

PSEUDOLUS: You're very silent, master. If I could learn from your silence what troubles and torments are torturing your soul, I'd be glad to save us both trouble – me the trouble of asking and you the trouble of replying. But as that is impossible, I must needs ask you: Why? Why have you been walking about half dead this past day and moaning to yourself in blank verse, other than it's the usual opening for a Plautine comedy? Come now, you can tell me.

CHARINUS: O Pseudolus, I am undone, and undone in love!  
Each month to me is mad as maddest June.  
My poor heart flutters like the gentle –

PSEUDOLUS: In Latin, please?

CHARINUS: Well, Pseudolus, you remember that during my last birthday, I made the acquaintance of one of the courtesans hired for entertainment. One would think that on one's birthday one can do what one likes, but when father caught us together – improving our acquaintanceship – he sent her back and withdrew my allowance. And I've just received this. [*Produces a letter*] Oh, I'm undone!

PSEUDOLUS: So you've said. Let me read it! [*reads*] Boy, are you undone!

CHARINUS: Oh, give it back! You can't even read! It's a letter from Pasicompsa.

PSEUDOLUS: Your...acquaintance.

CHARINUS: The same. She's being sold by Ballio the Pimp to a Macedonian general, and he's having one of his own officers pick her up today...and I, with no money of my own!

PSEUDOLUS: Cheer up! It could be worse!

CHARINUS: How?

PSEUDOLUS: You could be without a Pseudolus. You're very lucky – a lot of people must make do without one. But today, by Venus, (goddess of lovers and courtesans), the most brilliant strategist, the canniest conniver, the most atrocious liar is here to assist you.

CHARINUS: But I don't know any lawyers...

PSEUDOLUS: Not them, idiot! Me!

CHARINUS: You will? O Pseudolus –

PSEUDOLUS: *How* I'm going to do it, I have no idea, but never fear: I'll hatch a plan.

CHARINUS: That's what I was afraid of. Remember how your last one turned out? Lucky for you the press blamed it on Nero.

PSEUDOLUS: Yes, well, let's not harp on that now...

CHARINUS: How in the world are we going to be able to find that amount of money, and then convince Ballio to –

PSEUDOLUS: But soft! Here comes your father's slave, Acanthio.

CHARINUS: And he's running. It must be pretty serious!

[Enter ACANTHIO]

PSEUDOLUS: Hail, Acanthio, fellow toady and backscratcher!

ACANTHIO: Out of my way, Pseudolus, I have important news for Charinus!

PSEUDOLUS: Good news, I hope.

CHARINUS: I'm right here, Acanthio! What is it?

ACANTHIO: Oh, master, you're undone!

PSEUDOLUS: For gods' sake, don't encourage him. What is it?

ACANTHIO: You're father's seen your mistress!

CHARINUS: My father?

ACANTHIO: Yeah, you know him.

CHARINUS: Saw my mistress. I *am* undone!

PSEUDOLUS: Stop that! Do yourself up again. Where did this terrible event occur?

ACANTHIO: On the docks. She and the other courtesans were out for their morning walk, and your father's ship just came into port. He was standing on the poop, and before I could greet him, he was at her side, asking questions.

CHARINUS: What did she say?

ACANTHIO: I was there by that time so I told him.

PSEUDOLUS: What?

ACANTHIO: That she was not available because she was a maid-in-training.

CHARINUS: Do you think he believed you?

ACANTHIO: I know damn well he did.

CHARINUS: How?

ACANTHIO: Because right away he started making passes.

CHARINUS: At her?

ACANTHIO: Not at me!

PSEUDOLUS: One crisis at a time! First we must snatch the girl from Ballio, then we'll worry about your father.

CHARINUS: Shh! Quiet down!

PSEUDOLUS: What's the matter? Afraid of waking the audience?

CHARINUS: Ballio's door rattled!

PSEUDOLUS: I'd like to hear his shins rattle. Acanthio, get down to the master's ship right away. Do anything you can to detain him there, before he returns and makes an offer to Ballio. Now, beat it!

ACANTHIO: I just came from the docks. I'm too tired...

PSEUDOLUS: You'll be even more tired when I commit you to the treadmill! Shake a leg!

ACANTHIO: One more shake and it'll drop off!

[Exit ACANTHIO]

CHARINUS: He's coming out, Pseudolus!

PSEUDOLUS: Keep calm. He's an old friend of mine; we know each other well. We'll wait here and speak with him when he passes.

CHARINUS: But –

PSEUDOLUS: But, but, but! [They retire to the side]

[BALLIO and his chief eunuch enter]

BALLIO: Come here, Cyrus! I want the house in tiptop order today, and all the courtesans dressed in their finest finery, for today's my birthday and I want to throw a lavish party tonight for the neighbors and clients. Start the fires now and get the cooks moving or we'll never be ready on time. *Pay attention!* This is important! A Macedonian officer will be here around noon to collect the girl from Naxos, Pasicompsa. He'll have a match of this wax seal and the 100 minae he owes me. If he comes while I'm gone, give the girl to him, *after he pays you*. Is that clear?

PSEUDOLUS: What a tyrant! I've got a birthday present for him: a nice fat packet of trouble!

CHARINUS: Do shut up! Perhaps he'll say more.

PSEUDOLUS: I won't say another word.

