings; he was known to be a lunatic in Elis. He once attacked his father and mother with a spear, in their own house; and from time to time he suffers from epileptic fits. You had better come farther away from him.

HEGIO [in alarm]: Keep that man away from me! [The guards restrain Aristophontes.]

ARISTOPHONTES [to Tyndarus]: What do you mean, damn you? I a lunatic . . . attacked my parents with a spear . . . had epileptic fits?

HEGIO: It's nothing to be alarmed about, my good man; it's a disease many people suffer from, and they have usually been helped, even cured, by being spat on.

ARISTOPHONTES: Do you mean to say you believe him too?

HEGIO: Believe him?

ARISTOPHONTES: Believe that I am mad?

TYNDARUS: Take care, sir; he looks very dangerous. You had better leave us, sir. As I said, there's a fit coming on; be careful.

HEGIO: Of course I could tell he was insane, the moment he called you Tyndarus.

TYNDARUS: Oh yes, he sometimes forgets his own name – doesn't know who he is.

HEGIO: But he did say that you were a friend of his.

TYNDARUS: It's the first I've heard of it! Unless Alcmaeon and Orestes and Lycurgus are friends of mine too!

ARISTOPHONTES: You miserable cur! How dare you speak like that of me! Not know you indeed!

HEGIO: It's perfectly obvious you don't know him, when you call him Tyndarus instead of Philocrates. You are speaking of a man who isn't here; the man who is here is someone you don't know.

ARISTOPHONTES: On the contrary, he is pretending to be someone else and denying that he's the person he is.

TYNDARUS: You seem to be setting up your word against that of your friend Philocrates?

ARISTOPHONTES: As I see it, you are setting up plain falsehood against the simple truth. Look at me, for God's sake.

TYNDARUS: Well?

ARISTOPHONTES: Now then – do you deny that your name is Tyndarus?

TYNDARUS: I do.

ARISTOPHONTES: And you say your name is Philocrates?

TYNDARUS: I do.

ARISTOPHONTES [to Hegio]: Do you believe him?

HEGIO: I'd rather believe him than you. Indeed I couldn't believe myself more – for the man you take him for has this very morning left for Elis, to visit this man's father.

ARISTOPHONTES: This man's father? But this man is a slave.

TYNDARUS [still hoping Aristophontes will understand]: So are you a slave – now – though you were a freeman at home; and a freeman is what I hope to be again, if I succeed in bringing this man's son home to freedom.

ARISTOPHONTES: You scoundrel! Are you now claiming that you are a freeman by birth?

TYNDARUS: No! I am a Philocrates by birth!

ARISTOPHONTES: You see, Hegio, the rascal is just playing with us. He's a slave right enough; and if he ever *had* a slave it was himself!

TYNDARUS: Just because you have been reduced to poverty in your own country and haven't a penny to live on, you want to make out that everyone is in the same case. It doesn't surprise me; beggars are always spiteful and envious of respectable people.

ARISTOPHONTES: Hegio, I warn you not to go on putting your blind trust in this man. It's clear to me, he's scored a hit against you

already. That story of his hoping to ransom your son – I don't like it at all.

TYNDARUS: I know you don't like it; but I shall do it, God willing.
[*Trying to get it across to Aristophontes*] I shall get this man's son back, and then *he* will return me to my father in Elis. That is why I have sent *Tyndarus* with a message to *my* father.

ARISTOPHONTES: But *you* are Tyndarus; there's certainly no other slave of that name in Elis.

TYNDARUS: Must you go on taunting me with being a slave, when I have only become one as a result of war?

ARISTOPHONTES: Oh! . . . I shall burst!

TYNDARUS: Hear him, sir! Fly for your life. Have him arrested or he'll be attacking us with stones.

ARISTOPHONTES: It's unbearable!

TYNDARUS: Look how his eyes flash! This is it, Hegio. Look at those livid blotches all over his body. He's suffering from black bile.

ARISTOPHONTES: If this gentleman had any sense, you'd be suffering under black pitch at the stake and your head a flaming torch.

TYNDARUS: Delirious. He's possessed of a devil.

HEGIO: Do you think I should have him put under restraint?

TYNDARUS: It would be much the wisest thing.

ARISTOPHONTES: Oh! Why haven't I got a stone to bash the villain's brains out with, before he drives me raving mad with his nonsense!

TYNDARUS: You hear that? A stone.

ARISTOPHONTES: Hegio, please let me have a word with you alone.

HEGIO: Say what you want from over there. I'm listening.

TYNDARUS: That's right. If you go too near him he may bite your nose off.

