

CHARACTERS

SIMO	<i>an Athenian gentleman</i>
CALIDORUS	<i>his son</i>
PSEUDOLUS	<i>his chief slave</i>
CALLIPHO	<i>a neighbour and friend of Simo</i>
CHARINUS	<i>a friend of Calidorus</i>
BALLIO	<i>a pimp</i>
PHOENICIUM (mute)	<i>a girl in the possession of Ballio and loved by Calidorus</i>
HARPAX	<i>an officer's orderly</i>
SIMIA	<i>a slave</i>
A COOK	<i>hired by Ballio</i>
A BOY	<i>slave of Ballio</i>
<i>Other slaves in Ballio's house</i>	
<i>Women in Ballio's house</i>	
<i>Cook's assistants</i>	

★

The scene is at Athens, outside the houses of Ballio and Simo. The house of Callipho may also be visible.

PSEUDOLUS

PROLOGUE: If anyone wants to stand up and stretch his legs, now is the time to do it. The next item on the programme is a play by Plautus – and a long one.

★

[Enter CALIDORUS, a young man in a state of deep depression, with PSEUDOLUS, his father's chief slave.]

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 put a few questions to you. Can you tell me, master, why you've been going round half dead these last few days, and carrying that tablet with you everywhere, and soaking it with your tears, instead of finding someone to confide in? Come on, master, tell me. Let me into your secrets.

CALIDORUS: Oh Pseudolus, I am the most unhappy wretch alive.

PSEUDOLUS: Jupiter forbid it!

CALIDORUS: Jupiter has got nothing to do with it. I'm suffering under the tyranny of Venus, not Jupiter.

PSEUDOLUS: Won't you tell me all about it, then? I've always been your chief privy counsellor up to now.

CALIDORUS: You still are.

PSEUDOLUS: Then tell me what the trouble is. Money, service, or advice, all I have is at your disposal.

CALIDORUS: Look at this letter, then, and see for yourself what kind of pain and misery is wasting my life away.

PSEUDOLUS: I will. Give it here . . . What – what in the world does this mean? [Peering at the writing as if it was illegible.]

CALIDORUS: Why?

PSEUDOLUS: All these letters – they seem to be playing at fathers and mothers – crawling all over each other.

CALIDORUS: Oh, if you're going to make a joke of it –

PSEUDOLUS: It would take a Sibyl to read this gibberish; no one else could make head or tail of it.

CALIDORUS: Why are you so unkind to those dear little letters, written on that dear little tablet by that dear little hand?

PSEUDOLUS: A chicken's hand, was it? Some chicken surely scratched these marks.

CALIDORUS: Oh, you are an idiot. Read the letter or give it back to me.

PSEUDOLUS: All right. I'll read it. Give me your attention.

CALIDORUS: I have no attention.

PSEUDOLUS: Then you must find some.

CALIDORUS: You read the letter and I'll say nothing. All my attention is in that tablet, not in my mind.

PSEUDOLUS [*looking at the letter*]: Oh Calidorus, I can see your sweetheart!

CALIDORUS: Where, for goodness sake?

PSEUDOLUS: Here, full length, in the wax, on this tablet.

CALIDORUS [*exasperated*]: May all the gods and goddesses –

PSEUDOLUS: – save me.

CALIDORUS: You made my heart spring up like grass in summer; up one moment and the next moment dead.

PSEUDOLUS: Well, keep quiet, while I read the letter.

CALIDORUS: Why *don't* you read it, then?

PSEUDOLUS [*reads, with difficulty*]: 'By this messenger of wax and wood and writing ... Phoenicium to her lover Calidorus ... with trembling heart ... with mind and soul distressed ... with tears ... sends her wishes for his health ... and please will you send help ...'

CALIDORUS: Alas, Pseudolus, I don't know where to turn for help to send her.

PSEUDOLUS: What kind of help?

CALIDORUS: Money ... silver.

PSEUDOLUS: You want to send her a gift of silver in exchange for a gift of wood? That's no way to do business.

CALIDORUS: Read on. Then you'll see how urgent it is for me to get some money from somewhere.

PSEUDOLUS: 'I have been sold, my darling ... by my master, to a foreigner, a Macedonian officer ... for two thousand drachmas. The man paid fifteen hundred before he left ... and we're only waiting for the other five hundred. The officer left a token here ... his image sealed in wax ... and when he sends a man back with the same seal, I am to go with him. He fixed a day for this ... next Dionysia.'

CALIDORUS: That's tomorrow. I'm doomed, unless you can find some help for me.

PSEUDOLUS: Let me finish the letter.

CALIDORUS: Yes, go on, and I can imagine I am talking to her. Read on – though it is a bitter-sweet potion you mix for me.

PSEUDOLUS: 'This is the end of all our happy hours ... our loving meetings ... our talks and games and jokes ... our kisses and blisses ... our lovers' close embraces ... soft lips that sweetly nibble ... breasts that quiver gently pressed ... and all love's mystic raptures ... all now shattered, scattered to the winds, all lost beyond recall ... if I can find no help in you nor you in me. I have told you all I know ... now I shall be waiting to learn how much you love me ... or how much you pretend to love me. Farewell.'

CALIDORUS: It's a terrible letter, Pseudolus.

PSEUDOLUS: Terrible.

CALIDORUS: Doesn't it make you weep?

PSEUDOLUS: No, I've got eyes like pumice stones; can't squeeze a drop out of them.

CALIDORUS: Why –

PSEUDOLUS: All our family are a dry-eyed lot.

CALIDORUS: Well, aren't you going to help me?

PSEUDOLUS: What can I do?

CALIDORUS: Ah me!

PSEUDOLUS: You can save your 'ah me's'. I can do that much.

CALIDORUS: I'm lost. I don't know where to borrow any money.

PSEUDOLUS: Ah me!

CALIDORUS: And I haven't a penny of my own.

PSEUDOLUS: Ah me!

CALIDORUS: And tomorrow that man will take the girl away.

PSEUDOLUS: Ah me!

CALIDORUS: Is that all you can do to help me?

PSEUDOLUS: It's all I've got, sir. I've got a pile of 'ah me's' put away in my money-box.

CALIDORUS: But I'm desperate. Can't you lend me a single drachma? I'll pay you back tomorrow.

PSEUDOLUS: By God, I couldn't raise a drachma, not even if I pawned my own body. But what do you want to do with a drachma?

CALIDORUS: Buy a rope.

PSEUDOLUS: What for?

CALIDORUS: To hang myself. I am resolved before night falls to take refuge in everlasting night.

PSEUDOLUS: Then who'll pay me back my drachma? Is that your idea, to go and hang yourself on purpose to do me out of a drachma if I lend you one?

CALIDORUS: I tell you I cannot live if she is taken from me and carried off.

PSEUDOLUS: There's nothing to cry about, you silly cuckoo. You'll live.

CALIDORUS: Nothing to cry about – when I can't raise a drachma, not know where in the world to turn for a piece of silver?

PSEUDOLUS: Well, it's silver tears you'll have to weep, as I understand it from this letter. You might as well try to catch rain in a sieve, for all the good the tears you're shedding now can do you. But cheer up; I'll never desert a master in love. Somewhere or other, before the day's out, by hook or crook – or by this hand – I think I can find you some pecuniary assistance. Where it's coming from I can't exactly say at the moment; but it will come, that's all I know; I know by the twitch of this eyebrow.

CALIDORUS: Heaven send you'll be as good as your word.

PSEUDOLUS: Lord love you, you know what I can do when I wave my magic wand, what a dust I can stir up when I set about it.

CALIDORUS: All my hope of life rests on you.

PSEUDOLUS: Suppose I promise to get your girl back for you today or give you two thousand drachmas – how will that do?

CALIDORUS: It'll do very well, if you can do it.

PSEUDOLUS: Ask me for two thousand, then – in proper form, so that there'll be no doubt what I'm promising. Go on, ask me, please; I'm dying to promise it.

CALIDORUS: Will you give me two thousand drachmas today?

PSEUDOLUS: I will. Now don't say another word. One thing I warn you, though – so don't say I didn't tell you – if all else fails, I shall have to touch your father for it.

CALIDORUS: Heaven bless you and keep you mine for ever! But . . . as a dutiful son . . . I feel bound to say – why not try my mother too?

PSEUDOLUS: Leave it all to me, and you can sleep sound, on whichever eye you like.

CALIDORUS: Whichever eye? Don't you mean *ear*?

PSEUDOLUS: I like to vary the common expressions. [*He proclaims to the audience*] Now let all take notice – and let none say he has not received notice – all adults here present, all citizens of this city, all friends and acquaintances of mine, are hereby warned and advised, this day . . . to be on their guard . . . against me . . . and not to trust a word I say.

CALIDORUS: Sh! Be quiet, for goodness sake!

PSEUDOLUS: What's up?

CALIDORUS [*indicating Ballio's house*]: Ballio's door rattled.

PSEUDOLUS: I'd like to hear his shins rattle.

CALIDORUS: And here comes the old sinner himself.

[*They withdraw to a corner.*]

[*BALLIO storms out of his house, brandishing a whip and rounding up a miscellaneous gang of slaves.*]

BALLIO: Come along there, out here, the lot of you – idle rascals, scurvy scoundrels, not worth your keep! . . . Look at 'em; not one of them has any idea of how to behave; if I didn't keep them up to the mark with *this*, I should never get a day's work out of them. Asses – more like asses than any men I ever saw – with hides tanned till they can't feel it any more. Beating them hurts you more than it does them; just wasters of whip-leather, that's what they are. They've only one rule of life: watch your chance to steal, rob, plunder, loot, eat and drink, and do a bunk. That's all they think they're here for. You might as well leave wolves in charge of sheep as let these chaps look after your house. And yet they

don't seem such bad chaps to look at; it's their work that's rotten. Now then, pay attention all; and, mark my words, if you don't pay attention, if you can't wipe that sleep out of your eyes and wake up those weary carcasses, I'll draw such pretty patterns on your ribs with these whipcords as you never saw on any Campanian painted fabrics or Egyptian carpets with zoological embroideries. I gave you your orders yesterday, didn't I, and gave each man his place? Yes, I did; but you lazy louts are blessed with so much intelligence that you can't remember your duties without a sharp reminder. That's the sort you are. You're that obstinate, me and my friend here [*the whip*] can't make any impression on you . . . Look at 'em - I ask you - they don't give a damn; thinking of something else all the time . . . Pay attention to me, will you, and listen to what I'm telling you - generation of deadbeats! I'll show you which is the tougher, your skins or my rawhide . . . How's that, then? Did that hurt? That's what a slave gets for not paying attention to his master . . .

In line, everybody! Line up here, facing me - and *pay attention!* . . . That man with the water-pot, go and draw water and get the cook's copper filled. You with the axe, you're appointed chief of the chopping department.

SLAVE: This axe is blunt, sir.

BALLIO: I don't care if it is. You all are - worn down with flogging; that's no reason why I shouldn't get some work out of you, is it? . . . You, get the house cleaned up. Well, what are you waiting for? Inside, at the double! . . . You can be bedmaker . . . You, polish the silver and lay the tables. And mind, I want to find everything ready when I come back from town, everything swept, washed, polished, tidied, bright and shining. It's my birthday today and I'd like you all to help me celebrate it . . . You, boy, get some ham, bacon, sweetbread, and sow's udders into the stewpot. Do you understand? I want to entertain some important gentlemen in tiptop style, so that they'll think I'm well off . . . Inside, all of you, and get busy; I don't want any delay when the cook arrives. I'm going to market, to see what sort of a bargain I can strike with the fishmonger.

[*All the slaves have now been sent about their business, except one boy who carries a purse.*]

Lead on, boy; and I'll keep an eye on that purse to see that nobody picks it.

