

Introduction to *Pseudolus*

Pseudolus was first performed in 191 B.C., at the festival held in honor of the Great Mother; it is one of only two Plautine comedies for which we have an ancient production notice or *didascalia* (the other is *Stichus*). Nothing is known about the Greek model on which it was based. Composed late in Plautus' career, *Pseudolus* shows the comic playwright in top form. Although this work is not as carefully constructed as, say, *Rudens*, it is unsurpassed for comic invention of the peculiarly Plautine kind. A hit from the time of its first performance, it was still popular in Cicero's day, well over a century later, when the role of Ballio was being played by the celebrated actor Quintus Roscius.

The play's greatest strength, perhaps, is its magnificent gallery of characters, all stock types from the tradition of New Comedy, but each a graphic individual. The Roman stage has no more memorable a lovesick adolescent than Calidorus, whose desperate passion for a high-priced young slave-girl establishes the comic situation. Calidorus is a delightfully appealing young man, hopelessly inept and dependent on the family slave, Pseudolus ("Trickster"). His father Simo is the gruff and severe type of old man, the ideal target for a scheme of deception; yet in the final analysis Simo proves to be fair-minded and capable even of laughing at himself.

The more tolerant and amiable type of *senex* can be seen in the person of Callipho, the next-door neighbor. For some mysterious reason, either Plautus or his Greek predecessor chose to have this character disappear abruptly at the end of Act I, to be replaced by a much younger counterpart named Charinus. Elsewhere in the play, we meet a rather dull-witted messenger slave named Harpax ("Snatch"), agent of the braggart warrior who is Calidorus' rival for the girl. As well, we meet a devious slave named Simia ("Monkey"), whose ready wit and cunning are crucial to the main deception. We also encounter an unusually garrulous and inventive cook, a type well

established on the Greek stage, but often given greater prominence in Plautus by means of comic embellishments.¹

Vivid and colorful though they may be, all these characters are dwarfed by the two figures who dominate the action of the play—the pimp Ballio and the crafty slave Pseudolus.

Strictly speaking, we should not use the word “pimp” to translate the Latin term *leno*, which denoted a slave merchant who specialized in selling beautiful young women. However unacceptable we may find his profession today, he was a legitimate businessman in ancient Rome. Still, he did play the role of procurer, renting call girls to clients at large (see Ballio’s outrageous roll call, lines 173–229). Moreover, he was regarded, on the Roman stage at least, as such a shady and disreputable character that the modern label of pimp may appropriately reflect his public esteem. Ballio is the most villainous and unprincipled representative of his profession in all of ancient comedy. Plautus depicts him with such hyperbolic glee that we may be willing to overlook the offensive nature of a comic situation where women appear only as mute sexual merchandise. (Calidorus’ beloved Phoenicium does have a voice of sorts, even if it is only in a letter, read aloud by Pseudolus.) Ballio’s extended polymetric song in Act I is a brilliant poetic composition, far longer (we can be certain) than anything Plautus would have found in his Greek original. The entire characterization (Roscius’ choice of part, we should recall) is a comic *tour de force*.

Nonetheless it is Pseudolus to whom the play belongs, in more ways than one. In size and importance, his is the most taxing and dominant of any Plautine principal role. Almost continuously on stage, Pseudolus assumes control over all the other characters, steering and coaxing the plot through each tortuous turn. Like the wily slave Palaestrio, his forerunner in *Miles Gloriosus*, he will often resort to military imagery in order to extol his prowess. His most apposite metaphors, however, are drawn from the world of the stage. Plautus virtually convinces us that Pseudolus, the grand master of improvisation, is making up the plot as he goes along: this slave-hero, so we believe, is starring in a comedy of his own creation.² Confirming this impression, Pseudolus serves his audience a continual diet of theatrical criticism, offering a running commentary on the action that he has invented. He has no fewer than seven formal soliloquies, and countless other pointed asides.

As one might expect of a fast-paced, “improvised” story line, there are

¹See J. C. B. Lowe, “Cooks in Plautus,” *Classical Antiquity* 4 (1985): 72–102; and “The Cook Scene of Plautus’ *Pseudolus*,” *Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 411–416.

²For a stimulating essay on this theme, see the chapter “Words, Words, Words” in Niall W. Slater’s *Plautus in Performance* (Princeton, 1985).

several flaws and inconsistencies of plot. Why, for example, is Calidorus surprised in Act I, Scene 3 to hear about Phoenicium’s sale to the Macedonian soldier, when he has bewailed that circumstance in Act I, Scene 1? What happens to Callipho, for whom Pseudolus (lines 547–560) has planned a key role? Again, what happens to the dinner that is being so elaborately prepared by the zany cook? And how exactly are we to explain the play’s curious financial transactions, whereby a sum of twenty minas is passed in circular fashion from hand to hand? These problems can be addressed and resolved, if one wishes to take them seriously;³ but it is unlikely that any of them will even be noticed in the frenetic pace of performance.

For two generations, the standard English-language edition of this comedy has been Edgar H. Sturtevant’s *T. Macci Plauti Pseudolus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932). Though still useful, it has now been superseded by the excellent edition and commentary of M. M. Willcock, *Plautus: Pseudolus* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, and Oak Park, Ill.: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1987). Willcock provides a very convenient bibliography.

³See Willcock (cited in the final paragraph), pp. 15–17.

CHARACTERS

PSEUDOLUS	a cunning slave
CALIDORUS	his master's teenaged son
BALLIO	a slave dealer and pimp
SIMO	Calidorus' father, a stern old man
CALLIPHO	Simo's friend, a tolerant old man
HARPAX	an officer's slave
CHARINUS	a young man, Calidorus' friend
SIMIA	a cunning slave
YOUNG SLAVE	an unnamed slave of Ballio's
COOK	anonymous, but not reticent
COURTESANS	Ballio's female slaves; silent roles
ATTENDANT SLAVES	minor or silent roles

PROLOGUE

You'd better rise and stretch your legs,
Walk up and down the aisle;
Here comes a Plautine comedy,
It's bound to last a while.⁴

⁴Our manuscripts of Plautus contain this snippet of verse—two lines of Latin. It appears to be a fragment of a prologue composed for a revival of *Pseudolus*, sometime after Plautus' death. If Plautus' original play contained a prologue, it has been lost without a trace.

ACT I

The stage depicts three adjacent houses on a street in Athens. In the center is Simo's residence, flanked by the houses of his wealthy neighbor Callipho (stage right) and the disreputable pimp Ballio (stage left). As the play opens, the slave PSEUDOLUS and his young master, CALIDORUS, emerge from Simo's front door.

PSEUDOLUS wears the bizarre stock costume of the cunning slave—his physical appearance will be graphically described later in the play. CALIDORUS is a typical lovesick adolescent—a handsome, well-dressed, well-mannered, and appealing youth. Though he is not unintelligent, he is predictably unresourceful and naive. He is now preoccupied with the scrutiny of folding wooden letter-tablets, a standard form of ancient correspondence.

Act I, Scene 1

Pseud. Master, if only I could read your mind
And learn the torture that's tormenting you,
I'd gladly spare two men a lot of bother: 5
I wouldn't need to ask, or you to answer.
Now, since that's impossible, necessity
Compels me to question you. Answer me this:
Why have you been acting half-alive
These last few days, toting letter-tablets
Everywhere and drenching them with tears, 10
Taking no one into your confidence?
(*heroically*) Give voice, that I may know what I know not.

Calid. Oh, Pseudolus, I'm suffering!

Pseud. Jupiter forbid!

Calid. It's out of Jupiter's control;
Venus rules the region of my pain. 15

Pseud. Am I allowed some knowledge? In the past,
You've made me privy-partner of your plans.

Calid. My attitude's unchanged.

Pseud. Then state your problem.
I can offer cash, concern, or kind advice.

Calid. (*handing him the tablets*)
Take this message; learn for yourself
Why I am quite consumptified with gloom and worry. 20

Pseud. As you wish. (*examining tablets*) But oh! what's this?

Calid. What is it?

Pseud. I think these letters must be sexy characters:
They're climbing all over each other.

Calid. Very funny.

Pseud. Holy Pol, unless the Sibyl reads this first,
No one else could ever decipher it. 25

Calid. Why are you so rude to charming letters,
Charming tablets, traced with a charming hand?

Pseud. Excuse me, sir; do chickens now have hands?
These are hen-tracts.

Calid. Oh, you make me sick.
Read it or hand it back. 30

Pseud. All right, I'll read.
Take heart.

Calid. My heart is lost.

Pseud. Well, find it again!

Calid. No, I'll keep quiet; find it yourself in the wax.
That's where my heart resides—my breast is vacant now.

Pseud. (*suddenly*) I see your girl friend, Calidorus.

Calid. (*startled*) Where is she? Where? 35

Pseud. (*pointing to her name*)
Here, stretched out upon the boards, relaxed in wax.

Calid. (*furious*) May the gods all smother you—

Pseud. —with happiness.

Calid. (*tragically*)
My life's been brief, like a blade of summer grass:
Sudden was my birth, and suddenly I'm gone.

Pseud. Shut up, I'm trying to read.

Calid. Why not begin? 40

Pseud. (*reading*)
"Phoenicium to her darling Calidorus:
With wax and string and these appealing characters
I wish you love and health; your healing love I beg.
My eyes are moist, my heart and soul are faltering."

Calid. I'm sunk, Pseudolus! I can't find the healing love
To send her back. 45

Pseud. What healing love?

Calid. The silver kind.

Pseud. (*waving the tablets*)
You're willing to repay her wooden love
With silver? Keep your wits about you, please!

Calid. Read on, and soon the letter will explain
How urgently that silver must be found. 50

Pseud. "My pimp has sold me to a foreigner
(A Macedonian military man)
For twenty silver minas, dearest love.
Before that soldier left, he paid out fifteen
In advance. Now there's a balance of only five.
Therefore the soldier left a token here,
A portrait wax impression from his ring,
And so, when someone brings a token like it,
I'm to be sent with him at once. A day is set
For the transaction: next Dionysia."

55

Calid. And that's tomorrow! I'm on the brink of doom,
Unless you've help to offer.

60

Pseud. Let me finish.

Calid. Yes! I feel as though I'm talking with her.
Read—you give me bittersweet delight.

Pseud. (*reading again, with increasing fervor*)
"Now our loves, our lives, our passionate embraces,
Laughter, fun, sweet talk, and sexy face-to-faces,
Slender little hips and thighs a-jiggle,
Tender little lips and tongues a-wiggle,
Juicy jousts of bouncy-boob and titty-tickle—
All our hopes of orgiastic consummation
Face dismemberment, disaster, desolation,
If we fail to find some mutual salvation.
Everything I know I've tried to tell you clearly:
Now I'll put you to the test. One question, merely:
Are you in love or just pretending?
Yours sincerely."

65

70

Calid. An awful letter, Pseudolus.

Pseud. Absolutely awful!

Calid. Why aren't you crying?

Pseud. I've got stony eyes; I can't
Implore them to spit out a single tear.

75

Calid. How's that?

Pseud. Hereditary dry-eye-itis.

Calid. Won't you help me just a little?

Pseud. What should I do?

Calid. Oh, dear!

Pseud. "Oh, dear"? Great Herc, no need to scrimp
In that department; go ahead.

Calid. I'm so depressed, I can't find any cash to borrow—

80

Pseud. Oh, dear!

Calid. There's not a penny in the house—

Pseud. Oh, dear!

Calid. He's going to carry off my girl tomorrow—

Pseud. Oh, dear!

Calid. Do you really think that helps?

Pseud. I give what I've got:
I have an inexhaustible supply of groans.

Calid. It's all over for me today. But can you lend me
A single drachma I'd pay back tomorrow?

85

Pseud. Hardly—not if my life were on the line.
What will you do with a drachma?

Calid. Buy a rope.

Pseud. What for?

Calid. To help me learn to swing. (*tragically*) I plan,
Ere shadows fall, to fall among the shades.

90

Pseud. Then who'll pay back the drachma that I gave you?
Is that why you want to hang yourself, you sneak,
To dun me out of the drachma I've donated?

Calid. There's just no way that I can go on living
If she is grabbed from me and granted to another. 95
(*bursts into tears*)

Pseud. Why cry, you cuckoo? You'll survive.

Calid. I've got to cry:
I haven't any money of my own,
No hope on earth of scraping up a scrap.