ARISTOPHONTES: For pity's sake, Hegio, don't believe I am mad, or ever have been, or have ever had the sickness as he alleges. Look – you can have me chained up, if you're afraid of me; I have no objection, provided he is chained up too.

TYNDARUS: There you are, Hegio, chain him up, if he has no objection – but not me.

ARISTOPHONTES: Shut up, you. I'll find some way of proving that you're really Tyndarus, though you call yourself Philocrates . . . What are you glowering at me for?

TYNDARUS: Am I glowering?

ARISTOPHONTES [*to Hegio*]: I don't know what he'd be doing if you weren't here.

HEGIO [*to Tyndarus*]: Don't you think I had better go and talk to the madman?

TYNDARUS: What's the use? He'll only bluff you with a lot of nonsense you can't make head or tail of. Dress him up in the proper costume and he'd be mad Ajax to the life.

HEGIO: I don't care; I'm going to talk to him. [*He goes over to Aristophontes.*]

TYNDARUS [*aside*]: Now I'm done for. I'm between the axe and the altar now. I don't know what more I can do.

HEGIO: Well, Aristophontes, I'm listening. What is it you want to say?

ARISTOPHONTES: What I want to tell you is the truth, which you persist in disbelieving. But in the first place, I want to put you right about me; I am *not* insane, and there's nothing wrong with me – except that I'm a prisoner. And I swear – as I pray Almighty God to restore me to my native land – that man is no more Philocrates than you or I.

HEGIO: Good gracious! Who is he, then?

ARISTOPHONTES: I've been telling you ever since I came here who he is. If I'm wrong, I am willing to forfeit home and liberty and stay here as your prisoner for ever.

HEGIO [*to Tyndarus*]: And what have you to say for yourself?

TYNDARUS: I say that I am your servant and you are my master.

HEGIO: That's not the question. Were you once a free man?

TYNDARUS: I was.

ARISTOPHONTES: Rubbish! He never was.

TYNDARUS: What do you know about it? How can you be so sure – you weren't my mother's midwife, were you?

ARISTOPHONTES: We met as children.

TYNDARUS: And now we meet as adults – that's my answer to that. And I'd be glad if you would stop meddling with my business; I'm not meddling with yours, am I?

HEGIO [*to Aristophontes*]: Was his father Thesaurochrysonicochrysidēs?

ARISTOPHONTES: No, he wasn't; and I've never heard of such a name before. But Philocrates's father was Theodoromides.

[*Hegio remembers this, and is nearly convinced.*]

TYNDARUS [*aside*]: My hour has come. Stop beating, my heart . . . or go to the devil and be damned . . . if you're going to jump up and down like this, while I can hardly stand still for fear.

HEGIO: Then this man was a slave in Elis, and he is not Philocrates at all? Can I take that as proved?

ARISTOPHONTES: Proved beyond all possible doubt. But where, then, is Philocrates?

HEGIO: Where he most wants to be, and where I wish he wasn't! And in that case I've been made a fool of, had my tail twisted by this scheming villain; he only wanted to mislead me, and he's done it. But . . . are you sure . . . ?

ARISTOPHONTES: I've told you what I know and I am absolutely sure of my facts.

HEGIO: Beyond all doubt?

ARISTOPHONTES: Beyond all possible shadow of doubt. Philocrates and I have been friends since childhood.

HEGIO: What does your friend Philocrates look like? Describe him.

ARISTOPHONTES: Narrow face, sharp nose, light complexion, dark eyes, crisp curly hair, of a reddish tint.

HEGIO: That's the man.

TYNDARUS [*aside*]: And this is the man who's put his foot in it! Woe betide those birch-rods that are going to perish on my back today! . . .

HEGIO: I've been done!

TYNDARUS: Come on, chains . . . run and wrap yourselves round my legs and I'll look after you . . .

HEGIO: Yes, they've done me nicely, haven't they - those two damned prisoners? This one pretending to be the master and the other the slave! They've done me . . . cleaned out the nut and left me with the shell for a memento. Made a fool of me . . . flung the whole paint-pot in my face. But by God, this one is not going to have the last laugh. [*He rushes to his door*] Colaphus! Cordalio! Corax! Come out here, and bring straps with you!

[*Slaves come out.*]

A SLAVE: What's up, sir? You want some wood fetched?

HEGIO: Tie up this criminal.

[*The slaves deal with Tyndarus.*]

TYNDARUS: What's this for? What have I done?

HEGIO: You well may ask - when you're the man who has sowed and hoed, yes and reaped, all this crop of mischief.

