

# EPIDICUS BY PLAUTUS

An Annotated Latin Text,  
with a Prose Translation

CATHERINE TRACY





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Catherine Tracy, *Epidicus by Plautus: An Annotated Latin Text, with a Prose Translation*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0269>

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Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0269#resources>

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-284-3

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80064-285-0

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80064-286-7

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-80064-287-4

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 978-1-80064-288-1

ISBN Digital ebook (xml): 978-1-80064-289-8

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0269

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Cover design by Anna Gatti.

# The Play in English



# Cast of Characters<sup>1</sup>

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**ACROPOLISTIS** — a lyre-player and female slave who was Stratippocles's girlfriend till just before the action of the play begins

**APOECIDES** — an old man, friend of Periphanes

**CHAERIBULUS** — a freeborn young man, friend of Stratippocles

**EPIDICUS** — a male slave of Periphanes's household who is the con-man hero of the play

**LYRE PLAYER** — a freedwoman and professional musician

**MONEYLENDER**

**PERIPHANES** — an old man, father of Stratippocles

**PHILIPPA** — a poor freeborn middle-aged woman who had an illegitimate daughter (Telestis) by Periphanes

**SLAVE (MALE, UNNAMED)** — belonging to Periphanes's household

**SOLDIER** — wealthy and boastful, like most soldiers in Plautus

**STRATIPPOCLES** — a freeborn young man, son of Periphanes

**TELESTIS** — a freeborn young woman, illegitimate daughter of Philippa and Periphanes

**THESPRIO** — another male slave of Periphanes's household

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1 A note on the characters' names: "Acropolistis" means "woman of the acropolis"; "Apoecides" means "settler" or "colonist"; "Chaeribulus" (from the Greek "rejoice" + "adviser") means "one who loves to give advice" (see Duckworth-Wheeler 1940: 96 who cites Ussing 1888); "Epidicus" means "disputed at law"; "Periphanes" means "notable"; "Philippa" means "lover of horses"; "Stratippocles" means "glorious cavalryman"; "Telestis" means "perfection"; "Thesprio" means "Thesprotian", that is, man from Thesprotis, in Epirus (see Richlin 2017: 72–84 for a discussion of slaves names in Roman comedy).



# Setting

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*The play is supposed to take place in the Greek city of Athens, but the characters generally speak and act like Romans, and the “Athens” of this play looks a lot like Rome. For a plot summary of the play, see the introduction (page 1). Scene summaries (in English) can be found at the beginning of each scene in the Latin text, starting at page 35.*





# ACT I

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## 1.1 Scene with Epidicus and Thesprio

*Thesprio, a slave belonging to Periphanes, hurries on stage from the direction of the harbour (stage right), followed by Epidicus, another of Periphanes's slaves. Thesprio is lugging two travel bags and Epidicus is trying to catch up with him. The stage represents a street in front of the houses of Periphanes (stage right) and of Chaeribulus (stage left).*

**Epidicus:** Hey, kid!

**Thesprio:** Who's that, grabbing me by the cloak when I'm in a hurry?

**Epidicus:** You know — it's your fellow<sup>1</sup> slave.

**Thesprio:** [*about to barge past Epidicus*] Well, "fellow", you're in my way.

**Epidicus:** Just look for a minute, Thesprio.

**Thesprio:** [*realizing who it is*] Oh, it's you, Epidicus, is it?

**Epidicus:** [*ironically*] You're using your eyes all right.

**Thesprio:** Hello.

**Epidicus:** I hope the gods are good to you. [*using a traditional greeting for someone who's returned from a trip*] I'm glad to see you safely back.

**Thesprio:** [*unimpressed*] OK, and what else?

**Epidicus:** What usually comes with the greeting: there'll be a dinner for you too.

**Thesprio:** [*embracing him*] I promise you –

**Epidicus:** [*eagerly*] What?

**Thesprio:** That I'll accept, if you're inviting me.

**Epidicus:** Anyway, how are you doing? Are you well?

**Thesprio:** Yes, as you can see.

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1 "Fellow" here, and in Thesprio's response, is an attempt to translate a Latin pun on *familiaris* and *familiariter*. Epidicus calls himself Thesprio's *familiaris* (meaning "fellow slave" but also "friend") and Thesprio responds that Epidicus is being *nimum familiariter* (meaning "too friendly" or "too familiar" — that is, invading his personal space by grabbing his cloak).

**Epidicus:** Good, I can see you are! You seem fatter and sleeker.

**Thesprio:** Yeah, thanks to this [*gesturing to his left hand*].

**Epidicus:** [*snorts, and gestures to Thesprio's hand*] It should have been cut off for theft long ago.<sup>2</sup>

**Thesprio:** [*grinning*] I don't sneak around stealing as much as I used to.

**Epidicus:** Why's that?

**Thesprio:** I steal openly now [*heading towards Periphanes's house*].

**Epidicus:** [*hurrying to keep up with Thesprio*] May the gods bring you bad luck! What enormous strides you're taking! When I saw you at the harbour I started running after you, and I could barely catch you up.

**Thesprio:** You're a pathetic townie.

**Epidicus:** [*panting*] I know what you are — a real soldier-man.

**Thesprio:** [*pleased*] Say it as much as you like.

**Epidicus:** But how are you? Have you been in good health the whole time?

**Thesprio:** Up and down.

**Epidicus:** Now, going up and down is fine for goats and such, but I don't like to see it being done to people [*he mimes having his hands tied up to a frame before a whipping*].<sup>3</sup>

**Thesprio:** [*not looking, and therefore not getting E.'s joke*] Well, what do you want me to say?

**Epidicus:** How'd things go?

**Thesprio:** Fine.

**Epidicus:** How's our young master?

**Thesprio:** Very fit — as strong as a boxer.

**Epidicus:** That's good news you're bringing me now you've come back, Thesprio. But where is he?

**Thesprio:** He's coming now.

**Epidicus:** But where is he? You didn't bring him in that suitcase or in that little furry handbag of yours ...did you?

**Thesprio:** Oh for the gods' sake!

2 Thieves were punished by getting a hand (possibly always the left one) cut off. It is typical of Plautus that slaves joke to each other about the very real horrors that they all potentially faced.

3 *Qui uarie ualent / capreaginum hominum non placet mihi neque pantherinum genus* (literally: "those whose health is spotty, like a goaty type of man, or a leopard type, don't appeal to me"). This is another joke about the abusive treatment slaves lived with, referring to the "spotty" or scarred skin of a slave that has been beaten with whips.

**Epidicus:** I want to ask you some questions. [*speaking in mock legal language*] Give your attention to the speaker; your turn to speak will follow.

**Thesprio:** You speak like a law-court.

**Epidicus:** And so I should.<sup>4</sup>

**Thesprio:** So now you're playing praetor for us?<sup>5</sup>

**Epidicus:** Why not? Can you think of anyone better suited to the praetorship?

**Thesprio:** But Epidicus, you're missing one thing from this praetorship of yours.

**Epidicus:** What?

**Thesprio:** You know: two lictors, with two fasces<sup>6</sup> — nice bundles of sticks — \*for beating you with\*.<sup>7</sup>

**Epidicus:** You're such a jerk! But anyway, tell me all about it!

**Thesprio:** What's the question?

**Epidicus:** Where are Stratippocles's weapons?

**Thesprio:** Well, by Pollux,<sup>8</sup> those weapons just — deserted to the enemy side.<sup>9</sup>

**Epidicus:** His weapons did?

**Thesprio:** They certainly did — in super quick time, too.

**Epidicus:** Seriously?

**Thesprio:** Seriously; the enemy's got them all right.

**Epidicus:** By Pollux, what a shameful thing!

**Thesprio:** Well, others have done the same before him. He'll end up getting honoured for it.

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4 There is an untranslatable play on words here with *ius dicis* ("you speak like a lawcourt" or "you speak the law") and Epidicus's name, which in Greek (*ἐπίδικος*) refers to litigation. The Latin *dicis* and the Greek *-dikos* (*-δικος*) sound similar, though they have different meanings.

5 The urban praetor was the judge in charge of the Roman law courts.

6 "Two lictors with two fasces": lictors were officials whose job was to walk in front of magistrates to give them status and authority. Lictors carried bundles of sticks called *fasces*, which symbolized the magistrate's authority. The urban praetor had two lictors, while the ruling consul had twelve. The term "fascism" comes from the word *fasces*.

7 \*For beating you with\* doesn't appear in the Latin text but has been added to the translation for the sake of clarity.

8 "By Pollux!" (*pol!* or *edepol!* in Latin) was a mild Latin swear word used by men and women, referencing the name of one of a pair of semi-divine twin brothers, Castor and Pollux (or in Greek, *Polydeukes* / *Πολυδεύκης*), who were brothers of Helen of Troy. Castor and Pollux were subsequently turned into the constellation Gemini (which is the Latin for "Twins"). Jocelyn argues that "*pol*" and "*edepol*" were meant to sound comically feminine when spoken by male characters (Jocelyn 2001: 277).

9 In ancient warfare it was deeply shameful for a soldier to abandon his weapons, since it meant he had run away from the enemy as fast as he could instead of fighting like a hero.

**Epidicus:** Huh?

**Thesprio:** Others have been honoured for similar deeds.<sup>10</sup> Mulciber,<sup>11</sup> if I recall correctly, made those weapons that Stratippocles had: and they just flew over to the enemy.

**Epidicus:** Then let that descendant of Thetis<sup>12</sup> lose them for all I care; the daughters of Nereus<sup>13</sup> will bring him other weapons. Just make sure the shield-makers have sufficient materials to work with, if he's going to give up his weapons to the enemy in every campaign.

**Thesprio:** Stop all this now.

**Epidicus:** You can stop it whenever you like.

**Thesprio:** Lay off questioning me!

**Epidicus:** [*ignoring this*] Tell me: where is Stratippocles?

**Thesprio:** The reason he's not here is because he was afraid to come along with me.

**Epidicus:** Why on earth?

**Thesprio:** He doesn't want his father to see him yet.

**Epidicus:** Why not?

**Thesprio:** I'll tell you: because with his war booty he bought a young slave girl who's really cute and looks like she's freeborn.