Pseud. If I caught the drift of the lady's billet-doux,
Your eyes have got to shower silver tears, 100
Or this pretentious crying act will help
As much as catching raindrops in a sieve.
Don't fear, my lovesick dear, I won't desert you.
Somewhere, somehow, some way (maybe) today
I'll find you silvery succor and salvation. 105
Where, oh where will it come from? I don't know,
But I know it will: I've got a twitching brow.

Calid. I only hope your deeds can match your words!

Pseud. Holy Herc! If once I bang my holy gong,
You know the holy rumpus I can raise! 110

Calid. You're now the repository of all my hopes.

Pseud. Is it enough if I get this girl for you today
As your very own, or if I give you twenty minas?

Calid. It's enough—if it happens.

Pseud. Demand your twenty minas,
So you'll know I'll carry out my promise to you. 115
Make it all quite legal: I'm itching to take the oath.

Calid. (*formally*)
Sir, this day will you give me twenty minas?

Pseud. Sir, I will. And now don't be a nuisance.
Listen to this, if you still have any doubts:
If all else fails, I'll pinch it from your papa. 120

Calid. God save you, I love you! But look: if possible,
For goodness' sake, put the pinch on Mother, too.

Pseud. Dispel these worries from your fevered nose.

Calid. My fevered brain, do you mean?

Pseud. I hate clichés.
(*hailing the audience*)
Now hear ye, hear ye! Lend an ear, ye! 125
These are my solemn words of public warning
For the throng assembled here this morning,
All the citizens by tribe enrolled,
All my acquaintances and friends of old:
If you should meet me, be on guard today,
And don't believe a single word I say.

Calid. (*startled by a noise from Ballio's house*)
Shh!
Sweet Hercules, keep quiet!

Pseud. Why, what's up? 130

Calid. The pimp's front door just gave a squeaking noise.

Pseud. I'd rather twist his legs to make *him* squeak.

Calid. He's coming out in person: Lord of Lies!

Act I, Scene 2

As PSEUDOLUS and CALIDORUS make themselves inconspicuous, BALLIO emerges from his house, wielding a whip; the villainous slave dealer is berating a number of cowering male SLAVES, who are his household servants and personal attendants.

Ballio Get out! Come on, get out, you slugs!

As merchandise you're rotten;
 You never do no good nohow:
 There's naught you've not forgotten!
 Unless I whip you up this way,
 You aren't the least bit useful;
 You're more like donkeys than like men,
 With ribs all striped and bruise-ful.

135

(to audience) Flog 'em, you'll be the one to cry;
 These whipper-slappers always try,
 If given the chance, to have their fun:
 Grab, swipe, snatch, eat, drink, and run!
 That's just their nature; that's their way.
 And so, believe me when I say
 You'd rather wolves control your flock
 Than have these thugs patrol your block.

140

It isn't always true, you know,
 That seeing is believing;
 Though their appearances aren't bad,
 Their actions are deceiving.

(turning back to the SLAVES)
 Now unless you obey my command, all you guys,
 If you don't wipe the sleepiness out of your eyes,
 I'll embroider your hips
 With such colorful strips
 You'll resemble bright linen embroidered for feasts,
 Alexandrian coverlets covered with beasts.

145

I issued orders yesterday,
 Your provinces were all assigned;
 But you're such crooked characters,
 So careless, so devoid of mind,
 You can't remember any job
 Without a swift kick from behind.
 Perhaps you hope to get so tough
 That my whip won't be hard enough.

150

(to audience) Just look at that! No concentration.
 (cracking his whip at the SLAVES)

Pay attention, look this way!
 Make sure you point your ears at me,
 You whip-lashed human specimens!
 Your backsides can't get any harder
 Than this rawhide whip of mine.
 (flicking his whip at various victims)
 How now? That hurt? There! That's what's done
 If any slave shows disrespect.

155

Now form a line in front of me
 And pay attention to my words.
 (pointing to a SLAVE)
 You with the jug: go fetch some water;
 Fill the kettle for the cook.
 (to another) You with the axe: you'll oversee
 The Province of Woodsplittia.

Slave This axe is dull.

Ballio What if it is?

You're not so very sharp yourself.
 Do I enjoy your service less
 Because you're blunted with my blows?
 (to another) Your task is cleaning up the house.
 You know the job. Hurry up! Go in!
 (to another) Be thou the Keeper of the Couch.
 (to another) You get to wash the silver plate.

160

Make sure these jobs are done when I
 Return from town; I want to find
 That everything's been swept and sprinkled,
 Cleaned and leveled, washed and shined.
 Today's my birthday, don't you see?
 You all must celebrate with me.

165

Throw ham and pork-rind in the pot,
 Get sweetbreads, sow-tits boiling hot!
 I want to throw a banquet which
 Will make the powerful think I'm rich.
 Go in and quickly work away;
 When cook comes, we want no delay.

(Except for one personal ATTENDANT, Ballio's male SLAVES now enter the house.)

I'm off to market, where I wish
To buy the market out of fish.
Lead on, my boy, and guard your back:
Let no one grab my money sack.

170

Just wait! It nearly slipped my mind
There's something else I've got to do.
You women! Listen to me please:
My next announcement is for you.

(Ballio's contingent of lovely LADIES files out of his house in response to his call.)⁵

All you who live the languid life
Of dissipation and decay,
Famed mistresses of mighty men,
I'll learn your preference today:
Choose gluttony or liberty;
Siestas or self-interest.
Which girls I free and which I sell
I'll find out by a simple test.
Make sure I'm loaded down with loot
From lover-boys that you delight.
Bring in a full year's keep today
Or work the street tomorrow night.

175

Today's my birthday, as you know.
Bring on the lads who find you fun,
Who call you "sweetheart," "dearest darling,"
"Smoochie-pooch" or "honey-bun."
Make sure they march up by platoon,
Each bearing a beautiful birthday boon.

180

Why do I give you clothing, jewelry,
Everything you need,
When you repay me with obnoxious

Drunkenness and greed?
You soak and guzzle, getting high,
While I sit soberly and cry.

So now I'm going to call your names,
Proceeding one by one;
Don't try to tell me, by and by,
If any job's undone,
That tasks have not been all assigned.
Attention, everyone!

I'll start with you, Delectium,⁶
The darling of the grain suppliers.
All your lovers own vast stores
Of golden wheat piled mountain high.
Get grain delivered to us, please,
For me and all my household staff—
Enough to see us through the year.
Bring me such wheaty affluence
The citizens will change my name
From Ballio, the pauper pimp,
To Jason, prince of opulence.
(exit DELECTIUM)

190

Calid. (to PSEUDOLUS) You hear this jailbird chattering?
He's quite a loudmouth, don't you think?

Pseud. Dear Pollux, yes! A foulmouth, too.
Be quiet, though, and listen on!

195

Ballio Obscenium, your patrons are
The butchers, rivals of the pimps:
They make their living, just like us,
By selling poor and tainted meat.⁷

⁶Plautus gives Ballio's courtesans the Greek names of Hedylium ("Sweetie"), Aeschrodora ("Dirty Present"), Xystilis ("Workout"), and Phoenicium ("Rosie"). Though I prefer not to anglicize Plautine proper names, I have turned the first three into Delectium, Obscenium, and Gymnasium (the name of a Plautine call girl in *Cistellaria*.) I have not tampered with Phoenicium, because she is a central (if silent) character.

⁷This joke substitutes for an untranslatable Latin pun. In the next sentence, there is a mythical reference to the wicked Dirce, who was tied to the horns of a bull by Amphiion and Zethus, twin sons of Zeus and Antiope.

⁵The roll call of the call girls is perhaps a Plautine expansion on the Greek original. The scene could be staged with the women present from the start.

Unless I get three meat-racks jammed
 With juicy carcasses today,
 Tomorrow I'll copy what was done
 To Dirce by the sons of Jove:
 They bound her to a raging bull;
 I'll stretch you on an empty meat-rack. 200
 (exit OBSCENIUM)

Pseud. (to CALIDORUS) This person makes me blazing mad!
 To think the manly youth of Athens
 Let him go on living here!
 Where do they hide, those lusty lads
 Who get their loving from a pimp?
 Why don't they meet and all combine
 To rid our public of these pests?
 But hey, no way!
 I've been too simple, too naive.
 Where would they get the nerve to hurt
 The men their love enslaves them to? 205
 Their passion keeps them all from doing
 Things their pimps would not approve.

Calid. Be quiet!

Pseud. Why?

Calid. You bother me
 When you drown out this fellow's words.

Pseud. Then I'll shut up.

Calid. I wish you would,
 Instead of saying that you will.

Ballio It's your turn now, Gymnasium,
 All of whose lover-boys possess 210
 Untold reserves of olive oil.
 If oil's not dumped in leather sacks
 And carried here to me forthwith,
 I'll have *you* dumped in a leather sack
 And carried to the whorehouse shed.

There you'll be issued with a couch
 Where you will get no sleep, but where, 215
 To the point of sheer exhaustion. . . . Do you
 Get the drift of my remarks?

[See here, you snake! When you've so many
 Boyfriends oozing olive oil,
 Do any of your fellow slaves
 Have hair a wee bit glossier?
 Do I enjoy a salad that's 220
 A smidgen tastier? I know,
 You don't care very much for oil;
 You like to drench yourself in wine.
 I'll check your faults in one fell swoop
 If my commands aren't all obeyed.]⁸
 (exit GYMNASIUM)

But you, who are always on the point
 Of paying cash for liberty, 225
 So skilled in promising, less skilled
 In having promises fulfilled:
 Phoenicium, it's you I mean,
 You plaything of the upper class!
 Unless your boyfriends' grand estates
 Provide me all your keep today,
 Tomorrow, dear Phoenicium,
 I'll tan your hide Phoenician red
 And pack you off to the whorehouse shed.
 (exit PHOENICIUM)

Act I, Scene 3

Calid. Pseudolus, don't you hear what he's saying? 230

Pseud. Sir, my attention's undivided.

Calid. Help me: what should I send this man
 To stop my girl from going on sale?

⁸The passage in square brackets has been suspected or excluded by a number of scholars; Ballio's address to Gymnasium seems disproportionately long.

Pseud. Don't worry! Keep your mind unclouded;
I'll look after you and me.
This fellow and I've been friends for years;
We've traded favors back and forth.
I'll send him a great big birthday gift:
A bulging bundle of misery.

Calid. What's the use?

Pseud. Can't you change the subject? 235

Calid. But—

Pseud. Tut!

Calid. I'm tortured!

Pseud. Toughen up!

Calid. I can't.

Pseud. Well, force yourself!

Calid. How can I?

Pseud. Try to control your emotions, man!
Concentrate on constructive thoughts;
When things go wrong, don't pander to passion.

Calid. That's all nonsense; there's no pleasure
In love unless you can play the fool.

Pseud. Must you?

Calid. Pseudolus, let me be silly. Please!

Pseud. I'll let you, if you let me leave.

Calid. Wait! Wait! I'll be just the way you want me. 240

Pseud. Now you're sounding sensible.

Ballio It's late; time's wasting. Move, slave, move!
(*BALLIO and his SLAVE start to move offstage.*)

Calid. Hey, he's leaving. Why not call him?

Pseud. (*restraining CALIDORUS*) Slow down! Easy does it.

Calid. He mustn't leave.

Ballio Dammit, move, you lazy slave!

Pseud. (*aloud to BALLIO*) Birthday boy! Hey, birthday boy!
I'm calling you. Hey, birthday boy!
Come on back, take a look at us.
Though you're such a busy person,
We'll detain you. Wait! See,
People want to talk to you! 245

Ballio What's this? Who'd hold up
A very busy man like me?

Pseud. A friend and helpmate from your past.

Ballio The past is dead; I live right now.

Pseud. You blasted boor!

Ballio You blasted bother!

Calid. Seize the fellow; chase him!

Ballio (*to his SLAVE*) Move on, boy.

Pseud. Let's go round and block his way. 250

Ballio Jupiter damn you, whoever you are!

Pseud. I wish you—

Ballio —the same to you both!
Come on, forward march, my boy.

Pseud. May we not have a word with you?

Ballio No, you may not when I'm not in the mood.

Pseud. Not even something advantageous?

Ballio Will you or won't you let me leave?

Pseud. No, wait!

Ballio Let go.

Calid. Ballio, listen! Are you deaf?

Ballio Yes, to empty words and wallets. 255

Calid. I always gave you cash in the past.