TYNDARUS: Haven't you forgotten 'harrowed'? Harrowing always comes before hoeing on the best farms.

HEGIO: Look at him! Still standing up to me, as bold as brass.

TYNDARUS: Why shouldn't a poor innocent and harmless slave stand up for himself, particularly in his master's presence?

HEGIO: Tie up his hands, for goodness' sake - as tightly as you can.

TYNDARUS: Have them cut off, if you like; I'm your property.

But I'd like to know what the trouble is, and why you're so angry with me.

HEGIO: Because you . . . have taken it upon yourself . . . with your wicked, deceitful, lying imposture . . . to blow me and my project to smithereens, smash up all my hopes, bring all my plans and calculations to nothing. That's what you've done; you've used a trick to get Philocrates out of my hands. You made me believe he was the slave and you the master - didn't you - you said it was so, and exchanged your names for the purpose?

TYNDARUS: Yes . . . you are quite right . . . I confess it all. We tricked you into letting Philocrates go. I was the inventor and moving spirit of the plot. But still I ask, in all seriousness, can you be angry with me for it?

HEGIO: You did it, and you shall pay for it with the direst penalties.

TYNDARUS: I shall not complain - so long as I am not sent to my death as a criminal. Die I must, if my master does not honour his promise to return; but then what I have done will be remembered to my credit after I am dead - how I saved my master, when a prisoner, out of his captivity and out of the hands of his enemies, and sent him back to freedom, to his country and his father - how I chose to imperil my own life rather than let him die.

HEGIO: I hope you enjoy the credit of it in the next world.

TYNDARUS: To die in an act of courage is not to suffer everlasting death.

HEGIO: Death or everlasting death, I shan't mind what it's called, after I've treated you to the direst tortures and sent you to the stake. Once you're dead, they can say you're still alive, for all I care.

TYNDARUS: You do any such thing to me, and I swear you'll suffer for it, if my master comes back, as I am sure he will.

ARISTOPHONTES [*aside*]: Gods above! The whole thing is clear to me now. My friend Philocrates is free, and at home with his father. Well, I'm glad he is; I don't know anyone to whom I would wish better luck. But I am sorry to have done this poor fellow a bad turn; it's owing to me and my information that he is now in handcuffs.

HEGIO [*to Tyndarus*]: I warned you, didn't I, not to tell me anything but the truth?

TYNDARUS: You did, sir.

HEGIO: Then why did you dare to lie to me?

TYNDARUS: Because the truth would have harmed the man I was trying to help. As it is, my lies have helped to save him.

HEGIO: And will harm you instead.

TYNDARUS: As they should. At all events, I have saved, and am happy to have saved, the young master whom my elder master had put into my care. You think that a crime?

HEGIO: An atrocious crime.

TYNDARUS: Then I must beg to differ from you. I say it was right. Don't you think you would be grateful to any slave of yours who would do the same for your son? Would you not feel like giving that slave his freedom? Would you not call him the best slave you ever had? . . . Would you or wouldn't you?

HEGIO: I dare say I would.

TYNDARUS: Then why are you angry with me?

HEGIO: I am angry that you should have put your duty to him above your duty to me.

TYNDARUS: And I only yesterday taken prisoner, the most recent recruit to your service! Did you expect to be able to train me in twenty-four hours to be a better servant to you than to the man I have spent my life with?

HEGIO: I hope he'll be grateful to you for it. [*To the slaves*] Take him away, and fit him with the stoutest and heaviest chains you can find. [*To Tyndarus*] Then it's the stone-quarries for you; where, to every other man's eight blocks a day, you will produce half as much again, or your number will be Six Hundred . . . whiplashes.

ARISTOPHONTES: Hegio, by god and man, let me entreat you not to send him to his death.

HEGIO: Oh, they'll look after him all right. At night he'll be safely

under lock and key, and by day he'll be hewing stone underground. I want him to suffer as long as possible; you don't think I'll let him off with one day?

ARISTOPHONTES: Is that sentence irrevocable?

HEGIO: Irrevocable as death. Off with him! Take him straight to Hippolytus the blacksmith and get a stout pair of fetters clapped on to his legs. Then have him escorted outside the town and handed over to my freedman Cordalus, for the quarries. And say I want him to be given no less consideration . . . than the lowest class of prisoner.

TYNDARUS: Well, I will not plead for my life against your fixed resolve. What risk I stand under now is your risk too. If I die, I shall have no evil to fear in death; if I live, even to a great age, it is only a short time in which to endure the punishment you are putting upon me. Farewell, and be happy, little though you deserve it. And farewell, Aristophontes – as well as you have earned of me; it was you that brought me to this.