**Epidicus:** [*groaning*] What am I hearing from you?!

**Thesprio:** What I'm telling you.

**Epidicus:** Why did he buy her?

**Thesprio:** Oh, it was just a whim.

**Epidicus:** [*exasperated*] How many whims is that guy going to have? You know, before he left home to join the legion, he told me to go to the local pimp and buy a lyre-player that he was in love with — and so I did it.

**Thesprio:** [*shrugging*] Whichever way the wind blows, Epidicus, that's the way the sail will move.

**Epidicus:** Oh, I'm screwed! He's ruined me.

**Thesprio:** What are you talking about? What's wrong?

**Epidicus:** That new girl he bought — how much did he pay for her?

10 This may be a disparaging reference to the fugitives from the Battle of Cannae (216 BCE, when Hannibal destroyed a Roman army) who were thought to have been honoured undeservedly for their defeat (see Duckworth-Wheeler 1940: 125).

11 Mulciber was another name for Vulcan, the Roman blacksmith god, and god of fire generally. In Homer's *Iliad* the Greek blacksmith god Hephaestus made armor for the hero Achilles (similarly in Vergil's *Aeneid* the Roman god Vulcan made armor for the hero Aeneas).

12 Thetis was a sea nymph, and mother of the Greek hero Achilles.

13 Nereus was a sea god; his daughters, including Thetis, were sea nymphs.

**Thesprio:** [*prevaricating*] She... was cheap.

**Epidicus:** That's not an answer.

**Thesprio:** What then?

**Epidicus:** How many *minae*<sup>14</sup> did he pay for her?

**Thesprio:** This many [*crossing one index finger over the other to make an X and repeating it four times*]. Forty *minae*.<sup>15</sup> He borrowed this exact amount from a Theban moneylender, who lent it at an interest rate of one *sestertius*<sup>16</sup> per *mina* per day.

**Epidicus:** [*groaning*] Oh. my. gods.

**Thesprio:** And that moneylender came back with him, to make sure he gets his money repaid.

**Epidicus:** By the immortal gods! I am royally screwed!

**Thesprio:** What's happened? What's been going on, Epidicus?

**Epidicus:** I'm lost, thanks to him!

**Thesprio:** Thanks to who?

**Epidicus:** The same guy as "lost" his armour.

**Thesprio:** What is all this about?

**Epidicus:** He kept writing to me every day from the legionary camp — [*interrupting himself*] but it's best if I don't say anything. It's better for a man who's a slave to know more than he says out loud; that's just good sense.

**Thesprio:** By Pollux, what's making you so anxious? You're actually shaking, Epidicus! I can tell by your face that you've been getting into some trouble while I was away.

**Epidicus:** Lay off me!

**Thesprio:** [*moving away*] OK, I'm going.

**Epidicus:** [*grabbing Thesprio's arm*] Wait a minute, don't go!

**Thesprio:** Why are you trying to keep me?

**Epidicus:** Is he in love with that girl he bought with his war booty?

**Thesprio:** Need you ask? He's completely obsessed.

**Epidicus:** [*groaning*] I'm gonna lose the hide off my back over this.

14 A *mina* (plural: *minae*) was a weight of silver (about 430g), as well as a unit of currency.

15 It is impossible to convert ancient money into the modern equivalent with any accuracy. The poorest Athenian might have been able to subsist on two or three *minae* per year, while a skilled labourer might have made about six to ten *minae* per year. Forty *minae* is, therefore, a considerable sum of money.

16 The Latin text doesn't specify a *sestertius* (a small silver coin that weighed about 2.5g silver); instead the word *nummus* is used, which simply refers to some type of coin, although it usually implies a *sestertius* in Plautus. If the interest rate is indeed forty *sestertii* per day, it is an extortionate rate of interest, wildly higher than could have been charged by a real moneylender.

**Thesprio:** [*smirking*] He loves her more than he ever loved you!

**Epidicus:** [*angrily grabbing Thesprio's arm*] I hope Jupiter smites you down!

**Thesprio:** Let me go! [*trying to shake Epidicus off*] I mean it, now! My master ordered me not to go home. He told me to go to Chaeribulus's<sup>17</sup> house next door. He told me to wait there and he said he would come there himself.

**Epidicus:** Why?

**Thesprio:** I'll tell you: because he doesn't want his dad to see him or run into him, until he's paid out that money that he owes for the girl.

**Epidicus:** Oh, by Pollux, what a mess we're in!

**Thesprio:** Now stop holding onto me so I can get going.

**Epidicus:** When the old man hears about these goings on, our ship will be well and truly sunk!

**Thesprio:** What's it to me how screwed you'll be?

**Epidicus:** [*whimpering*] 'Cuz I don't want to die all on my own — I want you to go down with me, like the good friends we are!

**Thesprio:** Get out of my sight and get yourself crucified,<sup>18</sup> you and that delightful suggestion of yours.

**Epidicus:** OK, go on then, if you're in such a hurry.

**Thesprio:** I've never met a man I'm happier to get away from. [*exit Thesprio into Chaeribulus's house*]

**Epidicus:** Well, he's gone off now. [*addressing himself, possibly taking off his mask and addressing his remarks to it*] You're on your own now. You see how things are, Epidicus; unless you can help yourself by your own devices, you're screwed. Complete ruin is hanging over you. Unless you prop yourself up firmly somehow, you won't remain standing. A mountain of misfortune is going to crash down onto you. Right now I don't see how I can free myself from this predicament.

17 Chaeribulus, another young man, is the friend and neighbour of Stratippocles (the young master).

18 The most extreme penalty that slaves faced was the days-long agony of dying on a cross (crucifixion). Throughout the plays of Plautus, the slave characters joke casually to each other about crucifixion and other punishments. Perhaps slaves really did this as a way of dealing with the horrors they all feared, or perhaps the slave characters on stage joked like this to amuse the slave-owners in the audience, who would be the ones potentially inflicting these punishments on their own slaves.

Poor me, I managed to trick the old man<sup>19</sup> into thinking that he was buying his own daughter, when he actually bought the lovely lyre player<sup>20</sup> for his son — the one his son was in love with and told me to buy. If he's now gone and brought another girl from the army camp — I'm going to lose the skin off my back. 'Cuz when the old man finds out that he's been tricked, he'll flog my naked back with a cudgel.

OK, you'd better watch yourself. What if — oh, what a joke, that won't work. This head of mine clearly can't think straight. You're a worthless human being, Epidicus. Why do you want to talk so negatively to yourself? 'Cuz you're giving up on yourself, that's why. [*groaning*] What should I do?!! [*answering himself*] Are you asking me??? You're the one who used to give good advice to other people. I've got to hit on some scheme, somehow.

But why am I putting off meeting the young master? I'd better find out what kind of trouble we're in. Wait, here he comes himself. He's looking sad, walking along with his buddy Chaeribulus. I'll hide here, so I can quietly hear what these two are saying.

## 1.2 Scene with Stratippocles, Chaeribulus, and Epidicus

*Two freeborn young men walk onto the stage.*

**Stratippocles:** I've told you the whole story, Chaeribulus, and laid out the whole crappy problem that I'm having with these love affairs of mine.

**Chaeribulus:** You're stupider than I'd expect you to be at your age, Stratippocles, and you, a soldier! Are you actually ashamed of having bought a girl from a good family with your war booty? Who'd blame you for it?

**Stratippocles:** I've found that people who envy me are my enemies for that very reason. [*virtuously*] But I've never attempted to force myself on her.

**Chaeribulus:** And this makes you all the more honourable, in my opinion, since you're controlling yourself even in love.

19 "The old man" refers to Periphanes, the old master.

20 This "lovely lyre-player" is Acropolitis.

**Stratippocles:** [*disgustedly*] Someone who supports a friend in trouble with words alone is useless. When there's real trouble, a real friend gives real help when it's needed.

**Chaeribulus:** What do you want me to do for you?

**Stratippocles:** Give me forty *minae* of silver, so I can pay back the moneylender who I got that high-interest loan from.

**Chaeribulus:** I would give it to you if I had it, by Hercules!<sup>21</sup>

**Stratippocles:** What's the use of your generous words if you can't back it up with practical help?

**Chaeribulus:** Honestly, by Pollux, I'm being harassed by debt collectors myself.

**Stratippocles:** [*disgustedly*] Friends like you are better dead than indebted.<sup>22</sup> Right now I'd pay a pretty sum to get Epidicus's help. In fact, I'll have him beaten soundly and hand him over to the miller<sup>23</sup> unless he gets hold of forty *minae* for me before I finish saying the last syllable of "forty *minae*" to him.

**Epidicus:** [*overhearing and commenting sarcastically in a quiet voice*] Everything's fine then: great promises he's making! He'll keep his word, I hope! Without any expense to me at all, my share of the feast — a feast of blows — is being provided for my shoulders. I'll go up to him.

[*speaking louder, and giving the formal greeting to someone returning from a journey — see line 7*] Is it his master Stratippocles, returning from abroad, whom Epidicus the slave greets?

**Stratippocles:** [*looking around*] Where is he?

**Epidicus:** Here. [*continuing the formal greeting*] I'm glad to see you have returned safely.

**Stratippocles:** I believe you, as far as that goes, as much as I'd believe myself.

**Epidicus:** Have you been well?

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- 21 "By Hercules!" (*hercle* or *mehercle* in Latin) was commonly used by boys and men as a mild oath, referring to the most popular hero of both Greek and Latin mythology. Both men and women also swore by the divine hero Pollux ("*pol*" or "*edepol*" in Latin — see note 8 on page 131).
- 22 The Latin makes an alliterative joke with *furno* and *foro*, meaning something like "I'd rather friends like that were burnt in an oven (*furno*) than were thrust into the bankruptcy courts (*foro*).
- 23 Flourmills were powered by treadmills turned by animals or humans. It was exhausting work, and being sent to work at a mill was a dreaded punishment for slaves. Lucius, a man turned into a donkey in Apuleius *Metamorphoses* (9.11–12), gives a brutal description of such work.