CHARINUS: Well, *don't* say another word, instead of *saying* you're not going to say another word.

[By this time BALLIO has noticed them]

BALLIO: Who's there? Why, Charinus, my dear neighbor's son. What a nice surprise to see you out here alone, unescorted. Why not take some time to come in and browse? Who knows, perhaps...

PSEUDOLUS: [From afar] Coo-ee! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Hello, birthday boy!

BALLIO: I might have known: Pseudolus. Good morning to you, worst slave in the town!

PSEUDOLUS: May the gods give you all that I and my friend could wish for you, and may they bless you and help you nevermore. We just wanted to talk with you, friend Ballio, about a certain –

BALLIO: If you've only words to spend, I'm not listening.

PSEUDOLUS: Don't you want to know what we want?

BALLIO: I can guess. You want to see me ruined.

PSEUDOLUS: Well, partly that. But for now, I'm afraid my master's gone and fallen in love with a certain courtesan of yours, whom you are selling today...

BALLIO: The one who's just been sold? The girl from Naxos?

PSEUDOLUS: That's the faxos. Just a few more days to raise the money is all we ask.

CHARINUS: My family's always paid you well before.

BALLIO: I'm not asking for what you *have* paid. I'm asking for the whole two hundred, here and now.

CHARINUS: But that's just it, you see, I don't have the money now. I'll need some time in which to procure it...

PSEUDOLUS: You understand procuring, of course.

BALLIO: Of course. But I'm afraid I can't live on promises or guarantees. However, if you really are in love, then you'll find some way. Borrow the sum from a friend, go to a money-lender, or rob your father.

PSEUDOLUS: Rob his father? You scoundrel! I'm sorry for anyone who expects good advice from you! [*To Charinus*] That's it! We'll rob your father!

BALLIO: I'd love to talk with you further, but I'm as busy as a one-armed lion-tamer. Of course, if the Macedonian doesn't show up, she's all yours – for 200 minae.

PSEUDOLUS: Have you no shame? This lad's coming undone over her, and all you can do is quote him the price.

BALLIO: Stop it. You're breaking my heart, Pseudolus. Come, eunuch! We're off to market.

PSEUDOLUS: You...you...most wicked of wicked men.

BALLIO: Granted.

CHARINUS: [*As BALLIO leaves*] Pimp!

BALLIO: That's my trade.

PSEUDOLUS: Escaped convict!

BALLIO: Boo!

CHARINUS: Blashemer!

BALLIO: Oh, sure.

PSEUDOLUS: Public nuisance!

BALLIO: Evidently.

CHARINUS: False swearer!

BALLIO: Think of something new!

PSEUDOLUS: Grave robber!

BALLIO: Bah! [*he goes*]

PSEUDOLUS: Politician! [*To CHARINUS*] Right! No time to waste! Ballio thinks we're sunk, and that's just what I want him to think. Never, never turn your back on a Pseudolus!

CHARINUS: What are you going to do? Tell me!

PSEUDOLUS: I'll tell you when the time comes. No point in going over it twice – this play's long enough as it is. [*Looking off*] Here comes your mother. Try to get some money out of her, and I'll call in some favors at the gambling dens.

CHARINUS: I know you and those gambling dens! Don't take too long, for gods' sake. Hurry back!

PSEUDOLUS: You bet! [*Exits*]

[Enter PERISTRATA and LYCISSA]

PERISTRATA: Charinus, darling boy, you look much revived from your dour mood this morning. Perhaps if you left off poetry altogether –

CHARINUS: Mother, help me! I've bought you a present!

PERISTRATA: Oh, how nice! Lycissa, go help your young master carry –

CHARINUS: No, no, no, the present can walk. But, well, there's a final installment to put on her today, and, well, I'm broke.

PERISTRATA: Her, you say? But, Charinus, another female present...

CHARINUS: This one's personal, Mother, just for you.

PERISTRATA: But what would I do with a thing like –

CHARINUS: For your own rooms. You know how busy Lycissa is, waiting on father and all.

PERISTRATA: True, you may have a point there. However –

CHARINUS: Mother, if I don't make a payment in a flicker of a sundial she'll be snapped up.

PERISTRATA: Will you let me complete a sentence? It's just that I don't think that I can afford a gift from you at this time.

CHARINUS: You're not broke, too? Oh, Mother, just think: an import, from Naxos!

PERISTRATA: Charinus, darling, you're so intense about this!

CHARINUS: Oh, no, it doesn't matter to me, it's just that –

PERISTRATA: I know; you always like to have the house full of nice things, don't you? Well, come inside. We'll see if there's anything left in my emergency fund.

CHARINUS: Mother, one more thing! I don't want father to know about this until the deal's closed. You understand.

PERISTRATA: Dear boy, have you forgotten our routine? We never tell your father anything.  
[*Exeunt into house*]

[*Enter DEMIPHO in a frantic state. Enter LYSIMACHUS from the opposite direction.*]

DEMIPHO: Hail, Lysimachus, all hail!

LYSIMACHUS: Greetings, Demipho, how are you?

DEMIPHO: Wretched, my friend, simply wretched.

LYSIMACHUS: What's the matter?

DEMIPHO: Lysimachus, do you see in me an old man?

LYSIMACHUS: Not too old to be dead.

DEMIPHO: Your eyes deceive you! My friend, I am but a child.