HEGIO: Take him away.

TYNDARUS: One last request, Hegio: if Philocrates does come back – please let me see him.

HEGIO: Take him out of my sight this minute, or you are all dead men!

[*TYNDARUS is roughly hustled away.*]

TYNDARUS: Help! Assault! Must I be dragged and pushed . . .

HEGIO: So off to prison with him, where he belongs. It'll be a lesson to those other prisoners not to try any such tricks. If it hadn't been for this young man who put me wise to the situation, they'd have gone on leading me by the nose with their cunning. By heaven, I'll never trust a living soul again; once is enough . . . But the pity of it is, I thought I had bought my son out of captivity; now that hope has vanished. One son I lost long ago, stolen by a slave at four years old, and never a trace of son or slave have I seen since; and now his elder brother is a prisoner of war. Why should I be so cursed? Have I begotten sons only to be left childless in my old age? . . . [*He turns to Aristophontes*] Come this way. You're going back to where you came from [*He hands him over to the guards.*] No one is going to get any of my pity, since there is none anywhere for me. [*He goes into his house.*]

ARISTOPHONTES: I thought that fate was offering me a chance of freedom; now it seems that re-imprisonment is to be my fate. [*He is led away.*]

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[*It is late afternoon when ERGASILUS returns from his promenade, but he returns a changed man.*]

ERGASILUS: Jupiter Almighty be praised! I am saved! I am a made man! Jupiter has blessed me, Jupiter is offering me gain and glory, joy and jollity, feasting and fun and fullness and fatness, food and drink to my belly's content, and happiness ever after. Never again need I go begging to any man. Now I am free to be good to my friends and be a pest to my enemies, for this blessed beautiful day has beatified me with its beatitude. I have become the beneficiary of a stupendous legacy – with no strings to it. And now I'm legging it as fast as I can to old Hegio . . . I've got something for him . . . I'm going to make him a present of everything he could possibly ask from heaven, and more. How shall I do it? . . . I know . . . I'll come on like the slave in a comedy, with my cloak bundled round my neck like this . . . running like blazes to be the first to bring him the news. [*He prepares to re-enter as described, giving an imitation of an excited messenger.*]

[*HEGIO comes out of his house.*]

HEGIO: The more I think about this unhappy affair, the more wretched I feel. That I should have been treated with such impertinence – and couldn't see through the imposture. I shall be the laughing-stock of the town, when it gets about. I shan't be able to go near the market-place without everyone saying: 'There goes that clever old gentleman who allowed himself to be made a mug of.' . . . Who's that over there? Is it Ergasilus? What is he doing with his cloak tucked up like that? . . .

[*ERGASILUS comes bustling in, acting like a person of importance who must not be delayed.*]

ERGASILUS: Hurry up, Ergasilus, hurry up, this is important . . . Make way, there, make way, in the name of the law, out of my way – anyone that's not tired of living! Anybody who stops me will find his head in the dust. [*He pantomimes with fists and elbows.*]

HEGIO [*aside in a corner*]: Here's someone looking for a fight.

ERGASILUS: I mean what I say . . . everybody keep to his own side of the street . . . no loitering here to talk business. This fist is a cannon-ball, this elbow's a catapult, this shoulder a battering-ram, and a knock with this knee will lay a man flat. Anybody I bump into will be left picking his teeth . . . up.

HEGIO: Why all this pugnacity? Extraordinary thing!

ERGASILUS: He won't forget this day or place, or person, for the rest of his life. Anyone stops me – I'll see that he stops living.

HEGIO: He must have got some big idea in his head, with all this bluster; I wonder what it is.

ERGASILUS [*now with the air of a constable controlling the market-place*]: And I don't want anyone getting into trouble unnecessarily, through his own fault; I give you fair warning – stay at home, keep out of my way or I might hurt you.

HEGIO: A full stomach is the only thing that can have given him such a conceit of himself. I'm sorry for the man who had to provide the meal that has made him so cocky.

ERGASILUS [*strutting about, appears to fancy himself as an inspector of nuisances*]: Yes, keep out of my way . . . keep out of my way, you pig-farming millers who feed bran to your swine, making such a stink that nobody dare go near your mill; if I catch sight of one of those pigs on the public highway, I'll make bran mash of its owner.

HEGIO: Giving orders like an emperor! He's had a good tuck-in somewhere – a bellyful of assurance.

