

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00577-7 - The Comedy of Errors, Volume 5

William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

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The scene: Ephesus

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

SÖLINUS, *Duke of Ephesus*ÆGEON, *a merchant of Syracuse*ANTIPHOLUS of Ephesus } *twin brothers, and sons*ANTIPHOLUS of Syracuse } *to Ægeon and Æmilia*DROMIO of Ephesus } *twin brothers, and bondmen*DROMIO of Syracuse } *to the two Antipholuses*

BALTHAZAR

ANGELO, *a goldsmith**A Merchant, friend to Antipholus of Syracuse**Another Merchant, to whom Angelo is in debt*DOCTOR PINCH, *a schoolmaster*ÆMILIA, *an abbess at Ephesus, wife to Ægeon*ADRIANA, *wife to Antipholus of Ephesus*LUCIANA, *her sister*LUCE, or NELL, *kitchen-maid to Adriana**A Courtesan**Gaoler, officers, and other attendants*

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THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

[I. I.] *A public square in Ephesus, hard by the Mart: in the centre, at the sign of the Phœnix, the house of Antipholus of Ephesus, with a balcony; on one side, the wall of an abbey-garden, with a gate; on the other the entrance to a street. Without the garden-wall stands a judgment-seat of stone, with steps leading thereto*

The DUKE of Ephesus, followed by attendants, a gaoler, ÆGEON in charge of officers, and a crowd of citizens, enters the square and ascends the judgment-seat

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

Duke. Merchant of Syracuse, plead no more;
I am not partial to infringe our laws.
The enmity and discord which of late
Sprung from the rancorous outrage of your duke
To merchants, our well-dealing countrymen,
Who, wanting guilders to redeem their lives,
Have sealed his rigorous statutes with their bloods,
Excludes all pity from our threat'ning looks. 10

For, since the mortal and intestine jars
'Twixt thy seditious countrymen and us,
It hath in solemn synods been decreed,
Both by the Syracusians and ourselves,
To admit no traffic to our adverse towns:
Nay, more—if any born at Ephesus
Be seen at Syracusian marts and fairs;
Again, if any Syracusian born
Come to the bay of Ephesus—he dies;

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4 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS I. I. 20

20 His goods confiscate to the duke's dispose,
 Unless a thousand marks be levied,
 To quit the penalty and to ransom him.
 Thy substance, valued at the highest rate,
 Cannot amount unto a hundred marks—
 Therefore by law thou art condemned to die.

Ægeon. Yet this my comfort: when your words
 are done,

My woes end likewise with the evening sun.

Duke. Well, Syracusian, say, in brief, the cause
 Why thou departed'st from thy native home,

30 And for what cause thou cam'st to Ephesus.

Ægeon. A heavier task could not have been imposed
 Than I to speak my griefs unspeakable:
 Yet, that the world may witness that my end
 Was wrought by nature, not by vile offence,
 I'll utter what my sorrow gives me leave.

In Syracuse was I born, and wed

Unto a woman, happy but for me,
 And by me too—had not our hap been bad:

With her I lived in joy; our wealth increased

40 By prosperous voyages I often made
 To Epidamnum; till my factor's death
 And the great care of goods at random left
 Drew me from kind embracements of my spouse;
 From whom my absence was not six months old,
 Before herself—almost at fainting under
 The pleasing punishment that women bear—
 Had made provision for her following me,
 And soon, and safe, arrivéd where I was.

There had she not been long but she became

50 A joyful mother of two goodly sons:
 And, which was strange, the one so like the other,
 As could not be distinguished but by names.

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1.1.53 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS 5

That very hour, and in the self-same inn,
 A meaner woman was deliveréd
 Of such a burden male, twins both alike.
 Those, for their parents were exceeding poor,
 I bought, and brought up to attend my sons.
 My wife, not meanly proud of two such boys,
 Made daily motions for our home return:
 Unwilling I agreed. Alas, too soon 60
 We came aboard.
 A league from Epidamnum had we sailed
 Before the always-wind-obeying deep
 Gave any tragic instance of our harm:
 But longer did we not retain much hope;
 For what obscuréd light the heavens did grant
 Did but convey unto our fearful minds
 A doubtful warrant of immediate death,
 Which, though myself would gladly have embraced,
 Yet the incessant weepings of my wife, 70
 Weeping before for what she saw must come,
 And piteous plainings of the pretty babes,
 That mourned for fashion, ignorant what to fear,
 Forced me to seek delays for them and me.
 And this it was—for other means was none:
 The sailors sought for safety by our boat,
 And left the ship, then sinking-ripe, to us;
 My wife, more careful for the latter-born,
 Had fast'ned him unto a small spare mast,
 Such as seafaring men provide for storms: 80
 To him one of the other twins was bound,
 Whilst I had been like heedful of the other.
 The children thus disposed, my wife and I,
 Fixing our eyes on whom our care was fixed,
 Fast'ned ourselves at either end the mast;
 And floating straight, obedient to the stream,

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6 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS I. I. 87

Were carried towards Corinth, as we thought.

At length the sun, gazing upon the earth,

Dispersed those vapours that offended us,

90 And, by the benefit of his wishéd light,

The seas waxed calm, and we discoveréd

Two ships from far making amain to us:

Of Corinth that, of Epidaurus this.

But ere they came—O, let me say no more!—

Gather the sequel by that went before.

Duke. Nay, forward, old man—do not break off so,

For we may pity, though not pardon thee.

Egeon. O, had the gods done so, I had not now

Worthily termed them merciless to us.