Oh, wait a minute, though. I nearly forgot; I've some more orders for the household. [*He goes back to the house door.*] Girls! Where are you? Come out here and listen to me.

[*Several of his women parade in front of the house, among them PHOENICIUM, the beloved of Calidorus.*]

Now then, my pretties, all you have to do is to enjoy your little selves in comfort, ease and luxury, and make yourselves the most desirable companions for the highest gentry in the town. I'm going to put you to the test today. I'm going to find out which of you is only interested in her own freedom, or her stomach, or in lining her own purse, or just going to sleep. I shall have to decide which I'll choose to make a free woman of, and which to put back on the market. I want to see your lovers bringing me a whole pile of presents today. I want supplies for a year brought to this house this day, or else tomorrow you'll be out on the streets. As you are aware, today is my birthday. So where are they? Where are the lads for whom you are supposed to supply the light of love, the joy of life, the sweet sips of honeysuckle lips, the pressed caress . . .? Where are they? I want to see them in massed battalions outside this door, with their hands full of presents for me. Why do you suppose I provide you with clothes and ornaments and everything you could possibly need? And what return have you shown me for it so far? Nothing but dead loss. Drink is the only thing you miserable creatures are interested in; your stomachs are filled to bursting, while I go dry.

Now, the best thing I can do is to address you personally, one by one; then nobody can say she hasn't been given explicit instructions. Attention, all! . . . Number one, Hedylium - you're the favourite in the corn market; all your clients have got stocks of grain as high as mountains in their warehouses; make it your business to see that supplies come this way - a year's supply of grain for me and my household; I want to be a corn-king so rich that folks will call me King Jason instead of Pimp Ballio.

CALIDORUS [*aside to Pseudolus*]: Listen to the old crook. Did you ever see such a high-handed tyrant?

PSEUDOLUS: A low-minded scoundrel, I should call him. But don't say anything. Watch him.

BALLIO: Who's next? Aeschrodora – your clients are the butchers, and they're as bad as us pimps for making a dishonest living by bad faith – here are your instructions: get me three meat-frames loaded with fat heavy carcasses before the day's out, or . . . like Dirce in the story, tied to a bull by the sons of Jupiter . . . I'll have you pegged up, not to a bull, but to a butcher's meat-frame.

CALIDORUS: His language makes my blood boil.

PSEUDOLUS: I don't know how the young men of Athens can tolerate his existence. Where are they? What's become of all his youthful and able-bodied customers? Why don't they join together to rid the city of this pest? . . . But of course, that's the sort of silly thing I would say . . . as if they'd dare to do anything to someone to whom they're enslaved by their lust, which won't allow them to lift a finger against him.

CALIDORUS: Oh do shut up.

PSEUDOLUS: What's the matter with you?

CALIDORUS: You're a nuisance; I can't hear what he's saying if you keep on interrupting.

PSEUDOLUS: I won't say another word.

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

BALLIO: Now you, Xystilis; can I have your attention, please? Your friends are the oilmen, with gallons of the stuff in store. So I want bags and bottles of it delivered here without delay, or . . . tomorrow I'll have you bottled up in a bag and delivered to the shop down the road; where they'll give you a bed all right, not to sleep on, but to lie on till you're fagged out with . . . if you follow the drift of my remarks. Do you hear, you serpent? With all those friends of yours simply swimming in oil, have you done anything yet to win a drop of it with which to beautify the pretty heads of any of your fellow prisoners? Or to make my salad dressing a tiny bit more tasty? Oh yes, I know, you don't care so much for oil; you go for the wine. All I can say is, you mark my words, and obey my instructions, or by Hercules I'll settle the score with you on the nail. Next! Phoenicium . . . ah yes, the gentlemen's pet, who's always on the point of bringing me the price of her freedom

– always got a bargain to make, but not so clever at making it good. Well, just you see that my larder is stocked with everything your rich friends can provide – or tomorrow, my Phoenician pet, your back will be striped with Phoenician colours and you'll be on the market too.

[*While he is hustling them back into the house, CALIDORUS and PSEUDOLUS are still watching unseen.*]

CALIDORUS: There, Pseudolus – do you hear what the villain says?

PSEUDOLUS: I hear him, master. I'm giving the matter my full attention.

CALIDORUS: I must stop him putting my girl on the streets. What do you think I ought to send him?

PSEUDOLUS: Keep calm; don't worry. I'll do the worrying for both of us. He's an old friend of mine, and I'm one of his; we know each other well. I'll send him a birthday present – a nice fat packet of trouble.

CALIDORUS: What good will that do?

PSEUDOLUS: You mind your own business.

CALIDORUS: But –

PSEUDOLUS: But, but, but!

CALIDORUS: Oh, this is torture!

PSEUDOLUS: Bear it like a man.

CALIDORUS: I can't.

PSEUDOLUS: You'll have to try.

CALIDORUS: How can I possibly help feeling as I do?

PSEUDOLUS: You don't want to consider your feelings in time of trouble. Think about something helpful.

CALIDORUS: That's absurd. A lover must behave like a fool or there's no fun in it.

PSEUDOLUS: Oh, give over!

CALIDORUS: Pseudolus dear, let me make a fool of myself; let me go my own way –

PSEUDOLUS: Go where you like; I'm going myself –

CALIDORUS: No, wait! Wait, and I'll do anything you like.

PSEUDOLUS: That's better.

[*BALLIO shuts his house door and returns to the boy.*]

BALLIO: I must be off, time's flying. Lead on, boy.

CALIDORUS: He's going, he's going! Call him back!

PSEUDOLUS: Keep calm; all in good time.

CALIDORUS: But he'll be gone.

BALLIO: Get a move on, boy; we haven't got all day.

PSEUDOLUS [*calling to Ballio, but still from a distant or concealed place*]: Coo-ee! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! You! Birthday boy! Come and talk to us. Spare us a moment, can't you? Hey! Someone wants to talk to you.

[*BALLIO has paused, probably recognizing the voice but refusing to look.*]

BALLIO: What's that? Some fellow wasting my time when I'm busy?

PSEUDOLUS: An old friend.

BALLIO: An old friend is a dead friend. Present friends are what I need.

PSEUDOLUS: You're being very offensive.

BALLIO: You're being a damned nuisance.

CALIDORUS: Stop him, Pseudolus. Go after him.

PSEUDOLUS: We'll head him off this way. [*They intercept Ballio.*]

BALLIO: Jupiter destroy you, whoever you are.

PSEUDOLUS: I want to speak to you.

BALLIO: I don't want to speak to you - either of you. Come round this way, boy.

PSEUDOLUS: Can't you let me speak to you?

BALLIO: I can, but I don't want to.

PSEUDOLUS: Not even if it is in your own interest?

BALLIO: Can't you let me go on my way, damn it?

PSEUDOLUS: Now, now, not so fast.

BALLIO: Take your hands off me.

CALIDORUS: Listen, please, Ballio.

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

CALIDORUS: I have always paid you when I could.

BALLIO: I'm not asking for what you *have* paid.

CALIDORUS: And I'll pay you again when I have the money.

BALLIO: When you have the money, you can have the goods.

CALIDORUS: Oh dear, then all the money and gifts I've brought you were just wasted.

BALLIO: You're wasting your breath now, you young fool, offering me words with no assets to back them.

PSEUDOLUS: Do you know who you're talking to?

BALLIO: I used to know him; who he is now, he alone knows. Step along, boy . . . [*He again reaches the far end of the stage.*]

PSEUDOLUS [*in a more ingratiating tone*]: Ballio - do you think an attractive proposition could persuade you to give us a moment of your attention?

BALLIO [*stopping*]: Ah, now that's different. I'll listen to an attractive proposition. If I were in the middle of making an offering to Jove Almighty, standing there with the giblets ready in my hand - if someone came up with an attractive proposition, I'd postpone the ceremony rather than miss a good chance. You can't afford to be disrespectful to profit, when all's said and done.

PSEUDOLUS [*to Calidorus*]: He doesn't give a damn for all the holy gods.

BALLIO: Yes, I'll have a word with him . . . [*He comes back to 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 - or if you want it in other words, may they bless and help you nevermore.

BALLIO [*pleasantly*]: And how is my friend Calidorus?

CALIDORUS: Sick of love and poverty.

BALLIO: I'd be sorry for you - only I can't feed my family on sympathy.

PSEUDOLUS: We know your feelings all right; you needn't tell us. Do you know what *we* want?

BALLIO: I can guess; you want to see me ruined.

PSEUDOLUS: Well, partly that; but what we want you for now - if you will kindly listen a minute -

BALLIO: I'm listening. But I'm busy, so come to the point as quickly as possible.

PSEUDOLUS: My master is extremely sorry he has not been able to pay you, as he promised you, and on the day he promised to pay you, the two thousand drachmas for his girl's freedom.

BALLIO: I dare say he is; it's easier to be sorry than to be sore. He's sorry he hasn't paid the money; I'm sore at not getting it.

PSEUDOLUS: But he will pay it; he'll find it. Just give him a few more days. What he's afraid of is that you will sell her to spite him.

BALLIO: He could have paid me long ago if he had wanted to.

CALIDORUS: How could I, if I hadn't got the money?

BALLIO: You'd have found some way, if you'd been really in love - borrowed it from a friend, gone to a money-lender and offered him his bit of interest, or robbed your father.

PSEUDOLUS: Rob his father? You scoundrel. I'm sorry for anyone who expects good advice from you.

BALLIO: It's not a ponce's job to give good advice.

CALIDORUS: I couldn't possibly rob my father - the old man is far too clever for that. And if I could, my duty would forbid it.

BALLIO: All right, all right. Then you'll have to take your duty to bed with you instead of Phoenicium. You seem to think more of duty than of love. But everybody isn't your father; haven't you a friend whom you could ask for a loan?

CALIDORUS: Loan! There's no such word nowadays.

PSEUDOLUS: Lord bless you, no. No one's such a fool as to lend any money these days - ever since certain nameless gentlemen made their fortunes and closed their banks, after collecting their own debts and making sure that nobody else got his money back.

CALIDORUS: No, I haven't a hope. I can't raise a penny anywhere. All I can do is die - die of love and die of destitution.

BALLIO: You could buy oil under the counter and sell it in the open. You'd make twenty thousand in no time that way, I reckon.

CALIDORUS: But damn it, I'm under age - don't you know the law? - no one would dare give me credit.

BALLIO: Yes, I know the law; and I don't dare give you credit, much as I'd like to.

PSEUDOLUS: I bet you would. Aren't you satisfied with what you've got out of him already?

BALLIO: He's no true lover who isn't ready to keep on giving. He must pay, pay, and pay again. When he's got nothing left, he must stop loving.

CALIDORUS: Haven't you any pity at all?

BALLIO: Not when you come empty-handed. Your words don't ring on my counter. All the same, I'd be glad to see you alive and well.

PSEUDOLUS: What do you think he is, dead and buried?

BALLIO: He's dead as far as I'm concerned if he comes to me with

that kind of story. A lover might as well be dead as come whining to a man of my profession. Come to me any day you like, my boy, with a solid silver proposition; when you come wailing about having no money - you're only asking your stepmother for pity.

PSEUDOLUS: I didn't know you'd ever married his father!

BALLIO: God forbid!

PSEUDOLUS: Look here, Ballio; just do us a favour, can't you?

On my word of honour, if you're afraid to trust him. Give me three days and I'll produce the money for you from somewhere on land or sea.

BALLIO: You expect me to trust you?

PSEUDOLUS: Why not?

BALLIO: Why not? God almighty! I'd as soon trust you as tie up a stray dog with a string of sheep's guts.

CALIDORUS: And after all I've done for you, is this how you show your gratitude?

BALLIO: So what do you want me to do - eh? What do you want me to do now?

CALIDORUS: Just wait for five or six days before selling the girl and making her lover die of despair.

BALLIO: Cheer up, sonny. I'll wait six months if you like.