ERGASILUS: And any fishmonger . . . jogging to town on a bone-shaking nag to offer rotten fish for sale and drive everybody out of the market-hall into the street by the smell of it – I'll wipe his face with his own fish-basket, to show him what other people have to put up with. And what about the butcher . . . who robs the poor ewes of their little darlings, and then, after pretending to have a young lamb freshly killed for a customer, palms him off with mutton, at twice the price . . . and what they call mutton is usually a tough old ram. Let me catch sight of old father ram on the high-road – he and his master will be sorry for themselves!

HEGIO: Issuing magistrates' bye-laws now, if you please! He must have been appointed market-inspector for Aetolia.

ERGASILUS [*returning to his normal character and manner*]: You see, I'm no longer anybody's paid table-companion, but a regular royal

king! My ship has come in – with a gigantic cargo of comestibles for my consumption! ... But I must waste no time in carrying the load of good news to Hegio. He's the lucky man now – the luckiest man on earth.

HEGIO: A load of good news for me? What can that be, I wonder?
[Still without observing Hegio, ERGASILUS goes to knock at his door.]

ERGASILUS: Where are you? Anyone there? Will someone open this door!

HEGIO: So now he has come to me for his supper, I suppose.

ERGASILUS: Open this door – both doors – before I batter them to bits.

HEGIO: I shall have to speak to him ... [Still from a distance, and perhaps partly concealed] Ergasilus!

ERGASILUS: Who calls me?

HEGIO: Look my way.

ERGASILUS [cautious, not looking]: That'll be more than Good Luck ever does, or will do. Who are you?

HEGIO: Look, it's me – Hegio.

ERGASILUS: Well! This is a pleasure ... best of my best friends ... I'm delighted to see you.

HEGIO [suspecting his effusiveness]: You didn't seem to want to see me; you've been down to the harbour and found someone else to give you a supper, eh?

ERGASILUS: Shake hands!

HEGIO: Shake hands?

ERGASILUS: Give me your hand – at once – please.

HEGIO [does so]: All right.

ERGASILUS: And smile.

HEGIO: Why should I smile?

ERGASILUS: Because I tell you to. Smile and be happy.

HEGIO: Happy! I've more cause for sorrow than happiness.

ERGASILUS: Never mind; I shall soon wipe every spot of sorrow off you. Be of good cheer and rejoice!

HEGIO: Very well, I rejoice; but I don't know what I have to rejoice about.

ERGASILUS: That's better. Now, go and give the orders –

HEGIO: What orders?

ERGASILUS: First, for a big blazing fire –

HEGIO: A blazing fire?

ERGASILUS: That's what I said – a huge fire.

HEGIO: Oh indeed, you carnivorous creature! You think I'm going to set my house on fire to suit your pleasure?

ERGASILUS: Now, now, don't be offended. Surely you could oblige me by telling your staff to get the pots on the hob, and all the dishes washed out ... and some bacon on to boil, and ... a feast of good things frizzling on the fire. And send someone out shopping for fish.

HEGIO: The man must be day-dreaming!

ERGASILUS: And another for pork, and lamb, and poultry ...

HEGIO: You know what's good for you – when you can get it!

ERGASILUS: And mussel, and lamprey, and pickled mackerel, and stingray, and tunny ... and cream cheese.

HEGIO: Easier said than ... eaten, in my house, Ergasilus.

ERGASILUS: But you don't think I'm asking all this for *myself*, do you?

HEGIO: At my table you won't starve, I promise you, but you'll get no more than enough; so you had better bring no more than a normal appetite.

ERGASILUS: Ah, go on; I can make you so eager to make a spread, there'll be no holding you.

HEGIO: I, make a spread?

ERGASILUS: You.

HEGIO: My master, are you?

ERGASILUS: No, your benefactor. Will you let me make your happiness complete?

HEGIO: I'd prefer it to complete misery.

ERGASILUS: Give me your hand!

HEGIO [resigned]: There it is ...

ERGASILUS: The gods are with you!

HEGIO: I can't say I've noticed it.

ERGASILUS: You would – if you were a *woodman* – ha, ha! But do please tell your people to get the holy vessels ready for the service ... immediately ... and order a prime fat lamb.

HEGIO: What for?

ERGASILUS: For the sacrifice.

HEGIO: To what god, forsooth?

ERGASILUS: To me, bless your heart, to me! I am now your Jupiter Almighty, your Salvation, your Fortune, your Light, your Gladness, your Felicity; I am one in all, and all in one. Here is the god whom you must propitiate with fatness.

HEGIO: You're looking for a meal, I take it?