**Stratippocles:** Well in body, but I’ve been sick in spirit.

**Epidicus:** I took care of what I was told to do. What you ordered me to do has been achieved! The girl<sup>24</sup> has been purchased, since you kept sending me letters about it.

**Stratippocles:** [*coolly*] You wasted your efforts then.

**Epidicus:** How so?

**Stratippocles:** Because I don’t care about her anymore — she doesn’t appeal to me.

**Epidicus:** What was the use of giving me so many orders and sending me letters then?

**Stratippocles:** [*blithely*] Oh, I used to be in love with her, but now my heart belongs to another.

**Epidicus:** [*shrilly*] By Hercules, it’s a little upsetting when someone doesn’t appreciate a favour you’ve done for them. All the good work I did now turns out to be bad work, just because YOU’VE changed girlfriends.

**Stratippocles:** [*shrugging*] I must have been out of my mind when I sent you those letters.

**Epidicus:** Is it fair that I get to be the scapegoat because of your stupidity?! So that MY back gets the punishment for YOUR stupidity?<sup>25</sup>

**Stratippocles:** Why are we even talking now? This guy [*pointing both of his thumbs at himself*] needs forty red hot *minae* immediately, to pay off the moneylender — and fast!

**Epidicus:** Just tell me this: where do you want me to get it from? Which banker do you want me to borrow from?

**Stratippocles:** Whichever you want. ‘Cuz unless you get it from somewhere before the sun has set don’t bother coming home. You’ll be taking yourself to the mill!

**Epidicus:** You say that so casually, without any worry or anxiety, with a carefree heart. But I know those punishment slaves we have on staff;<sup>26</sup> I’m the one that’ll feel the pain, since I’m the one that’ll get the beating.

24 “The girl” is Acropolistis, the “lovely lyre-player” of line 90.

25 In the Latin text Epidicus makes explicit reference to religious sacrifice, referring to himself, and then his back, with two words that meant sacrificial victim (*piacularem* in line 139 and *succidaneum* in line 140).

26 “Those punishment slaves we have on staff” is a translation of the less explicit Latin *nostros*, which literally translates to “our people” or “our staff of slaves”. Context makes it clear, however, that Epidicus is referring to the slaves Periphanes keeps for inflicting punishment on other slaves.

**Stratippocles:** What are you on about now? Do you really want to be responsible for my suicide?!!

**Epidicus:** Don't do that! I'll take on the danger and do whatever risky plan rather than let you kill yourself.

**Stratippocles:** That's better; I can praise you for that now.

**Epidicus:** I'll endure whatever you want me to.

**Stratippocles:** What're we going to do with that lyre-player?<sup>27</sup>

**Epidicus:** I'll hit upon something. I'll fix things for you somehow — I'll get you out of this somehow.

**Stratippocles:** [*digging an elbow into Epidicus's ribs*] You are full of contrivances. I know you.

**Epidicus:** There's a rich soldier from Euboea<sup>28</sup> who has a lot of buying power. When he finds out that you bought the lyre-player and that you've now brought over this other girl, he'll beg you to give that first girl to him, without us even having to suggest it. But where's the one you brought home with you?

**Stratippocles:** She'll be here soon, I promise.

**Chaeribulus:** What should we do now?

**Stratippocles:** [*to Chaeribulus*] Let's go into your house here, so we can have a good time today. [*Stratippocles and Chaeribulus go into the latter's house*].

**Epidicus:** You go on in. Meanwhile I'll call a senate meeting — that is, a senate meeting in my mind — to deliberate about this money matter, and especially about who's going to get my declaration of war, and where I'll get the money from. Epidicus, [*addressing himself*] be careful what you do! This situation's been thrown at you so suddenly. Now's not the time for you to be snoozing or procrastinating: get to work. [*suddenly getting an idea*] OK! I've got a definite plan to target the old man. I'll go inside and tell the young master (the old man's son) not to stroll out of doors and to make sure not to run into the old man at all. [*Epidicus follows the young men into Chaeribulus's house*]

27 "That lyre-player" is, of course, Acropolistis.

28 Euboea is an island off mainland Greece. This soldier may or may not be the same as the soldier from Rhodes mentioned by Epidicus in line 300, and/or the soldier who arrives on stage at line 437.

## ACT 2

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### 2.1 Scene with Apoecides and Periphanes

*Apoecides and Periphanes come out from Periphanes's house together.*

**Apoecides:** Most men feel ashamed of things that don't actually matter, but then in situations when they should feel ashamed, well, shame ups and leaves them just when they ought to be feeling the disgrace. You're exactly that kind of man. What've you got to be ashamed about, marrying a woman from a good family, though she is poor? Especially this woman, when you say she's the mother of that daughter of yours that you brought to your house.<sup>29</sup>

**Periphanes:** I have to be respectful of my son.<sup>30</sup>

**Apoecides:** Oh, for Pollux's sake! Like I believed you were "respectful" of your wife, who's now dead and buried. [*with a hearty guffaw*] You do an animal sacrifice to Orcus the god of the dead every time you happen to see her tomb, right there and then. A very appropriate thing to do, seeing as you won in the end [*elbowing Periphanes in the ribs*] — by outliving her!

**Periphanes:** Ugh, I was a Hercules as long as she was still around. His Sixth Labour<sup>31</sup> wasn't any harder than what I had to put up with.

**Apoecides:** But by Pollux, a dowry is good money!

**Periphanes:** By Pollux, it is good — except for the marriage part!

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29 The illegitimate daughter of Periphanes and this woman (Philippa) is Telestis, but we the audience know that the young woman Periphanes has brought into his house is not actually Telestis, but is his son's former slave girlfriend, the lyre-player Acropolistis.

30 Periphanes, it seems, worries that his son Stratippocles will object to Periphanes bringing a stepmother into their household.

31 The Sixth Labour of Hercules, according to common Roman versions, was that of the belt of Hippolyta the Amazon (Duckworth-Wheeler 1940: 218). Periphanes is thus suggesting that his dead wife was belligerent and powerful like an Amazon.

## 2.2 Scene with Epidicus, Periphanes, and Apoecides

*Epidicus comes out of Chaeribulus's house.*

**Epidicus:** [*aside*] Shush! Be quiet, all of you, and cheer up. I've come out to report a clear sign from the gods: a bird flew by on my left side.<sup>32</sup> I've got a sharp knife for cutting open the old man's moneybag.<sup>33</sup>

But look! I see the old man himself in front of our house, along with Apoecides. They're just the lambs for slaughter — I mean, just the old men I was wanting!<sup>34</sup> I'm now going to turn myself into a leech and suck out their blood, those so-called pillars of the senate.

[*there may be some lines missing here, in which Apoecides probably tried to persuade Periphanes that if he married off his son Stratippocles it would leave Periphanes free to remarry*]

**Apoecides:** ... so he can be married off right away.

**Periphanes:** I like that advice, since I heard that my son was obsessed with some lyre-player, which is REALLY upsetting me.<sup>35</sup>

**Epidicus:** [*aside*] By Hercules! All the gods are on my side, they're looking out for me, they love me! These guys here are showing me the way forward — they're showing me how I can get the money from them! Go on now, Epidicus [*addressing himself*], get yourself ready! Throw your cloak out of the way over your shoulder and pretend that you've been searching for the man all over the city. Act now, if you're going to act!

32 When Romans wanted to know if their plans were likely to turn out well, they took the auspices (also known as practicing augury). This was a form of divination that interpreted the behaviour of birds as evidence for the will of the gods or of fate. Birds seen flying by on the left were usually considered to be a favourable omen, though there were some exceptions. These exceptions seem to have become more emphasized in later antiquity, however, since the Latin word for "left" (*sinister*) ended up meaning "malicious", or "suspicious".

33 Epidicus makes several references to religious sacrifice; here the image is of Periphanes and his moneybag as the sacrificial animal. Cutting open the moneybag with a knife is the equivalent to cutting open the belly of the sacrificial animal.

34 "Lambs for the slaughter" is an attempt to translate a probable pun on the Latin word for "old men" (*uetulos*), which sounds like *uitulos* ("calves"), animals commonly used in animal sacrifice (see Gellar-Goad 2012 and Barrios-Lech 2014).

35 Periphanes says in Latin *id ego excrucior*: "it's crucifying me".

[pretending to have just come running up, and speaking loudly so that the old men will hear him] By the immortal gods, if only I could find Periphanes at home! I'm exhausted from looking all over the city for him. I looked into all the doctors' offices, the barbers, I went to the gymnasium and the forum, the perfume shops, the butchers' shops, and all the banking establishments. I'm completely hoarse with asking for him, and I nearly fainted from running.

**Periphanes:** Hey, Epidicus!

**Epidicus:** Who's that back there calling out "Epidicus"?

**Periphanes:** It's Periphanes.

**Apoecides:** And it's also me, Apoecides.

**Epidicus:** And here's me, Epidicus! But master, I've met you both at the best possible moment.

**Periphanes:** What's up?

**Epidicus:** Wait, wait [*panting after his pretended run*], let me catch my breath please.

**Periphanes:** Of course, take your time.

**Epidicus:** I'm feeling a bit faint.

**Apoecides:** Catch your breath.

**Periphanes:** Calm down and rest for a bit.

**Epidicus:** [*straightening up*] OK, listen: everyone from the legion has been sent home from the war in Thebes.

**Apoecides:** Who says so?<sup>36</sup>

**Epidicus:** I say so!

**Periphanes:** Do you know it for a fact?

**Epidicus:** Yes I do.

**Periphanes:** How do you know it?

**Epidicus:** I saw the soldiers coming through the crowded streets, carrying their weapons and leading their pack mules.

**Periphanes:** This is great news!

**Epidicus:** And the prisoners they're bringing with them! There's boys, young women, some have got two prisoners, some three, one has five. There's a traffic jam in the streets with the people trying to see their sons.

**Periphanes:** By Hercules, this is wonderful!

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36 The Latin is *<quis hoc> scit factum?* which would literally translate to "who knows that this has happened?", and Epidicus's response is literally "I'm telling [you] that it's happened".