LYSIMACHUS: You've reached that state, have you? Well, we all come to it sooner or later if we live long enough.

DEMIPHO: No, no, you misunderstand me. I'm young – and in love!

LYSIMACHUS: What? You in love?

DEMIPHO: Isn't it dreadful?

LYSIMACHUS: It's worse than that.

DEMIPHO: I knew you'd sympathize, my friend. It's terrible.

LYSIMACHUS: It's revolting. If you're in love, so's my laundry bag.

DEMIPHO: Lysimachus, if you please! I need your help in this endeavor.

LYSIMACHUS: You want *me* to help *you*?

DEMIPHO: You see, my son is enamoured of this same courtesan, and will, of course, want to buy this beauty for my wife...

LYSIMACHUS: I do see. That would place you in an even more awkward position, if possible.

DEMIPHO: Exactly. I must acquire her without my family knowing anything about it. Once I get to a money-lender I'm going to send Acanthio to purchase her, and I'll need to stow her away at your house until I find more...suitable accommodations.

LYSIMACHUS: I get the whole, sordid picture. Say no more. All I hope is that someday you can do as much for me.

[Enter BALLIO]

BALLIO: Why good morning, citizens, how are you both? Lysimachus, it's been quite a while since you've graced the threshold of my establishment.

LYSIMACHUS: It's been a very busy week, friend Ballio.

BALLIO: Of course it has, of course it has. And you, neighbor Demipho – but hold! Do you not know that not a half hour since your son was conferring with me about purchasing a courtesan?

DEMIPHO: My son... a courtesan?

BALLIO: No, your son Charinus.

LYSIMACHUS: How did he come into such money?

BALLIO: That's just it! He didn't have any! [To DEMIPHO] Pseudolus said that he was going to get it from you.

DEMIPHO: Pseudolus! I might have known! You didn't take them seriously, did you?

BALLIO: Heavens no! If I listened to the pleadings of every youth who met a courtesan at a birthday party, I'd have no inventory left!

DEMIPHO: And what did Pseudolus say to you?

BALLIO: Oh, the usual stage gags. They called me all the usual names that are given to pimps in comedies; he said I was a scoundrel, a criminal, a liar...

LYSIMACHUS: And he wasn't far wrong, either.

BALLIO: I know, that's why I took in all in good part.

DEMIPHO: Tell me, Ballio, this, ah, courtesan my son wants so dearly, she's, well, not available to him, is she?

BALLIO: She's available to the first person who gives me two hundred minae, but I fancy that will be the Macedonian officer, who arrives today.

DEMIPHO: [To LYSIMACHUS] This is terrible! I've got to make sure that Macedonian officer never finds this place, and you've got to help me!

LYSIMACHUS: Me? Help *you*? I'd rather die.

DEMIPHO: What was that?!

LYSIMACHUS: I mean I'd love to try!

DEMIPHO: Worry not, dear Ballio, my friend, and I will keep an eye out for your officer – and Pseudolus.

[PSEUDOLUS enters with a bag of gear, sees them, and tries to escape]

LYSIMACHUS: Why here he is, just the man we were looking for. Hail, Pseudolus!

DEMIPHO: Hail!

BALLIO: Hail!

DEMIPHO: Good day to you, Pseudolus! May I ask what you are doing out here?

PSEUDOLUS: Just...standing here...as you see.

BALLIO: How innocent!

LYSIMACHUS: Indeed, I can see he knows how to stand up for himself.

PSEUDOLUS: An honest servant, with a blameless record, as a right to stand up for himself, isn't that so?

DEMIPHO: There is a certain matter, Pseudolus, which we have heard about, and about which we would like to ask you a few questions.

PSEUDOLUS: As me what you will. For all that is within my knowledge, consider me your oracle.

DEMIPHO: I'll hold you to that promise. Listen then. Do you know anything about my son being in love with a courtesan?

PSEUDOLUS: [*mysteriously*] Ay, verily.

DEMIPHO: And that he wants to buy her?

PSEUDOLUS: Ay, verily.

DEMIPHO: And do you know anything about two thousand drachmas which you are planning to get out of me by some crafty and underhanded trick?

PSEUDOLUS: Ay, again, ver – me? Get money out of you?

LYSIMACHUS: Exactly. So that his son can buy that courtesan he so longs for.

DEMIPHO: Is it true or not?

PSEUDOLUS: Ay, verily.

BALLIO: So, he confesses it!

DEMIPHO: What did I tell you?

LYSIMACHUS: You know, Pseudolus, that he could have you packed off to the mills for this, don't you?

PSEUDOLUS: I won't be punished because I refused to inform on my master. You're all much too curious to see how I'm going to get the money.

DEMIPHO: You must be joking! Do you still think you'll get it from me?

PSEUDOLUS: Ay, verily. I'm only telling you so you can be on your guard.

DEMIPHO: Gods above! The nerve of this rascal! The gall!



PSEUDOLUS: Gaul is divided into three parts...

LYSIMACHUS: And if this plan of yours fails?

PSEUDOLUS: Send me to mill-town! But if I succeed?

DEMIPHO: You'll have your freedom. [*To the others*] You see, either way now, I win!

PSEUDOLUS: Beware: before the end of this day, you'll give me the money with those very hands.

LYSIMACHUS: Incredible!