Ballio Cash in the past is not what I'm after.

Calid. I'll give when I get it.

Ballio You'll have when you've got it.

Calid. Oh, how foolishly I've wasted
All my presents and payments to you!

Ballio Now that your account's defunct
You want to pay me off in words.
Stupid boy! Your books are closed. 260

Pseud. Just realize who this boy is!

Ballio I've known for ages who he *was*;
He should discover who he *is*.
(*to his SLAVE*) Let's get walking.

Pseud. Ballio, could you
Grant us just a single glance?
There may be filthy lucre.

Ballio *Lucre!*
That's a word that's worth a glance.
If I were involved in sacrifice
To mighty Jupiter on high,
Holding sacred vessels in my hands,
And there and then I saw a chance
Of finding filthy lucre—well,
I'd ditch the whole divine affair.
All else aside, lucre's one
Religious force I can't resist.

265

Pseud. (*to CALIDORUS*) The gods we honor and revere
This fellow holds in total scorn.

Ballio (*aside*) I'll speak to him. (*to PSEUD.*) My kindest greetings,
Most egregious slave in Athens! 270

Pseud. This lad and I would like the gods
To shower blessings on your head;
But, if you get your just deserts,
The gods are bound to cut you dead.

Ballio (*ignoring PSEUDOLUS*) What's the trouble, Calidorus?

Calid. Love and cruel lack of cash.

Ballio "What a pity!" I might say—
If pity kept my stomach full.

Pseud. O.K. We know the type you are:
No need at all to advertise.
But do you know what we want? 275

Ballio Oh, Pollux! Pretty well: trouble for me!

Pseud. That, too; but there is something else.
Come on, pay attention.

Ballio I'm listening.
Since you see I'm very busy,
Keep your story cut and dried.

Pseud. My man's ashamed, because he promised
On the appointed day to give you
Twenty minas for his girl,
And hasn't arranged delivery. 280

Ballio If you've got to bear some burden,
Shame's far easier than disgust.
He hasn't delivered: he's feeling down;
I haven't collected: I'm fed up!

Pseud. He'll come across, he'll raise the money;
Just you wait a few more days.
You see, he's terribly afraid
You'll sell his girl friend out of spite.

Ballio If he wanted, he had a chance
To pay me the money long ago. 285

Calid. What if I didn't have the cash?

Ballio If you were in love, you'd have floated a loan.
You could have gone to a financier;
You could have carried a carrying charge;
You could have defrauded dear old Dad.

Pseud. This boy defraud his dad? Outrageous!
No danger you would ever suggest
A moral act!

Ballio That would be un-pimp-ly.

Calid. How could I defraud my father,
When he's such a sly old man? 290
And even if I had the chance,
Filial love forbids!

Ballio I see.
Then hug that filial love of yours
At night instead of Phoenicium.
But since you apparently prefer
To put filial love before romance,
Is every man alive your father?

Is there no one you could ask
To lend you money?

Calid. Lend? Oh, no:
The word itself is dead and buried. 295

Pseud. Holy Herc, no lending these days!
Bloated bankers leave the table
Gorged on debts that they've recalled,
And let their creditors go starving;
All the world is far too cagey
Ever to credit another man.

Calid. I'm most unhappy. I can't find
A solitary silver piece;
And so, unhappily I die
Of love and lack of currency. 300

Ballio Corner the market in olive oil!
Speculate and sell for cash.
By Herc, I'm sure that you could put
At least two hundred in your pocket.

Calid. Fat chance! The wretched law declares
I'm underage. Everyone's scared
To give me credit.

Ballio That's my kind
Of law: I'm scared to give you credit.

Pseud. Credit! Hey, aren't you satisfied
To know how useful he's been to you? 305

Ballio There's no such thing as a useful lover
Unless he gives perpetually.
Let him give, give; and when there's
Nothing left, then let him cease to love.

Calid. Have you no pity?

Ballio Look: you're coming
Empty-handed. Words don't clink.

Yet I sincerely hope you'll live
And thrive.

Pseud. You speak as if he's dying.

Ballio Dead, as far as I'm concerned—
If he keeps on talking the way he has. 310
A lover's given up the ghost
When he starts pleading with a pimp.
Learn to sing a loud lament
That has a silvery, tinkling tune;
Toward your present woeful dirge
About your lack of cash, I feel
A stepmother's sympathy.

Pseud. What?
Were you once married to his father?

Ballio God forbid!

Pseud. Do as we ask you, *Ballio*. 315
Give *me* credit, if you're afraid
To trust this boy. Within three days
By land or sea (or somewhere else)
I'll scrape this money up for you.

Ballio Give *you* credit?

Pseud. Why not?

Ballio Well,
To give you credit would be much
Like tying up a hungry dog
With twisted strips of mutton tripe.

Calid. How, when I'm so deserving, can you
Show this kind of gratitude? 320

Ballio Well, what do you want?

Calid. I want you to wait,
Six days only, more or less,

And don't sell her or destroy me,
The man who loves her.

Ballio Oh, cheer up!
I'm prepared to wait six months.

Calid. Hurray! You dear, delightful man!

Ballio Hang on—do you want me to increase
Your happiness a hundredfold?

Calid. How so?

Ballio By telling you, right now
Phoenicium is not for sale. 325

Calid. She isn't?

Ballio That's a fact, by Herc!

Calid. (*ecstatically*) Pseudolus, go, get holy victims,
Beasts and butchers; I would pay
This Jove a sacrifice divine.
I now regard our friend right here
As a mightier Jove than Jupiter.

Ballio No victims, please. I much prefer
To be appeased with chunks of lamb.

Calid. Hurry! Move! Go get the lambs!
Do you hear what Jupiter has said? 330

Pseud. I'll soon be back; but first I've got
To run outside the city gate.

Calid. Why there?

Pseud. I'll find two human butchers,
Armed with deadly warning bells;⁹

⁹Roman public executioners, who did their gruesome work outside the Esquiline Gate, signaled their actions by ringing ominous bells. Pseudolus is suggesting that executioners and floggers will be an appropriate offering for the "god" *Ballio*.

And while I'm there, I'll bring two flocks
Of weeping-willow flogging whips:
Today there'll be a sweet supply
Of offerings for this Jupiter.

Ballio Go hang yourself!

Pseud. No, hanging's what
They do to a pimp-ly Jupiter.

335

Ballio You wouldn't stand to gain a thing
If I should die.

Pseud. Why not?

Ballio Well, look:
If I were dead, in all of Athens
There'd be no one worse than you.

Calid. Holy Herc, you've got to tell me—
Answer seriously, please:
You haven't got my girl for sale,
My lovely, dear Phoenicium?

340

Ballio She's not for sale; by Pollux, no.
You see, I sold her long ago.

Calid. You sold her? How?

Ballio Right off the stall:
Neck and gizzard, guts and all.

Calid. You sold my girl?

Ballio Precisely so;
For twenty minas.

Calid. Twenty?

Ballio Yes,
Or four times five, if you prefer.

345

I sold her to a soldier boy,
A captain out of Macedon.
He paid me fifteen in advance.

Calid. What am I hearing?

Ballio That your girl's
Converted into currency.

Calid. How could you?

Ballio Well, I felt like it;
And she was mine.

Calid. Ho! Pseudolus:
Run, fetch a sword!

Pseud. Why do I need
A sword?

Calid. To kill this man—and me!

Pseud. Why not just destroy yourself?
This fellow soon will starve to death.

350

Calid. (to *BALLIO*) What do you say, you ultimate
Extreme of human perjury?
Did you swear that you would never
Sell her to anyone but me?

Ballio I did, and I admit it.

Calid. Well, then.
Hadn't you pledged, and formally, too?

Ballio Yes, but I fudged; I normally do.

Calid. Perjury! You criminal!

Ballio I put some money in my pocket.
If that's criminal, don't knock it.

355

You've got virtue and family fame—
But not a penny to your name.

Calid. Pseudolus, stand on the other side
And pile the curses on him.

Pseud. Fine.
I wouldn't be more keen to run
To the praetor for my liberty.

Calid. Bring on the insults!

Pseud. Here we go;
My tongue will tear you limb from limb.
Shameless!

Ballio All right.

Pseud. Criminal!

Ballio That's true enough.

Pseud. You whipping-boy!

Ballio Why not?

Pseud. Grave-robber!

Ballio Certainly.

Pseud. Filthy jailbird!

Ballio Excellent!

Pseud. Treacherous swindler!

Ballio That's my style.

Pseud. Foul assassin!

Ballio Yes. Continue.

Calid. Sacrilegious!

Ballio I admit it.

Calid. Perjurer!

Ballio An old refrain.

Calid. Lawbreaker!

Ballio Most emphatically.

Pseud. Youth-corrupter!

Ballio Ouch! That stings.

Calid. Thief!

Ballio Touché!

Pseud. Deserter!

Ballio Bravo!

Calid. Public fraud!

Ballio Too obvious.

Pseud. Crooked cheater!

Calid. Dirty pimp!

Pseud. You crud!

Ballio Your voices are divine.

Calid. You beat your father and your mother!

Ballio And what's more, I killed them both
Rather than provide them food;
Was that an awful thing to do?

Pseud. We're pouring all our juicy words
In a bottomless pot—a waste of time.

Ballio Is there nothing else you'd like to say?

Calid. Are you incapable of shame? 370

Ballio Or you—a lover who's been found
As empty as a rotten nut?
(*reconsidering*) And yet, although you've shouted many
Nasty noises at my head,
If that captain doesn't bring
The other five he owes me still
By today, the final deadline
Formally agreed for payment—
Well, if he can't deliver, then
I think I can act in character. 375

Calid. How's that?

Ballio If you bring me the money,
Then I'll break my word with *him*:
I'm that kind of character. I'd gladly
Chat with you, but it's not worthwhile.
If you're broke, it's a hopeless effort
Pleading with me to pity you.
Here's my final word on the subject:
Focus on the job at hand.

Calid. You're leaving?

Ballio I've got many worries
On my mind.
(*BALLIO and his SLAVE leave for the marketplace, stage left.*)

Pseud. You'll soon have more! 380
(*to audience*) I own that fellow now, unless
All gods and men abandon me.
I'll bone and fillet him, the way

A cook prepares a slippery eel.
Now, Calidorus, give me your
Attention.

Calid. What is your command?

Pseud. I want this town placed under siege;
I've got to capture it today.
To do that, I'll require a man
Who's wily, clever, cunning, crafty, 385
Able to execute commands,
Not fall asleep when he's on watch.

Calid. What do you intend to do?

Pseud. When the time is ripe, I'll let you know.
I don't want to repeat myself:
That's how plays become too long.

Calid. Very good and very fair.

Pseud. Hurry! Bring him right away.

Calid. Of all our friends, there are so few
A man can really depend upon. 390

Pseud. I know that. You've a double job:
Prepare a prime selection drawn from
All our friends; then pick out one
That we can really count on.

Calid. I'll have him here at once.

Pseud. Get moving,
Won't you? Talking means delay.

Act I, Scene 4

*As CALIDORUS leaves (stage right) to find an accomplice, PSEUDOLUS moves
downstage to address the audience.*

Pseud. He's gone; you're on your own now, Pseudolus.
 Now what'll you do? You've loaded master's son 395
 With precious promises; can you get the goods?
 If you haven't a particle of a proper plan
 You can't begin to weave a cunning cloth
 Or execute a definite design. 400
 But look at the poet: when he starts to write,
 He seeks what doesn't exist, and then he finds it;
 He makes invented fiction look like truth.
 All right, I'll be a poet! Twenty coins,
 Which don't exist on the face of earth, I'll find.
 Ages ago I said I'd give him the money,
 Hoping to lay a snare for our old man;
 But somehow "Dad" got wind of what I wanted.

(SIMO and CALLIPHŌ appear from the forum, stage left.)

I must control my voice and hold my tongue;
 Look! Here's my master Simo coming this way, 410
 Strolling with his neighbor Callipho.
 Out of this old tomb today I'll dig up
 Twenty coins to give to master's son.
 I'll step aside and hear their conversation.

Act I, Scene 5

Enter the two old men and neighbors, SIMO and CALLIPHŌ. SIMO, who is Calidorus' father and Pseudolus' master, is severe in temperament; CALLIPHŌ is more tolerant and urbane.