**Epidicus:** And the huge number of prostitutes — all the whores in the city — were out there dressed in their fancy clothes, each trying to find her lover. I tell you, they were on the hunt! And do you want to know how I know that? Most of them had hunting nets — well, net tunics at least — under their dresses.<sup>37</sup> When I get to the city gate I see that chick waiting around for him, and there were four music girls<sup>38</sup> with her.

**Periphanes:** [*increasingly anxious*] With who, Epidicus?!!

**Epidicus:** With that chick your son's madly, desperately in love with — has been for years — the one for whose sake he's throwing away all his (and your) credit and fortune in a hurry. So she was waiting around for him at the gate.

**Periphanes:** [*very upset*] The witch! Don't you get it?!

**Epidicus:** [*enthusiastically*] But so well dressed, wearing gold jewelry, looking so charming, so elegant, wearing the latest fashion!

**Periphanes:** [*distracted for a moment*] Oh? What was she wearing? Her lingerie — was it royal, or beggarly?

**Epidicus:** It was the Skylight style. The names women give to their fashions! [*rolling his eyes*]

**Periphanes:** [*ignorant of women's fashions and so misunderstanding*] What, she was dressed in a skylight?

**Epidicus:** What's so strange about that? Don't lots of women walk around the streets wearing entire estates?<sup>39</sup> And yet when it's tax time, guys claim they can't pay up, even though they seem to be able to pay the higher taxes those ladies charge.

37 Apparently underclothing made out of netting were worn by Roman women, or perhaps only by Roman prostitutes. Since nets were used in hunting, Plautus can make a joke about prostitutes preying on men.

38 The "music girls" (*tibicinae*) would have been slaves or very lower-class women who played the *tibia* professionally. A *tibia* was a double-reed instrument, perhaps like an oboe.

39 This is a reference to the cost of the women's clothing, and the fact that freeborn men were thought to waste their estates paying for sex workers or supporting concubines (concubines were women who had an official and potentially long-term sexual relationship with men who supported them, though they were of significantly lower status than wives). Epidicus's comic rant about women's clothing may relate to the repeal, in 195 BCE, of the Oppian law that had restricted the value of women's adornment (see Livy 34.4–7). If so, then the play must have been produced after 195 BCE.

[*digressing into a more general scorn for women's fashion*] And what is it with the weird names women give every year to their clothes? The “little nothing” tunic, the “full-coverage” tunic, the “blue linen-esque”, the “underneath”, the “edge-embroidered”, the “mini-slip”, the “saffron-hue”, the “Oscan robe”, the “over-much robe”, the “praying veil”, the “royal”, the “foreigner”, the “sea-coloured” or the “feather-patterned”, the “nut-brown” or the “wax-dyed” — what extreme silliness! They’ve even taken a name from a dog!

**Periphanes:** How so?

**Epidicus:** They call one of their outfits “the Alsatian”!<sup>40</sup> Anyway, it’s thanks to all these silly names that the men have got to sell off their property in public auctions just to pay for it all.

**Apocides:** But won’t you go on with what you were starting to tell us?

**Epidicus:** OK, so two other women began to chat together right behind me. I moved a little away from them on purpose — I was pretending not to listen to their conversation. I didn’t overhear perfectly, but I didn’t miss much of what they were saying.

**Periphanes:** I want to know what they said!

**Epidicus:** Then one of them said to the one the other one was walking with —

**Periphanes:** [*confused*] Huh?

**Epidicus:** Just listen, and you’ll hear it. They caught sight of that woman your son’s madly in love with. “How perfectly and fortunately it’s turning out for her, honestly, that woman whose lover wants to set her free” says one. “Who in the world is her lover, anyway?” says the other woman to her friend. So then she (the first woman) gives his name as Stratippocles, son of Periphanes.

**Periphanes:** By Hercules, I’m ruined! What is this I’m hearing from you?

**Epidicus:** You’re hearing what happened. Now when I heard them saying this I began to slow down bit by bit so they’d be closer to me, making it look as though the crush of people ahead of me was pushing me back.

**Periphanes:** [*nodding*] I get it.

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40 The Latin does not, of course, refer to “Alsatian”, but to “Spartan”. There was a well-known dog breed called the “Spartan” (because it had originated in the Greek state of Sparta), and presumably there was also a fabric or style of women’s dress that also originated in Sparta and was called “Spartan”.

**Epidicus:** So then the other one asked the first one: “How do you know? Who told you this?” “She got a letter today” (says the first one) “from Stratippocles saying that he’d taken out a loan in Thebes from a moneylender, and that he had the money ready and was bringing it so he could free her.”

**Periphanes:** [*groaning*] I’m completely ruined!

**Epidicus:** The lady claimed to have heard this from the girl herself and to have read the letter.

**Periphanes:** What’ll I do? [*turning to Apoecides*] I’m in desperate need of advice now, Apoecides.

**Apoecides:** Let’s find some good and speedy advice then, because I think your son will be here soon, by Hercules, if he’s not here already.

**Epidicus:** If it weren’t wrong for me to set myself up as wiser than you two, I could give you some sensible advice that you’ll both like, I think.

**Periphanes:** Well, what’s your advice, Epidicus?

**Epidicus:** [*looking bashful*] It’s appropriate for the circumstances.

**Apoecides:** Why don’t you just tell us?

**Epidicus:** [*pretending to be very modest*] It’s right for you to go first, since you’re so much cleverer than me, and it’s my place to speak afterwards.

**Periphanes:** [*scornfully*] Yeah, right! Go on, tell us.

**Epidicus:** You’ll laugh.

**Apoecides:** [*encouragingly*] We won’t, by Pollux.

**Epidicus:** OK then. If you like my plan, use it. If you don’t, find a better one. It’s nothing to do with me, except that I want what you want, of course.

**Periphanes:** [*ironically*] Thanks. Now share your wisdom with us.

**Epidicus:** Choose a wife for your son right away, and take your revenge on the lyre-player your son wants to set free — the lyre-player that’s corrupting him. Make it so she remains a slave for the rest of her life.

**Apoecides:** [*rubbing his hands in glee*] You’ve got to make this happen!

**Periphanes:** [*equally enthusiastic*] I’ll do whatever you say, if we can just make this happen!

**Epidicus:** [*briskly*] OK, look. Now’s the time to do it, before he arrives, since he’ll be here tomorrow. He’s not going to come today.

**Periphanes:** How do you know that?



**Epidicus:** [*hastily coming up with an explanation*] I know it because someone who just came from Thebes told me that your son was going to be here tomorrow morning.

**Periphanes:** Anyway, you were telling us what we should do.

**Epidicus:** I recommend the following: pretend you want to free the lyre-player for your own sake, pretend you're madly in love with her yourself.

**Periphanes:** How will that help me?

**Epidicus:** Need you ask? So you can buy her before your son gets home. You'll be able to say that you bought her in order to free her —

**Periphanes:** [*interrupting*] I get it!

**Epidicus:** When she's been purchased, you'll get her out of the city somewhere, unless you've got a different plan.

**Periphanes:** No, no! Your plan is very clever!

**Epidicus:** What do you think, Apocides?

**Apocides:** [*rubbing his hands gleefully*] What can I say, except that this deception of yours is just too clever!<sup>41</sup>

**Epidicus:** So then any doubts he may have about marriage<sup>42</sup> will be removed, and he won't get upset at doing what you want.

**Periphanes:** You are a genius. I like it!

**Epidicus:** OK then, you need to get going soon if you're going to do it.

**Periphanes:** By Hercules, you're right.

**Epidicus:** And I've found out how you can avoid suspicion.<sup>43</sup>

**Periphanes:** Tell me!

**Epidicus:** I will. Listen.

**Apocides:** This guy is super smart!

**Epidicus:** We're going to need someone to bring the money to pay for the lyre-player, since I don't want you involved, and there's no need anyway.

**Periphanes:** Why not?

41 "Too clever" is ironic, because Apocides doesn't get how clever Epidicus's deception is; he thinks Epidicus is going to trick Stratippocles, but in fact Epidicus is going to trick Periphanes and Apocides.

42 This marriage would be that of Stratippocles and whatever young woman Periphanes may choose for him, as mentioned at lines 190 and 267.

43 "How you can avoid suspicion": that is, how Periphanes can prevent Stratippocles from finding out that he (Periphanes) is the one to have bought Stratippocles's lyre-playing girlfriend.

**Epidicus:** In case the pimp guesses you're buying her to save your son —

**Periphanes:** [*interrupting*] Clever!

**Epidicus:** [*continuing his sentence*] — to keep your son away from her. It could cause problems if your son gets suspicious.

**Periphanes:** Who can we find to do this?

**Epidicus:** [*gesturing to Apoecides*] This man here will be perfect. He'll be good and careful, and he understands the laws.<sup>44</sup>

**Periphanes:** [*grinning at his friend*] You should say thank you to Epidicus for that.

**Epidicus:** Meanwhile I'll do my part faithfully: I'll go and meet him [*gesturing to Apoecides*] and bring the lyre-player — who'll belong to you now — here to you, and also he [*gesturing to Apoecides again*] and I will take charge of the money.

**Periphanes:** What's the lowest price we can buy her for?

**Epidicus:** For that girl? Maybe you could get her for as low as forty *minae*, but if you give me more, I'll bring any leftover back — I'm not about to cheat you.<sup>45</sup> Anyway, that money won't be out of your hands for even ten days.

**Periphanes:** Why won't it?

**Epidicus:** Because there's another young man that's madly in love with the woman — a very wealthy young man, a great soldier from Rhodes<sup>46</sup> who's captured loads of enemy combatants.<sup>47</sup> Very boastful man. This guy'll buy her from you, and willingly pay a big price. Just do what I say. There'll be a big profit for you.

**Periphanes:** [*rubbing his hands greedily*] I pray to the gods that there will!

**Epidicus:** Don't worry, there will be.

**Apoecides:** [*to Periphanes*] Why don't you go indoors and get the money? I'll head off to the forum.<sup>48</sup> You meet me there, Epidicus.