PSEUDOLUS: Not only that, but I'll also remove this coveted courtesan from pimp Ballio's clutches for good.

BALLIO: He's lost his mind! Are you seriously suggesting –

PSEUDOLUS: Yes, yes, yes! No need to go over it again; it's time to advance the plot! By evening Pasicompsa will be in Charinus's arms, and I'll be a rich and free man.

DEMIPHO: Over my dead body.

LYSIMACHUS: Well, we shouldn't have too long to wait.

BALLIO: My friends, I'm off to set up for tonight's festivities. And I'm giving notice to my entire staff not to trust Pseudolus for a single moment. [*Exit*]

DEMIPHO: And I'm off to my banker to collect some debts. [*Exit*]

LYSIMACHUS: And I to intercept this Macedonian hoplite. [*Exit*]

PSEUDOLUS: [*To the audience*] Thank heavens! I never thought they'd leave! Now at last I can soliloquize!

[*Enter CHARINUS from his house*]

CHARINUS: Pseudolus! Pseudolus!

PSEUDOLUS: What!?

CHARINUS: I was only able to find one hundred minae. That's all we have in the entire house.

PSEUDOLUS: Listen, you: it's the middle of the play and this is where my big monologue begins and I get to tell the audience – how much did you say you had?

CHARINUS: One hundred. Exactly half.

PSEUDOLUS: It will have to do. Fly down to the harbor and bring Acanthio here. Hurry! And if you see your father, don't let him near that brothel, or your maid will be un-made. Fly!

CHARINUS: I fly, Pseudolus, with wings of –

PSEUDOLUS: Get out of here!!! [*CHARINUS exists*]

[HARPAX enters, lost. *PSEUDOLUS turns to him only when he recognizes the uniform*]

PSEUDOLUS: Can I help you find your way, sir?

HARPAX: I'm looking for a brothel.

PSEUDOLUS: Typical. Any one in particular?

HARPAX: Very definitely. I am looking for an establishment run by a certain Ballio: Panderer, Pimp, and Procurer. Do you have anything like that here?

PSEUDOLUS: We do, and I am honored to be a member of that household.

HARPAX: Are you Ballio?

PSEUDOLUS: No, I'm his sub-Ballio.

HARPAX: What does that mean?

PSEUDOLUS: I'm the chief supply officer. At Ballio's orders, I put out.

HARPAX: I see. And your name? [*He confirms the subsequent answers on a scroll*]

PSEUDOLUS: Cyrus.

HARPAX: Well, there must be some mistake, for while there is mention of a Cyrus in my orders, the personage mentioned is a eunuch.

PSEUDOLUS: Sir, do not let my manly and masculine exterior fool you. I am, indeed, as that letter states, head eunuch in these parts.

HARPAX: Well, you don't look it.

PSEUDOLUS: You force me to be candid, sir. They botched the job.

HARPAX: Botched it?

PSEUDOLUS: Botched, bungled, butchered – choose your description. Now I am neither one nor the other. I'd tell you all about it, but –

HARPAX: No, don't! That's quite all right. Well then, eunuch, I suppose you know who I am and why I am here.

PSEUDOLUS: You are the aid-de-camp to a certain Macedonian general. You are here to put the final installment of one hundred minae on Pasicompsa, the girl from Naxos. Whereupon, on presentation of a wax seal, the twin to the one my master keeps, you will take the girl with you to the general.

HARPAX: Correct. I have with me both the money and the seal. Where is the girl?

PSEUDOLUS: My master is out at market, sir, preparing for this evening's orgy. The courtesans are in seclusion until tonight; however, if you'd like to rest in the slave's quarters...

HARPAX: No, I'll wait for your summons in the tavern just inside the gate. I should be grateful if you'd deliver this letter, which bears the wax seal agreed upon, to your master when he arrives.

PSEUDOLUS: Consider it done, my good sir. Good day to you. [*HARPAX exits. ACANTHIO enters*] Psst! Acanthio! Come here!

ACANTHIO: Nothing doing, Pseudolus. I've wasted enough time with you today. Besides, the garden needs watering, the atrium needs to be swept, the shrubs need pruning, and I'm pooped!

PSEUDOLUS: You wouldn't be so pooped if you'd let me do all the work.

ACANTHIO: Like hell you would. What are you talking about?

PSEUDOLUS: If you help me now – quickly, without any complaining – I swear that as long as I am a slave in that house I shall do all your chores for you.

ACANTHIO: You're joking.

PSEUDOLUS: Have I ever liked to you?

ACANTHIO: Constantly.

PSEUDOLUS: Does that matter, now? Besides, it's not about helping me, it's about helping Clarinus. [*He dresses ACANTHIO in assorted pieces of ill-fitting armor*]

ACANTHIO: I've already thought about it and the answer is – What are you doing to me? Stop that!

PSEUDOLUS: Just think how much fun it would be to watch me cleaning the privy, all by myself.

ACANTHIO: You've got a point there.

PSEUDOLUS: No more getting up early to light the braziers, or scrubbing the floors till all hours...

ACANTHIO: Just the novelty of seeing you work is attractive in and of itself.

PSEUDOLUS: Then do as I say and keep your flap shut. Here. [*Hands him the letter*] Now you're to go in and get Charinus's girl from Ballio.

ACANTHIO: I am? You're kidding! How?