Simo If all the spendthrifts and the lovesick boys
 In Athens met to elect a president,
 I'm sure that no one would defeat my son.
 He's the only topic of the town—
 How he wants to free his girl by scrounging
 Money to save her. People tell me this; 420
 In fact, I sniffed the truth a while back
 But pretended not to know.

Pseud. (aside) His son must stink.
 The plot is killed; the whole affair is jammed.

I meant to take this route to silver city;
 Now I find the road's completely blocked.
 He's on to us: no spoils for the despoilers!

Calli. People who blab or listen to slanderous gossip,
 If I were in charge of things, would all be hanged:
 Blabbers by the tongue, listeners by the ears.
 These stories that they tell you—that your son 430
 Is so in love he'd swindle you of silver—
 Chances are that these reports are lies.
 But even if they're absolutely true,
 In the light of present morals, what did he do
 Remarkable? What's new if a young man
 Loves or frees a mistress?

Pseud. (aside) Charming fellow! 435

Simo As an old man I object.

Calli. But that's no use.
 You shouldn't have done these things when you were young.
 A father must be pure if he insists
 That his son be purer than he's been himself.
 When you were young, the damage that you caused 440
 Was enough to share with every man alive!
 "A chip off the old block": what's the big surprise?

Pseud. (aside) O Zeus,¹⁰ how few obliging men there are.
 Hey! That's the kind of father a son should have.

Simo Who's talking here? It's my slave Pseudolus. 445
 He's the corrupter of my son, the crook!
 He's the leader, he's the teacher, he's the one
 That I want crucified.

Calli. Now that's just silly,
 Flying off the handle. How much better
 To go up and ask him diplomatically 450
 Whether those reports are true or false.
 When times are tough, good heart is half the battle.

¹⁰Here Pseudolus uses a Greek oath, and will later deliver his oracular responses in Greek. I have decided to avoid any illogical modern bilingualism.

Simo I'll take your advice.

Pseud. (aside) Here they come, Pseudolus.
Prepare your speech to take the old man on.
(aloud) Good health to master first, that's only fair; 455
What health is left can be his neighbor's share.

Simo Good day. What are you doing?

Pseud. Standing here like this.

Simo See his attitude, Callipho? King of the roost!

Calli. I think he displays a fine self-confidence.

Pseud. A slave who's free of crime and free of cunning 460
Should stand tall in his master's company.

Calli. We want to question you about some news
That's reached us, sort of drifting through a cloud.

Simo His words will now convince you that you've taken on
Not Pseudolus, but Socrates. 465

Pseud. All right. I realize you've always put me down;
I know you've got no confidence in me.
You'd like me worthless; still, I'll be first-class.

Simo Keep your ear space vacant, Pseudolus;
Admit my words as tenants for a while. 470

Pseud. Speak your mind, though I'm furious at you.

Simo A slave, furious at me, your master?

Pseud. Does that
Seem so strange?

Simo Great Herc! According to you,
I've got to guard against your rage. You plan
To batter me the way I batter you. 475
(to CALLIPHON) What do you think?

Calli. I feel his anger's justified,
When you place no confidence in him.

Simo All right,
Let him rage! I'll stop him doing any damage.
(to PSEUDOLUS) Well? What about my question?

Pseud. Go ahead and ask.
Treat my knowledge as your Delphic oracle. 480

Simo Pay attention, then, and remember your promise.
What do you say? Do you know my son's in love
With a music-girl?

Pseud. (in oracular tones) Yea, yea, forsooth.

Simo And he wants her freed?

Pseud. In truth, forsooth.

Simo And twenty silver minas,
Through skulduggery and dirty tricks, 485
You're planning to snatch from me?

Pseud. I? Snatch from you?

Simo Yes. To give my son, to free his girl.
Confess it! Speak: in truth, forsooth?

Pseud. In truth, forsooth.

Simo He admits it! Didn't I tell you, Callipho?

Calli. I remember.

Simo The moment you knew this, why was it
Concealed from me? Why didn't I hear? 490

Pseud. I'll tell you.
I didn't want to breed a wicked custom
By denouncing master A to master B.

Simo This fellow's fit for service in the mill!

Calli. But Simo, has he sinned?

Simo You bet he has! 495

Pseud. Please stop. I keep my own books, Callipho;
My sins belong to me. Just listen; I'll
Explain why I shut you out of the love affair.
I knew I'd land in the gristmill, if I spoke.

Simo Didn't you know the mill would be your lot
If you kept mum? 500

Pseud. I knew.

Simo. Why wasn't I told?

Pseud. One fate was instant; one was more remote.
Silence gained me a day or two of grace.

Simo What'll you do now? There's no hope of pinching
Money out of me; I'm wide awake. 505
I'll pass a law: "*Don't lend to Pseudolus!*"

Pseud. Ye gods! I'll never beg from another man
While you're alive. You'll give the cash yourself.
I'll wheedle it from you.

Simo From me?

Pseud. Precisely.

Simo Holy Herc, knock out my eye, if I give.

Pseud. You'll give. 510
Watch out; you've got fair warning.

Calli. One thing's sure:
If you succeed, you'll stage a stunning coup!

Pseud. I will.

Simo And if you don't?

Pseud. Then flog me with canes.
But what if I pull it off?

Simo So help me Jove,
You'll live your life unpunished.

Pseud. Don't forget! 515

Simo You think I can't take care, when I'm forewarned?

Pseud. You're warned: take care! You're told: take care! *Take care!*
Those hands will bestow the cash on me today.

Calli. He's a living masterpiece if he keeps his word.

Pseud. Haul me off into slavery if I fail. 520

Simo Very generous! You're mine already.

Pseud. Do you want to hear a more amazing story?

Calli. Gladly! I love to listen to you talk.

Pseud. (to SIMO) Before I tackle you, I'll first engage
Another foe in a memorable match. 525

Simo What other foe?

Pseud. This pimp, your neighbor here.
Through trickery and dirty double-dealing,
I'll deprive our precious pandering pimp
Of the music-girl your son adores.

Simo You will?

Pseud. The two campaigns will be finished by this evening. 530

Simo If you carry out these tasks, as you declare,
You'll be mightier than King Agathocles.¹¹
But if you fail, won't I be justified
In sending you to the mill?

Pseud. Not just for a day,
But for all eternity! If I succeed, 535
Will you give me the cash to pay the pimp,
Of your own free will?

Calli. (to SIMO) That's reasonable and fair;
Say yes.

Simo But something's just occurred to me.
What if there's collusion, Callipho,
Or they've arranged some underhanded deal 540
To dupe me of my wealth?

Pseud. Not even I
Would have the nerve to stoop so low! Look here:
If there's collusion, Simo, or if we
Have ever wheeled and dealed in such a way,
Then use your whip like a writing instrument
And scratch red letters all across my back. 545

Simo Your comedy can start now, any time.

Pseud. Help me out today, please, Callipho;
Don't get involved in any other scheme.

Calli. I had set up a visit to the country.

Pseud. Un-set it then; upset your settled plans. 550

Calli. All right, I'll choose to stay on your account;
I yearn to watch you in action, Pseudolus.
And if I see him holding back the cash
He promised, I'll come through with it myself.

¹¹Agathocles had been a famous tyrant and king of Syracuse about a hundred years earlier (317–289 B.C.).

Simo I won't renege.

Pseud. By Pollux, if you do, 555
You'll be dunned to death with a devastating din.
Come on now, move along inside, you two,
And give my tricks some room: it's their turn now.

Calli. All right; you'll get your way.

Pseud. Remember, don't
Leave home today.

Calli. I promise you my help. 560
(CALLIPHO enters his house.)

Simo Well, I'm off to the forum. I'll be back here.

Pseud. Make it soon! (exit SIMO, stage left)

(PSEUDOLUS moves downstage again to address the audience.)
I suspect that you're suspicious of me now.
You think I'm making these grand promises
To entertain you, till our play is done.
You don't expect me to do what I said I would.
Well, I won't back down. One fact I know for sure:
I don't quite know just how I'll pull it off . . .
And yet I'll manage! Somehow every actor ought
To bring some novel innovation to the stage.
If he can't, he should give way to one who can. 570

I think I'll step inside here for a while
To drill my regiment of roguery.

I'll hurry back; expect a brief delay.
Here's music that will charm the time away.
(exit into house)

ACT II

A very short time has elapsed. PSEUDOLUS emerges from Simo's house, in obvious good spirits.

Act II, Scene 1

Pseud. Great Jupiter! How sweet to find
That everything is working out!
I've chased anxiety and doubt
From this grand scheme I have in mind.
It's stupid to entrust a plan
To a weak or wishy-washy man;
For all endeavors must depend
On how much effort you expend.

575

Inside my brain I've so prepared
My tricky troops, my sneaky squad
Of flimflam, fakery, and fraud,
That, after war has been declared,
My ancestral fortitude, combined
With hard work and a nasty mind,
Will snare my enemies with ease,
And falsely force them to their knees.

580

This adversary that I share
With all you lusty men out there,
This Ballio I'll bash and break:
Just pay attention, for my sake.

585

Today I will besiege this town,
Draw up my legions, tear it down;
And when I've stormed and scaled that wall

(My men won't find it hard at all),
I'll lead my army straightaway
To a second town, all old and gray.
This will provide my friends and me
With loads of booty, duty-free.
My destiny, the world will know,
Is striking panic in the foe.
It's in my blood: I feel the need
To carry out some doughty deed—
A hero's act, enshrined in fame,
That will perpetuate my name.

590

But who's this fellow striding up?
He's quite unknown to me;
And why's he coming with that sword?
I'll step aside and see.

Act II, Scene 2

From the harbor (stage right) there appears a figure dressed in the conventional traveler's outfit of cloak, broad-brimmed hat, and conspicuous sword. It is HARPAK, the somewhat dim-witted messenger slave of the Macedonian captain.

Harpax Here we are, the neighborhood
My master carefully described.
Everything seems to correspond
With my instructions from the captain:
Seventh block beyond the gate,
The home of Ballio the pimp,
The fellow I'm supposed to give
This token and this moneybag.
But I could use some guidance now.
Which one's the pimp's establishment?

595

Pseud. (*aside*) Quiet! Shh! I've got this man,
If heaven and earth approve my plan.
But I'll require a new invention:
Here's a sudden, new dimension.
Let's proceed with all dispatch;
Scrap the old scheme, start from scratch!

600

I'll pulverize and quite destroy
This regimental errand-boy.

Harpax I'll knock on the door and see if I
Can rouse up anyone inside.
(*He knocks loudly on Ballio's door.*)

Pseud. (*rushing up to HARPAX*) Knock it off, whoever you are;
Please save your knocks and spare these doors. 605
I'm here to plead on their behalf
As guardian patron of the portals.

Harpax Are you Ballio?

Pseud. Not quite,
But I'm Assistant Ballio.

Harpax What's that supposed to mean?

Pseud. It means
I'm Exchequer, In-checker, Prince of the Pantry.

Harpax Sort of majordomo?

Pseud. Higher up
In rank: I'm General Factotum.

Harpax What's your status, slave or free?

Pseud. Right at the moment, I'm a slave. 610

Harpax You look the part. You don't appear
A candidate for liberty.

Pseud. Shouldn't you check the looking glass
When you've got insults to unload?

Harpax (*aside*) This fellow's just a troublemaker.

Pseud. (*aside*) Gods be gracious, here's an anvil
For my craft! I'll hammer out
A brazen masterpiece today.

Harpax (*aside*) Why's he talking to himself?

Pseud. Look here, you youngster!

Harpax What do you want? 615

Pseud. Do you or don't you represent
That Macedonian officer
Who bought a beauty from our stock,
Who paid my master, Mister Pimp,
A cash advance of fifteen minas,
Five still owing?

Harpax I'm your man.
But how in the world do you know me?
Where have you seen or talked to me?
I've never made a trip to Athens 620
In the past, and till today,
I'd never laid an eye on you.

Pseud. It's just because you look the part.
When he left town, we all agreed
The balance would fall due today,
But no cold comfort has arrived.

Harpax Well, here it is.

Pseud. You've brought it?

Harpax Yes.

Pseud. Then why so slow to hand it over? 625

Harpax Give it to you?

Pseud. Yes, Herc, to me!
I'm Ballio's financial wizard:
Bursar, purser, debt-disperser.

Harpax Holy Herc, if you controlled
The treasure of almighty Jove,

I'd never trust you with a single
Silver sliver!

Pseud. (*reaching for the bag*) Quick as a wink
We'll see your debt discharged.