ERGASILUS: That's right, but *I* take it.

HEGIO: Oh well, have your way. I'll consent to anything.

ERGASILUS: Your habit from boyhood, I believe.

HEGIO: And damn your insults.

ERGASILUS: You should be damned . . . damned grateful to me for the news I have for you. I've just come from the harbour, man . . . with a load of luck for you. That's why I want to be your guest.

HEGIO [*tired of him*]: Oh go away, you idiot. You've lost your chance; you're too late.

ERGASILUS: You'd have had more reason to say that if I had come earlier. As it is, I come to bring you joy; listen - I have seen, a few minutes ago, at the harbour, your son Philopolemus - seen him, I tell you, alive, safe and well, in the state launch; and with him that young Elian prisoner, and your slave Stalagmus, the one who ran away from you, taking your four-year-old son with him.

HEGIO: The devil damn you! You're making a fool of me.

ERGASILUS: No, Hegio! By Saint Abundance, and may she bestow her name upon me for ever, I swear, I saw him.

HEGIO: You saw my son?

ERGASILUS: I saw your son - my divine protector.

HEGIO: And that Elian prisoner?

ERGASILUS: Ay, by Apollo.

HEGIO: And that wretched slave Stalagmus who stole my child?

ERGASILUS: Ay, by Cora.

HEGIO: Is it possible?

ERGASILUS: Ay, by Praeneste.

HEGIO: After all this time?

ERGASILUS: Ay, by Signia.

HEGIO: You're positive?

ERGASILUS: Ay, by Frusino.

HEGIO: Please -

ERGASILUS: Ay, by Alatrium. [*He has been invoking the names of*

towns in the neighbourhood of Rome, supposedly harsh to his native Greek tongue - and perhaps to be varied, ad lib, at different performances.]

HEGIO: Why do you take oaths by those outlandish places?

ERGASILUS: Because they are jaw-breakers, like your meals.

HEGIO: Plagues on your head!

ERGASILUS: On yours, if you won't believe the solemn truth I'm telling you. This Stalagmus - what nationality was he of, when you last saw him?

HEGIO: Sicilian.

ERGASILUS: Well, he's now a Slav - with a slave's collar to wear . . . married to a ball and chain, I reckon . . . so he can get children of his own . . .

HEGIO: For heaven's sake, tell me, on your word of honour, is all this true?

ERGASILUS: On my word of honour.

HEGIO: Gods above! This is new life for me - if it *is* true.

ERGASILUS: Do you mean to say you still have doubts, when I have sworn on my solemn oath? All right, then, if an oath isn't good enough for you, go down to the harbour and see for yourself.

HEGIO: I certainly will. You go and see to things in the house. Take anything you want, ask for anything, help yourself out of the store room. I make you my butler.

ERGASILUS: So heaven help me, if my prophecy doesn't come true, you can trounce me with a truncheon.

HEGIO: And if it does . . . you shall have free maintenance for life.

ERGASILUS: Who will supply that?

HEGIO: I and my son.

ERGASILUS: Promise?

HEGIO: Promise.

ERGASILUS: And I promise you your son has come back.

HEGIO: Get us a good dinner ready! [*He hurries off*]

ERGASILUS: Have a good walk - and a happy return! . . . So there he goes . . . and leaves me in supreme control of the victuals! Oho, gods in heaven! Watch me decapitating carcasses! Ho, for the slaughter among the swine, the pestilence upon the pork! Let tripes tremble and crackling crumble, butchers and bacon-curers faint with fatigue! Let . . . no, let us not waste time enumerating all that may contribute to the stomach's sustenance. I go - to sit in

judgement on the bacon, and put out of their misery the poor hams hanging in the balance. [*He goes into the house.*]

[*A brief interval, punctuated by sounds of commotion within, indicates turmoil in the kitchen, until a BOY escapes from the fray.*]

BOY: May all the gods damn that Ergasilus and his greedy guts; and damn all the tribe of cadgers and all who support them from now on. It's chaos, ruin, and riot in that house. The man is like a ravenous wolf; I was afraid he would attack me too. One look at his hungry jaws and gnashing teeth, and I had to run for my life. In he comes and tears down the meat-rack and everything on it; grabs a weapon and chops the collops off three carcasses; smashes up pots and dishes, all except the biggest ones. I heard him asking the cook if the brine vats couldn't be used for boiling! Then he goes through all the pantries, breaking down doors and opening cupboards. [*He calls through the door*] Watch him, lads! I'm going to look for the old man and tell him he'd better lay in fresh supplies if he wants any for himself; at the rate this fellow's laying on, everything must be about used up, or soon will be. [*He goes off.*]

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[*HEGIO is now on his way back from the harbour, and with him come his ransomed son PHILOPOLEMUS, the slave STALAGMUS, and PHILOCRAATES.*]

HEGIO: Now, my son, let me thank Jove and all the gods, as I must, for restoring you to your father – for granting me this relief from the load of sorrow I have had to bear since I lost you – for bringing this man [*Stalagmus*] back into my sight and power – and for the honourable way in which my trust has been rewarded here [*touching Philocrates*].