PSEUDOLUS: By presenting him with this letter and these one hundred minae. And you're in a hurry.

ACANTHIO: Oh yeah? Well, who am I, anyway?

PSEUDOLUS: Your name is Harpax. You're an officer serving under some Macedonian general who wants the courtesan Pasicompsa from Ballio. You're here to pay the last installment, and you're hot and you're tired. Now go! [*PSEUDOLUS pushes him towards BALLIO's door and knocks on it for him*] And don't forget you're mean and tough! [*He hides to the side as BALLIO's eunuch opens the door*]

ACANTHIO: My name is mean and tough. I'm a Macedonian serving under some Pasicompsa from Ballio. I'm here to pay the last courtesan, and I'm an officer and general! Now go! [*The eunuch retires*] And don't forget I'm hot and Harpax! [*To PSEUDOLUS*] Was I convincing?

PSEUDOLUS: As a jackass, yes! Now it's milltown for both of us! [*As ACANTHIO starts to flee*] Don't be nervous! Relax! And when in doubt, just yell. Like this: Heyy you!

ACANTHIO: Heyy you! I think I've got it.

PSEUDOLUS: No! Don't think! You're a soldier, for gods' sake! [*he hides*]

[*BALLIO enters*]

BALLIO: What's all the commotion?

ACANTHIO: Heyy you! I've come for the girl!

BALLIO: Which girl, heathen?

[*ACANTHIO draws his sword and threatens BALLIO with it*]

Oh, *that* girl! Cyrus, bring out the girl from Naxos – the Macedonian is here! [*To ACANTHIO*] Perhaps you'd like to sample the harem yourself, while we're waiting? Some wine, cheese, dates? A date and a date? You know, you look awfully familiar to me. Have you visited before...?

ACANTHIO: Heyy!

BALLIO: I can see that you haven't. Now, concerning the bargain, the balance due on this particular piece of merchandise is – [*ACANTHIO shoves the money at him*] Wonderful! All here. And a letter too. Sealed as expected! Well, it has been a pleasure doing business with you, Sir...Sir...?

PSEUDOLUS: *Harpax!*

ACANTHIO: HARPAX!

BALLIO: I believe you, I believe you! Ah, says here in the letter "my estimable emissary Harpax...blah blah blah...letter sealed with the likeness heretofore agreed," yes that's done, "my compliments to you and your house...blah blah blah," awfully nice, isn't he, your general? "...and if this is not done in accordance with our agreement in respect to the girl, the price, or any other stated conditions, I will return with my army and raze your house to the ground." How sweet. I love Macedonians. Such a warm-blooded people. [*The eunuch brings in PASICOMPSA*] Now, my dear, you go along with this gentleman, mind your manners, and don't come back, you understand? Farewell! [*He slams the door, eager to get away*]

PSEUDOLUS: [*entering*] Wonderful! Wonderful! You were brilliant! [*As he divests ACANTHIO of his uniform*] You know, sometimes I've wondered whether to give up all my lies, my tricks, my stratagem, and settle down to an honest and blameless life, but when I see something like this I say, "Never!" Send me to the mills, to prison, to the lions, I don't care. Tickle my feet, even. I'd do it all again in a second. [*Notices that PASICOMPSA is crying*] What's all this?

ACANTHIO: Don't cry, my dear. You don't understand what's going on, but you soon will, I promise you. I'm not taking you to that tooth-gnashing Macedonian – that's what's worrying you, isn't it? Well, worry no longer, because Charinus will be by your side –

PASICOMPSA: Charinus? He's here?

ACANTHIO: Somewhere here, very close. We're his servants, and we've just rescued you from Ballio and the Macedonian.

PASICOMPSA: You have? Oh, how can I ever thank you? [she embraces ACANTHIO]

PSEUDOLUS: Alright, alright, enough hanky-panky. We need to beat a tactical retreat before we're spotted. Acanthio, you hide Pasicompsa in Charinus's chamber while I get rid of this armor and look for Charinus. Whatever you do, keep out of sight. Now, scram! [*he exits*]

[ACANTHIO and PASICOMPSA start towards the house of DEMIPHO. LYSIMACHUS enters]

LYSIMACHUS: What ho, Acanthio. You've got her already? As of course you know, your master wants me to hide the girl until – [*catching sight of PASICOMPSA*] I say! - he returns. Now, come along my dear, Acanthio, you go and find your master...slowly. I will make sure this charming creature is well looked after. Don't be afraid, my dear, my wife's in the country. [*Ignoring ACANTHIO's and PASICOMPSA's faint protestations, he ushers her inside his house*]

ACANTHIO: This is truly awful. Pseudolus! Pseudolus!

[*DEMIPHO enters*]

DEMIPHO: Ah, there you are, Acanthio. How do I look? You were right; the bath worked wonders. Now, to business [*hefting his purse*] – [*stops*] you didn't by chance hear someone calling out for Pseudolus?

ACANTHIO: No, I did not hear me calling out for Pseudolus.

DEMIPHO: Good. Make sure you warn me if either Pseudolus or my son arrive.

ACANTHIO: I shall, sir, but may I suggest that you –

DEMIPHO: And while you are watching for those two ruffians, Acanthio, I've noticed that the garden needs watering, the atrium needs to be swept, and the shrubs need pruning. And right away, too.