Harpax (*protecting the bag*)
I'd rather keep these funds tied up.

630

Pseud. Damn you! It's very obvious
You're smearing my integrity—
As though I'd never handled trust
Accounts a thousand times as large.

Harpax Well, maybe others have more faith;
You don't inspire my confidence.

Pseud. Are you suggesting I might want
To con the silver out of you?

Harpax No. You're the source of that suggestion;
My suspicions are my own.
But what's your name?

635

Pseud. (*aside*) This pimp has a slave called Syrus.
I'll pretend that's me. (*aloud*) I'm Syrus.

Harpax Syrus?

Pseud. Yessir, that's my name.

Harpax We're wasting time. If your master's home,
Why don't you call him to the door,
So I can get my business finished
Here, whatever your name may be.

Pseud. If he were home, I'd summon him.
But trusting me with all the cash
Would be a more conclusive act
Than paying him.

640

Harpax Conclusive? Sure!

I'd close the deal and kiss it sweet
Goodbye! Of course, I realize
You're hot and bothered when you see
The money slipping through your claws.
I won't negotiate with anyone
But Ballio in person.

Pseud. He's occupied and busy now:
He's got a case before the judge.

645

Harpax Good luck to him! I'll just return
Another time, when he's at home.
But take this letter from me, please,
And give it to him. Inside he'll find
The token our masters both agreed
To use in dealing with the girl.

Pseud. I understand. Your captain wanted
Her released to anyone
Who brought the cash, together with
His portrait image, stamped in wax.
He left a specimen with us.

650

Harpax You know about the whole affair.

Pseud. Why shouldn't I?

Harpax Then give him the token.

Pseud. O.K. But what's your name?

Harpax Harpax.¹²

Pseud. Harp off, Harpax! You're not welcome.
You won't get inside our house
To play your snatching harpy acts.

Harpax I snatch great foes right off the battlefield:
That's how I got my name.

655

¹²One of Plautus' significant character names, "Harpax" suggests the Greek verb *harpazein*, "to snatch" or "to plunder."

Pseud. I'm more inclined to think
You snatch great pots right off the pantry shelf.

Harpax Not true! But Syrus, do you know
What I would like?

Pseud. I'll know if you tell me.

Harpax I've got a room beyond the gate,
The third tavern on the right;
My hostess is a tubby, chubby,
Gimpy grandma, name of Chrysis.

Pseud. What do you want from me?

Harpax Please reach me there, when your master comes. 660

Pseud. As you would have it, certainly.

Harpax I'm now so weary from my travels,
I must rest and freshen up.

Pseud. A wise and admirable plan.
But please make sure you don't go missing
When I need to summon you.

Harpax No fear. I'll have a delicious meal,
And then an after-dinner nap.

Pseud. I quite approve.

Harpax And is that all?

Pseud. Go off to slumberland.

Harpax I'm going. 665
(*exit HARPAX, stage right*)

Pseud. Just you listen, Harpy-boy:
Bundle up in lots of blankets;
Sweating makes a person sweet.

Act II, Scene 3

Pseud. (*moving downstage to confide in the audience*)
Immortal gods! I think this fellow
Saved my skin by coming here.
He's paid the ticket for my trip
From Way-off-course to Journey's-end.
Father Nick-of-Time himself
Couldn't have made a timelier entrance
Than this timeliest of letters
That has landed in my lap. 670

Here I've found my horn of plenty—
Plenty of everything I need:
A horn of hoax and hocus-pocus,
Sleight of hand, bamboozlement;
Plenty of cash, and a horny girl
To hug my master's horny son.

How I'm going to swagger now,
When I've got cause for confidence!
Already I'd laid out a plan
Of action, scheming how to snatch
The little lady from the pimp; 675
It all took shape inside my mind,
Well ordered, beautifully arranged.

But this will often be the case:
The plans of a hundred clever men
Can be overturned by a single goddess—
Luck. And isn't it the truth?
Depending on how a person uses Luck
He may succeed, and everyone of course
Will then pronounce him sensible and wise. 680
If a scheme should turn out well, then all the world
Declares him shrewd; but if disaster strikes,
We look upon him as an utter fool.

Well, we're the fools; we just can't see our folly!
All of us pursue our greedy goals,
Grasping at gain, as if we possibly

Could judge what serves our real interest.
 We sacrifice the real world
 By chasing unreality.
 The outcome is predictable:
 We groan and moan our lives away,
 While death creeps closer all the while.

685

Enough profound philosophy!
 My lectures always last too long.

Immortal gods! My little fib
 Was worth its weight in platinum—
 That sudden, spur-of-the-moment claim
 That I belonged to Ballio.
 Now I'll use this letter here
 To dupe three victims: master, pimp,
 And military messenger.

690

What's this? Oh bliss! I think another
 Wish I made is coming true.
 Look: Calidorus is approaching,
 Leading someone by the hand.

Act II, Scene 4

As PSEUDOLUS steps aside to watch and listen, CALIDORUS returns (stage right) with CHARINUS, a bright and appealing youth of about his own age.

Calid. Sweet and bitter, I've revealed
 The truth in its entirety.
 You know my passion and my pain;
 You know my abject poverty.

695

Chari. I remember everything;
 Just let me know what I should do.

Calid. Pseudolus commanded me
 To find a strong and sympathetic
 Friend, and then to bring him here.

Chari. You've followed orders to the letter:

Here's a friend and sympathy.
 But that man Pseudolus of yours
 Is new to me.

Calid. A living masterpiece!
 He's my inventive genius.
 He told me he could carry out
 The project I discussed with you.

700

Pseud. (*aside*) I'll try the grand, heroic style.

Calid. Is that a voice?

Pseud. Oh yea, rejoice!
 Dire despot, unto thee I bow;
 Pseudolus' sovereign lord art thou.
 A threefold pleasure; thrice prepared,
 Three victims cunningly ensnared
 Thou shalt possess: a triple treat;
 A triform triumph of deceit.
 Judge not this letter by its size:
 It holds a vast and precious prize.

705

Calid. That's him.

Chari. A bold, bombastic beggar!

Pseud. Forward march, extend your arm,
 And greet the answer to your prayer.

Calid. Pray, how should I greet you, Pseudolus?
 As Wishful Hope or Wish Fulfilled?

Pseud. As both, I'd say.

Calid. As both, good day!
 But what's the news?

Pseud. Dispel your fear!

710

Calid. (*identifying CHARINUS for PSEUDOLUS*)
 I packed this man out.

Pseud. Come again?

Calid. I picked him out, I meant to say.

Pseud. Who is he?

Calid. Charinus.

Pseud. Gracious me!
A graceful name! My gratitude.

Chari. Look, if I can be of service,
Say the word.

Pseud. Thanks just the same.
Bless you, Charinus, I don't want
The two of us to bother you.

Chari. Could you two be a bother? Nothing
Bothers me.

Pseud. Then wait a while.

715

Calid. What's that you've got?

Pseud. A letter
I waylaid just now; a token, too.

Calid. A token? What do you mean, a token?

Pseud. One the captain sent this way.
His flunky was delivering it,
Along with five bright silver coins;
He'd come to fetch your ladylove,
But I threw dust into his eyes.

Calid. How?

Pseud. This audience has paid
To see us act our comedy.
They know precisely how it happened;
You'll get caught up later on.

720

Calid. What's our next move?

Pseud. Today your girl
Will be free to take you in her arms.

Calid. Me?

Pseud. Yes you, yourself, in person,
If yours truly lives so long;
And if you can find a man to help me—
Quickly!

Chari. What should he be like?

Pseud. Immoral, clever, cunning, one
Who quickly gets the hang of things
And then relies on native wit
To see what action he should take.
Someone unknown in these parts.

725

Chari. If he's a slave, could that create
A problem?

Pseud. Not at all; I much
Prefer the slave to the freeborn.

Chari. Well, I think I can provide your man:
Quick-witted, rotten to the core.
My father sent him from Carystus;
So far, he hasn't ventured from
Our house, and never until yesterday
Had he set foot in Athens.

730

Pseud. Wonderful! But I'll still need
To float a loan—five silver minas,
Which I'll pay back today; you see,
His father (*pointing to CALIDORUS*) owes a debt to me.

Chari. I'll lend you the money; look no farther.

Pseud. What a dear, obliging man!

I'll also need a cloak, a dagger,
And a broad-brimmed hat.

Chari. Can do. 735

Pseud. Immortal gods! This fellow's not
Charinus, he's sweet Charity!
Tell me about your father's slave:
Has he any sense about him?

Chari. Armpit scents: he stinks to heaven.

Pseud. Phew! We'll get him longer sleeves.
Can he be sanguine, sharp, and keen?

Chari. His blood is two parts vinegar.

Pseud. But what if he has to tap his veins
For sweeter fluids?

Chari. Sweeter? He'll drip 740
Spiced liqueur and raisin brandy,
Muscatel and honey-mead;
In fact, he had a notion once
To start a walking winery.

Pseud. Touché, Charinus! You're a treat;
You fleece me at my favorite game.
But how shall I address your flunky?

Chari. Simia, alias Mister Monkey.

Pseud. When it's windy, can he whirl?

Chari. He'd teach a twister how to twirl. 745

Pseud. Is he cautious?

Chari. Maybe not:
He's often cautioned, never caught.

Pseud. What if they nail him fast and firm?

Chari. He's just an eel: away he'll squirm.

Pseud. And is he sharp at dirty tricks?

Chari. Sharp enough for politics.

Pseud. The man's an ideal choice, to judge
From your account.

Chari. If you only knew!
He'll glance at you, and straightaway
He'll tell you what you want him for.
But what's your proposal? 750

Pseud. I'll explain.
When I have got him all dressed up,
I want this fellow to become
A counterfeit of the captain's slave;
He'll take the token to the pimp,
Along with the sack of silver coins,
Then whisk the woman off to safety.

Help! I've given the plot away!

Any instructions that remain
I'll tell the fellow face to face. 755

Calid. Then what are we doing standing here?

Pseud. Get the man and all the trappings,
Bring him right away to meet me
At the countinghouse of Aeschinus.
Be quick about it!

Calid. We'll be there
Ahead of you.
(*exeunt CALIDORUS and CHARINUS, stage left*)

Pseud. More haste, less speed!
(*addressing the audience*)
All my plans that earlier
Were clouded and obscure have now

Become transparent, and my vision's
 Crystal clear. The road's wide open:
 All my legions now are marshaled,
 Standards proudly raised on high.
 The birds are soaring overhead;
 The auspices all point my way.
 My heart's abrim with confidence
 That I can rout the enemy.
 Off to the forum, where I'll load
 My orders on this Simia:

He mustn't trip, his leadership
 Is crucial in my grand design;
 I'll sound the call, we'll storm the wall,
 And then Fort Pimp will all be mine.
(exit stage left)

760

ACT III

*From Ballio's doorway there emerges a YOUNG SLAVE, a wretched and timid boy in his early teens.*¹³

Act III, Scene 1

<i>Slave</i>	<p>When the gods assign a boy the job of slaving For a pimp, and then they grant him ugliness, That boy has been assigned, if you ask me, A lousy load, a low-down dirty deal. Just look at me slaving here, where I'm obliged To shore up every shape and size of misery; And I can't find a single lover-boy To give me even a smidgen of tenderness.</p>	770
	<p>Today's the birthday of our boss the pimp; He's threatened the household, high and low alike: Whoever fails to give him a gift today Will die tomorrow in cruel agony. Hey! I don't know what I'm supposed to do; I lack the wherewithal all do it with. If I don't find a present for our pimp, I'm bound to get the long end of the stick. That's awful for a little kid like me!</p>	775 780
	<p>Gosh! I'm so scared of catching holy heck That if some fellow lays a load on me, Though people say that really makes you groan, I guess I'll somehow learn to clench my teeth.</p>	785
	<p>I'd better learn to clench my lips. Just look! My master's coming home; he's brought a cook.</p>	

¹³On this little monologue, with its sometimes cryptic brand of humor, see General Introduction, note 3.

Act III, Scene 2

As the SLAVE BOY tries to become invisible, enter (stage left) BALLIO and a COOK, accompanied by apprentice cooks and other ATTENDANTS.

Ballio "Cook's Marketplace"—that's such a stupid name: 790
Not cooks but crooks go on the market there.
Upon my oath, I couldn't hope to find
A worse type than this cook I've got in tow—
A loud-mouthed, swaggering, useless nincompoop.