PHILOPOLEMUS: For my part, I have had enough misery, enough exhausting anguish and lamentation; and I well understand your grief, from what you have told us already since we landed. Have we not other things to think about?

PHILOCRAATES: What have you to say to me, sir, now that I have proved my good faith and brought your son back to you and to freedom?

HEGIO: What you have done for me, Philocrates – what you have

done for me and my son – is something for which I can never repay you.

PHILOPOLEMUS: Oh yes, you can, father; you will, and I shall, and the gods will show us the way to make a worthy return to our benefactor for his kindness. And this man [*Stalagmus*] too, father, you will now be able to reward as he deserves.

HEGIO: Well, I can say no more. I cannot find words to refuse you anything you ask.

PHILOCRAATES: What I ask, sir, is that you will give me the chance to reward the services of the slave whom I left here with you as my surety; he has always been a better friend to me than to himself.

HEGIO: Yes . . . in return for your goodness to us, you shall have your wish . . . you shall have that and any other thing you desire. And I hope you will not hold it against me if . . . in my anger . . . I have treated him harshly.

PHILOCRAATES: Why, what have you done to him?

HEGIO: When I discovered how I had been tricked . . . I had him put in chains and committed to the quarries.

PHILOCRAATES: Oh, horror! Oh, the shame – my life to be saved at the cost of such a fate for that good man!

HEGIO: To make amends, I will surrender him into your hands; he is yours, he is free; and you need not pay me a penny for him.

PHILOCRAATES: You are kind indeed, sir. Will you have him sent for at once?

HEGIO: I will. [*To servants in the house*] Anyone there? . . . Go at once and bring Tyndarus back here . . . Now will you two go in? I want to put some questions to this whipping-post, and find out what became of my younger son. Go in and wash yourselves.

PHILOPOLEMUS: Will you come this way, Philocrates?

PHILOCRAATES: Thank you. [*They go in.*]

HEGIO [*to Stalagmus*]: Now then . . . step over here, my good man . . . my pretty slave . . .

STALAGMUS: If a gentleman like you can tell such lies, what am I supposed to do? I may have been good-looking in my time – pretty if you like; but a good man, never; nor good for anything, and never will be. Don't expect me to be any good to you.

HEGIO: At any rate you must have a good idea of what sort of position you are in now. But if you can tell the truth, you may be

able to make a bad business slightly better. Speak openly and honestly . . . though I doubt if you ever did an open and honest action in your life.

STALAGMUS: I've admitted it, haven't I? You can't make me blush by harping on it.

HEGIO: Oh, I'll make you blush before I've finished with you! I'll make you blush from head to foot.

STALAGMUS: Ha! That means a flogging, doesn't it? As if I wasn't used to it! You can cut the cackle; just tell me what you're offering, and you may get what you're asking for.

HEGIO: You have a gift of the gab, I see. But I would be obliged if you would restrain it for the present.

STALAGMUS: With pleasure.

HEGIO [*aside*]: He's certainly not the amenable youth that he was . . . Well, then, to come to the point, give me your attention and answer my questions carefully. And remember that truthful answers will somewhat ameliorate your condition.

STALAGMUS: To hell with that. Do you think I don't know what I deserve?

HEGIO: Maybe, but you have a chance of escaping some, if not all, of the consequences.

STALAGMUS: I shall escape precious little, I know. There'll be consequences enough, and I shall have earned them. I ran away, I kidnapped your son, and I sold him.

HEGIO: To whom?

STALAGMUS: To Theodoromides Polyplusius, in Elis, for six hundred drachmas.

HEGIO: Theo . . . ? Gods in heaven! That's the father of my prisoner, Philocrates!

STALAGMUS: Of course he is; I know the young man better than you do - seen him dozens of times.

HEGIO: Jove Almighty, save me, and give me back my son! [*He runs to the house*] Philocrates! Come here, for your sweet life's sake! Come out here, I want you!

[PHILOCRATES *appears*.]

PHILOCRATES: Here I am, sir; what do you want?