ACANTHIO: But how will I watch for –

DEMIPHO: The shrubs, Acanthio. Dismissed.

[*ACANTHIO exits*]

DEMIPHO: I thought the fool would never leave. [*Charinus rushes in*] Oh, damn! My son! I can't be seen *here*!

CHARINUS: [*Aside*] My father! He's going to buy her for himself! It's now or never!

DEMIPHO: Well, my boy, how are you? Beautiful day and all, especially down by the docks. Well, well, well. Time to try to triangulate the Tiber, eh?

CHARINUS: I haven't time. There's some business I have to do...for a friend.

DEMIPHO: Good, good, good. Well, be off about it. I shan't interfere.

CHARINUS: Oh, but we never talk, Father. Ah...how are you?

DEMIPHO: Good...fine.

CHARINUS: Good, fine, good.

DEMIPHO: And you?

CHARINUS: Fine. Fine, fine.

DEMIPHO: Good. [*Seeing that CHARINUS is not going away*] Look, ah, what's this about your bringing home a serving maid for your mother?

CHARINUS: Yes, well, it occurred to me that Lycissa might need some help and –

DEMIPHO: What's she like? What's her name?

CHARINUS: Pasicompsa.

DEMIPHO: Ah, And her manners? Her deportment?

CHARINUS: *Comme ci, comme ca.*

DEMIPHO: Her looks, though, how are they?

CHARINUS: Exquisite, like Diana's, like Venus's...

DEMIPHO: Exactly what I thought when I saw her.

CHARINUS: Oh, so you've seen her?

DEMIPHO: Ah, yes, if she's the one I think you mean. But she won't do, my boy, she won't do at all.

CHARINUS: Why not?

DEMIPHO: Charinus, your mother needs a girl who can chop wood, grind corn, sweep, scrub, weave, spin, and stand a good lashing. This girl hasn't the figure for it.

CHARINUS: I know, that's what I like about her.

DEMIPHO: No, no, she won't do at all. Why, she couldn't even attend your mother in the street! A scandalous figure like that! Why, everybody would be winking and whistling and following her home and singing under our windows. Your mother would look like a madam out showing samples.

CHARINUS: Well, then, what's to be done? I've already put her on layaway.

DEMIPHO: Leave everything to me. I'll get your mother a good useful girl with a build like a boxer and a face like the Minotaur. As for your girl –

CHARINUS: We could try her out for a while and then take her back if she doesn't suit.

DEMIPHO: No, no, people in our position don't ask for refunds, it's not polite. No, I'll take the loss myself and see if I can't find another buyer for you.

CHARINUS: Well, I don't know if that's possible, Father; she's awfully dear...

DEMIPHO: Yes, isn't she, though! I mean, I dare say, I dare say! However, it so happens that an old gentleman – a friend of mine – has asked me to pick him up just that type of thing.

CHARINUS: The fact is, a man I know is looking for a thing like that, too.

DEMIPHO: Look, son, this friend of mine is half mad with love for beautiful girls. He'll pay anything. Heh heh heh. Silly old ape, isn't he?

CHARINUS: My friend is completely mad with love for this particular girl and he won't let anyone else have her!

DEMIPHO: The old ape's richer than your friend, I imagine. He'll have her if it breaks him.

CHARINUS: Well, he can't have her!

DEMIPHO: And why not?

CHARINUS: Because I have sworn to my friend...that I would find her a good home.

DEMIPHO: Oh, don't you worry about that! She'll have an excellent home, very exclusive and private, I can promise you.

CHARINUS: Bue she wouldn't like that. She's too fond of company.

DEMIPHO: My friend will keep her company just as often as he can get away.

CHARINUS: But – !

DEMIPHO: Now, my boy, your ignorance of business ethics embarrasses me. Why don't you leave me alone and go about that business you spoke of earlier?

CHARINUS: It would be done by now if you didn't talk so much!

DEMIPHO: Blame the delay on a father's love. [*LYCISSA enters from DEMIPHO's house*] Ah, Lycissa, there you are! I've got something very important for you to do.

LYCISSA: Master, not again! You promised –

DEMIPHO: No, no, not *that*. Take Master Charinus down to the docks to inspect my ship. The boy must learn sometime, don't you think?

LYCISSA: [*Clearly pleased, but cautious*] But what about the mistress?

DEMIPHO: Oh, don't worry about her. She'll manage without you for the afternoon.

CHARINUS: Afternoon? But I hate ships, Father, you know that...

DEMIPHO: This is not a time to put in your oar. [*Hustling them both out*] Have a nice long walk, both of you. Goodbye! [*They exit*] A close one, that. But you can't fault the boy for trying. He does have exquisite taste in women. Takes after his father.

[*He goes to the brothel door and knocks. BALLIO peeps out cautiously.*]

BALLIO: Why, Master Dephino, how good to see you. I was, ah, just polishing this shield for tonight...

DEMIPHO: Listen, Ballio, I'm concerned about that courtesan.

BALLIO: Nothing to fear, my dear Demipho: it's over.

DEMIPHO: Over? You mean she's bought? Are you sure?

BALLIO: Positive. The orderly just left here with the girl not five minutes ago.

DEMIPHO: The Macedonian officer? He left with her? Just now?

BALLIO: Why, yes. They should be at the city gates by this time.

DEMIPHO: You swear to this – on your honor?