**Epidicus:** Stay there till I show up.

**Apoecides:** I'll wait till you come.

44 The laws around buying and selling slaves, that is.

45 Oh, the irony! That's exactly what Epidicus is doing.

46 It's unclear whether or not this soldier from Rhodes is the same as the soldier from Euboea mentioned at line 153.

47 The soldier's wealth is explained by the number of enemy combatants he has captured, since he would have sold them into slavery (one of the reasons why war was so profitable for successful soldiers).

48 The forum was the big open area in the middle of the city. The direction of the forum was the stage left.

**Periphanes:** [*to Epidicus*] You, follow me inside now.

**Epidicus:** Go on, count out the money. I won't keep you waiting at all.  
[*exeunt Periphanes and Apoecides*]

## 2.3 Scene with Epidicus

**Epidicus:** [*laughing to himself*] I don't think there's a piece of land in all of Attica<sup>49</sup> that's as profitable to me as our Periphanes here. Really, I take as much money from his locked and sealed-up money chest as I like. By Pollux, though — what I'm afraid of is if the old man finds out! He'll shear me to the bone the way a poor man fleeces a rich friend.<sup>50</sup> But one thing bothers me: how to get hold of some hired lyre-player to show to Apoecides?<sup>51</sup>

[*Epidicus thinks for a bit*]

I've got it! Just this morning the old man told me to get a lyre-player for him here, to play her lyre while he does a religious sacrifice. I'll bring her here after I give her some coaching on how to deceive the old man. I'll go indoors now and get the money from that careless old man.

49 Remember that the play is supposedly set in Athens, which is in the region called Attica.

50 Epidicus here is making reference to the stock figure of the "parasite" (*parasitus*), who would stick close to the richer man to take what he could get. In this somewhat strange metaphor, the rods with which Epidicus would be beaten are likened to such parasites.

51 Remember that Epidicus has claimed to Periphanes and Apoecides that he'd use Periphanes's money (see lines 296–297) to buy the slave lyre-player Acropolistis, whom Epidicus has told them is still Stratippocles's girlfriend. Epidicus had, however, already bought Acropolistis a few days earlier (using Periphanes's money then too), having convinced Periphanes that she was his long-lost daughter Telestis. Epidicus now needs to find a woman who can pretend to be Acropolistis. He is therefore going to hire the services of a freelance lyre-player.



## ACT 3

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### 3.1 Scene with Stratippocles and Chaeribulus

**Stratippocles:** I'm eaten up by the waiting — it's torturing me! Such plausible assurances Epidicus gave me — but how are they going to turn out? It's really wearing me down. I want to know if it's going to happen or not!

**Chaeribulus:** Help from that source? You can get other help. I knew right away from the beginning that there'd be no help from that guy.

**Stratippocles:** [*burying his head in his hands*] By Hercules, I'm doomed!

**Chaeribulus:** You're being silly, getting so upset. By Hercules, if I could just get hold of him I'd never let that slave go unpunished for laughing at us.

**Stratippocles:** What do you expect HIM to give me, when your family's got so much money but you haven't got a penny yourself, and you can't help out your mate.

**Chaeribulus:** By Hercules, if I had any, I'd willingly offer it. But there is some hope of something, somehow, in some way, from somewhere, from someone — some good luck for you and me.<sup>52</sup>

**Stratippocles:** You total idiot!

**Chaeribulus:** What makes you want to turn on me?

**Stratippocles:** [*sarcastically*] Obviously you are babbling something at me in some way from somewhere from some source that doesn't exist! And I don't intend to listen to you. You're no more supportive than someone who hasn't even been born yet.

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52 Remember that Chaeribulus's name can be interpreted as meaning "one who loves to give advice", and these lines illustrate how useless his advice is.

### 3.2 Scene with Epidicus, Stratippocles, and Chaeribulus

*Epidicus has been given the money by Periphanes and has come outdoors again.*

**Epidicus:** [*talking through the doorway to Periphanes, who is in the house*]  
You've done your part, now I've got to do mine. You can relax, I'll take care of it.

[*moving out of Periphanes's earshot, and patting the purse of money gleefully*]

He's well and truly lost this! Don't go hoping otherwise — this money is well and truly buried. You can trust me on this: that's how I do things, and that's how my people have always done things.<sup>53</sup>

By the immortal gods, what a perfect day I've been given! So easy, so much success! But am I putting off starting on my mission? I need to bring the supplies to the outpost while the signs are good!<sup>54</sup> Just standing around like this is delaying me.

[*catching sight of the two young men*]

But what's this? I see the two friends, my master and Chaeribulus, in front of his house. [*addressing them*] What are you doing here? [*thrusting the purse at Stratippocles*] Here, take this.

**Stratippocles:** How much is in the bag?

**Epidicus:** As much as is enough and more than enough. There's extra. I brought ten *minae* more than you owe to the moneylender. Provided that I can keep you happy and obey you, I don't have to worry at all about my back.<sup>55</sup>

**Stratippocles:** Why?

**Epidicus:** Because I'm going to make your dad into a dad-icide.

**Stratippocles:** What does that mean?

53 Slaves in Rome were considered, by slave-owners, no longer to have parents or ancestors, so Epidicus's reference to "how my people (or "our people") have always done things" is probably a humorous reference to how the class of slaves, or perhaps just the class of cunning/clever slaves like Epidicus (*serui callidi*) act.

54 "While the signs are good" is a translation of *meo auspicio*, meaning "under my own auspices". Auspices were signs from the gods that they approved (or potentially disapproved) of a person's course of action. This line is a military metaphor; Epidicus is likening himself to military personnel with an important mission.

55 That is, Epidicus doesn't need to worry about getting a beating as long as he keeps Stratippocles happy. The implication of the following lines seems to be that Epidicus needs to keep only Stratippocles happy, and needn't worry about Periphanes, because Periphanes will be well and truly undermined.

**Epidicus:** [*loftily*] I don't bother with common, old fashioned words. [*Stratippocles still looks confused, so Epidicus explains*] The punishment for killing parents is to be sewn into a sack, right? Well, I'm stitching him up in this purse. Get it?<sup>56</sup>

The brothel keeper took every bit of the money I paid for the lyre-player — you know, the one your dad thinks is his daughter. I paid down the money with my own hands. Now I've figured out a way to cheat your dad again and help you out. I persuaded the old man — gave a whole long speech in fact — about you not getting access to her when you got back.<sup>57</sup>

**Stratippocles:** Perfect!

**Epidicus:** But really she's at your home now, posing as your half-sister.

**Stratippocles:** [*nodding*] I get it!

**Epidicus:** Now your dad's given me Apoecides to act as adviser in this matter — he's waiting for me at the forum — supposedly to keep an eye on things.

**Stratippocles:** Not bad at all!

**Epidicus:** [*giggling*] But this super careful guy is the one who'll be tricked! Your father put the moneybag around my neck himself! [*laughing*] By the way, he's planning to get you married as soon as you get home.

**Stratippocles:** [*angrily*] The only way he'll persuade me to get married is if Orcus the god of the dead takes my girlfriend away first! The one I've just brought back, of course, not the other one.<sup>58</sup>

56 The Latin isn't very clear either, but it relates to the fact that in Roman law a person convicted of having killed his parent (parricide) was traditionally punished by being sewn into a sack, possibly along with various animals, and drowned. Epidicus's joke seems to be based on the idea that Periphanes getting cheated and outwitted (getting "stitched up") is like being literally stitched up in a sack.

The reference to parricide in the play may have been a response to what Plutarch tells us was the first Roman perpetrator of parricide, Lucius Hostius, just after the end of the Second Punic War (Plutarch, *Rom.* 22.4). If so, it helps to date the production of *Epidicus* to after 201 BCE. If the comic rant about women's expensive clothing at lines 226–235 is a response to the repeal of the Oppian law then the play can be dated to after 195 BCE.

57 "Not getting access to her when you got back": Epidicus refers to the fact that, thanks to his trickery, Periphanes thinks he's going to be buying Acropolistis the lyre-player in order to keep her away from his son Stratippocles.

58 More literally this line reads: "He'll only persuade me if Orcus takes away the girl I've brought home with me" (*uno persuadebit modo, si illam, quae adducta est mecum / mi adempsit Orcus*). This reference to Orcus coming to get a dead soul is distinctly Roman, rather than Greek (Jocelyn 2001: 281).

**Epidicus:** OK, I've set up a clever deception: I'll go to the pimp's establishment alone, and tell him to say, if I happen to bring them to see him, that he was given the money for the lyre-player — that he got fifty *minae* of silver for her.

\*He'll just think I'm trying to make a sneaky profit, but won't figure out what the full scam is\*.<sup>59</sup> Obviously the day before yesterday I paid down the money for that other girlfriend of yours — that one your father thinks is his daughter. \*The pimp'll think I mean that lyre-player\*.<sup>60</sup>

Then the corrupt pimp will implicate himself in the scam without realizing it, saying he got the money for the new girl that you've just brought home.

**Chaeribulus:** [*admiringly*] You're craftier than a — than a craft sale!<sup>61</sup>

**Epidicus:** Now I'll get hold of some lyre-player that's good at lying, and that I can hire on the cheap, who'll pretend that I've bought her, and who's clever enough to fool the two old men. Apocides will bring her to your dad.

**Stratippocles:** What a good plan!

**Epidicus:** I'll send her off well coached, full of my lies and tricks. But I've been talking too much — you've held me up a while. You now know what's going to happen. I'm off. [*exit Epidicus stage left*]

**Stratippocles:** Good luck!

**Chaeribulus:** [*admiringly*] That guy's too good at double-dealing!

**Stratippocles:** He's certainly saved me with his scheming.

**Chaeribulus:** Let's go into my house.

59 I added the comments within the asterisks for clarity (they don't appear in the Latin text). Epidicus is trying to achieve the following: he wants the pimp to mislead the old men by telling them that Epidicus has just paid fifty *minae* for the new lyre-player (who is actually a freedwoman whom Epidicus will hire for the day). The pimp, having previously sold the original lyre-player (Acropolistis) to Epidicus for thirty *minae*, will think that the only scam is Epidicus trying to claim he paid fifty *minae* instead of thirty. Pimps in Roman comedy are notoriously corrupt, so no doubt he would agree to this lesser scam out of fellow-feeling for a cheating slave, or in the hopes that Epidicus would return the favour in some way, perhaps by sharing the profits of his scam.