HEGIO: This man says he sold my son to your father in Elis for six hundred drachmas.

PHILOCRATES: How long ago was that?

STALAGMUS: It'll be nearly twenty years now.

PHILOCRATES: He's lying.

STALAGMUS: One of us is. It's a fact, anyway, that your father gave you a four-year-old boy for your very own, when you were about the same age.

PHILOCRATES: What was the boy's name? Tell me that, if your story is true.

STALAGMUS: He was generally known as Laddie; and later your family gave him the name of Tyndarus.

PHILOCRATES: How is it I don't know you?

STALAGMUS: People usually forget, or pretend not to know, someone whose acquaintance they don't value.

PHILOCRATES: Are you telling me that the boy you sold to my father, and the boy who was given to me, are one and the same person?

STALAGMUS: That's right; this gentleman's son.

HEGIO: And do you know if the poor fellow is still alive?

STALAGMUS: I got my money for him: I never bothered what happened to him after that.

HEGIO [*to Philocrates*]: What do you think?

PHILOCRATES: Well, of course, it's my slave Tyndarus who is your son, if this man's story is to be believed! Tyndarus and I grew up together; from boy to man he had a decent and honourable upbringing.

HEGIO: If you are right, then I am at once the happiest and unhappiest of men. I cannot bear to think of the terrible thing I have done to him, if he is my son! To have done so much more, yet so much less, than I had the right to do! My heart bleeds for what I have made him suffer; oh that I could undo what has been done! . . . And here he comes . . . in what a state for a brave and honest man!

[*TYNDARUS is brought in by guards, shackled and carrying a crow-bar; he is allowed a moment to rest and recover at the far side of the scene.*]

TYNDARUS: I've often seen pictures of the tortures of the damned in hell; but there's no hell to equal the place where I've been, in those quarries. Down there they make a man work till he's incapable of feeling tired any more. As soon as I got there, they gave me this crow to amuse myself with - like the dicky-birds and

ducklings that rich men's children are given to play with! ...
Hullo, there's the master outside the house ... and ... why, it's
my young master back from Elis!

HEGIO: My son ... my long awaited son ... welcome!

TYNDARUS: Son? Why son, for God's sake? ... Oh yes, I get it ...
you call yourself my father, because like a parent you are bringing
me into the daylight.

PHILOCRATES: Welcome, Tyndarus.

TYNDARUS: Welcome to you, the cause of all this misery.

PHILOCRATES: But now, I promise you, you're going to be a free
man and a rich man. This is your father. And this ... is the slave
who stole you from your father when you were four years old,
took you away and sold you to my father, for six hundred drach-
mas. It was then that my father gave you to me, a little slave of
my very own, and of my own age. We have just brought this man
back from Elis, and he has told us the whole story.

TYNDARUS [*hardly taking this in*]: But ... what of Hegio's son, whom
you went to -

PHILOCRATES: He's here, in the house ... your own brother ...

TYNDARUS: You mean ...? You've brought him back ... Hegio's
captive son?

PHILOCRATES: We have; as I say, he's in the house now.

TYNDARUS: Thank God; you've done a fine job, sir.

PHILOCRATES: But listen: Hegio is *your* father too. This thief stole
you from here when you were a child.

TYNDARUS: Did he? I'll get him hanged for that, now we're both
grown up.

PHILOCRATES: He deserves it.

TYNDARUS: He does, and I'll serve him as he deserves, by God! ...

So [*now looking more closely at Hegio*] is it really true ... you are my
father?

HEGIO: I am indeed, my son.

TYNDARUS: I seem to remember now ... yes, now it's coming back
to me ... I think I can remember, vaguely, hearing people call
my father Hegio.

HEGIO: I am Hegio ... [*He embraces his son.*]

PHILOCRATES: But look at those chains, sir; isn't it time you took
the weight off your son and put it on ... your son's slave?

HEGIO: Of course, that is the first thing we must do. Come in, and
we'll send for the blacksmith, to get the chains off you and present
them to this fellow.

STALAGMUS: I shall appreciate that; they'll be the only thing I
possess in the world!

EXEUNT

★

EPILOGUE

Spectators, you have seen today
A highly edifying play:
No sex, no secret love affairs,
No baby smuggled in backstairs.
Here is no fraud or knavery,
No boy buys girl from slavery
Behind his father's back. Such plays
Are far from common nowadays.
Playwrights no longer use the pen
To improve the minds of decent men.
If we have pleased, not wearied you,
If you think virtue worth reward,
Kind friends, you all know what to do ...
Just let us know it - and applaud.