BALLIO: As if I had such a thing!

DEMIPHO: Are you quite sure that our friend hasn't played one of his tricks on you?

BALLIO: I assure you you've nothing to fear. The man was quite genuine – frighteningly so. He paid her price in full and had with him a sealed letter from the general himself. [*Produces letter*]

DEMIPHO: [*Reading the letter*] It's the genuine article, by Jove. Well, I must admit I'm a bit relieved, though it's a damned shame about the girl.

BALLIO: What was that?

DEMIPHO: I said I'm surprised he didn't give it a whirl. Pseudolus, I mean. I can't tell you the pleasure I'll feel when I commit that lying, sneaking, treacherous dog to the mills.

BALLIO: None more than I. And what about you? Has he managed to finagle the two thousand from you?

DEMIPHO: You must be joking, my dear Ballio. I'm wise to all his tricks. As a matter of fact, I have two thousand with me now, for a certain purchase I had in mind, and it's staying right where it is.

BALLIO: Well, my friend, two thousand is quite a lot of money to be carrying around. Why don't you step inside, and let me help you spend it? [*HARPAX enters*] Hullo, who's this?

DEMIPHO: Hang me if I know. An officer of some kind, I shouldn't wonder.

HARPAX: I'm looking for the owner of this house, the pimp Ballio.

BALLIO: Are you? Well, you needn't look long, sir, for he's standing right in front of you.

HARPAX: [*To DEMIPHO*] So it's you, is it? I expect you received the letter –

DEMIPHO: No, no, no it's not me! Do I look like a pimp to you?

HARPAX: Hard to tell, sir. My pardon. [*To BALLIO*] I am instructed by my master to pay you this sum which he owes you, and to ask you to let me take the girl Pasicompsa with me.

BALLIO: You're Macedonian, aren't you?

HARPAX: I am.



BALLIO: And you're to give me this money?

HARPAX: That's right, if you're Ballio the pimp.

BALLIO: And I'm to let you have the girl, what was it, Pasicompsa?

HARPAX: You've not forgotten it, I see.

BALLIO: One moment. [*Aside, to DEMIPHO*] You see what's going on, don't you?

DEMIPHO: I do, indeed. Pseudolus must have hired this knave to impersonate the messenger from the Macedonian.

BALLIO: Yes, and he's even given me half the money! He's ingenious, your Pseudolus, I'll say that for him. I almost believed this scoundrel, in spite of having met the real one. Well, it's time to call his little sham. [*To HARPAX*] So, you are the general's ensign, huh? How much did he hire you for? Come on, out with it!

HARPAX: I beg your pardon? I was commissioned –

DEMIPHO: Oh, he was “commissioned”, was he? Is that what they call it now?

BALLIO: “Commissioned” by the greatest scoundrel in the world!

HARPAX: Are you both insane? How dare you insult –

BALLIO: Yes, we know all that. What I don't understand is where you got that superb armor. Perhaps when you're arrested for fraud they'll let me have it as a reward.

DEMIPHO: Surely he's well-used to the stink of jail cells by now. Seriously, though, we're dying to know: how much – or how little – did Pseudolus get you for?

HARPAX: I won't stand here and be insulted by two ignorant, old fools. Just send the girl out to me, or give the whole sum back and let me go on my way. [*Howls of laughter from the other two*] I don't know what Pseudolus you're talking about, for I've never heard the name in my life.

BALLIO: I have no doubt that he'd cover his tracks in such a fashion. Nevertheless, the woman you seek is gone already, so there's no use in keeping up this ridiculous pretense.

HARPAX: You're badly mistaken if you think this is pretense. I'm losing my temper with you. Did I not just give you the sum required? And did you not receive my letter, sealed by the general himself? I gave it to one of your slaves, at this very spot.

BALLIO: Oh ho! You gave it to one of my slaves, did you? And which slave would that be?

HARPAX: He called himself Cyrus.

BALLIO: Cyrus gave me no letter. A very good try, my friend, but I'm afraid your story does not –

HARPAX: The slave I met knew about the entire arrangement. I gave him the letter and went to a tavern to rest, thinking you would send for me. When you did not, I came straight here to fulfill my obligation.

DEMIPHO: Wait one moment! What did this Cyrus look like?

HARPAX: Frankly, he looked like a knave, a scoundrel, a cutpurse, a rogue, and a thief.

BALLIO: [To DEMIPHO] I'm getting a bad feeling about this, my friend.

DEMIPHO: Me, too. Quick, send for your eunuch!

BALLIO: Cyrus! [To HARPAX] Now, my friend, we'll settle this once and for all. [CYRUS enters] Is this the man who took your letter?

HARPAX: I've never seen that man before in my life. The man I spoke with had a red nose, big head, and very large feet.

BALLIO: Large feet! That's it! Pseudolus!!! Oh, Demipho, I'm done for! Your slave has ruined me!

DEMIPHO: Ye gods, but he's diabolical! Didn't I tell you over and over again to beware of him?

BALLIO: What am I going to do? He could have taken the girl anywhere!

HARPAX: Look, I still don't know what is going on, but it seems I've arrived in the middle of a family dispute.

BALLIO: Oh, Pseudolus, you shall roast in the fires of hell for this! But I'll have my revenge, I swear it!