The King of Hell refused to let him in: 795
He's needed here to cater to the dead,
Since he alone can satisfy their taste.

Cook If you hold that opinion of me,
Why did you hire me?

Ballio Scarcity: no choice!
If you're a cook, why were you sitting there, 800
Left out in the market all alone?

Cook I'll tell you:
Human greed's the cause of my decline,
Not lack of talent.

Ballio How so?

Cook Let me explain:
As soon as people come to hire a cook,
Nobody wants the best and highest priced; 805
They'd rather hire the cheapest one around.
That's why I sat alone in the marketplace.
No drachma-per-diem dope am I; no one
Gets me off my butt for less than double that.

My dinner menu's not like other cooks', 810
Who spice up mounds of mouldy meadow grass,
Converting guests to cattle (greens galore!),
Then lace that fodder with more foliage.
They toss in coriander, fennel, garlic,

Parsley, sorrel, cabbage, spinach, beet, 815
Dissolve a pound of asafetida,

Then grind in murderous mustard, guaranteed
To make you howl before you touch the stuff.
When these boys cook, their seasonings do not 820
Consist of spices, but of vampire bats,
To gnaw the living entrails from their guests.
So that's why people here live such short lives,
Their bellies bloated with this kind of fodder,
Scary to mention, let alone to munch on.
Humans choose the greens that cows refuse. 825

Ballio And you? Do you use heavenly seasoning
That can extend the span of human life,
Since you attack those spices?

Cook Shout it aloud!
People can aspire to live two hundred years
By sticking to the spicy diets I've designed. 830
When I've put scorchilender in the pan,
Or torridopsis or inflammagon,
The dish becomes red hot upon the spot.
Those are my seasonings for Neptune's creatures;
Earth-born beasts I spice with yummiander, 835
Smackalyptus, or delectamom.

Ballio May Jupiter and all the gods destroy you
With your spices and your pack of lies!

Cook Please let me speak.

Ballio Speak on, and go to hell!

Cook When the pans are boiling, I remove their lids: 840
The savor flies to heaven on soaring feet.

Ballio A savor with sore feet?

Cook A careless slip.

Ballio How so?

Cook	I meant to say, "on soaring wings." ¹⁴ Jupiter dines daily on that scent.	
Ballio	On your day off, what's Jupiter to eat?	845
Cook	He goes to bed on an empty stomach.	
Ballio	Damn you! Is it for this I'm shelling out hard cash?	
Cook	Though I admit I'm an expensive cook, I promise that my hiring price is matched By service rendered.	
Ballio	Larceny, no doubt.	850
Cook	Do you expect to find a single cook Who's not equipped with grasping eagle talons?	
Ballio	Do you expect to cook a single meal Without those grasping talons tightly tied? (<i>catching sight of the lurking SLAVE BOY</i>) Hey, boy, look lively! Here's a job for you! Get all my valuables locked away. Don't let this fellow's face out of your sight: If he looks sideways, you look sideways, too. If he steps forward, match him step for step. If he sticks out his hand, you do the same.	855
	If he should grab what's his, just let him grab it; But if he grabs what's mine, then hold him fast. He starts: you start. He stops: you stop likewise. He squats upon the ground: just squat away! And each apprentice cook gets a private guard.	860
		865
Cook	Come on, cheer up!	
Ballio	Will you explain how I Can be cheerful when I'm going home with you?	

¹⁴I have paraphrased Plautus' joke, which is obscure in the original Latin. It is one of his recurrent slip-of-the-tongue gags (cf. *Miles Gloriosus*, line 27).

Cook	Because today I'll dip you in my broth The way Medea cooked old Pelias. Her poisons and her magic drugs, they tell us, Made the old man a little lad again; I'll do the same for you.	870
Ballio	So you're also a poisoner?	
Cook	Heavens, no! I'm a man-preserver.	
Ballio	Ha! How much to teach me that single recipe?	875
Cook	Which one?	
Ballio	Preserving you from fleecing me.	
Cook	Base price, if you trust me; otherwise, no deal. But is it your friends or enemies you're going To feast today?	
Ballio	Why, they're my friends, of course.	
Cook	Why don't you call your enemies instead? Today I'll give your guests a banquet so bespiced, So sprinkled with sweet seasoning, The instant someone samples my delights He'll want to nibble off his fingertips.	880
Ballio	By Herc, before you serve a single guest, Be sure that you and your henchmen have a taste, To make you nibble off your pilfering paws.	885
Cook	Perhaps you don't believe what I'm telling you.	
Ballio	Don't be a nuisance! Too much nagging! Shush! Look: here's my house. Go in and cook your meal. Hurry!	890
Slave	Why not sit down and call your guests? The dinner's already a mess.	

(The COOK and his retinue go into Ballio's house, leaving BALLIO alone on stage.)

Ballio Just look at the sprig!
That rascal is the cook's assistant tongue.¹⁵
Really, I don't know where to watch out first,
With thieves inside my house and a thug next door. 895
You see, my neighbor here (Calidorus' dad),
As he left for the forum, warned me specially
To be on guard against Pseudolus, his slave,
And not to trust him; for he's on the prowl today,
Hoping somehow to swindle the girl from me. 900
The old man said he'd promised solemnly
That he would filch away Phoenicium.

So now I'll go inside and tell my household staff
On no account to trust this Pseudolus riffraff.
(goes into his house)

¹⁵The "rascal" must be the slave who has just spoken in lines 891–92. This person could be either the young slave of Act III, Scene 1 (if he is still on stage), or an impudent assistant cook.

ACT IV

PSEUDOLUS enters from the forum (stage left), singing exultantly to his newly found assistant, the slave SIMIA. SIMIA, who does not appear immediately, is disguised as the messenger-slave Harpax, with cloak, broad hat, and conspicuous sword; in guile and virtuosity, he can rival Pseudolus.

Act IV, Scene 1

Pseud. If ever immortal benevolent gods
Get involved in our human condition,
They must want Calidorus and me to be saved,
And the pimp to go down to perdition.
What a godsent support they've provided in you:
You're a fellow so cunning and clever!
(*looking back, and failing to see SIMIA*)
Where's he gone? If I've started to talk to myself,
I'm becoming more loony than ever.

By Herc, I'm tricked, it's plain to see:
I failed to check a cheat like me.

Holy Pollux, I'm ruined if he's taken off,
My design won't unfold as expected. 910
Look at that! There's my whipping-post strutting along,
With his arrogant manner perfected.
(to SIMIA) Hello, there, I was hunting all over for you;
I was frightened that you had defected.

Simia I confess I'm a frightfully flighty type.

Pseud. Where were you dawdling?

Simia Wherever I pleased.

Pseud. I know that already.

Simia Then why do you ask?

Pseud. I want to school you in this scheme.

Simia You need the school; don't scholar me. 915

Pseud. You're treating me with cool contempt.

Simia Don't you deserve contempt from me,
A legendary legionary?

Pseud. Concentrate on the job at hand.

Simia Do you see my attention wandering?

Pseud. Then walk along more quickly.

Simia No, I like to take my time. 920

Pseud. Here's our chance: while he's asleep,
I want you to get the jump on him.

Simia Why such a rush? Relax! No fear!
If only Jupiter would place
That soldier's emissary here
To meet my challenge, face to face:
There's no way he could ever be
A Harpax half as good as me. 925
Cheer up! I'll fix your fine affair,
Untangling it with tender care.
My tricks and lies will so dismay
This foreign army type, he'll say
He isn't who he seems to be;
He'll calmly claim that I am he.

Pseud. How come? 930

Simia How dumb a question! I'm going to die!

Pseud. (*aside*) A really charming sort of guy!

Simia I'll outclass even you in lying,
Master snitch, without half trying.

Pseud. Jupiter watch over you
For my sake!

Simia And for my sake, too.
Does this outfit suit me, would you say? 935

Pseud. It's quite magnificent!

Simia O.K.

Pseud. I pray the kindly gods may grant you
Everything for which you yearn;
If I prayed them to grant what you were worth,
You'd get less than nothing in return.
(*aside*) He's so downright sly and sneaky;
I've never seen a man more cheeky.

Simia What's that I heard?

Pseud. Hey, mum's the word.
But what rewards you'll get from me
If you manage this business properly!

Simia Won't you shut up?
Reminding the mindful is mindless and mad: 940
The rememberer's memory may become bad.
I've absorbed all the facts and I've learned them by heart;
I've religiously practiced my fraudulent part.

Pseud. An upright man!

Simia (*aside*) Not he nor I.

Pseud. Don't falter now!

Simia Won't you shut up?

Pseud. So help me heaven—

Simia But heaven won't;
You're spouting undiluted lies.

Pseud. For your treachery, Simia, you have earned
My love, my fear, my high esteem.

Simia I've learned to hand out guff like that;
You can't pat me upon the head.

945

Pseud. What a lovely reception you'll get from me
When you've done this job today!

Simia Ha, ha!

Pseud. With lovely food and wine and perfume,
Succulent morsels and drinks galore.
A lovely girl will be there as well,
To lavish kisses upon you.

Simia You're a lovely host.

Pseud. I'll cause you to say
Much more, if you pull off this job.

Simia If I don't, may the crucifixioner
Give me a cross reception!
Now get a move on! Show me the mouth
Of the pimp's establishment. Which door?

950

Pseud. Third along here.

Simia Shh! That mouth just
Yawned.

Pseud. The house has a bellyache,
I'd say.

Simia Why?

Pseud. Because, so help me
Pollux, it's vomiting the pimp!

(PSEUDOLUS and SIMIA make themselves inconspicuous, as BALLIO emerges from his house in an odd, furtive manner.)

Simia Is that the man?

Pseud. That's him.

Simia What measly
Merchandise! Just take a look:
Forward motion's not for him;
He skitters sideways like a crab.

955

Act IV, Scene 2

Ballio I'll admit this cook's less foul
A character than I supposed;
So far he's pilfered nothing but
A ladle and a little mug.

Pseud. (to SIMIA, sotto voce)
Here you go now, this is the perfect
Moment.

Simia I agree with you.

Pseud. Step out into the street. Be tricky!
I'll be waiting in ambush here.

Simia (in a loud "soliloquy," moving toward BALLIO)
I've been counting carefully:
Sixth lane from the city gate.
Here we are; this must be the alley
Where he told me to turn aside.
But how many houses down the alley,
That I really couldn't say.

960

Ballio (aside) Who's this fellow in the cloak?
Where's he come from? Who does he want?
He's got a sort of foreign look, and
I don't recognize his face.

Simia Here's a man who's sure to know
The matter I'm unsure about. 965

Ballio (aside) He's heading straight for me. I wonder
Where in the world the fellow's from.

Simia Hey there! You with the wild goatee,
I've got a question; answer me.

Ballio Well, well! You've no "good day" to share?

Simia No, I have no good days to spare.

Ballio You'll get from me as good as you give.

Pseud. (aside) A fine beginning: superlative! 970

Simia Tell me, then, do you know any
Person living on this lane?

Ballio I know myself.

Simia Few human beings
Reach the condition you describe.
Down in the forum I doubt you'd find
One man in ten who knows himself.

Pseud. (aside) I'm safe; he's turned philosopher.

Simia I'm looking for a nasty fellow—
Scofflaw, low-life, perjurer,
Degenerate.

Ballio (aside) It's me he wants.
Those are my nicknames, sure enough. 975

I hope he gets my surname right.
(aloud) What is this fellow's name?

Simia Pimp Ballio.

Ballio Do I know myself?
I am the object of your search,
Young man.

Simia You're Ballio?

Ballio Me, yours truly.

Simia The way you're dressed,
You look like a second-story man. 980

Ballio If you spotted me on some dark street,
I think you'd treat me with respect.

Simia My master asked me to express
His warmest compliments to you.
Take this letter from me now;
He told me to deliver it.

Ballio Just who issued the command?

Pseud. (aside) We're sunk! My man is all mucked up.
Names weren't mentioned; what a mess!

Ballio Who do you say sent me this letter? 985

Simia Look at his picture on the seal;
Then, sir, *you* tell *me* his name,
Proving to me that you are really
Ballio.

Ballio Give me the letter.

Simia (handing it over) Here: identify the seal.

Ballio (*aside, as he studies the seal*)
 Ah! Polymachaeroplages:¹⁶
 Pure and simple recognition.
 (to SIMIA) Hey! Polymachaeroplages
 Is his name.