CALIDORUS [*astounded*]: You will? Oh you glorious man!

BALLIO: I can give you some even better news too.

CALIDORUS: What's that?

BALLIO: Your girl is not for sale any more.

CALIDORUS: She isn't?

BALLIO: I promise you she isn't.

CALIDORUS: Pseudolus! This man is Jupiter Almighty! I must give him a sacrifice! Go and find offerings, victims, butchers! He is Jupiter for me, more mighty than Jupiter!

BALLIO: I don't want any victims, thanks. Just a few lamb cutlets will do me.

CALIDORUS: Lambs, Pseudolus! Hurry up, do you hear what Jupiter orders?

PSEUDOLUS: I'll be as quick as I can; but I shall have to run as far as the city gate and farther.

CALIDORUS: Why must you go there?

PSEUDOLUS: To find a couple of throat-slitters, chain-swingers; and

at the same time I'll rustle up a few bundles of birch rods, so we'll have enough and to spare to give your Jupiter a grand ovation.

BALLIO: You go to hell.

PSEUDOLUS: That's where the Prince of Pimps is going, all right.

BALLIO: It'd suit you fine to have me dead, wouldn't it?

PSEUDOLUS: Would it?

BALLIO: It would, by God; as long as I live, you'll never come to any good. On the other hand, you'd be sorry to see me dead.

PSEUDOLUS: Would I?

BALLIO: Because when I'm dead, you'll be the wickedest man in Athens.

CALIDORUS: But tell me, for goodness sake, are you serious? You're *not* selling my girl now?

BALLIO: I assure you I'm not. She's sold already.

CALIDORUS: How can she be sold?

BALLIO: How? Just as she stands, no clothing included, but with all her bodily organs complete.

CALIDORUS: So you've sold my beloved!

BALLIO: That's right, for two thousand drachmas.

CALIDORUS: Two thousand!

BALLIO: Or four times five hundred, whichever you like; to a Macedonian officer; and he has paid me fifteen hundred on account.

CALIDORUS: I can't believe it!

BALLIO: Oh yes, she's been turned into good money now.

CALIDORUS: How could you dare!

BALLIO: She was mine to do as I liked with.

CALIDORUS: Pseudolus, a sword! Bring me a sword!

PSEUDOLUS: What do you want a sword for?

CALIDORUS: To end his life, and mine.

PSEUDOLUS: End yours if you like; his will soon end in starvation.

CALIDORUS [*to Ballio*]: Didn't you swear to me, you most shameless perjurer in all the world; didn't you swear you'd never sell her to anyone but me?

BALLIO: That's right; I did.

CALIDORUS: In express and formal terms.

BALLIO: All properly sewn up.

CALIDORUS: And you've broken your oath, you scoundrel.

BALLIO: But I've filled my purse. So I'm a scoundrel, and I've got

money to spend; you're an honest man, of an honest family, and you haven't a penny to bless yourself with.

CALIDORUS: Pseudolus, just stand on the other side of him, will you, and call him all the names you can think of.

PSEUDOLUS: With pleasure. With as much pleasure as I'd run to court to claim my freedom.

CALIDORUS: Smother him with curses.

PSEUDOLUS: I'll tongue-twist you . . . you . . . you dirty man!

BALLIO: Granted.

CALIDORUS: You . . . wicked man!

BALLIO: Correct.

PSEUDOLUS: You scourgeable scoundrel!

BALLIO: Undoubtedly.

CALIDORUS: Grave-robber!

BALLIO: Certainly.

PSEUDOLUS: Gallows-meat!

BALLIO: That's a good one.

CALIDORUS: Who'd deceive his best friend.

BALLIO: That's my trade.

PSEUDOLUS: Assassin!

BALLIO [*to Calidorus*]: Now your turn.

CALIDORUS: Blasphemer!

BALLIO: Oh, sure.

PSEUDOLUS: False swearer.

BALLIO: Think of something new.

CALIDORUS: Law-smasher!

BALLIO: Well done.

CALIDORUS: Corruptor of youth.

BALLIO: Precisely.

CALIDORUS: Thief!

BALLIO: Boo!

PSEUDOLUS: Escaped convict.

BALLIO: Bah!

CALIDORUS: Public nuisance.

BALLIO: Evidently.

PSEUDOLUS: Cheat.

CALIDORUS: Scum.

PSEUDOLUS: Pimp.

CALIDORUS: Ordure.

BALLIO: Ha, ha! What a charming pair of songsters.

CALIDORUS: I know you beat your parents.

BALLIO: Oh, I did – and killed them, to save their keep. Nothing wrong in that, was there?

PSEUDOLUS: We're pouring water in a sieve – sheer waste of time.

BALLIO: Is there anything more you wish to say, gentlemen?

CALIDORUS: Is there nothing you're ashamed of?

BALLIO: I'd be ashamed of having to confess myself a suitor with nothing to offer – as hollow as an empty nutshell. However, although you've called me all those dirty names, I can tell you this: if I don't get that five hundred the Macedonian owes me – today is his last chance, according to our agreement – if he doesn't pay up, I shall do what I consider my duty.

CALIDORUS: What will that be?

BALLIO [*slyly confidential*]: You bring me the money, my boy, and his deal is off. That's what I consider my duty. I'd be delighted to discuss it further with you, but I'm busy just now . . . if you'll excuse me . . . [*going*]. Only remember – without the money it'll be no use your coming to me with cries for mercy. That's my last word; you'd better go and think it over.

CALIDORUS: No, wait a minute.

BALLIO: Sorry, I've a lot of things on my mind. [*He goes.*]

PSEUDOLUS: You'll have a lot more presently . . . I've got him, sir; I've got him, if gods and men don't let me down. I'll bone and fillet him like a cook splitting a lamprey. See here, Calidorus, I shall want your assistance.

CALIDORUS: At your service, sir.

PSEUDOLUS: We've got to besiege and capture the position before the day's out. For this purpose we shall need a sharp, intelligent, careful, and crafty man – one who will carry out his instructions to the letter, and not go to sleep at his post.

CALIDORUS: What are you going to do? Do tell me.

PSEUDOLUS: I'll tell you when the time comes. No point in going over it twice – plays are long enough as it is.

CALIDORUS: You can count on my assistance, anyway.

PSEUDOLUS: Hurry up, then, and get your friend here as soon as possible.

CALIDORUS: I have plenty of friends, but precious few whom I could call reliable.

PSEUDOLUS: Well I know it. So you've got two things to do; make a short list out of the many, and then pick the one man you can count on.

CALIDORUS: I think I can find somebody for you . . .

PSEUDOLUS: Off you go, then. Don't waste your own time talking.

[*CALIDORUS goes.*]

That leaves me, on my own. Now what are you going to do, eh, Pseudolus? You've entertained your young master with a feast of fine talk. And what does it amount to now? As for having a ghost of a definite plan, let alone money – no, I don't know what I'm going to do. No, Pseudolus, you haven't a clue, which end to start weaving or where to finish off. Well, after all, when a poet sits down to write, he has to start by looking for something which doesn't exist on this earth, and somehow or other he finds it; he makes a fiction look very much like a fact. That's what I'll do; I'll be a poet; I'll invent two thousand drachmas, which at present don't exist anywhere on earth. As a matter of fact, I had promised to find it for him some time ago, and I meant to train my sights on the old man; but he got wind of me somehow . . . Hullo, here he comes . . . my master Simo and his neighbour Callipho. I must cut short this oration. Here he comes . . . Now I've got to dig two thousand out of this old coffin to give to the young master. I'll keep out of the way and hear what they're talking about.

[*He withdraws to a corner. SIMO and CALLIPHO appear.*]

SIMO: If the Athenians were looking for a dictator among their most notable prodigals and libertines, I reckon my son would be their first choice. He's the talk of the town; everybody knows he wants to buy his girl out and hasn't got the money for it. People keep telling me this, but of course I had my suspicions long ago. I nosed him, but I wasn't going to let on.

PSEUDOLUS: Oh, he nosed him, did he? So it looks as if my scheme is sunk already; nothing doing. My plan to go foraging for supplies – cash supplies – is frustrated; road completely blocked. He had his suspicions; so there'll be no booty to be picked up.

CALLIPHO: If I had my way, I'd hang all tale-tellers and all who listen to them; I'd string 'em up, the tellers by their tongues and the

listeners by their ears. All those tales you hear about your son wanting to wheedle money out of you, to further his love affair, may very well turn out to be lies. And even if they are true, what of it? Has he done anything surprising – as things go nowadays? Is it anything new for a young man to be in love and want to buy his girl's freedom?

PSEUDOLUS: That's a sensible old gentleman.

SIMO: It may not be new, but I object to his doing it.

CALLIPHOS: You can object till you're blue in the face. As if you hadn't been the same when you were a young man! A father must have a clear conscience if he expects his son to be as good a man as he was, or better. As for you, your sins and extravagances were numerous enough to be distributed round the whole population, one per man. Why should you be surprised if your son takes after his father?

PSEUDOLUS: Zeus! How rare is a man of proper feeling! That's the sort of father a son ought to have.

SIMO: Somebody spoke. [*Seeing Pseudolus*] Oh, so it's my slave Pseudolus. This is the rascal who is corrupting my son; he's the tempter and tutor; I'd like to get him on the rack.

CALLIPHOS: It'll do you no good to make a show of temper. The best thing would be to approach him peaceably and ask him whether the tales you hear are true or not. In a tight place, gentleness is half the battle.

SIMO: I'll take your advice.

[*The old gentlemen move towards Pseudolus.*]

PSEUDOLUS: Look out, Pseudolus, they're coming. Get a good speech ready for the old man. [*He greets them.*] Greetings to my master first, as is right and proper . . . and to his neighbour a share of what is left over.

SIMO: Good day to you, Pseudolus. What are you doing out here?

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

SIMO: Standing there . . . and in a very princely pose, don't you think, Callipho?

CALLIPHOS: Oh indeed, I can see he knows how to stand up for himself.

PSEUDOLUS: An honest servant, I presume, with a blameless record,

has a right to stand up for himself, especially in his master's presence?

CALLIPHOS: There is a certain matter, which we know of, mistily as it were, which we have heard about, and about which we would like to ask you a few questions.

SIMO: You be careful, Callipho; he'll talk your head off till you feel as if you're arguing with Socrates instead of Pseudolus.

PSEUDOLUS: I am quite aware, sir, that you have long had a very low opinion of me. I realize that you place little confidence in my loyalty; nevertheless, insist as you may on my being good for nothing, I am determined to prove myself good for something.

SIMO: Then kindly throw open your auricular temples, so that my words may find their desired destination.

PSEUDOLUS: Pray do not let my displeasure prevent you from speaking with perfect frankness.

SIMO: Displeasure, eh? Can a slave be displeased with his master?

PSEUDOLUS: You find that surprising?

SIMO [*with heavy irony*]: From the way you talk, by Hercules, I can see that I shall have to beware of your wrath. You evidently have it in mind to give me a drubbing, of a different kind from those that I give you. What do you think, Callipho?

CALLIPHOS: Well, I must say I think he has a right to resent it if you show you have no confidence in him.

SIMO: Let him resent it as much as he likes. I'll take care he doesn't do me any harm. [*To Pseudolus*] Now then, kindly answer my questions.

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

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

PSEUDOLUS [*oracularly*]: Ay, verily.

SIMO: And that he wants to free her?

PSEUDOLUS: Ay, again verily.

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

PSEUDOLUS: Me? Get money out of you?

SIMO: Exactly – money for you to give to my son, for him to pay for his girl's freedom. Is that true or not?

PSEUDOLUS: Ay, verily.

CALLIPHO: So he confesses it.

SIMO: What did I tell you, Callipho?

CALLIPHO: I know.