HARPAX: I'll thank you to give me the money back, and then go hang yourself. If you've allowed the girl to be stolen, that is your affair with the general, not mine.

BALLIO: [kneeling] Mister soldier, I don't usually beg, but this time I'll grovel. No! I'll give you two grovels, only don't leave. Forgive us for our insults and slurs, we took you for another entirely. Listen, I'll give you all the money back, only stay for one hour. I'll give you a banquet to yourself, honeyed wines, the choicest morsels, a concubine into the bargain, only give me an hour so that my faithful assistant here can locate the girl.

DEMIPHO: I, your assistant? You wretch!

BALLIO: [to DEMIPHO] It's your son who wants her, isn't it? And it's your slave that took her, wasn't it? Find her while I keep the officer here, and for gods' sake be quick about it. If that officer leaves and we haven't found her, we'll all pay. [To HARPAX] My lord, please, follow me. [BALLIO and CYRUS hustle HARPAX into the house]

DEMIPHO: Oh, I'll find her, alright, but not for you. [He knocks at LYSIMACHUS's door] Lysimachus! Lysimachus! I need your help!

[LYSIMACHUS comes out, closing the door behind him, and walks with DEMIPHO away from the house]

LYSIMACHUS: Oh, Demipho, you've come have you? That's grand. Look, my friend, why don't you take some time to think things over before you go in there?

DEMIPHO: What are you talking about?

LYSIMACHUS: Take all the time you need. Months, years, it doesn't matter. In the meantime, she can stay at my place and gain some useful experience.

DEMIPHO: What are you babbling about?

LYSIMACHUS: Well, you can't rush in there right now, she's changing. My wife's away in the country, and I thought she wouldn't mind if your new maid tried on –

DEMIPHO: She's there? In your house?

LYSIMACHUS: Well, of course she is. That was the plan, wasn't it?

DEMIPHO: How did she get in your house?

LYSIMACHUS: Acanthio brought her to me. I think we had agreed that she'd be safer in my house than in yours.

DEMIPHO: Acanthio? Well, how did he get her?

LYSIMACHUS: From Ballio, of course. Is everything all right? Your wife doesn't know, does she?

DEMIPHO: No, no, no, it's not that at all. I just thought...well, it doesn't matter now. I'm just very relieved, my friend, very relieved. Wait – where's Pseudolus?

LYSIMACHUS: I haven't seen him since this mornig.

DEMIPHO: Thank the gods! Well, then, musn't keep a girl waiting. [*He moves toward LYSIMACHUS's house*]

LYSIMACHUS: Wait a minute, wait a minute. Demipho, you can't go in there, you're too old...

DEMIPHO: Well, if that isn't the pot calling the cauldron black.

LYSIMACHUS: I beg you, think it over.

DEMIPHO: No, lovers like myself, don't think. We act!

LYSIMACHUS: Only if you're very fortunate, you old ruin.

DEMIPHO: Ruin indeed! If I'm a ruin, you're an unexhumed fossil!

LYSIMACHUS: Demipho, listen to reason! Look at yourself! You need a bath! Your clothes are dusty! Neither of your hairs is brushed! You'll make her queasy.

DEMIPHO: How can that be, you old artifact? I just bathed not an hour ago!

[*PASICOMPSA enters from LYSIMACHUS's house, freshly done up*]

PASICOMPSA: Whoo-hoo, mister man?

LYSIMACHUS: Yes, my dear?

PASICOMPSA: Isn't it time we went over to my lover's house? I don't want the poor boy to worry.

DEMIPHO: Did you hear what she called me? Her "lover!"

LYSIMACHUS: She wasn't speaking of you, you imbecile! My pet, this will be a rude shock to you, but this gentleman here is your master, not I.

DEMIPHO: Delighted, my dear. Now, shall we...?

PASICOMPSA: What, him? He's just some old man I met on a poop. What about--?

LYSIMACHUS: Now, you must be brave, my child.

DEMIPHO: Lysimachus! It's not up to you to tell her to be brave.

LYSIMACHUS: Well, somebody ought to!

DEMIPHO: Now, precious, I know I don't look my best, but wait 'til I change my clothes and visit my barber –

LYSIMACHUS: Barber? All you need is a buffer!

PASICOMPSA: But what about Charinus? Where is he?

DEMIPHO: Charinus? Well, my dear, you happen to be talking to the *father* of Charinus. You have exceptional taste in men, although I must say that of the two of us he's a bit green and inexperienced...

PASICOMPSA: But I love him, don't you see? We've been waiting ever so long...

LYSIMACHUS: You're disturbing her, you mangy werewolf! Pasicompsa, why don't you go inside and rest until Charinus returns? I'll go with you.

DEMIPHO: Lysimachus! How dare you? What would your wife say?

LYSIMACHUS: My wife's a lot further away than yours is!

DEMIPHO: Look, we can't be seen arguing in the street. Why don't we go down to the forum...all together?

PASICOMPSA: [*Brightening*] Now that's the best idea anyone's had yet! I'm sure the markets are still open. Do you really mean it?

DEMIPHO: I do!

PASICOMPSA: Then let's be quick about it, for I don't want to miss Charinus when he returns. [*PASICOMPSA heads towards the market*]

DEMIPHO: Well? No pithy comments, Methusela?

LYSIMACHUS: May the best-preserved man win! [*And they run out after her*]

End of sample