Simia Now I know how right
 I was in giving you the letter,
 Seeing how you spoke the name
 Of Polymachaeroplages. 990

Ballio What's he doing?

Simia Playing the role
 Of brave heroic warrior.
 But hurry up and scrutinize
 This letter, please—I'm very rushed—
 Take the cash immediately
 And give the woman her release.
 I must be in Sicyon today
 Or else tomorrow I die.
 Master's very domineering. 995

Ballio Don't tell me; I know him too.

Simia Come on, read the letter through, then.

Ballio Well, I will, if you'll shut up.
 (*reads*)
 "Captain Polymachaeroplages
 Dispatches to the pimp named Ballio
 This letter sealed with a portrait mutually
 Agreed upon." 1000

Simia The token's in the letter.

Ballio I see; I'm satisfied. But does he never
 Start a letter with a friendly wish?

¹⁶A typical bit of comic nonsense, the Greek name means "Son-of-many-sword-blows"; Willcock (p. 129) suggests "McWhackem."

Simia No; that would violate army protocol.
 By action he confers good health on friends
 And likewise deals destruction to his foes. 1005
 But keep on reading, let experience teach you
 What this letter says.

Ballio Just listen, then:
 "Harpax, my aide, is on his way to you—"
 You're Harpax?

Simia I'm your man, (*aside*) and harp I can. 1010

Ballio "—Bearing this letter. He'll convey the cash;
 I want the woman sent with him at once.
 It's right to wish the righteous 'Best of health':
 I'd do so, if I thought you qualified."

Simia What next?

Ballio Pay up and take away the girl. 1015

Simia What are we waiting for?

Ballio Follow inside, then.

Simia Here I come.

Act IV, Scene 3

As BALLIO and SIMIA disappear into Ballio's house, PSEUDOLUS comes down-stage to address the audience yet again.

Pseud. I swear to Pollux I've never seen a man
 More devious or deceitful than this Simia.
 I'm frightened of the fellow. I'm really scared
 I'll face the gory treatment Ballio got: 1020
 My man may turn his lucky horns on me,
 If any chance of mischief should arise.
 Heavens! I hope not, for I wish him well.

Now I'm feeling triply terrified.
 First, I'm nervous that my pal here could
 Desert me and defect to the enemy; 1025
 Next, master might arrive back anytime,
 To snatch the loot and catch the looters, too;
 Finally, Harpax the First could reappear 1030
 Before this Harpax gets the girl away.

Oh Herc, I'm doomed! They've been inside too long.
 My heart is waiting with its suitcase packed;
 It plans to fly away to distant realms,
 Unless he brings the girl out right away. 1035

(*seeing Ballio's door open*)
 I've won! I've overthrown my overseers!

Act IV, Scene 4

SIMIA reappears from Ballio's house, leading the girl PHOENICIUM.

Simia Don't cry, you don't understand, Phoenicium.
 You'll get the picture soon, at dinner time.
 You're not being led to the fellow with the fangs, 1040
 That Macedonian who provokes your tears;
 I'm taking you to your dearest sweet desire:
 In a twinkling you'll be in Calidorus' arms.

Pseud. Why did you loiter so long inside the house?
 My heart's been battered, bruised, and beaten flat. 1045

Simia You jailbird, how can you find the luxury
 Of grilling me when the enemy's everywhere?
 I'd say, "Forward march, in double time!"

Pseud. By Pollux, good advice from such a no-good thug! 1050
 Advance! Let's crown our win with a triumphant jug!
 (*They leave with PHOENICIUM, stage right.*)¹⁷

¹⁷Although there is no textual evidence of their destination, it makes good sense to assume that they have taken refuge with Charinus, Calidorus' generous friend from Act II. See Willcock, p. 16.

Act IV, Scene 5

BALLIO comes out of his house, obviously pleased at the success of his transaction.

Ballio Ha, ha! At last my mind's been set at rest:
 That fellow's gone; he's led the girl away.
 Let Pseudolus come now, the dirty crook,
 And try to snatch the girl by trickery! 1055
 By Herc, I'm positive I'd rather swear
 An oath, commit a thousand perjuries,
 Than let that swindler get the laugh on me.
 Now when we meet, he'll be my laughingstock.
 He's bound for the gristmill soon—that was the deal. 1060

I'd love to meet old Simo, I confess;
 How happily he'd share my happiness!

Act IV, Scene 6

SIMO enters from the forum, stage left.

Simo I'll see if my Ulysses has achieved
 The sack of Ballio's sacred citadel.¹⁸

Ballio Give me your lucky hand, you lucky fellow, 1065
 Simo.

Simo What's up?

Ballio Now—

Simo What now?

Ballio No problem!

Simo Why?
 Did my man come here?

¹⁸In depicting Pseudolus as a warrior at Troy, Simo refers to Ulysses' legendary theft of the Palladium, Minerva's sacred image. I have simplified the allusion.

Ballio No.
Simo Then what's so good?
Ballio Your twenty mina coins are safe and sound—
 The bet you made today with Pseudolus.
Simo I'd like to think so.
Ballio I'll pay up myself, 1070
 If your slave gets possession of that girl
 Or else conveys her to your son, as pledged.
 Oh, Herc! Please bet me! I'm itching to give my word,
 To reassure you that your money's safe.
 You can even keep the woman as a gift. 1075
Simo I see no risk in closing out the deal
 On those conditions. (*formally*) Twenty minas do you
 Swear to give?
Ballio I do.
Simo That's not so bad!
 But have you ever met Pseudolus?
Ballio Sure, with your son.
Simo What did he say to you? What words did he use? 1080
Ballio Theater rubbish, standard pimp abuse
 From the comic stage, well known to every child:
 He called me a dirty double-crossing crook.
Simo He didn't tell a lie.
Ballio So I wasn't angry.
 How can it matter if you bad-mouth a man 1085
 Who doesn't care and doesn't contradict?
Simo All right, I'd like to hear why he's no problem.
Ballio Because he'll never nab the girl from me:

He can't! Remember I told you she was sold,
 Some time back, to a captain from Macedon? 1090
Simo I do.
Ballio Well, sir, his slave brought me the cash,
 With a sign in sealing wax—
Simo Go on.
Ballio —As prearranged by the officer and me.
 He took away the girl a while ago.
Simo Is that the honest truth?
Ballio The what? From me?
Simo Watch out it's not some fabricated scheme.
Ballio The seal and the letter make me positive.
 He took her and left for Sicyon just now.
Simo Great Herc! Great work! I can hardly wait to appoint
 Pseudolus Mayor of Millstone Colony.¹⁹ 1100
 (*looking offstage, left*)
 But who's this in the cloak?
Ballio I've no idea.
 Let's watch to see where he goes and what he does.

Act IV, Scene 7

The real HARPAX enters (stage right) singing a self-congratulatory solo. BALLIO and SIMO are not quite close enough to understand his words; at first, BALLIO will take him to be a young client, ripe for the plucking.

Harpax I find corrupt those slaves who flout
 Or disregard their master's rules.

¹⁹As the first "colonist" sent to forced labor in the gristmill, Pseudolus will give his name to the new settlement.

Some can't perform a task without
 A blunt reminder: stupid fools!
 No sooner out of master's sight
 They think they're free,
 At liberty
 To wench and brawl
 And squander all
 They have; but they're still slaves, all right!
 The only talent they possess
 Is getting by on craftiness.
 I've had no contact with that mob:
 I've kept my distance, done my job.
 In master's absence, I assume
 My master's standing in the room.
 I'm frightened when he's nowhere near;
 When he's around I feel no fear.

And now for this assignment here!

I remained in the tavern for Syrus' call—
 He had taken the letter and told me to wait;
 I expected some word when the pimp arrived home,
 But the man hasn't come and it's now getting late.
 So I'm here to discover just what's going on;
 Did he take me, perhaps, for a bit of a ride?
 Now my sensible move is to knock on the door
 And to summon somebody who may be inside.

(waving the purse, as he moves toward Ballio's door)
 I want the pimp to take this fee
 And send the girl away with me.

Ballio (whispering to SIMO) Hey there!

Simo What is it?

Ballio The man is mine.

Simo How so?

Ballio Because this catch looks fine.

He's got the dough, he wants a doll;
 I'm going to crunch him, bones and all.

Simo Will you devour him on the spot?

Ballio Yes, while he's fresh and piping hot.
 For while he's in a giving mood,
 Not to eat him would be rude.

Upstanding fellows make me poor,
 And sinners make me fat;
 The public likes the hero type,
 But I prefer the rat.

Simo (aside) The gods will give you living hell
 For wickedness like that!

Harpax (aside) I'm wasting time; I'll give these doors a swat,
 To see if Ballio's at home or not.

Ballio (to SIMO) It's Venus who confers these joys,
 Who sends me all these good-time boys,
 These damn-the-cost, let's-go-for-brokers,
 Self-indulgent, carefree jokers.
 Lads who eat and drink and screw,
 In temperament they're not like you:
 A pleasure-hater so repressed
 You spoil all pleasure for the rest.

Harpax (shouting at the door) Hey, anybody home?

Ballio (aside) I think
 He's heading straight toward my house.

[Harpax (knocking) Hey, anybody home?

Ballio Young man,
 What debt are you collecting here?]²⁰
 (aside) I'll get a load of loot from him;
 I recognize my lucky charm.

²⁰The bracketed lines are repetitive, and should perhaps be deleted from the text.

Harpax (*knocking loudly*) Will no one open?

Ballio You in the cloak!
What debt are you collecting here?

Harpax I'm after Ballio the pimp,
The master of this residence.

1140

Ballio Whoever you may be, young fellow,
Spare the effort of that search.

Harpax Why so?

Ballio Because he's here before you,
Face to face and large as life.

Harpax (*pointing to SIMO*) You're him?

Simo (*outraged*) Watch out, you dressed-up lout,
Beware my crooked walking stick
And point your filthy finger this way:
(*indicating BALLIO*) Here's the pimp.

Ballio (*indicating SIMO*) And here's the gent.
But gentle sir, you've often heard
The howls of raging creditors,
When you've been penniless except
For what this pimp's provided you.

1145

Harpax Why don't you talk to me?

Ballio O.K.,
I'm talking. What do you want?

Harpax For you to take some money.

Ballio Give!
My hand is constantly outstretched.

Harpax Here, then. Take these silver minas—
Five, all counted and correct.

My master, Polymachaeroplages,
Said I should bring them here to you,
The sum he owed, and you should send
Phoenicium away with me.

1150

Ballio Your master?

Harpax That's correct.

Ballio The soldier?

Harpax Yes, that's right.

Ballio From Macedon?

Harpax Exactly so.

Ballio Sent you to me?
Polymachaeroplages?

Harpax You speak the truth.

Ballio Instructing you
To give me this cash?

Harpax If you're in fact
Pimp Ballio.

Ballio And told you then
To take the woman away from me?

1155

Harpax Yes.

Ballio Did he say Phoenicium?

Harpax Your memory is excellent!

Ballio Wait here!
I'll soon be back.

Harpax Well, hurry up;

Be quick! I'm in a rush. You see
How late in the day it is.

Ballio I do;
But still I want this man's advice.
Just wait right here, I'll soon
Be back to see you.
(*taking SIMO aside*) What now, Simo?
What'll we do? He's caught in the act,
This man who brought the moneybag. 1160

Simo How so?

Ballio Don't you understand?

Simo My ignorance is absolute.

Ballio Your Pseudolus has hired this man
To play the role of messenger
From Macedon.

Simo Have you received
His moneybag?

Ballio Is seeing believing?

Simo Say! In dealing with those spoils,
Remember to give half to me:
Friends should share and share alike.

Ballio Good grief! The whole amount is yours. 1165

Harpax (*impatiently*) How soon will you attend to me?

Ballio (*aloud*) Hang on!
(*sotto voce*) What do you suggest now, Simo?

Simo Let's have a little fun and games
With this fictitious courier;
We'll keep it up until he comes
To realize the joke's on him.

Ballio (*to SIMO*) Just follow me.
(*to HARPAX*) Well, well! So you're
His slave, you say?

Harpax Most certainly.

Ballio What was your purchase price?

Harpax His valor
Won me on the battlefield. 1170
I was commanding officer
In the place where I was born, back home.

Simo Did he ransack the city jail,
The place where you were born, back home?

Harpax If you speak insulting words to me,
You'll get them back.

Ballio How long a time
Did it take to come from Sicily?