100 For, ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues,

We were encount' red by a mighty rock,

Which being violently borne upon,

Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst;

So that, in this unjust divorce of us,

Fortune had left to both of us alike

What to delight in, what to sorrow for.

Her part, poor soul, seeming as burdenéd

With lesser weight, but not with lesser woe,

Was carried with more speed before the wind,

110 And in our sight they three were taken up

By fishermen of Corinth, as we thought.

At length, another ship had seized on us;

And, knowing whom it was their hap to save,

Gave healthful welcome to their shipwrecked guests—

And would have reft the fishers of their prey,

Had not their bark been very slow of sail;

And therefore homeward did they bend their course.

Thus have you heard me severed from my bliss,

That by misfortunes was my life prolonged

120 To tell sad stories of my own mishaps.

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1.1.121 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS 7

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

Ægeon. My youngest boy, and yet my eldest care,
At eighteen years became inquisitive
After his brother; and importuned me,
That his attendant—for his case was like,
Reft of his brother, but retained his name—
Might bear him company in the quest of him;
Whom whilst I laboured of a love to see, 130
I hazarded the loss of whom I loved.
Five summers have I spent in farthest Greece,
Roaming clean through the bounds of Asia,
And, coasting homeward, came to Ephesus;
Hopeless to find, yet loath to leave unsought
Or that, or any place that harbours men.
But here must end the story of my life—
And happy were I in my timely death,
Could all my travels warrant me they live.

Duke. Hapless Ægeon, whom the fates have marked 140
To bear the extremity of dire mishap.
Now, trust me, were it not against our laws,
Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,
Which princes, would they, may not disannul,
My soul should sue as advocate for thee:
But, though thou art adjudgéd to the death,
And passéd sentence may not be recalled
But to our honour's great disparagement.
Yet will I favour thee in what I can;
Therefore, merchant, I'll limit thee this day 150
†To seek thy help by beneficial hap.
Try all the friends thou hast in Ephesus—
Beg thou, or borrow, to make up the sum,
And live: it no, then thou art doomed to die.

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8 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS I. I. 155

Gaoler, take him to thy custody. [*he rises*]

Gaoler. I will, my lord.

Ægeon. Hopeless, and helpless, doth Ægeon wend,
But to procrastinate his lifeless end. [*they depart*]

[I. 2.] *The Mart of Ephesus: in the centre, at the sign of the Porpentine, the house of a courtesan; streets on either side, one leading to the Bay, the other to the house of Antipholus of Ephesus*

ANTIPHOLUS of Syracuse, his man DROMIO and a merchant enter from the street leading to the Bay

Merchant. Therefore, give out you are of Epidamnum,
Lest that your goods too soon be confiscate:

This very day, a Syracusian merchant

Is apprehended for arrival here,

And, not being able to buy out his life,

According to the statute of the town,

Dies ere the weary sun set in the west.

There is your money that I had to keep.

S. Antipholus [to Dromio]. Go bear it to the Centaur,
where we host,

10 And stay there, Dromio, till I come to thee;

Within this hour it will be dinner-time;

Till that, I'll view the manners of the town,

Peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings,

And then return and sleep within mine inn;

For with long travel I am stiff and weary.

Get thee away.

S. Dromio. Many a man would take you at your word,
And go indeed, having so good a mean. [*he goes*]

S. Antipholus. A trusty villain, sir, that very oft,

20 When I am dull with care and melancholy,

Lightens my humour with his merry jests.

What, will you walk with me about the town,

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1.2.23 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS 9

And then go to my inn, and dine with me?

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

S. Antipholus. Farewell till then: I will go lose myself, 30
And wander up and down to view the city.

Merchant. Sir, I commend you to your own content.
[*he departs*]

S. Antipholus. He, that commends me to mine
own content,
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
†In quest of them, unhappier, lose myself. 40

DROMIO of Ephesus enters the Mart

Here comes the almanac of my true date:
What now! How chance thou art returned so soon?

E. Dromio. Returned so soon! rather approached
too late.

The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit;
The clock hath stricken twelve upon the bell;
My mistress made it one upon my cheek:
She is so hot, because the meat is cold:
The meat is cold, because you come not home:
You come not home, because you have no stomach:
You have no stomach, having broke your fast: 50
But we, that know what 'tis to fast and pray,
Are penitent for your default to-day.

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10 THE COMEDY OF ERRORS 1.2.53

S. Antipholus. Stop in your wind, sir—tell me this,
I pray!

Where have you left the money that I gave you?

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

S. Antipholus. I am not in a sportive humour now:
Tell me, and dally not, where is the money?

60 We being strangers here, how dar'st thou trust
So great a charge from thine own custody?

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

Methinks your maw, like mine, should be your clock,
And strike you home without a messenger.

S. Antipholus. Come Dromio, come, these jests are
out of season:

Reserve them till a merrier hour than this.

70 Where is the gold I gave in charge to thee?

E. Dromio. To me sir? why you gave no gold to me.

S. Antipholus. Come on, sir knave, have done
your foolishness,

And tell me how thou hast disposed thy charge.

E. Dromio. My charge was but to fetch you from
the mart

Home to your house, the Phoenix, sir, to dinner.

My mistress and her sister stay for you.

S. Antipholus. Now, as I am a Christian, answer me,
In what safe place you have bestowed my money;
Or I shall break that merry sconce of yours

80 That stands on tricks when I am undisposed:

Where is the thousand marks thou hadst of me?

E. Dromio. I have some marks of yours upon my pate: