

The Comedy of Errors

By William Shakespeare

Sample

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Cast of Characters

Antipholus of Syracuse
Dromio of Syracuse, his servant
Antipholus of Ephesus
Dromio of Ephesus, his servant
Aegeon, father to both Antipholus's
Duke Solinus, ruler of Ephesus
Angelo
Balthazar
First Merchant/Dr. Pinch
Officer

Adriana, wife of Antipholus of Ephesus
Luciana, her sister
Luce/Courtesan
Aemelia, an abbess

Act I, Scene I

A hall in DUKE SOLINUS'S palace.

[Enter AEGEON, in handcuffs led by the OFFICER, and DUKE SOLINUS]

AEGEON

Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall
And by the doom of death end woes and all.

DUKE SOLINUS

Merchant of Syracuse, plead no more;
I am not partial to infringe our laws:
'Twixt thy seditious countrymen and us,
It hath in solemn synods been decreed
Both by the Syracusians and ourselves,
To admit no traffic to our adverse towns Nay, more,
If any born at Ephesus be seen
At any Syracusian marts and fairs;
Again: if any Syracusian born
Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies,
Unless a thousand marks be levied,
To quit the penalty and to ransom him.
Thy substance, valued at the highest rate,
Cannot amount unto a hundred marks;
Therefore by law thou art condemned to die.

AEGEON

Yet this my comfort: when your words are done,
My woes end likewise with the evening sun.

DUKE SOLINUS

Well, Syracusian, say in brief the cause
Why thou departed'st from thy native home
And for what cause thou camest to Ephesus.

AEGEON

A heavier task could not have been imposed
Than I to speak my griefs unspeakable:
In Syracuse was I born, and wed
Unto a woman, happy but for me,
With her I lived in joy; our wealth increased
By prosperous voyages I often made
To Epidamnum; till my factor's death
Drew me from kind embracements of my spouse:
From whom my absence was not six months old
Before herself had made provision
And soon and safe arrived where I was.
There had she not been long, but she became
A joyful mother of two goodly sons;
And, which was strange, the one so like the other,
As could not be distinguish'd but by names.
That very hour, and in the self-same inn,
A meaner woman was delivered
Of such a burden, male twins, both alike:
Those,--for their parents were exceeding poor,--
I bought and brought up to attend my sons.

My wife, not meanly proud of two such boys,
Made daily motions for our home return:
Unwilling I agreed. Alas! too soon,
We came aboard.
A league from Epidamnum had we sail'd,
Before the always wind-obeying deep
Gave any tragic instance of our harm:
But longer did we not retain much hope;
For what obscured light the heavens did grant
Did but convey unto our fearful minds
A doubtful warrant of immediate death;
My wife, more careful for the latter-born,
Had fasten'd him unto a small spare mast;
To him one of the other twins was bound,
Whilst I had been like heedful of the other:
The children thus disposed, my wife and I,
Fixing our eyes on whom our care was fix'd,
Fasten'd ourselves at either end the mast;
At length the sun, gazing upon the earth,
Dispersed those vapors that offended us;
The seas wax'd calm, and we discovered
Two ships from far making amain to us,
Of Corinth that, of Epidaurus this:
But ere they came,--O, let me say no more!

DUKE SOLINUS

Nay, forward, old man; do not break off so;
For we may pity, though not pardon thee.

AEGEON

Ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues,
We were encountered by a mighty rock;
Which being violently borne upon,
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;
So that, in this unjust divorce of us,
Fortune had left to both of us alike
What to delight in, what to sorrow for.
Her part, poor soul! seeming as burdened
With lesser weight but not with lesser woe,
Was carried with more speed before the wind;
And in our sight they three were taken up
By fishermen of Corinth, as we thought.
At length, another ship had seized on us;
And, knowing whom it was their hap to save,
Gave healthful welcome to their shipwreck'd guests;
And would have reft the fishers of their prey,
Had not their bark been very slow of sail;
And therefore homeward did they bend their course.
Thus have you heard me sever'd from my bliss;
That by misfortunes was my life prolong'd,
To tell sad stories of my own mishaps.

DUKE SOLINUS

And for the sake of them thou sorrowest for,
Do me the favor to dilate at full
What hath befall'n of them and thee till now.

AEGEON

My youngest boy, and yet my eldest care,
At eighteen years became inquisitive
After his brother: and importuned me
That his attendant--so his case was like,
Reft of his brother, but retain'd his name--
Might bear him company in the quest of him:
Five summers have I spent in furthest Greece,
Roaming clean through the bounds of Asia,
And, coasting homeward, came to Ephesus;
Hopeless to find, yet loathe to leave unsought.
But here must end the story of my life;
And happy were I in my timely death,
Could all my travels warrant me they live.

DUKE SOLINUS

Hapless Aegeon, whom the fates have mark'd
To bear the extremity of dire mishap!
Now, trust me, were it not against our laws,
My soul would sue as advocate for thee.
But, though thou art adjudged to the death
Yet I will favor thee in what I can.
Therefore, merchant, I'll limit thee this day
To seek thy life by beneficial help:
Try all the friends thou hast in Ephesus;
Beg thou, or borrow, to make up the sum,
And live; if no, then thou art doom'd to die.

AEGEON

Hopeless and helpless doth Aegeon wend,
But to procrastinate his lifeless end.
[Exeunt]

Act I, Scene II

The Mart.

[Enter ANTIPHOLUS of Syracuse, DROMIO of Syracuse,
and First Merchant]

FIRST MERCHANT

Therefore give out you are of Epidamnum.
This very day a Syracusian merchant
Is apprehended for arrival here;
And not being able to buy out his life
According to the statute of the town,
Dies ere the weary sun set in the west.
There is your money that I had to keep.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Go bear it to the Centaur, where we host,
And stay there, Dromio, till I come to thee.
Within this hour it will be dinnertime:
Till that, I'll view the manners of the town.
Get thee away. [Dromio Exits]

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

What, will you walk with me about the town,
And then go to my inn and dine with me?

FIRST MERCHANT

I am invited, sir, to certain merchants,
Of whom I hope to make much benefit;
I crave your pardon. Soon at five o'clock,
Please you, I'll meet with you upon the mart
And afterward consort you till bedtime:
My present business calls me from you now.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Farewell till then: I will go lose myself
And wander up and down to view the city.

FIRST MERCHANT

Sir, I commend you to your own content.
[Exit]

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

He that commends me to mine own content
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.
[Enter DROMIO of Ephesus]
What now? how chance thou art return'd so soon?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Return'd so soon! rather approach'd too late:
The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit,
The clock hath strucken twelve upon the bell;

My mistress made it one upon my cheek:
She is so hot because the meat is cold;
The meat is cold because you come not home;
But we that know what 'tis to fast and pray
Are penitent for your default today.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Stop in your wind, sir: tell me this, I pray:
Where have you left the money that I gave you?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

O,--sixpence, that I had o' Wednesday last
To pay the saddler for my mistress' crupper?
The saddler had it, sir; I kept it not.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

I am not in a sportive humor now:
Tell me, and dally not, where is the money?
We being strangers here, how darest thou trust
So great a charge from thine own custody?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

I pray you, sir, as you sit at dinner:
I from my mistress come to you in post;
If I return, I shall be post indeed,
For she will score your fault upon my pate.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Come, Dromio, come, these jests are out of season;
Reserve them till a merrier hour than this.
Where is the gold I gave in charge to thee?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

My charge was but to fetch you from the mart
Home to your house, the Phoenix, sir, to dinner:
My mistress and her sister stay for you.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

In what safe place you have bestow'd my money,
Or I shall break that merry sconce of yours
That stands on tricks when I am undisposed:
Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

I have some marks of yours upon my pate,
Some of my mistress' marks upon my shoulders,
But not a thousand marks between you both.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Thy mistress' marks? what mistress, slave, hast thou?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Your worship's wife, my mistress at the Phoenix;
She that doth fast till you come home to dinner,
And prays that you will hie you home to dinner.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

What, wilt thou flout me thus unto my face,
Being forbid? There, take you that, sir knave.
[Strikes DROMIO of Ephesus]

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

What mean you, sir? for God's sake, hold your hands!
Nay, and you will not, sir, I'll take my heels.
[Exit]

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Upon my life, by some device or other
The villain is o'er-wraught of all my money.
They say this town is full of cozenage,
As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
And many such-like liberties of sin:
If it prove so, I will be gone the sooner.
I'll to the Centaur, to go seek this slave:
I greatly fear my money is not safe.
[Exit]

Act II, Scene I

The house of ANTIPHOLUS of Ephesus.

[Enter ADRIANA and LUCIANA]

ADRIANA

Neither my husband nor the slave return'd,
That in such haste I sent to seek his master!
Sure, Luciana, it is two o'clock.

LUCIANA

Perhaps some merchant hath invited him,
And from the mart he's somewhere gone to dinner.
Good sister, let us dine and never fret:
A man is master of his liberty:
Time is their master, and, when they see time,
They'll go or come: if so, be patient, sister.

ADRIANA

Why should their liberty than ours be more?

LUCIANA

Because their business still lies out o' door.

ADRIANA

Look, when I serve him so, he takes it ill.

LUCIANA

O, know he is the bridle of your will.

ADRIANA

There's none but asses will be bridled so.

LUCIANA

Why, headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.
The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls,
Are their males' subjects and at their controls:
Men, more divine, the masters of all these,
Lords of the wide world and wild watery seas,
Are masters to their females, and their lords:
Then let your will attend on their accords.

ADRIANA

This servitude makes you to keep unwed.

LUCIANA

Not this, but troubles of the marriage-bed.

ADRIANA

But, were you wedded, you would bear some sway.

LUCIANA

Ere I learn love, I'll practice to obey.

ADRIANA

How if your husband start some other where?

LUCIANA

Till he come home again, I would forbear.

ADRIANA

Patience unmoved! no marvel though she pause;
They can be meek that have no other cause.

LUCIANA

Well, I will marry one day, but to try.
Here comes your man; now is your husband nigh.
[Enter DROMIO of Ephesus]

ADRIANA

Say, is your tardy master now at hand?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Nay, he's at two hands with me, and that my two ears
can witness.

ADRIANA

Say, didst thou speak with him? know'st thou his mind?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Ay, ay, he told his mind upon mine ear.

ADRIANA

But say, I prithee, is he coming home?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

When I desired him to come home to dinner,
He ask'd me for a thousand marks in gold:
'Tis dinner-time,' quoth I; 'My gold!' quoth he;
'Your meat doth burn,' quoth I; 'My gold!' quoth he:
'Will you come home?' quoth I; 'My gold!' quoth he.
'Where is the thousand marks I gave thee, villain?'
'The pig,' quoth I, 'is burn'd;' 'My gold!' quoth he:
'My mistress, sir' quoth I; 'Hang up thy mistress!
I know not thy mistress; out on thy mistress!'

LUCIANA

Quoth who?

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Quoth my master:
'I know,' quoth he, 'no house, no wife, no mistress.'

ADRIANA

Go back again, thou slave, and fetch him home.

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Go back again, and be new beaten home?
For God's sake, send some other messenger.

ADRIANA

Back, slave, or I will break thy pate across.
[Kicks DROMIO of Ephesus]

DROMIO OF EPHEBUS

Am I so round with you as you with me,
That like a football you do spurn me thus?
You spurn me hence, and he will spurn me hither:
If I last in this service, you must case me in leather.
[Exit]

LUCIANA

Fie, how impatience loureth in your face!

ADRIANA

His company must do his minions grace,
Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.
Hath homely age the alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? then he hath wasted it:
Are my discourses dull? barren my wit?
I know his eye doth homage elsewhere,
Or else what lets it but he would be here?
Sister, you know he promised me a chain;
Would that alone, alone he would detain,
Since that my beauty cannot please his eye,
I'll weep what's left away, and weeping die.

LUCIANA

How many fond fools serve mad jealousy! [Exeunt]

Act II, Scene II

A public place.

[Enter ANTIPHOLUS of Syracuse]

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

The gold I gave to Dromio is laid up
Safe at the Centaur; and the heedful slave
Is wander'd forth, in care to seek me out.
[Enter DROMIO of Syracuse]
How now sir! is your merry humor alter'd?
As you love strokes, so jest with me again.
You know no Centaur? you received no gold?
Your mistress sent to have me home to dinner?
My house was at the Phoenix? Wast thou mad,
That thus so madly thou didst answer me?

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

What answer, sir? when spake I such a word?

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Even now, even here, not half an hour since.

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

I did not see you since you sent me hence,
Home to the Centaur, with the gold you gave me.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Villain, thou didst deny the gold's receipt,
And told'st me of a mistress and a dinner;
For which, I hope, thou felt'st I was displeas'd.

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

I am glad to see you in this merry vein:
What means this jest? I pray you, master, tell me.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Yea, dost thou jeer and flout me in the teeth?
Think'st thou I jest? Hold, take thou that, and that.
[Beating him]

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

Hold, sir, for God's sake! now your jest is earnest:
Upon what bargain do you give it me?

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Dost thou not know?

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

Nothing, sir, but that I am beaten.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Shall I tell you why?

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

Ay, sir, and wherefore; for they say every why hath
a wherefore.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Why, first,--for flouting me; and then, wherefore--
For urging it the second time to me.

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

Was there ever any man thus beaten out of season,
When in the why and the wherefore is neither rhyme
nor reason?
Well, sir, I thank you.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

Thank me, sir, for what?

DROMIO OF SYRACUSE

Marry, sir, for this something that you gave me for nothing.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE

But, soft! who wafts us yonder?
[Enter ADRIANA and LUCIANA]

ADRIANA

Ay, ay, Antipholus, look strange and frown:
Some other mistress hath thy sweet aspects;
I am not Adriana nor thy wife.
The time was once when thou unurged wouldst vow
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing in thine eye,
That never touch well welcome to thy hand,
That never meat sweet-savor'd in thy taste,
Unless I spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or carved to thee.
Ah, do not tear away thyself from me!
For know, my love, as easy mayest thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled that same drop again,
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself and not me too.
How dearly would it touch me to the quick,
Shouldst thou but hear I were licentious
And that this body, consecrate to thee,
By ruffian lust should be contaminate!
Wouldst thou not spit at me and spurn at me
And hurl the name of husband in my face
And tear the stain'd skin off my harlot-brow
And from my false hand cut the wedding-ring
And break it with a deep-divorcing vow?
I know thou canst; and therefore see thou do it.
I am possess'd with an adulterate blot;
My blood is mingled with the crime of lust:
For if we too be one and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion.
Keep then far league and truce with thy true bed;

I live unstain'd, thou undishonored.