SIMO [to *Pseudolus*]: Why didn't you tell me, when you first discovered how things were? Why was it kept from me? Why wasn't I informed?

PSEUDOLUS: If you want to know, it was because I refused to be a father to the nasty practice of denouncing one's master to one's other master.

SIMO [to *Callipho*]: You'd have him packed off to the mills for this, wouldn't you?

CALLIPHO: Really, Simo, has he done anything wrong?

SIMO: Of course he has; the most grievous wrong.

PSEUDOLUS [to *Callipho*]: Don't trouble yourself, sir. I know what I'm about. If I am in the wrong, it's my own doing. [To *Simo*] I'd like to tell you, sir, if you please, why I kept you in ignorance of your son's affair. I knew it was the mill for me if I did otherwise.

SIMO: And didn't you know it would be the mill for you if you said nothing?

PSEUDOLUS: Yes, I knew that too.

SIMO: Then why not tell me?

PSEUDOLUS: It was a choice between a present evil and a more distant one – immediate punishment or a few days' grace.

SIMO: I see. So now what do you propose to do? Nobody is going to get any money out of me, I can tell you, now I'm on the alert. I'll have a proclamation made forbidding any loan to be made to you.

PSEUDOLUS: Don't you worry, sir; I promise I won't go begging to anyone else, as long as you're alive. You'll give it me all right; you're the one I'll get it from.

SIMO: You think you'll get it from me?

PSEUDOLUS: I'm sure of it.

SIMO: Gods! May I lose an eye if I give you anything.

PSEUDOLUS: You'll give it me. I'm only telling you, so that you can be on your guard.

CALLIPHO: Well, all I can say is, if you do get it out of him, you'll have performed a most remarkable feat.

PSEUDOLUS: I shall perform it.

SIMO: What if you don't succeed?

PSEUDOLUS: Flog me. But what if I do succeed?

SIMO: If you do succeed . . . by Jove, I'll give you impunity for life, and that's a promise.

PSEUDOLUS: Don't forget it.

SIMO: Do you imagine I can't take care of myself, after I've been forewarned?

PSEUDOLUS: Well I am warning you; take care. That's my advice; take care. Take care. Before the end of this day, you'll be giving me money with those very hands.

CALLIPHO: Ye gods! The man's a living marvel – if he can be as good as his word.

PSEUDOLUS: I shall. Take me for your slave if I don't.

SIMO: That's a very generous offer. You're no longer mine, at all events.

PSEUDOLUS: Would you like me to tell you something else even more exciting?

CALLIPHO: I would indeed. I could listen to you all day.

SIMO: Oh yes, do; I've no objection to your talking.

PSEUDOLUS: Before I engage on the . . . contest I've mentioned, I'm going to try my skill in another contest; and a famous and memorable contest it will be.

SIMO: What sort of a contest?

PSEUDOLUS: You'll see. I'm going to wage war on a neighbour of yours, the pimp Ballio; I'm going to employ some artful diplomacy and cunning tactics, in order to remove neatly from his grasp the singing girl who has inspired a fatal passion in your son's heart.

SIMO: What – ?

PSEUDOLUS: And I expect to have two victories to my credit by this evening.

SIMO: Ah well, if you can do all you promise, you'll be a greater man than King Agathocles. On the other hand, if you don't, you will agree I am entitled to commit you to the treadmill?

PSEUDOLUS: Absolutely; not for a day only, but for all eternity.

But the point is this: if I succeed in my first object, will you then give me some money to give to Ballio – as a kind of generous gesture on your part?

CALLIPHOS: That's a very fair request, Simo. Say you will.

SIMO: I'm not so sure. Do you know what occurs to me? How do we know the villains haven't come to an understanding and cooked up this ingenious plot to get money out of me?

PSEUDOLUS: You think I'd dare to do such a mean trick? I'd be the most audacious rogue alive! But seriously, sir – if we have hatched up anything between us or come to any understanding or conspired together in any way on the subject . . . you can scribble me over from head to foot with birch rods for pens, like writing words in a book.

SIMO: Very well; announce the contest as soon as you please.

PSEUDOLUS [to Callipho]: I'd like you, sir, if you will, to put yourself at my disposal for today, and cancel all your other engagements.

CALLIPHOS: I'm afraid I made arrangements yesterday to go to the country today.

PSEUDOLUS: Couldn't you change your plan of campaign?

CALLIPHOS: All right, I will. I'll stay on your account. I wouldn't miss that contest of yours for anything. And if I find he refuses to give you the money as agreed, I'll give it you myself rather than have your scheme fall down.

SIMO [grumpily]: I shan't default.

PSEUDOLUS: Of course you won't. . . . [Aside] If you do, you'll never hear the last of it . . . Come on, then, let's have you two out of the way and leave me room to do my stuff.

CALLIPHOS: Right-o; you're the boss.

PSEUDOLUS [apart to Callipho]: Don't forget I want you to be on hand at your house.

CALLIPHOS: I'll be there. [He goes into his house.]

SIMO: I'm going to town. I shan't be long. [He goes.]

PSEUDOLUS: Come back as soon as you like . . . [To the audience] I imagine . . . that you good people imagine . . . that I have no intention of doing what I've just said I'm going to do . . . that I'm only making these rash promises for the purpose of keeping you amused as long as the play lasts. Well, you're wrong. I shall keep my word. And I can tell you another thing . . . another thing I can

promise you for certain is that I haven't the slightest idea *how* I'm going to do it . . . all I know is that it will be done. What's an actor for, if he is not to bring some new kind of surprise on to the stage? If he can't do that much, he'd much better make way for someone who can. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'd like to leave the stage for a few minutes, in order to make a mental mobilization of my forces of ingenuity. I'll be back soon . . . shan't keep you long. In the meantime our musician will entertain you. [He introduces the flute-player, and exits.]

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[After the interlude, PSEUDOLUS reappears, in high spirits.]

PSEUDOLUS: Glory be to Jupiter! Everything's lovely, everything's going fine! No more doubts, no more fears; I've got it all safe in here [slapping his chest.] Only a fool would entrust an important enterprise to a faint heart. The way things go is the way you make them go; give your mind to a job and you can do it. And I've got all my forces lined up in my mind, arts and stratagems two and three deep; [orating grandiloquently] wheresoever we may grapple with the adversary – and I say this, my friends, in the confidence inspired by the valour of my forebears, by my own determination and my unscrupulous villainy – victory is certain, deception will defeat and despoil the enemy. This enemy, our common enemy, my enemy and yours, this Ballio, will be scientifically and ballistically destroyed. Watch me. I intend to besiege and capture the position this very day. Here [indicating Ballio's house] is where I shall make the first attack. Having captured this ground and made the way here clear for my allies, I shall proceed with my troops to assault this ancient fortress [the house of Simo], where I expect to load myself and my confederates with more booty than we can carry, and let my enemies know that I was born to scourge them with rout and terror. For I am born of noble stock, and it behoves me to do such deeds of note, whose fame shall long live after me . . . [He breaks off abruptly.] But hold! Whom do I see? Do my eyes discern a stranger? A stranger with a sword? What can he be doing here, I wonder? I must conceal myself and spy on his movements. [He conceals himself.]

[The newcomer is HARPAX, the emissary of the Macedonian officer; he is a smart and intelligent soldier.]

HARPAX: Somewhere about here, I should think, must be the place I was told to find. Yes, this seems to agree with the captain's directions. Seventh house from the gate, he said, and I was to give the pimp who lives there this money and the token. I wish I could find someone to tell me for certain which is this Ballio's house.

PSEUDOLUS: Sh! Not a word! This is the man I want, or I'm no friend of gods or men. I shall have to change my tactics now; this alters the situation. This'll have to be dealt with first and all my previous plans shelved. Just watch me deliver a *coup de grâce* to this military emissary.

HARPAX: I'll knock at this door and fetch somebody out.

PSEUDOLUS [*accosting him*]: Wait a minute, whoever you are. I shall be obliged if you will refrain from knocking at that door. I've come out here on purpose to protect the interests of that door.

HARPAX: Are you Ballio?

PSEUDOLUS: Not exactly; I'm his sub-ballio.

HARPAX: What does that mean?

PSEUDOLUS: I'm the getter-in and giver-out; supply officer.

HARPAX: Kind of head butler, then?

PSEUDOLUS: No, I'm the man who gives orders to the head butler.

HARPAX: Slave or free?

PSEUDOLUS: Slave - up to now.

HARPAX: I should think so; and always will be, by the look of you.

PSEUDOLUS: You might take a look at yourself, before insulting other people.

HARPAX [*aside*]: He's up to no good, I'll be bound.

PSEUDOLUS [*aside*]: The gods are on my side! This man will be the anvil on which I'll forge a lot of forgeries today.

HARPAX: I wonder what he's talking to himself about?

PSEUDOLUS: Listen to me, laddie.

HARPAX: Pardon?

PSEUDOLUS: Is it or is it not a fact that you've been sent here by a Macedonian captain? Are you not the servant of a man who bought a girl from us here, who paid my master, her employer, fifteen hundred for her, and still owes five hundred?

HARPAX: That's right, I am. But where in the world have you met

me before? You've never seen me or spoken to me, have you? I'm sure I've never set eyes on you - never been to Athens before in my life.

PSEUDOLUS: I just thought you looked as if you had come from him. It's some time since he went away; and today, according to the agreement, was the last day for paying over the money; and it hasn't come yet, so -

HARPAX: And now it has come.

PSEUDOLUS: You've brought it?

HARPAX: I have.

PSEUDOLUS: Come on, then; why don't you give it me?

HARPAX: Give it to you?

PSEUDOLUS: Of course. I look after all my master's business and accounts. I receive all money for him, make all payments and settle all debts.

HARPAX: No, thank you. I'm not trusting you with any petty cash, not even if you're treasurer to God Almighty.

PSEUDOLUS: You might as well. We can get the whole business tied up in a jiffy.

HARPAX: I'd rather keep it tied up in my purse.

PSEUDOLUS: Blast you, who are you to cast aspersions on my probity? As if I wasn't trusted to handle six hundred times that amount every day, on my own responsibility.

HARPAX: Because others like to trust you, that's no reason why I should trust you.

PSEUDOLUS: You might as well say straight out that I intend to rob you.

HARPAX: Yes, you might as well say that; and I might as well suspect that you will. What is your name?

PSEUDOLUS [*aside*]: Ballio has a slave called Syrus - that'll do . . . My name is Syrus.

HARPAX: Syrus?

PSEUDOLUS: That's right.

HARPAX: Well, we're only wasting time talking. If your master is at home, why don't you call him out, so that I can do the business I was sent to do?

PSEUDOLUS: If he *were* at home, I *would* call him out, Mister whatever your name is. But if you'd like to give me the money, the

business will be settled just as quickly as if you gave it to him, or quicker.

HARPAX: Yes, but don't you understand? My master sent me here to *pay* this money, not to *lose* it. And I can see very well that you're getting into a fever at not being allowed to get your claws into it. I'm not paying a penny to anyone but Ballio in person.

PSEUDOLUS: Well, he's busy just now - got a court case on.

HARPAX: Good luck to him. All right, then, I'll come back when I think he's likely to be at home. You can have this letter to give him; it bears the seal agreed between my master and yours in the matter of this girl.

PSEUDOLUS: Yes, I know about that. He said the girl was to be handed over to the person who would bring the money together with a seal showing his own likeness. He left a copy of it here with us.

HARPAX: You know it all.

PSEUDOLUS: Why shouldn't I know it all?

HARPAX: Then just give him that sealed letter.

PSEUDOLUS: I will. By the way, what is your name?

HARPAX: Harpax.

PSEUDOLUS: Then run away, Harpax; I don't like the look of you. I'll see you don't get into this house; we don't want any of your *harpacity* here.

HARPAX: I'm noted for snatching my victims alive off the field of battle; that's how I got my name.