Harpax I arrived the second day, at noon.

Ballio Holy Herc! You made good time!

Simo The man's as speedy as can be: 1175
When you look at his calves, you know he's fit—
To wear great thumping ankle-chains.

Ballio Tell me, were you accustomed to sleep
In a cradle as a little boy?

Simo Of course he was.

Ballio And had you the habit
Of doing (tut, tut!) . . . you know what I mean?

Simo Tut, tut! Of course he had.

Harpax Are you both
Quite sane?

Ballio A probing question now:
At night, when the captain took the watch
And you stood guard along with him,
Did his sword-blade always fit
Inside your scabbard perfectly? 1180

Harpax Go hang yourself!

Ballio You'll get your chance
At hanging soon enough today.

Harpax Either bring me out the girl
Or else return the money.

Ballio Wait!

Harpax Why wait?

Ballio Tell us about this cloak:
How much was the rental fee?

Harpax The which?

Simo What does it cost to hire a sword?

Harpax (aside) These men need their heads examined!²¹ 1185

Ballio Don't leave—

Harpax Let go!

Ballio That hat: what price
Will it fetch its owner for the day?

Harpax What "owner"? Are you raving mad?
I own these clothes; I bought them as
My private things.

Ballio You've got your only
Private things between your legs.

²¹Literally, "These men need a dose of hellebore."

Harpax (aside) These gents are smeared with oil; they need
A good old-fashioned rubbing down. 1190

Ballio Answer this question, in the name
Of Herc (I'm very serious!):
What are your wages? At what pittance
Were you hired by Pseudolus?

Harpax Who is that Pseudolus?

Ballio Your coach,
Who trained you in this stratagem,
So you could use more stratagems
To snatch the girl away from me.

Harpax What Pseudolus? What stratagems
Do you keep going on about?
I haven't the faintest notion who
He is. 1195

Ballio Come on, away with you!
Today there'll be no profit here
For swindlers. Just tell Pseudolus
Another fellow snatched the spoils,
The first Harpax who came along.

Harpax Honest to Pol, I'm really Harpax.

Ballio Honest to Pol, you want to be.
This is a swindle, pure and simple.

Harpax I've handed you the moneybag;
When I first came some time ago,
I gave the token to your slave,
Right here before your door—the letter
Signed with the portrait of my master. 1200

Ballio You gave a letter to my slave?
Which slave?

Harpax Syrus was his name.

Ballio (to SIMO) This swindle's based on more than nonsense:
It's been thought out wickedly.
That scoundrel of a Pseudolus!
How cleverly he's planned it all!
He gave him the exact amount
Of money that the captain owed,
And dressed the fellow up like this
So he could take away the girl.
(*aloud*) The real Harpax personally
Brought that letter to me here.
1205

Harpax My name is Harpax, and I am
The Macedonian captain's slave.
I've not been guilty of a single
Wicked or deceitful deed,
And I've no knowledge or awareness
Of your precious Pseudolus.
1210

Simo Barring a miracle, old pimp,
You've forfeited the girl for good.

Ballio Ye gods, I'm getting really scared,
The more I listen to his words.
Ye gods, that Syrus fellow, too,
Has left my heart frigidified—
The one who took the token in.
It's a wonder if he's not Pseudolus.
(to HARPAX) Hey, you, what did he look like, then,
The man you gave the token to?
1215

Harpax Bright red hair, protruding belly,
Rather swarthy, chubby calves,
With large head, ruddy face, sharp eyes,
And utterly enormous feet.

Ballio You killed me when you reached those feet!
It was Pseudolus himself.
I'm done for! Now I'm dying, Simo.
1220

Harpax I won't let you die, by Herc,
Unless the money's paid me back—
All twenty minas.

Simo In addition,
Twenty minas more for me.

Ballio (to SIMO) So will you take away the prize
That I put forward as a joke?

Simo From wicked men it's right to take
All loot and lucre that they make.
1225

Ballio At least hand over Pseudolus.

Simo Hand over Pseudolus to you?
What harm's he done? Did I not tell you
A hundred times to watch for him?

Ballio He ruined me.

Simo He sentenced me
To pay a twenty-mina fine.

Ballio What shall I do now?

Harpax Give me
The money, then go hang yourself.

Ballio Damn you! Follow me this way, please,
To the forum; I'll pay up.

Harpax I follow.
1230

Simo What about me?

Ballio All foreigners get paid
Today; but citizens, tomorrow.
Pseudolus convened a court
That put me on trial for life or death,²²
When he dispatched that other man
To steal the girl from me today.
(to HARPAX) Follow me. (*to audience*) But don't you wait

²²Plautus' Roman reference is to the Comitia Centuriata, the assembly that had jurisdiction on capital charges.

For me to take this road back home.
The way life's gone, I've now decided
Alley travel's best for me.

1235

Harpax If you only walked at the rate you talked,
We'd have reached the forum long ago. (*exit stage left*)

Ballio My happy birthday soon will be
My gloomy death-day. Woe is me! (*exit*)

Act IV, Scene 8

Simo I've hit him up just fine, the way
My slave has hit his enemy.
Now I intend to lie in wait
For Pseudolus—not the way it's done
In other plays, where people lurk
With whips and prods; I'll go inside
To find the twenty minas that
I promised if he did the job.
I'll pay him of my own free will.
The creature is so very clever,
Very cunning, very sly.
Pseudolus has quite surpassed
The Trojan horse, Ulysses too.

1240

I'll get the money all prepared;
Then Pseudolus will be ensnared.²³
(*exit into his own house*)

1245

²³If taken at its face value, this comment seems inconsistent with what Simo has just said. Does he still hope to outwit Pseudolus by means of some trick or snare? There is a similar mysterious allusion in line 1292.

ACT V

Enter PSEUDOLUS, stage right, in wild disarray; he is wearing a garland and has obviously been drinking nonstop since he was last seen.

Act V, Scene 1

Pseud. What's up, feet? My word, feet!²⁴
You're acting absurd, feet.
Do you really suppose I'll be offered a hand
When I wobble because you're unable to stand?
If I stumble and fall,
My tumble is all
Your fault!
Well, moving at last? Hey, foot, I feel
You need your backside kicked, you heel.
That's the trouble with wine: it always knows
Like a sneaky wrestler, to tackle the toes.

So help me Pollux, I do declare
I've gone on a simply spectacular tear!

Such an elegant spread, good taste sublime,
A marvellous host and a marvellous time.
No need for a rambling rhetorical style:
Parties like this make life worthwhile!
All forms of pleasure, all manner of love;
The next best thing to heaven above.

1255

Two lovers locked in love's embrace,
With lips engaged and tongues entwined;

1260

²⁴I intend these two lines to be read jerkily, in imitation of Plautus' bacchiac tetrameter: "Whă't's ūp, feét? Mŷ wórd, feét! / Yōū're ácting äbsúrd, feét."

Two partners snuggling breast to breast,
A couple with coupling on their mind.

A snow-white hand, a toast, a sip,
Sweet cup of love and fellowship.

No hateful or obnoxious guest,
No idiotic bore;
Just perfumes, unguents, pretty ribbons,
Floral wreaths galore,
Provided in profusion there—
Don't ask me any more.

1265

That's the way
We spent the day,
Young master and I, getting happy and tight,
After I
Accomplished my
Objective by putting the foe to flight.

1270

There I left them wining and dining,
Reclining and fondling their ladies of leisure;
My sweetheart was acting the life of the party,
Indulging herself with the utmost of pleasure.

I rose to leave; "Come, dance!" they cried.
I gave a sort of jiggle,
This way; with expert skill I tried
The Asiatic wiggle.²⁵
All bundled in my frilly cloak,
I did these steps (a silly joke);
They clapped, they shouted out "Encore!"
"Come back, we want a little more!"
I had my doubts, but just the same
Continued with my foolish game:
Parading for my girl, like this,
So she would offer me a kiss,
I pirouetted—and I fell!
That was my frolic's sad farewell;

1275

²⁵Ionic dancing was proverbial for its immodesty and immorality.

For while I struggled, *oops!* Watch out!
I shit my cloak (or just about).
Sweet Pollux, how they roared at me
For such a loss of dignity!

1280

I'm given a jug: I take a quaff.
I change my cloak, get that one off;
I head for home, and home I'll stay
Till this hangover goes away.

So long, young boss! Old boss must learn
The bargain's satisfied.
(*knocking on his own door*)
Hey, open up, somebody, hey!
Tell Simo I'm outside.

Act V, Scene 2

Simo (*cautiously opening his door*)
Some wretch at the door is calling me.
What's this? How come? What do I see?

1285

Pseud. Your Pseudolus, garlanded and stewed.

Simo (*aside*) That's frank, at least. Some attitude!
Is he scared on my account? No, sir!
I wonder, should I growl or purr?
(*pointing to a purse that he is carrying*)
This moneybag rules out brute force;
I hope to save it still, of course.

1290

Pseud. (*approaching SIMO*)
Good man, meet bad man: how do you do.

Simo God bless you, Pseudolus! (*recoiling*) Phew!
Get lost!

Pseud. Hey, why am I rejected?

Simo What the hell had you expected,
Drunk and belching in my face?

1295

Pseud. Just hold me gently, please, in case
I crash. How can you fail to see
That I am smashed quite smashingly?

Simo What gall is this, to come here tight,
A wreath on your head, in broad daylight?

Pseud. It gives me pleasure. (*belches again*)

Simo Pleasure, sure!
You're pleased to belch in my face once more. 1300

Pseud. Belching's beautiful. Don't be a pain!

Simo I think, you rascal, you've the power
To guzzle Massic wine and drain
Four harvests in a single hour.

Pseud. "In winter," add.²⁶

Simo All right, not bad! 1305
From where exactly should I say
You steered your loaded barge this way?

Pseud. From a bash with your son.
Oh, Simo, what fun
To cheat Ballio!
My mission's accomplished
According to plan.

Simo You're a terrible man! 1310

Pseud. The girl's doing this (*a lewd gesture*).
She's in bed with your boy
And she's actually free.

Simo I know the whole story;
No need to tell me.

²⁶Because the Romans divided the daylight period into twelve hours, regardless of season, winter hours were of shorter duration.

Pseud. Then where is my money
And why the delay?

Simo You've got right on your side.
I admit it; I'll pay.

(*SIMO hands the purse to PSEUDOLUS.*)

Pseud. You said I'd never get it, yet it's mine.
(*pointing to his own shoulder*)
Just load this fellow up and fall in line. 1315

Simo (*to audience*) Load him up?

Pseud. That's what I said.

Simo (*to audience*) May I beat him up instead?
Will he pinch my purse and laugh at me, the swine?

Pseud. Woe to the vanquished!²⁷

Simo All right, turn your shoulder.

(*Humiliated, SIMO places the purse over PSEUDOLUS' shoulder, and falls to his knees to beg for mercy.*)

Pseud. Ah!

Simo I never thought I would become
A suppliant at your feet. Oh dear! Oh dear!

Pseud. Oh, stop it!

Simo I hurt!

Pseud. If you didn't hurt, I would. 1320

Simo Will you take this purse from master, Pseudolus, friend?

²⁷*Vae victis*, the proverbial saying of the Gallic chieftain Brennus after the capture of Rome in 387 B.C.

Pseud. With all the feeling in my heart and soul!

Simo Please give me a tiny refund; you agree?

Pseud. A greedy fellow: you can call me that,
For you won't get a penny richer from this purse.
You'd feel no pity for my wretched back,
If I had not achieved my goal today.

Simo Someday, sure as I live, I'll get even with you!

Pseud. Why do you threaten me? My skin is tough. 1325

Simo Then go ahead. (*starting to leave*)

Pseud. All right, come back.

Simo What for?

Pseud. Come back, that's all; no trick involved.

Simo I'm here.

Pseud. Come, join me for a drink together.

Simo Me?

Pseud. Just do as I tell you. If you come, I'll give you
Half or even more of your money back.

Simo I'll come; conduct me where you will.

Pseud. Well, then. This business hasn't made you cross 1330
At me or my young master, has it, boss?

Simo Of course not!

Pseud. Step this way; I'll follow you.

Simo Perhaps you should invite the audience, too.

Pseud. Those cheapskates never have invited me;
Why offer them our hospitality?

(*to audience*)

But if you say
You liked our play,
And cheer our company before you go,
Then I'll invite you—to tomorrow's show.
(*exeunt omnes*)

1335