60 Again, the asterisks surround words that don't appear in the Latin text but are added here to make Epidicus's sense clearer.

61 The Latin (*uorsutior es quam rota figularis*) translates more literally to "you are more twisty than a potter's wheel".



**Stratippocles:** I'll be going inside a lot more cheerfully than I came out! Thanks to Epidicus's courage<sup>62</sup> and good luck I'm returning to the military base with the war prize in hand.<sup>63</sup> [*exeunt Chaeribulus and Stratippocles into the former's house*]

### 3.3 Scene with Periphanes, Apoecides, a Slave, and the [Hired] Lyre-Player (Who Doesn't Speak in this Scene)

*Periphanes comes out of his house.*

**Periphanes:** [*holding up a mirror and speaking philosophically*] When a man gazes at his own face, it's not just for the sake of the face itself that he should own a mirror. There are those who are able to examine the core of their wisdom, and therefore examine the resources of their hearts. When they've looked into a mirror, they then reflect on how they have lived their lives when they were young. It's a good idea to do so, in my opinion.

Indeed, I myself had been about to get very upset about my son, as though he'd done me wrong in some way. As though I hadn't done a lot of bad things myself when I was young! We old guys certainly stray from the right path once in a while.

[*seeing Apoecides arriving with the hired lyre-player*] But here's my buddy Apoecides coming with the goods. [*humorously giving a formal greeting*] Tradesman, I'm glad to see you safely back.<sup>64</sup> How'd it go?

**Apoecides:** The gods and goddesses favour you.

**Periphanes:** I like the omen!

**Apoecides:** Fortunately everything agrees with the omen. But give the order for her [*gesturing to the hired lyre-player*] to be taken indoors.

**Periphanes:** [*calling to his slaves indoors*] Hey, come outside, someone, and take this woman indoors. Do you hear?

62 The word Stratippocles uses for "courage" is *uirtus*, which is literally "manly excellence" (it's related to the Latin word for "man"). It is an interesting word for a slave-owner to apply to a slave, who is generally not supposed to have *uirtus*.

63 Stratippocles is a soldier (if a very cowardly one), hence his military metaphors. Many of the free members of Plautus's audience would have served as soldiers in Rome's constant warfare, so they would have understood the military references.

64 Periphanes is being humorous by greeting Apoecides as though he has been away on a long voyage (see line 7). He addresses him as "tradesman" because he's been on a shopping trip, though the audience knows that Apoecides has not been directly involved in the supposed purchase at all.

**Slave:** [*coming out*] Did you want something?

**Periphanes:** Make sure you don't let this woman associate with, or even look at my daughter, do you understand? I want that one [*pointing to the hired lyre-player*] kept away from my daughter. The manners and morals of freeborn girls are very different from a lowborn prostitute's.

**Apocides:** You talk sensibly and wisely. You can't be too careful about a daughter's modesty. By Pollux, though — we bought that woman just in time, before your son could.

**Periphanes:** What do you mean?

**Apocides:** Some guy told me that he'd seen your son here a while ago, and that he was already making moves towards buying her, by Pollux.

**Periphanes:** By Hercules, a close call indeed!

**Apocides:** You sure have a wonderful, priceless slave, worth his weight in gold. [*laughing*] If you could have seen how he managed to keep the lyre-player from realizing it was you she'd been bought for! He brought her along, and she was giggling and cheerful.

**Periphanes:** That's impressive!

**Apocides:** He said you'd be performing a sacrifice for his son, at home, because he'd arrived safely from Thebes.

**Periphanes:** He did exactly the right thing.

**Apocides:** He told her that she'd been hired to assist you in the sacrifice.<sup>65</sup> I just pretended to be slow and tried to look really stupid.

**Periphanes:** Very appropriate.<sup>66</sup>

**Apocides:** By the way, a friend of mine has got a big court case going on in the forum. I want to go and act as witness for him.

**Periphanes:** Please come back here as soon as there's a pause in the proceedings.

**Apocides:** I'll come back right away [*exit Apocides*].

**Periphanes:** There's nothing friendlier than a useful friend. You get things done that you want done without having to do them yourself. Now if I'd entrusted the business to some less skilled man, or to someone less clever in this sort of thing, my son would have outwitted him, and would have laughed at me mercilessly — and I'd have deserved it!

<sup>65</sup> I have not translated line 419, which was probably a copying error and should be deleted.

<sup>66</sup> Periphanes doesn't see the irony here, but the audience does, since they know that Apocides has no idea what the real situation is.

Anyway, it's stupid to blame my son for what I myself did when I was young. When I was in the army... [*chuckling*] I used to talk the ears off anyone and everyone when I got started telling them about my war stories.

[*noticing the arrival of the soldier*] But who's that I see coming this way, making his cloak billow out behind him with his swaggering?

### 3.4 Scene with the Soldier and Periphanes (and an Unnamed, Non-Speaking Slave)

**Soldier:** [*to his slave*] Make sure you don't miss going into any house you pass, to ask where the old man Periphanes Platenius<sup>67</sup> lives. Don't come back until you find out.

**Periphanes:** [*addressing the soldier*] Young man, if I were to direct you to the man you're looking for, would you thank me?

**Soldier:** [*arrogantly*] I've earned the right for EVERYONE to thank me because of my excellence in war.

**Periphanes:** [*patronizingly*] You haven't found a quiet place, young man, to show off your military excellence the way you want to. If a weaker man boasts about his battles to a stronger man, those battles look pathetic next to the other man's. But the man you're looking for — Periphanes Platenius — that's me, if you're wanting anything.

**Soldier:** Really? The one they talk about who got incredibly rich when he was a young man, fighting alongside kings, because of his military prowess?

**Periphanes:** Yep. If you heard about my battles, you'd run off home as fast as you could go.

**Soldier:** By Pollux, I'm looking for someone to tell my stories to, not someone who'll tell me his.

**Periphanes:** This isn't the place for that. Look for someone else who'll believe your tall tales.

**Soldier:** Listen up, so you'll know what I've come to you for: I heard that you bought the slave girl I'm in love with.<sup>68</sup>

67 "Platenius" may be a demonym referring to Periphanes's hometown, or a comic family name meaning something like "Boastful" (see Schmidt 1902: 202). Soldiers in Plautus, who are always boastful, usually have two names, signaling their self-importance.

68 "The slave girl I'm in love with" is a translation of *amicam*, which could also be simply translated as "girlfriend".

**Periphanes:** [*aside*] Oh! Now I know who this guy is — he's the soldier Epidicus told me about a little while ago. [*to the soldier*] Young man, you are right; I bought her.

**Soldier:** I want to have a few little words with you, if it's no trouble.

**Periphanes:** By Pollux, I don't know if it's a trouble or not, unless you tell me what you want.

**Soldier:** I want you to hand that girl over to me and take the money for her.

**Periphanes:** Do you have the money with you?

**Soldier:** Why shouldn't I speak frankly with you? I was intending to make that girl my freedwoman today so she can become my live-in girlfriend.<sup>69</sup>

**Periphanes:** I'll make this quick then: I bought her for fifty *minae* of silver. If you pay me sixty *minae* in full, the woman will be yours to spend your free time with. Really — on condition that you take her out of the country.

**Soldier:** So she'll be mine on those conditions?

**Periphanes:** You can have her.

**Soldier:** You've made a good bargain.

**Periphanes:** [*calling to his slaves inside the house*] Hey! Bring out the lyre-player you took inside earlier. [*talking again to the soldier*] And her lyre that came with her, I'll include it as a gift for you, no extra charge.

### 3.4a Scene with Periphanes, the Soldier, and the [Hired] Lyre-Player

*Some unnamed slaves bring the recently hired lyre-player out of the house, and Periphanes pushes her towards the soldier.*

**Periphanes:** There, take her please.

**Soldier:** Are you crazy? What kind of trick are you trying to play on me? Why don't you tell them to bring the lyre-player out here?

**Periphanes:** This is the lyre-player. There isn't any other one.

<sup>69</sup> The soldier intends to make her his concubine (*concubina*), which involved a pseudo-conjugal relationship, but a concubine's legal status was inferior to that a wife would have. Any children they produced would not come under their father's legal power (*patria potestas*), but would be considered illegitimate.

**Soldier:** [*angrily*] You can't fool me. Bring Acropolistis the lyre-player out here.

**Periphanes:** I'm telling you this is her.

**Soldier:** And I'm telling you it isn't. Do you think I can't recognize my own girlfriend?

**Periphanes:** I'm telling you that my son was madly in love with this lyre-player.

**Soldier:** This isn't the right one.

**Periphanes:** What! She's not?!

**Soldier:** Nope.

**Periphanes:** Where in the world did she come from then?! By Hercules, I paid good money for her!

**Soldier:** I guess you made a bad bargain — you majorly screwed up!

**Periphanes:** No, this has got to be the right girl. I sent a slave — one that's always hanging around that son of mine. That slave arranged for the purchase of this lyre-player himself.

**Soldier:** Hah! The guy's carved you up joint by joint, old man, that slave of yours.

**Periphanes:** What do you mean, "carved me up"?

**Soldier:** That's what I suspect, since this chick<sup>70</sup> has been substituted for your lyre-player. [*laughing*] Old man, you've been well and truly scammed! I'm off to go look for my girlfriend, wherever she is.

[*ironically*] So long, warrior. [*exit the soldier*]

**Periphanes:** [*angrily*] Well this is just perfect! Epidicus, quite the thrifty, dependable guy, you are.<sup>71</sup> You've got me beaten. You're the guy that's wiped my snotty, worthless nose. [*addressing the hired lyre-player*] Did Apocides buy you today from the pimp?

**Hired lyre-player:** I've never heard of the man before today, and certainly no one could have bought me at any price: I've been a freedwoman for more than five years.

**Periphanes:** What are you doing at my house then?

**Hired lyre-player:** Listen: I was hired to come play my lyre for an old man who was going to do a religious sacrifice.