PSEUDOLUS: More likely snatching brass pots from other people's houses!

HARPAX: You're quite wrong. But . . . do you know what I'd like you to do for me, Syrus?

PSEUDOLUS: I shall know when you tell me.

HARPAX: I'm staying at a tavern outside the gate, third house down, kept by an old dame called Chrysis - a fat old barrel with a limp.

PSEUDOLUS: So what can I do for you?

HARPAX: Just send word to me there when your master comes in.

PSEUDOLUS: I'll do that with pleasure.

HARPAX: I'm pretty tired after my journey and I want to freshen up.

PSEUDOLUS: That's a good idea; very sensible of you. But mind you're there when I send for you.

HARPAX: I'll be there. I'm going to have a bit of lunch and then all I shall want is some sleep.

PSEUDOLUS: I'm sure you will.

HARPAX: That's all, then?

PSEUDOLUS: That's all; have a good sleep.

HARPAX: Right-o then. [*He goes.*]

PSEUDOLUS: And get them to give you plenty of blankets! It'll do you good to sweat it out! . . .

Oh the blessed gods! That man's coming has saved the day. He found me wandering and brought me back on to the right road at his own expense, bless him. Fortune herself could not have made a more fortunate appearance than his fortunate arrival with this letter. Here I've been presented with a cornucopia containing all my heart's desire; everything is wrapped up in here - all the schemes and tricks and dodges I could need, the money, and my loving master's loving mistress! Now I can crow and puff my chest out! . . . Of course I had it all worked out before - how I was going to set about getting the girl out of the pimp's hands; I had everything prepared and provided, just as I wanted it to be; I'd thought of everything and planned it all out . . . But you know how it is . . . and always will be. The best laid plans of a hundred skilled men can be knocked sideways by one single goddess, the Lady Luck. It's a fact; it's only being on good terms with Dame Fortune that makes a man successful and gives him the reputation of being a clever fellow; and we, as soon as we hear of someone striking it lucky, we admire his shrewdness, and laugh at the folly of the poor devil who's having a run of bad luck. For that matter, we're all fools though we don't know it, for running so hard after this or that, as if we could possibly tell for ourselves what's good for us and what isn't. We lose the certainties while seeking for uncertainties; and so we go on, in toil and trouble, until death creeps up on us . . . But enough of this philosophizing. I do run on, don't I? . . . By the gods, that little fib was worth its weight in gold . . . saying I was Ballio's slave . . . it just came to me on the spur of the moment. Now with this letter I can hoodwink three people, my master, the pimp, and the chap who brought it. [*Looking down the street*] And whoopee! here's another stroke of luck. Here comes young Calidorus, and he's got someone with him.

[CALIDORUS arrives with his friend CHARINUS; PSEUDOLUS stands aside.]

CALIDORUS: Now I have told you all the facts, pleasant and unpleasant. You know all about my love, my misery, and my need.

CHARINUS: Yes, I've got it all clear. All I want to know is, what you want me to do.

CALIDORUS: It was Pseudolus who wanted me to find him a useful and sympathetic friend.

CHARINUS: You have carried out your instructions admirably. You have found a friend and sympathizer. But this Pseudolus? He's new to me.

CALIDORUS: Oh, he's a living marvel. He's my chargé d'affaires. He has undertaken to bring off the scheme I told you of.

PSEUDOLUS [*aside*]: I must address the gentlemen in my best manner.

CALIDORUS: Did I hear a voice?

PSEUDOLUS: Hail to Pseudolus's lord and master - with thee, O king, ay with thee I crave a word, that I may bring thee joy, thrice three times triple triumph truly won by threefold stratagem from foemen three, by guile, by cunning and deceit; the which I here present to thee within this tiny tablet signed and sealed.

CALIDORUS: This is the very man.

CHARINUS: A tragic villain to the life!

PSEUDOLUS: Approach, advance, come forth, stretch out thy hand, to grasp thy fortune.

CALIDORUS: As Hope or Victory shall I greet thee, Pseudolus?

PSEUDOLUS: As both.

CHARINUS: Welcome, both. But *do* tell us what has happened.

PSEUDOLUS [*not much impressed with the look of Charinus*]: There's no cause for alarm.

CALIDORUS: This is the man I've found for you.

PSEUDOLUS: You *found* him, did you?

CALIDORUS: I mean I brought him here.

PSEUDOLUS: What's his name?

CALIDORUS: Charinus.

PSEUDOLUS [*with ironical courtesy*]: Charmed to meet him, I'm sure.

[*He has obviously decided that this young man will be of little use to him.*]

CHARINUS [*peevish by his reception*]: If there is anything I can do for you, why don't you say so straight out?

PSEUDOLUS: You are very kind. Thank you very much, Charinus.

But I don't think we ought to trouble you.

CHARINUS: Trouble? It won't be any trouble, I assure you.

PSEUDOLUS: Wait a minute, then. [*He produces the letter.*]

CALIDORUS: What have you got there?

PSEUDOLUS: This is the letter, and token, which I have intercepted.

CALIDORUS: Token? What token?

PSEUDOLUS: The one from the Macedonian officer, which has just been brought here. His servant arrived here with it, bringing five hundred drachmas also, and was to take your girl away with him - but I pulled the wool over his eyes.

CALIDORUS: How did you do that?

PSEUDOLUS: Well, look, this play is being acted for the benefit of the audience; they know what happened because they saw it happen. I'll tell you about it some other time.

CALIDORUS: All right; what do we do next?

PSEUDOLUS: You're going to have your girl free and in your arms today.

CALIDORUS: I am, really?

PSEUDOLUS: Yes, you, your very self - provided nothing happens to me; and provided you can find me a *man* in less than no time.

CHARINUS: What sort of a man?

PSEUDOLUS: A bad man; a wily man, an experienced man; one who, having grasped the essentials of a job, can carry it through by his own intelligence and initiative; and who is not too well known round here.

CHARINUS: Any objection to his being a slave?

PSEUDOLUS: I should much prefer a slave.

CHARINUS: I think I can provide the very man for you, an experienced rascal whom my father has just sent over from Carystus; he has never been outside the house since he arrived, that was yesterday, and this is the first time he has been in Athens.

PSEUDOLUS [*with a new respect*]: My friend, you're invaluable. I shall also require five hundred drachmas - a loan, of course, which I shall repay before the end of the day; his [*Calidorus's*] father owes me that much.

CHARINUS: You needn't look any further for that. I can let you have it.

PSEUDOLUS: You're a benefactor, sir. And I shall want a soldier's cloak and sword and hat.

CHARINUS: I can get you those.

PSEUDOLUS: Blessed gods! This Charinus is a charitable institution! Now this slave of yours from Carystus - is he a foxy sort of fellow?

CHARINUS: Goaty, by the smell of his armpits.

PSEUDOLUS: We'll have to give him a long-sleeved tunic. Sharp, is he?

CHARINUS: As an acid-drop.

PSEUDOLUS: And suppose we wanted him to serve up the sweet stuff, can he produce that too?

CHARINUS: Easily. Spiced wine, raisin wine, fruit cordial, honey cup, sweet drinks of all kinds - they say he once set up as a one-man refreshment bar!

PSEUDOLUS: Well done! Jolly good, Charinus! You can beat me at my own line of patter. By the way, what name does this chap go by?

CHARINUS: Simia.

PSEUDOLUS: Can he do a quick turnabout in a tight corner?

CHARINUS: He can spin like a top.

PSEUDOLUS: Proper twister, eh?

CHARINUS: He's been properly twisted for his crimes often enough.

PSEUDOLUS: What would he do if he were caught in the act?

CHARINUS: Slip out like an eel.

PSEUDOLUS: He's a man we can rely on, then?

CHARINUS: Reliable as an act of parliament.

PSEUDOLUS: From your account of him, he must be a model of all the virtues.

CHARINUS: Just wait till you meet him. As soon as he sets eyes on you, he'll tell you exactly what you want him to do. What do you want him to do?

PSEUDOLUS: I'll tell you. When I've got him suitably dressed up, I want him to play the part of that soldier's servant. He'll bring this token to Ballio with the five hundred drachmas, and get the girl from him. That's the long and the short of it. I shall have coached him, of course, in all the details and how he's to go about it.

CALIDORUS: Come on, then, let's get on with it.

PSEUDOLUS: You bring the fellow to me as soon as you can, properly dressed and equipped, at Aeschinus's bank. Look sharp.

CALIDORUS: We'll be there before you.

PSEUDOLUS: Get a move on, then. [*The young men go off.*] That sets my mind completely at rest; any doubts or uncertainties I had before are quite cleared away; it's all plain sailing now. The bird is on my left, the auspices plainly propitious, and I am ready to lead my ranked battalions forward to the field; now I know beyond doubt that I can destroy my adversaries . . . And the next thing to do is to go to the forum and cram this Simia with all the necessary instructions, so that he can do his bit of sleight-of-hand like an expert, with no bungling. And then, by Jupiter, we'll take by storm this citadel of pimpery! [*He goes off to the town.*]

★

[*A slave BOY, of very unprepossessing appearance, creeps out of Ballio's house.*]

BOY: To make a boy a slave in a pimp's house - and on top of that, to make him an ugly boy - I should think that's the most cruel and miserable thing the gods could do to him. That's the sort of slave I am here; all the troubles great and small are piled on my shoulders. I can't find anyone to take any interest in me; nobody loves me; so naturally I don't bother to make myself presentable. And now today it's the boss's birthday, so he's been threatening us all, from the oldest to the youngest, that anyone who hasn't given him a present will die tomorrow with terrible tortures. So what can a poor boy like me do? I'm damned if I know what I can do. I'd do what the other boys do if I could but I can't. And if I can't find the money for a present for the boss today, tomorrow I shall have to swallow a dose of fuller's mixture. That'll be a sad fate for poor little me. It's not a very pleasant prospect, but I dare say I can grin and bear it. I could grin and bear anything, however unpleasant, if someone were to make it worth my while! But now I must shut my mouth; here's the boss coming back from town, and a cook with him.

[*BALLIO returns from his marketing, bringing with him a hired*

COOK *and one or more underlings carrying provisions and the cook's implements. The 'ugly boy' makes himself scarce, or perhaps waits to help with the provisions.*]

BALLIO: Cooks' Market they call that place – of all silly names; more like a Thieves' Kitchen, I should say. If I'd pledged my life to find a worse scoundrel of a cook than this one I've got here, I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have found a more garrulous, glib-tongued, stupid, and useless specimen. I don't know why Pluto hasn't carried him off to hell before now, unless it's so that there can be someone left here fit to cook dinners for dead bodies. There's no one better qualified to please those customers.

COOK: If that is what you think of me, why did you hire me?

BALLIO: Sheer necessity. There was nobody else. If you call yourself a cook, how comes it you were the only one still waiting to be engaged?

COOK [*ever smiling, obsequious, and professionally ingratiating*]: I will tell you why, sir. If I appear to be a bad cook, it is by no fault of my own, but because of other people's meanness.

BALLIO: How do you make that out?

COOK: It is like this: when the gentlemen come to hire a cook, none of them is looking for the best and most expensive; they only want the cheapest. That is why I am sitting there alone in the market. One drachma is all those poor creatures want to pay; I must have nothing less than two drachmas or I am not getting on my feet. Mine is not the sort of cooking you will get from ordinary cooks, who will give you big platefuls of farm produce, carefully spiced with condiments, treating your guests like cattle, filling them up with greenstuff and using more greenstuff to give it a flavouring. They will give you coriander, fennel, garlic, parsley, with heaps of cabbage, sorrel, beet, spinach; all smothered in silphium, pounds and pounds of it, and grated mustard – horrible stuff, which stings the eyes out of the boys who have to grate it, before they've finished. That kind of cook – it's not seasonings they use but screaming screech-owls that peck the living insides out of your guests. It is no wonder people have such short lives in these parts, when they stuff their bellies with that kind of fodder; disgusting to speak of, let alone eat. Men here eat plants which animals will not touch.

BALLIO: So what do you use? If you find fault with that kind of cooking, what's yours like? Cooking fit for the gods, eh? Able to prolong a man's life?

COOK: Why, yes, indeed it is, sir; I would be so bold to say it. A man who eats of my cooking will live for two hundred years. When I spice a dish with a bit of ciciliander [*he is now inventing imaginary herbs*] or cipoliander or macarosis or secatopsis, she immediately hots herself up in no time. Those of course are the seasonings for sea creatures; for the terrestrial meat I use chici-mandrium, halitosis, or cataracticum.

BALLIO: May Jupiter and all the gods blast you to blazes with your fancy condiments and your lying tongue!

COOK: But I have not yet finished.

BALLIO: Then finish, and be damned to you.

COOK: When I have all my dishes nice and hot, I take off the covers, and *pouf* – the odour flies hot-handed to heaven.

BALLIO: A hot-handed odour?

COOK: No, I mistake – I meant to say hot-footed.

BALLIO: And what if nobody employs you – what happens to Jupiter's supper then?

COOK: He goes to bed with no supper.

BALLIO: And you can go to the devil. Do you think I'm going to pay you two drachmas for that sort of nonsense?

COOK: My cooking is very expensive, I know. But I promise you I give value for money to any gentleman who hires me to cook for him.

BALLIO: To rob him, you mean.

COOK [*still smiling*]: Ah well . . . you do not expect to find a cook anywhere who has not got claws like a bird of prey?

BALLIO: Do you expect to be allowed to cook anywhere without having your claws safely tied up? [*To his slave*] Here you, 'boy – you, the one that belongs to me – get inside quick, and have everything that we possess cleared out of the way; and then keep your eyes fixed on this man's eyes; wherever he looks, you look that way too; wherever he goes, go with him; whenever he puts out his hand, get yours ready too; if he picks up something of his own, let him; if it's something of ours, get hold of the other end of it. When he moves, you move; when he stands still, you stand

near him; when he squats, you squat. Yes, and every one of these underlings of his shall have a man told off to watch him.

COOK: I assure you, sir, you do not have to worry.

BALLIO: I don't have to worry, don't I, when I give you the run of my house?

COOK: Wait till you see what my *bouillon* will do for you. Like Medea cooked up old Pelias and with her possets and potions made his old bones like young again – that is what I shall do for you.

BALLIO: Eh? Are you a poisoner too?

COOK: Ah no – a life preserver.

BALLIO: Indeed? How much would you charge to teach me your recipe for that?

COOK: For what?

BALLIO: For preserving myself from your pilfering.

COOK: Two drachmas, if you trust me; if not, nothing less than a hundred. But tell me, sir, who is it you are giving this dinner for today? Friends, or enemies?

BALLIO: Friends, of course; what do you think?

COOK: Why not ask your enemies instead? I shall be serving your guests such a delicious feast, so sweetly and delicately seasoned, the first taste of it will give them such a ravenous appetite that they will be biting off their fingers.

BALLIO: Then for God's sake, before you serve a single guest, take a taste of it yourself, and give your lads some, and bite off your own thieving fingers.

COOK: I think perhaps you do not believe all I am saying.

BALLIO: Oh, shut your cackle; you make me tired. That is my house. Get inside and cook the dinner . . . *toute suite*.

COOK'S SLAVE [*perkily*]: You can sit down to table right now, mister, and call the guests in; dinner's as good as cooked, and spoiling.

[*The Cook's party enter the house.*]

BALLIO: That's a cheeky young brat too; a proper crafty cook's dish-licker. Damn it, I don't know on which side to be on my guard first – with thieves in my own house and bandits next door. I must tell you, I just met my next door neighbour, Calidorus's father, in town, and he warns me most emphatically to beware of his slave

Pseudolus and not trust him an inch. He's got some plot, it seems, to get that girl away from me this very day – has given his solemn promise to Simo that he'll remove Phoenicium from my house by some trick or other. I shall go and give notice to all my people that none of them is to trust Pseudolus for a single minute. [*He goes in.*]

*

[PSEUDOLUS now returns from the town. As he comes in he is talking to SIMIA whom he presumes to be following but who is actually lagging behind and not yet visible.]

PSEUDOLUS: If ever the everlasting gods wanted to help a man, they must certainly want to help me and Calidorus to live and the pimp to die, otherwise they wouldn't have produced such a brilliant brainy chap as you to be my assistant . . . But where has he got to? Am I off my nut, talking to myself like this? . . . By God, I believe he's made a monkey of me. It's a poor look-out if one rogue can't keep an eye on another better than that! By golly, if he has done a bunk that's the end of me, and of my chance of bringing off this job today . . . Ah, no, here he comes . . . and a walking whipping-post he is too. Look how he swaggers along . . . [SIMIA arrives, a slick and self-confident youth, dressed in a military rig.] Well, I've been looking for you everywhere; I was beginning to be afraid you'd been clever enough to hop it.

SIMIA: It wouldn't have been the first time, I can tell you.

PSEUDOLUS: Where have you been?

SIMIA: Where I wanted to go.

PSEUDOLUS: Well, I know that.

SIMIA: Then if you know, why ask?

PSEUDOLUS: What I want to do is to give you some advice.

SIMIA: Don't trouble; I could give you some.

PSEUDOLUS: You seem to be adopting a somewhat haughty tone with me, my lad.

SIMIA: I have to, don't I, if I'm supposed to be a bold army man?

PSEUDOLUS: All right, but I want to get on with this job we're doing.

SIMIA: Well, I am getting on with it, aren't I?

PSEUDOLUS: Quick march, then.

SIMIA: I'd rather take it slowly myself.

PSEUDOLUS: But now's our best chance; I want you to get in first, while the other chap's asleep.

SIMIA: Oh, take it easy, man, there's no hurry. By God, I hope that other chap turns up too, what's his name, the officer's servant. I'll make a better Harpax than he is, you see if I don't. You don't have to worry, chum. I'll have everything nicely worked out for you. I'll have some tricky patter ready for this foreign soldier man, that'll scare the life out of him and make him admit that he's not himself but I am!

PSEUDOLUS: How can you do that?

SIMIA: Oh for God's sake! You kill me with your everlasting questions.

PSEUDOLUS [*appeasingly*]: All right, all right, there's a good chap.

SIMIA: You needn't try to teach me my business; I'll show you I can give you points at faking and fiddling.

PSEUDOLUS: Then Jupiter be with you, for my sake.

SIMIA: For my sake too. How do I look? Is this kit all right?

PSEUDOLUS: It's perfect.

SIMIA: Good.

PSEUDOLUS: All I ask is that the good gods give you all you could wish for; I won't say all you deserve – that would be nothing, or less. [*Aside*] I'm sure I've never seen a more accomplished villain than this one.

SIMIA: Were you referring to me?

PSEUDOLUS: No, nothing. [*Fussing him again*] Oh what won't I give you, what won't I do for you, if you'll really take this job seriously and make a success of it!

SIMIA: Can't you stop jawing at me? It makes a chap forget all he remembers, to be constantly reminded not to forget what he knows he knows quite well. I've got it all; it's all in here; I've got my tactics all worked out.

PSEUDOLUS: That's a good boy.

SIMIA: We're neither of us good boys.

PSEUDOLUS: But you never know; you might make some slip.

SIMIA: Shut up, can't you!

PSEUDOLUS: On my solemn oath, as the gods love me –

SIMIA: As they won't, if they hear any more of your lies.

PSEUDOLUS: – I swear, Simia, you're such a crafty fellow I love you, I respect you, I look up to you.

SIMIA: You can't give me that pap; I know too well how to dish it out to others.

PSEUDOLUS: You'll see, my boy, you'll see what a wonderful treat I shall have in store for you – *if you make a success of this.*

SIMIA [*sick of this repetition*]: Oh . . . no! . . .

PSEUDOLUS: There'll be wonderful food, wonderful wine, perfumes, delicious dishes, and delicious drinks to go with them; and a wonderful girl all to yourself, to kiss and kiss –

SIMIA: You're too kind.

PSEUDOLUS: Oh, you'll thank me ever so much more than that – if you succeed.

SIMIA: And if I don't succeed, the executioner can treat me to a capital reception. Now come on, show me which is this pimp's front door.

PSEUDOLUS: The third from here.

SIMIA: Look out! Keep quiet; the den's mouth is opening.

PSEUDOLUS: The den must be feeling sick.

SIMIA: Eh?

PSEUDOLUS: It's going to throw him up whole.

[*BALLIO has appeared in his open door, coming out hesitantly, while keeping an eye on the operations within.*]

SIMIA: Is that him?

PSEUDOLUS: That's him.

SIMIA: He doesn't look up to much. D'ye see how he walks, sideways like a crab, instead of frontways?

BALLIO: Perhaps that man is not so dishonest after all, as cooks go. He hasn't pocketed anything so far, except a cup and a spoon.

PSEUDOLUS [*to Simia*]: Now's your chance, laddie.

SIMIA: This is it.

PSEUDOLUS: Watch your step . . . carefully now . . . I'll stay here in ambush.

[*SIMIA comes forward and assumes the air of a stranger finding his way.*]

SIMIA: I'm sure I've counted right. He told me to take the sixth turning after the city gate; and this one here is the sixth turning all

right. But what did he say was the number of the house? Blest if I can remember.

BALLIO: Who's that chap in uniform? Where has he come from, I wonder, and who's he looking for? I don't seem to know him. Looks like a foreigner.

SIMIA: Ah, there's somebody who may be able to solve my problem for me.

BALLIO: He's coming my way. I wonder what part of the world he comes from.

SIMIA [*hailing Ballio from a distance*]: Hey! . . . You there! Billy-goat-beard . . . tell me something, will you?

BALLIO: Can't you give me good day first?

SIMIA: Sorry; I've nothing good to give away.

BALLIO: Then you don't get anything either.

PSEUDOLUS: That's a good start.

SIMIA: Do you know anyone who lives in this alley? . . . I'm talking to you.

BALLIO: I know one . . . myself.

SIMIA: You're lucky. As men go, there's not one in ten can say he knows himself.

PSEUDOLUS: I like that. He's using his wits like a philosopher.

SIMIA: The man I'm looking for is a lawless, shameless, faithless, godless sinner.

BALLIO [*aside*]: Must be me. I answer to all those epithets. If he'd only mention my name . . . What's his name, then?

SIMIA: Ballio, a pimp.

BALLIO: What did I tell you? . . . Right, lad, I'm the man you want.

SIMIA: You are Ballio?

BALLIO: No doubt about it.

SIMIA [*fingering Ballio's clothes*]: From your clothes, I'd take you for a burglar.

BALLIO: And if you met me in the dark, you'd keep your hands off my clothes.

SIMIA: Well . . . my master wishes me to convey to you his cordial greetings, and I have a letter for you which he has told me to give you.

BALLIO: What's your master's name?

[SIMIA is at a loss.]

PSEUDOLUS: That's torn it. He's in a mess now; he doesn't know the name; we're sunk.

BALLIO: Come on, tell me who that letter comes from.

SIMIA: You'd better look at the seal first; then you can tell me the man's name; so that I'll know you're really Ballio.

BALLIO: Give it here, then.

SIMIA [*handing over the letter*]: There you are. Tell me if you know that seal.

BALLIO: Oho, yes, that's Polymachaeroplages - living image of him. Yes, I know him. See, young fellow, Polymachaeroplages is the name.

SIMIA: That's right - Polymachaeroplages. Now you've come out with the name, I know I did right to give you the letter, don't I?

BALLIO: And what is he doing now?