70 "This chick" is a translation of the Latin *haec cerua*, literally meaning "this doe".

71 "Thrifty, dependable guy": in the Latin text Periphanes called Epidicus *frugi homo*, which was a term used by masters to describe their reliable, hard-working slaves who curried favour with their masters and saved any money they made in order to eventually buy their own freedom. It is particularly impudent of Epidicus later in the play at line 693 when he condescendingly describes Apocides as a *frugi homo* since he is applying a slave attribute to a slave owner.

**Periphanes:** [*groaning*] I've got to admit that I'm the most worthless of all men in Athens, or in all of Attica<sup>72</sup> for that matter. [*turning to the hired lyre-player*] Hey, do you know Acropolistis the lyre-player?

**Hired lyre-player:** I know her as well as I know myself.

**Periphanes:** Where does she live?

**Hired lyre-player:** Since she's been freed, I'm not really sure where she's living.

**Periphanes:** What??!! She's been freed? Who freed her, I'd like to know?

**Hired lyre-player:** I'll tell you what I heard, which is that Stratippocles the son of Periphanes arranged for her to be freed while he was away.

**Periphanes:** By Hercules, if what you say is true, I'm completely ruined! Epidicus has gutted my bank account.

**Hired lyre-player:** [*smirking*] Yeah, so I heard. Do you want me for anything else?

**Periphanes:** [*enraged*] Get out of here and go get yourself crucified!

**Hired lyre-player:** Aren't you going to give me back my lyre?

**Periphanes:** No I'm not giving it back, nor your *tibia*<sup>73</sup> neither. If the gods love you, you'll get out of here fast.

**Hired lyre-player:** I'm going, but you'll give me back my lyre or I'll make trouble for you. [*exit the lyre-player*]

**Periphanes:** What'll I do now? I, who've had such a good reputation,<sup>74</sup> am I going to let her go without any punishment? No! I'd rather lose the same amount of money again than not get my revenge on those who've laughed at me and cheated me.

[*groaning*] Oh! I've been lied to right to my face! And I've made myself look like an idiot in front of someone<sup>75</sup> who's considered a maker and publisher of laws and legal statements. He even refers to himself as a clever guy. [*rolling his eyes*] I've seen a broken hammer that's cleverer than him.

72 "Athens, or in Attica" — remember that the play is supposed to be set in Athens, which is in the region called Attica.

73 A *tibia* was, as mentioned in note 38 above, a double reed instrument, perhaps like an oboe.

74 "I, who've had such a good reputation" is a translation of *qui in tantis positus sum sententiis*, which could also mean "I, whose name has been noted down in such important senatorial decisions" (meaning that he was the proposer of such senatorial decrees).

75 This "someone" is Periphanes's friend Apocides.

# ACT 4

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## 4.1 Scene with Philippa and Periphanes

*Philippa, a middle-aged woman, arrives onstage; she and Periphanes don't see each other at first.*

**Philippa:** [*weeping and wringing her hands*] If a person suffers so much that she even pities herself, then she's really pitiable. I should know: so many things are coming at me at once, breaking my heart. Trouble on top of trouble keeps me in a state of worry: poverty and fear are terrorizing me, and there's no safe place where I can pin my hopes. [*sobbing*] My daughter has been captured by the enemy, and I don't know where she may be now.

**Periphanes:** [*catching sight of Philippa*] Who is that foreign woman, coming along looking so fearful, who's moaning and pitying herself?

**Philippa:** Periphanes is said to live around here.

**Periphanes:** She mentioned my name. I expect she's here because she needs a place to stay.<sup>76</sup>

**Philippa:** I'd give a good reward to anyone who could point the man out to me or show me where he lives.

**Periphanes:** I'm trying to recognize this woman. I feel like I've seen her before somewhere. Is it the woman I think it is, or not?

**Philippa:** [*catching sight of Periphanes*] Oh good gods! Haven't I seen this man before?

**Periphanes:** It's definitely her — [*reminiscing*] it was in Epidaurus, I remember jumping the bones<sup>77</sup> of a penniless girl there...

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<sup>76</sup> Periphanes guesses that Philippa needs *hospitium* (hospitality); in the ancient Mediterranean world travellers preferred to stay with people whom they knew through inherited ties of hospitality, rather than risk the dangers of a public inn.

<sup>77</sup> "Jumping the bones" and "banged" (line 542, below) are translations of *comprimere* and *compressus*, respectively. The Latin does not make it clear whether the young Philippa consented to sex with Periphanes, or if he raped her. It is, in fact, indicative of Roman and Greek attitudes around sex that the woman's consent to a sexual encounter is less important

**Philippa:** [*wringing her hands and looking anxious*] This is clearly the man who took my virginity when I was a girl in Epidaurus.

**Periphanes:** [*delighted*] She's the one who, after I banged her, gave birth to the daughter that I now have staying in my house. Should I go up to her?

**Philippa:** [*continuing to speak quietly to herself*] I don't know if you're going to approach?

**Periphanes:** If it even is her...

**Philippa:** If it is the same man... it's been many years, and that makes me doubt...

**Periphanes:** Such a long time ago. I'm just not sure. If it is her, as I sort of think it is, I'll deal with her craftily.

**Philippa:** I'll have to use my womanly wiles now.

**Periphanes:** I will speak to her.

**Philippa:** I'll use my clever speaking skills against him.

**Periphanes:** [*using the polite formulaic greeting*] Good health to you.

**Philippa:** [*responding coolly*] I accept your greetings for myself and my family.

**Periphanes:** [*surprised*] OK, and where's the rest of the greeting?

**Philippa:** I'll repay what you gave me: good health to you.

**Periphanes:** I wasn't questioning your credit.<sup>78</sup> Don't I know you?

**Philippa:** [*cautiously*] If I know you, I'll persuade myself that you know me.

**Periphanes:** Where have I seen you?

**Philippa:** You're being unfair.

**Periphanes:** How so?

**Philippa:** Because you think I should jog your memory.

**Periphanes:** [*admiringly*] Nicely said.

**Philippa:** You say surprising things. \**[some text missing]*\*

**Periphanes:** There, that's even better! Don't you remember —

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than the fact that she had sex outside of marriage. Periphanes seems to have given Philippa some financial support at the time (see lines 555–556) which causes him to view his actions as having been beneficial to her, but the negative consequences for her of having a child outside of marriage would have been ruinous. Whether Periphanes had raped the young Philippa or not, his marrying her now would be viewed by the ancient audience as a satisfactory resolution that Philippa must welcome.

78 Philippa and Periphanes are verbally sparring; the joke is that Philippa at first failed to give back the formulaic greeting "good health to you" until Periphanes pushed for it. She then makes it clear that she's only giving him the full greeting because he gave (or lent) it to her first. Periphanes then uses the term "credit" (Latin *fides*) to compare the exchange of greetings with the repayment of a loan.



**Philippa:** [*interrupting*] I remember... what I remember.

**Periphanes:** Back in Epidaurus I mean —

**Philippa:** [*suddenly overcome by emotion*] Oh! That's like a little drop of water on my parched heart.

**Periphanes:** — that I lessened the poverty of you and your mother, when you were just a penniless young girl?

**Philippa:** Are you the one who gave me such terrible hardship in return for your pleasure?

**Periphanes:** [*unrepentant*] I'm the one! Good day to you.

**Philippa:** [*courteously*] It's a good day for me since I see it's a good day for you.

**Periphanes:** Give me your hand.<sup>79</sup>

**Philippa:** Here [*holding out her hand*]; you're taking the hand of a woman who is full of troubles and misery.

**Periphanes:** Why is your face so troubled?

**Philippa:** The daughter I bore because of you —

**Periphanes:** What about her?

**Philippa:** I raised her, and now I've lost her. She's been captured by the enemy.

**Periphanes:** Don't be upset; hush now. She's safe and sound here, in my house. As soon as I heard from my slave that she'd been captured, I immediately gave him the money to buy her. He did exactly that, as sensibly and prudently as [*remembering how Epidicus tricked him with the hired lyre-player*] — as he is incredibly shameless in other matters.

**Philippa:** [*with desperate eagerness*] If she's really my daughter let me see her, if you value my health!

**Periphanes:** [*calling to a slave inside his house*] Hey! Canthara, are you in there? Tell my daughter Telestis to come out here in front of the house so she can see her mother.

**Philippa:** At last! My spirits are restored to me.

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79 Periphanes asking Philippa for her hand, and her giving it to him, hints at the Roman marriage ceremony in which this was done (Maurice 2006: 42; James 2020: 114).

## 4.2 Scene with Acropolistis, Periphanes, and Philippa

*Acropolistis, whom Periphanes thinks is his illegitimate daughter Telestis, comes out of the house.*

**Acropolistis:** What is it, father? Why did you call me outside?

**Periphanes:** So you can come and see your mother, and give her a greeting and a kiss.

**Acropolistis:** [*stalling for time*] Come and see... which mother exactly?

**Periphanes:** The one who's worn herself out searching for a glimpse of you.

**Philippa:** Who is that girl you're telling to kiss me?

**Periphanes:** [*rolling his eyes*] Uh, your daughter...?

**Philippa:** This girl?!

**Periphanes:** Yes, this one!

**Philippa:** And I'm supposed to give her a kiss?

**Periphanes:** Why not, you gave birth to her!

**Philippa:** You're crazy.

**Periphanes:** I'm crazy?

**Philippa:** Yes, you!

**Periphanes:** Why?

**Philippa:** Because I neither know nor recognize who this girl is, and I've never laid eyes on her before today.

**Periphanes:** I know why you're confused. She's wearing different clothes and jewelry \**[some text missing]*\*

**Philippa:** \**[some text missing]*\* puppies smell quite different from pigs.<sup>80</sup> I tell you that I don't know who this girl is.

**Periphanes:** [*realizing he's fallen for another of Epidicus's tricks*] By the god! By honesty! Why?! Have I gotten into sex trafficking, what with keeping strange girls in my house and completely draining my bank account of so much money? [*turning on Acropolistis*] You! Calling me your father and kissing me... Why are you standing there looking stupid? Why don't you say something?