SIMIA: Oh, just what you'd expect a brave and gallant soldier to be doing. But if you'd have a look at that letter right away - that's all you need to do - and take the money, then I can take the girl, and that's it. I've got to be at Sicyon today or lose my head tomorrow; my master is like that - very strict with his orders.

BALLIO: You needn't tell me; I know him.

SIMIA: Well, hurry up and read the letter.

BALLIO: That's what I am doing - if you'll shut your trap. 'From Captain Polymachaeroplages to Pimp Ballio, this letter, sealed with the likeness heretofore agreed -'

SIMIA: That's the seal on the letter, see?

BALLIO: I can see it; and I recognize it. But does he usually start his letters without a salutation of any kind?

SIMIA: Oh yes, that's the army way, Ballio. When a soldier wants to salute his friends he does it with his hand; likewise with his hand he damns his enemies. But go on, and see what it says there.

BALLIO: Then shut up, and listen. 'The bearer of this letter is my orderly, Harpax' - that's you?

SIMIA: That's me - in nature as in name.

BALLIO: '- from whom please receive the money, and allow the woman to return with him. Such compliments as it is fitting to offer in writing to an esteemed friend I should have been happy to offer to your good self had I esteemed you a fit person to receive them.'

SIMIA: What about it, then?

BALLIO: When I get the money, you can have the woman.

SIMIA: What are we waiting for, then? [*He hands over the money.*]

BALLIO: Come inside.

SIMIA: Ta, I will. [*They go into the house.*]

PSEUDOLUS: He's a wily rascal, that Simia, if ever I saw one. He puts the wind up me; I'm scared he'll take it into his head to use his wiliness against me as he has against Ballio. With one victory behind him, he may turn his offensive against me, if he sees a chance to try anything on. I should be sorry if he did, by Jove, because I like the fellow. So now I've got three things to be in a panic about: one, lest my assistant should desert me and go over to the enemy; two, lest my master should come back from town too soon and catch the bandits with the catch in their hands; and three, lest the real Harpax turn up here before my Harpax can get away with the girl . . . Oh damn it all, they're taking a long time to come out. My heart is flitting . . . it's all packed up and ready to leave me . . . if he hasn't got the girl . . . [*At last the door opens.*] Victory! Victory — the vigilant warders are outwitted!

[SIMIA comes out with PHOENICIUM.]

SIMIA: Now don't cry, love. You don't understand what's going on; but you soon will, I promise you, when you see who you're going to have dinner with. I'm not taking you to that tooth-gnashing Macedonian — that's what you're crying about, isn't it? I'm taking you to somebody you very much want to belong to. You'll see; it won't be long now before you'll have your Calidorus in your arms.

PSEUDOLUS: What kept you hanging about in there so long? My heart was knocked out of shape with banging at my ribs.

SIMIA: Hold your tongue, scum. Is this a time for asking questions, while we're still in the enemy's lines? Rapid retreat is the order now.

PSEUDOLUS: You're right, by God — though you're a wrong 'un. Forward march! For victory and the cup of triumph! [*They march off.*]

[BALLIO comes out of his house.]

BALLIO: So that's that. It's a relief to see that fellow safe off and the woman with him. Ha, ha! Now let that damned rascal Pseudolus

come and try his tricks to take her away from me! Upon my living soul, I'd rather swear a thousand oaths and damn myself with perjury than let him make a monkey of me. By God, I'll have the laugh on him when I see him. But I dare say he's on the treadmill by now, where he ought to be. I'd like to see Simo here too, and let him share the joke with me.

[SIMO arrives.]

SIMO [*to himself*]: I wonder how my Ulysses is getting on, and whether he has succeeded in stealing the goddess from the Ballioneum.

BALLIO: Congratulations, Simo. Come, give me the hand of a lucky man.

SIMO: Why, what —

BALLIO: It's all over.

SIMO: What's all over?

BALLIO: You have nothing more to fear.

SIMO: You mean — ? Has Pseudolus been to see you?

BALLIO: No.

SIMO: Then what are you so joyful about?

BALLIO: That money's quite safe — the two thousand drachmas that Pseudolus wagered he'd get out of you — it's safe and sound.

SIMO: Well, I hope it is, by Jove.

BALLIO: You can touch me for two thousand if he gets possession of that girl today and hands her over to your son as he has undertaken to do. Go on, ask me to promise it; please do; I'm longing to promise it to you, to convince you that you're in the clear. I'll give you a woman too, if you like.

SIMO: All right, on those terms I don't see that it can do me any harm to clinch your bargain. You'll give me two thousand?

BALLIO: Two thousand I will give you.

SIMO [*aside*]: I look like doing pretty well out of this . . . But have you ever met the fellow?

BALLIO: I have indeed — two of them.

SIMO: What did he say to you? What kind of tales did he spin? Do tell me what he said.

BALLIO: The usual stage gags — and called me all the dirty names that are given to pimps in comedies — schoolboy stuff. He said I was a scoundrel, a criminal, a liar —

SIMO: He wasn't far wrong either.

BALLIO: I know; that's why I took it all in good part. You can't do a man any harm by reviling him, if he doesn't care a damn and doesn't try to deny what you say.

SIMO: But you were saying I had nothing more to fear from him. How is that? Explain, if you please.

BALLIO: Because whatever he does he will *not* be able to remove the girl from my house – not now. You remember my telling you that she had been sold to a Macedonian soldier?

SIMO: Yes, I remember.

BALLIO: Well, his orderly has just brought me a sum of money and a sealed letter, the token –

SIMO: What was that?

BALLIO: – the token, the sign agreed between me and the Macedonian. And the orderly has taken the girl away with him, not ten minutes ago.

SIMO: Is this true – on your honour?

BALLIO: If I had such a thing!

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

BALLIO: I couldn't be mistaken; the letter and the likeness on the seal were perfectly genuine. Anyway, the man is out of the city with her by now and on his way to Sicyon.

SIMO: Splendid! Good work! Now for Pseudolus! Is there any reason why I shouldn't give him his ticket for Milltown? ... Hullo, who's this coming along – that man in a military cloak?

BALLIO: Hanged if I know; but we may as well see where he's making for and what he wants ...

[HARPAX arrives.]

HARPAX: He's a worthless slave who doesn't think his master's orders worth his attention. For that matter no man is worth anything who can't attend to his duty without being prodded. The sort of servants who think they are free men the moment they escape from their masters' sight, and spend all they've got on gay living and low company – it's a long time before they'll be anything but slaves. They have no good qualities at all, except persistence in their evil ways. They're not the sort I care to keep company with, or speak to at all; I've always kept clear of them. When I've been

given an order, even if my master is far away, he's present as far as I am concerned. I go in fear of him, when he's not with me, so that I can face him fearlessly when he is. So now I shall be about my business. I've been waiting at the tavern for that Syrus, as he told me to after I gave him the letter; he said he'd send for me as soon as his master came home. But he hasn't turned up, nor sent word, so I've come back on my own to see what's going on; I'm not having him pulling a fast one on me ...

The best thing I can do now is to knock at the door and get hold of somebody. All I want is to make this pimp take the money from me and let me have the girl. [*But he still hovers about, perhaps not quite sure of the house.*]

BALLIO [*to Simo*]: I say.

SIMO: What?

BALLIO: He's mine.

SIMO: How do you mean, yours?

BALLIO: He's in my net. He's after the girl, and he's got the money.

Oho, wait till I get my teeth into him!

SIMO: You're going to gobble him up, eh?

BALLIO: That's right; while he's fresh, while he's hot, ready, and ripe for eating. Good men are a dead loss to me; it's the wicked ones I thrive on. Honest men may serve their country; only the villains are any use to me.

SIMO: And the gods will use you as your villainy deserves.

HARPAX: Well, here goes. I'll knock and see if Ballio is at home.

BALLIO [*still to Simo*]: Venus is kind to me, anyway, sending me all these money-wasters, loss-lovers, good-timers, eaters, drinkers, and fornicators. Very different from your sort – who won't let yourself have a good time and grudge it to those who do.

HARPAX [*at the door*]: Hey, anyone there?

BALLIO: You see, he's walking right into my hands.

HARPAX: Where are you all?

BALLIO: Hullo, young fellow. What do you want? [*Aside*] I'll make a packet out of this chap; I know it; the omens are favourable.

HARPAX: Can someone open this door?

BALLIO: Now then, corporal, what are you after?

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

BALLIO: Then you needn't look for him long, whoever you are.

HARPAX: Why not?

BALLIO: Because you're looking *at* him, in front of your nose.

HARPAX [*thinking he means Simo*]: Oh, is it you, sir?

SIMO [*indignant*]: Don't point at me, soldier, unless you want this crooked stick on your back; point at him, he's the pimp.

BALLIO [*referring to Simo*]: He's only a gentleman. [*To Simo*] But gentleman as you are, I've known the times you've been dunned for debt on the market and haven't known where to lay your hand on a shilling unless this pimp would lend it to you.

HARPAX: May I trouble you to speak to me for a moment?

BALLIO: With pleasure. What can I do for you?

HARPAX: I have money for you here.

BALLIO: And here's my hand ready to receive it.

HARPAX: Take it; five hundred drachmas good silver, counted and correct. I am instructed by my master Polymachaeroplages to pay you this sum which he owes you, and to ask you to let me take the girl Phoenicium away with me.

BALLIO: Your master sent you, did he?

HARPAX: That's right.

BALLIO: An officer - ?

HARPAX: He is.

BALLIO: Macedonian?

HARPAX: That's right.

BALLIO: Polymachaeroplages? He sent you to me?

HARPAX: That's quite correct.

BALLIO: To give me this money?

HARPAX: Yes. That is, if you are Ballio the pimp.

BALLIO: And I'm to let you have the girl?

HARPAX: That was the message.

BALLIO: Phoenicium? Was that the name he said?

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

BALLIO: Just a minute. I'll be back. [*Turning away towards Simo.*]

HARPAX: Don't be long, then; I'm in a hurry. The day's going, look.

BALLIO: Yes, I see it is. I just want to consult my friend. You stay there, I'll be back in a minute. [*To Simo*] Now what about it, eh? How are we doing? I've caught him in the act now, haven't I, this fellow with his money?

SIMO: How do you mean?

BALLIO: Well, don't you see what's happening?

SIMO: I can't say I do.

BALLIO: Why, this man has been put up by your Pseudolus to impersonate the messenger from the Macedonian.

SIMO: And have you got the money from him?

BALLIO: You can see I have, can't you?

SIMO: Well, don't forget to give me half the loot; we ought to share it.

BALLIO: Ought we, indeed? That's what *you* think!

HARPAX: How much longer are you going to keep me waiting?

BALLIO: I'll be with you in a moment. [*To Simo*] What shall we do with him?

SIMO: Let's have some fun with this substitute spy, and see how long it takes him to realize he's being guyed.

BALLIO: Come with me. [*To Harpax*] Now, my lad. So you really are my friend's servant, are you?

HARPAX: Certainly I am.

BALLIO: How much did he pay for you?

HARPAX [*with proud dignity*]: It cost him his own valour and victory on the field of battle. I was a high officer myself in the place I came from.

BALLIO: Where was that? A prison perhaps - which he stormed?

HARPAX: If you're going to use insulting language, you'll hear the same from me.

BALLIO: How long did it take you to come from Sicyon?

HARPAX: A day and a half.

BALLIO: Quick work!

SIMO: Well, you can see he's a strong walker; look at those calves; you can tell he's got the right legs - for a pair of heavy chains.

BALLIO [*surveying him insolently*]: I suppose you slept in a nice bed when you were a boy, eh?

HARPAX: I suppose so.

BALLIO: And had a nice time in bed . . . as lads do . . . eh?

SIMO: Sure to have done.

HARPAX: What's the matter with you two? Are you crazy?

BALLIO: And I suppose you spent nights out with your officer on nightwatch, like good pals, his sword in your scabbard?

HARPAX: God damn you to hell.

BALLIO: Where you're going, all in good time.

HARPAX: Just send that girl out to me, please; or let me have the money back.

BALLIO [*catching the soldier's cloak as he turns*]: Wait a minute.

HARPAX: What for?

BALLIO: How much did it cost you to hire this cloak?

HARPAX: What do you mean?

SIMO: And that sword; how much is that worth?

HARPAX: These people need a dose of hellebore -

BALLIO [*grabbing at Harpax's hat*]: Hey! -

HARPAX: Get off!

BALLIO: What did its owner charge you for the loan of that hat?

HARPAX: Owner? What are you dreaming about? Everything I'm wearing is my own, bought and paid for out of my own purse.

BALLIO: The one you keep nearest your own belly, no doubt.

HARPAX [*aside*]: These old fools are well oiled; they need a good old rubbing down too.

BALLIO: No, but seriously, tell me; I want to know; what's in this for you? How much - or how little - did Pseudolus get you for?

HARPAX: Pseudolus? Who's he?

BALLIO: Your instructor - the one who put you up to this clever trick for getting the woman out of my house.

HARPAX: I don't know what Pseudolus you're talking about, or what clever trick. I've never met any such person.

BALLIO: Then you can take yourself off. There are no perquisites for impersonators here. Just tell your friend Pseudolus that what he's after has already gone, with another man, who was here before you, a man named Harpax.

HARPAX: Harpax! But I am Harpax!

BALLIO: So you say. [*To Simo*] He's a rogue, if ever I saw one.

HARPAX: Haven't I just given you the money? And a little while ago, when I first arrived, I gave one of your slaves the token, the sealed letter, here in front of this house.

BALLIO: You gave the letter to one of my slaves? Which slave?

HARPAX: His name was Syrus.

BALLIO [*shaken, but trying to stick to his own belief*]: Oh, no, that won't

wash. The impostor is overplaying his part, and being a bit too clever. But by God, the impudence of that Pseudolus! The scoundrel had it all worked out - to give this chap exactly the sum the officer owed me, and send him to fetch the woman away!

HARPAX: I assure you my name is Harpax, and I am the servant of a Macedonian officer. I am not impersonating anyone or attempting to deceive anyone. As for that Pseudolus, I don't know any such person nor have I ever heard of him.

SIMO: At any rate, my dear pimp, it looks as if, short of a miracle, you are not going to see the woman again.

BALLIO: My God, that's what I'm beginning to be afraid of, the more I hear of this man's story. Syrus . . . it gave me a nasty turn when he mentioned that name . . . he gave the letter to Syrus, did he? . . . I'll bet my boots that was Pseudolus. Hey you, what did he look like, this fellow you gave the letter to?

HARPAX: Ginger hair, fat belly, thick legs, dark skin, big head, sharp eyes, red face, and very large feet.

BALLIO: Large feet - that settles it! I'm a dead man! It's Pseudolus himself. I'm done for, Simo; I'm dying.

HARPAX: Not if I know it, you aren't; not before you give me back the whole two thousand drachmas.

SIMO: And another two thousand to me.

BALLIO: You're not going to dun me for the bet I made in fun?

SIMO: Villains deserve to lose both their bets and their booty.

BALLIO: At least you might let me have Pseudolus.

SIMO: Let you have Pseudolus? Why blame him? Didn't I tell you over and over again to beware of him?

BALLIO: He's ruined me.

SIMO: But only robbed me of a mere two thousand drachmas!

BALLIO: Well what am I going to do now?

HARPAX: You can give me that money back, then go and hang yourself.

BALLIO: To hell with you! . . . All right, come along with me to the bank and I'll pay up.

HARPAX: I will.

SIMO: What about me?

BALLIO: I'll settle my foreign debts today; home business tomorrow.

Pseudolus got me sentenced to death today, when he put up that impostor to steal the woman from me. Come on, you. [*To the audience*] And don't expect to see me coming home by this street any more; in future I shall use the back way.

HARPAX: You could be in town by now, if you were as good a walker as you are a talker.

BALLIO: My birthday! From now on I shall call it my death-day. [*He and HARPAX depart.*]

SIMO: I got the better of him all right. And my man has got the better of his opponent too. Now what I'm going to do is to prepare a reception for Pseudolus - oh, no, not the kind of reception you have seen in many another comedy, a reception with whips and irons - no, I'm going into my house, and I'm going to bring out that two thousand drachmas which I promised to give him if he won. I shall bring it out and put it into his hands before he asks for it. For, by gad, he's the cleverest, craftiest, wickedest creature alive! The trick that took Troy, and all the wiles of Ulysses, are nothing to what Pseudolus can do! ... Yes, that's what I'll do; I'll go to my house, I'll fetch the money, and ... spring a surprise on Pseudolus! [*He goes in.*]

*

[*The day must be drawing to its close when PSEUDOLUS staggers home, after celebrating his triumph with his confederates.*]

PSEUDOLUS: Ups-a-daisy! ... Now then, feet, what are you thinking of? ... Can you stand up, or not? ... Or do you want someone to come and pick me up off the ground? By God, there'll be trouble if you let me fall down ... are you going to keep going, or aren't you? I can see I shall have to be angry with you before long. That's the worst of drink ... it goes for your feet first, like a crafty wrestler. Oh, by Pollux, I'm properly pickled, aren't I? ... But it was a wonderful party ... a reception fit for the gods ... wonderful food ... and all so friendly and jolly ... well, I mean to say, there's no need to beat about the bush ... after all, there's nothing else in life worth living for, is there? ... there's no pleasure, no beauty to compare with ... it makes a man feel at his most god-like, I reckon ...

When a lover ... loves his lassie ...
Lips and tongues ... together pressed ...
Two in one ... each with the other ...
Heart to heart ... and breast to breast.

One pale hand ... a cup of kindness
Lifting to her bonny boy ...
No hard words ... no scowl of sadness ...
No one else to mar their joy.

Feasts of flowers ... fragrant incense ...
Joy and beauty unconfined ...
Fill the cup ... and what comes after ...
What comes after ...
never mind!

Oh yes, we had it good today, me and my young master ... to celebrate my glorious victory and the rout of my enemies. They're still at it ... lying there drinking ... and loving, and ... a girl each ... and one for me too ... everybody enjoying themselves. As soon as I could stand up, they asked me to dance! So I obliged with a few capers ... like this ... pretty good, eh? ... quite the professional. Of course I've had lessons, Greek style and all that. Anyway I put on a pretty tunic and in I came ... like this. It was a scream. Everybody applauded and shouted 'encore' to call me back. So I started again ... a bit different this time ... like this. All the time I was making up to my girl, hoping she'd let me ... and suddenly, doing one of my pirouettes, down I fell ... curtain! And made a mess of my nice tunic in scrambling to my feet. They liked that best of all, seeing me fall down. However, someone passed me a cup ... and I drank it off; then changed my dirty tunic for a clean one; and here I am, for a breath of fresh air. Now, from young master to old master, I'm on my way to remind the old 'un of our bargain. [*He knocks at Simo's door.*] Hey there! Open up! Open up! Tell Simo I'm here.

[SIMO comes out, carrying a large bag of money, which he is concealing, as far as possible, behind his back.]

SIMO: That sounds like a notable villain shouting for me. Hullo!
What's all this, then? What have we here?

PSEUDOLUS: Your humble servant Pseudolus ... crowned with
flowers ... drowned with drink.

SIMO: Well, that's a nice way to behave, I must say. [*Aside*] Look at
him ... not in the least ashamed in my presence, is he? I don't
know whether to speak to him severely or kindly. I can't pitch
into him now, with what I have here for him, unless I want to
lose him altogether.

PSEUDOLUS: Greetings from a scoundrel ... to a gentleman -

SIMO: Bless you, Pseudolus -

PSEUDOLUS: Hup!

SIMO: Damn you, Pseudolus! Get away from me.

PSEUDOLUS: Who are you pushing?

SIMO: How dare you belch in my face, you drunken ruffian!

PSEUDOLUS: Put your arms around me, darling ... hold me gently
lest I fall ... don't you see I'm soaked and sozzled? ...

SIMO: How dare you, Pseudolus, how dare you go wandering about
like this in the daytime, dead drunk and with flowers on your
head? What is the meaning of this?

PSEUDOLUS: It means ... I like it.

SIMO: You like it, do you? Stop breathing in my face.

PSEUDOLUS: I have a very sweet breath. Don't let it worry you,
Simo.

SIMO: Rascal - you're capable, I've no doubt, of accounting for all
the vintage of the Massic vineyards, four times over, in under an
hour.

PSEUDOLUS: Better say a winter hour - a short one.

SIMO: You may well be right. Well, where have you come from?
From what port is this well-laden vessel sailing?

PSEUDOLUS [*now more coherent*]: Your son and I have been carousing.
Oh yes, Simo, we did it all right! We put it across old Ballio. I've
kept my word, done all I promised.

SIMO: You're a rascal, Pseudolus.

PSEUDOLUS: Blame the wench, then. She's free now, and sitting by
your son's side.

SIMO: I know all about it, and how you did it.

PSEUDOLUS: Well then? Aren't you going to give me some money?

SIMO: It is your right, I must admit. Take it, then.

PSEUDOLUS: So you're giving it me after all; and you declared you
would never give it me. Come on, then; put it on my shoulder;
and follow me where I'm going. [*He means to humiliate Simo by
parading the booty, and his victim, through the streets.*]

SIMO: I am to put it on your shoulder?

PSEUDOLUS: Yes, please. I know you will.

SIMO: The rascal! What shall I do with him? Is he not only to have
the money but make me a laughing-stock as well?

PSEUDOLUS: *Vae victis!*

SIMO: Give me your shoulder then.

PSEUDOLUS: Here it is.

SIMO [*still reluctant to hand over the money-bag*]: No, please! Oh, to
think that it should come to this - me going down on my knees
to you for mercy. Oh, whatever shall I do? [*Sobbing.*]

PSEUDOLUS: Stop that.

SIMO: But think how I suffer.

PSEUDOLUS: Think how I should be suffering if you weren't.

SIMO: Can you do it, my dear Pseudolus? Can you take all this
money from your own master?

PSEUDOLUS: With the greatest of pleasure and satisfaction.

SIMO: Please, I beg you, couldn't you find it in your heart to let me
off a little bit of this debt?

PSEUDOLUS: Now you're not calling me a greedy man, are you?
You won't get a penny out of me that way. How much pity would
you have had for my back, if I hadn't done this for you today?

SIMO: All right. But I'll get even with you, as sure as I live.

PSEUDOLUS: Threaten what you please; I can take it.

SIMO: Then take it! [*He puts the bag on Pseudolus's back and turns
away.*]

PSEUDOLUS: Hey, come back!

SIMO: Why should I come back?

PSEUDOLUS: Just come back and you'll see. Come on, there's no
catch in it.

SIMO [*coming back*]: Well?

PSEUDOLUS: You're coming with me ... to where the drink is
flowing.

SIMO: I come drinking with you?

PSEUDOLUS

[1330-5]

PSEUDOLUS: Orders is orders. Do as I tell you . . . and maybe I'll give you half . . . or maybe more . . . of this.

SIMO: Lead on; take me where you will.

PSEUDOLUS: How now, Simo? Are you still angry with me, or with your son, for all this business?

SIMO: Indeed I am not.

PSEUDOLUS: Let's go, then. After you.

SIMO [*pausing*]: Shall we . . . invite them all? [*Referring to the spectators.*]

PSEUDOLUS: My God, no! They never invite me anywhere; I'm not inviting them. But [*To the audience*] . . . if you will please to show your kind appreciation of our company and our play . . . we will invite you here again . . . tomorrow.

EXEUNT



Some other books published by Penguins are described on the following pages.