**Acropolistis:** What do you want me to say?

**Periphanes:** She [*gesturing to Philippa*] says she's not your mother.

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<sup>80</sup> "Puppies smell quite different from pigs" was probably a proverbial saying, about a mother dog's sense of smell causing her to reject a piglet given to her to pass as one of her puppies in hopes that she would nurse it.

**Acropolistis:** She doesn't have to be, if she doesn't want to. I'll still be my mother's daughter even if she [*gesturing to Philippa*] doesn't agree. It wouldn't be fair for me to make her be my mother if she doesn't want to be.

**Periphanes:** Why were you calling me "father" then?

**Acropolistis:** That's your fault, not mine. Shouldn't I call you "father" if you call me your daughter? And I'd call this woman "mother" if she called me "daughter". She says I'm not her daughter, though, so she's clearly not my mother. Anyway, it's not my fault. I did everything I was told to do, everything Epidicus taught me.

**Periphanes:** I'm ruined! I've really messed up!

**Acropolistis:** Surely I didn't mess up, father?

**Periphanes:** By Hercules, if I ever hear you calling me "father" again, I'll kill you!

**Acropolistis:** [*soothingly*] I won't. When you want to be "father", be one; when you don't, don't be one. [*Acropolistis goes into the house*]

**Philippa:** If you bought her because you thought she was your daughter, what made you think you recognized her?

**Periphanes:** I didn't recognize her.

**Philippa:** Then why did you believe she was our daughter?

**Periphanes:** My slave Epidicus said she was.

**Philippa:** Just because your slave made a mistake, shouldn't you have been smarter, for the gods' sake?

**Periphanes:** How could I, since I never saw her after that first time?<sup>81</sup>

**Philippa:** [*sobbing*] It's hopeless!

**Periphanes:** Stop crying, woman. Go indoors and try to keep up your spirits. I will find our daughter.

**Philippa:** An Athenian citizen from here in Athens bought her. They told me that it was a young man that bought her.

**Periphanes:** I'll find her. Hush now. Just go indoors and keep an eye on this Circe, daughter of the Sun.<sup>82</sup> [*Philippa goes into the house*] I'll deal with the other business later. First I'll focus on finding Epidicus. If I find him [*hitting his clenched right fist into his left palm menacingly*], I'll make this day his last. [*Periphanes strides off stage left, towards the forum*]

81 Periphanes apparently saw his daughter when she was a baby but hasn't seen her since. We know, however, that Epidicus saw her relatively recently, as he mentions at lines 639–640.

82 Circe was a sorceress in Greek mythology who lured the hero Odysseus to her bed (as told in Homer's *Odyssey*).



## ACT 5

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### 5.1 Scene with Stratippocles, Epidicus, the Moneylender, and Telestis

**Stratippocles:** [*annoyed*] The moneylender isn't very obliging to me. He's not coming to get his money from me, and he's not bringing the girl I bought from my war booty. But look! There's Epidicus coming. Why's his forehead all frowny with worry?

**Epidicus:** [*whimpering*] If Jupiter brought all the eleven other gods along with him they still couldn't save Epidicus from what's coming to him.<sup>83</sup> I saw Periphanes, with Apocides, buying the leather straps.<sup>84</sup> I think they're looking for me now. They've figured it out, they know they were tricked.

**Stratippocles:** What are you up to, my useful one?

**Epidicus:** What someone who's completely screwed would be up to, that's what.

**Stratippocles:** What's the matter with you?

**Epidicus:** [*desperately*] Why don't you give me what I'll need to run away before I get killed? Those two old men I cheated are looking for me throughout the city, carrying leather thongs in their hands too!

**Stratippocles:** Cheer up!

**Epidicus:** [*sarcastically*] Yeah, you say that like I'm about to be set free!

**Stratippocles:** I'll keep you safe.

**Epidicus:** By Pollux, those old men will keep me even safer, if they catch me. [*seeing the moneylender and a beautiful young woman arriving from the harbour*] But who's this young woman and the little old man that are coming along?

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83 "What's coming to him" (Latin *cruciatu*s): Epidicus refers to the torture in store for slaves who have really angered their masters.

84 The leather straps were for tying up a slave before inflicting punishment.

**Stratippocles:** That's the moneylender, and SHE'S the one I bought with my war winnings.

**Epidicus:** That's her?

**Stratippocles:** [*sighing ecstatically*] Yes, that's her! Isn't she just as I described? Look at her, gaze at her, Epidicus! From her toes to the top of her head she's stunning. Isn't she just like a beautifully painted statue when you look at her?

**Epidicus:** You might as well be foretelling that my skin's going to be beautiful, since those two great artists Apelles and Zeuxis<sup>85</sup> are going to mark me up with elmwood rods.

**Stratippocles:** [*addressing the moneylender angrily*] By the immortal gods, did I tell you to take your time like this? A man with feet made of lead would have come before you got here.

**Moneylender:** She [*jerking a thumb at the young woman*] slowed me down, by Pollux.

**Stratippocles:** [*tenderly looking at her*] Well, if you went slow for her sake, because she wanted it, you went too quickly.

**Moneylender:** Come on, just pay up the money you owe me, so I don't hold up my associates.

**Stratippocles:** I've already got it set aside.

**Moneylender:** Take my moneybag and put it in here.

**Stratippocles:** You come well prepared. Wait till I bring the money out to you.

**Moneylender:** Be quick about it.

**Stratippocles:** It's in my house. [*he goes into his house.*]

**Epidicus:** [*staring at the young woman*] Do I still have proper use of my eyes, or not? Is it you that I see, Telestis, daughter of Periphanes? Born to her mother Philippa at Thebes, conceived at Epidaurus?

**Telestis:** Who are you, who mention my mother's name, and my name?

**Epidicus:** Don't you recognize me?

**Telestis:** Not that I can remember right now.

**Epidicus:** Don't you remember that I brought you a little gold moon pendant on your birthday, and a little gold ring for your finger?<sup>86</sup>

85 Apelles and Zeuxis were two famous Greek painters from the fourth and fifth centuries BCE respectively. Epidicus is referring to Periphanes and Apocides, whom he knows are planning to beat him and thus make the skin of his back brightly coloured from the blows.

86 Epidicus must have been in Thebes no more than a few years before and was presumably commissioned by Periphanes to bring Telestis some birthday gifts. Romans celebrated birthdays, whereas ordinary Greeks did not (Jocelyn 2001: 283).

**Telestis:** [*with tears of joy*] I remember! You're the one?

**Epidicus:** I am! And this guy who just bought you is your brother.

\*[*some text missing*]\* you've the same father, but different mothers.<sup>87</sup>

**Telestis:** [*very excited and anxious*] What about my father? Is he alive?

**Epidicus:** Hush, don't worry about that!

**Telestis:** The gods truly want to save me, if you are telling me the truth.

**Epidicus:** I have no reason to lie to you.

**Stratippocles:** [*coming out of the house*] Here, take this, moneylender. Here's forty *minae*. If you're suspicious about any of the coins, I'll exchange them.

**Moneylender:** That's fine. Bye! [*exit the moneylender*].

**Stratippocles:** [*looking lustfully at Telestis and taking her by the hand*] Now you are mine!

**Telestis:** [*hastily*] I'm your sister, by Pollux! Just so you know. Hello, brother!

**Stratippocles:** [*to Epidicus*] Is she crazy?

**Epidicus:** She's perfectly sane, if she's calling you her brother.

**Stratippocles:** What! How have I turned into her brother just by going into and then out of my house?!!

**Epidicus:** You can just keep quiet and be happy about what's happened.

**Stratippocles:** [*groaning*] You've lost me,<sup>88</sup> and you've found me, sister.

**Epidicus:** [*in a fierce whisper*] Shut up, stupid! There's a perfectly good lyre-player for you, who's already living in your house thanks to me — and I've got your sister her freedom too.

**Stratippocles:** Epidicus, I have to say —

87 Some scholars think that the original Greek play that Plautus adapted ended with a marriage between Telestis and her half-brother Stratippocles, which was considered acceptable in Greek culture. Such a marriage would have been considered incest by the Romans, however, so, according to this theory, Plautus changed the plot, and avoided concluding with a marriage. The line "you've the same father, but different mothers" suggests the title of two lost Greek comedies, known only by title, called *Homopatritoi* (*Ὁμοπάτριτοι*), or "Having the Same Father", one by Antiphanes and the other by Menander (Katsouris 1977: 321). Speculation about this possible Greek original is less in vogue nowadays.

88 "You've lost me": in the Latin this has a double meaning. Stratippocles means both that she lost him (by the circumstances of her birth and thus not growing up with her half-brother) and that she's ruined his hopes for a sexual relationship with her by turning out to be his half-sister.

**Epidicus:** Go inside and order a hot bath for her. I'll fill you in later on everything else, when I have time.

**Stratippocles:** [*meekly obeying his slave*] Follow me, sister.

**Epidicus:** I'll tell Thesprio to help you. But remember, if the old man gets really angry you and your sister need to help me out.

**Stratippocles:** Yeah, yeah, no problem. [*Stratippocles goes into his house*]

**Epidicus:** [*calling into Periphanes's house*] Thesprio! Come out here, through the garden! Help me out over here. It's important.

[*talking to himself*] I'm not as worried about those old men as I was before. I'll go indoors and fill Stratippocles in on everything that's happened. I'm not going to try to run away. I'm determined to stay home, so my master won't be able to claim I provoked him by running away. In I go — I've been talking too long. [*Epidicus follows Stratippocles into the house*]

## 5.2 Scene with Periphanes, Apoecides, and Epidicus

*Periphanes and Apoecides arrive on stage from the direction of the forum (stage left). They don't see Epidicus at first.*

**Periphanes:** That slave of mine has really been making fools of us two old farts, hasn't he?

**Apoecides:** [*panting*] By Pollux, it's you that's been screwing me around with your stupid plans.

**Periphanes:** Oh be quiet. Just let me catch that man!

**Apoecides:** I'm letting you know now: find some other friend than me. I've got swelling joints in my poor knees from chasing around after you.

**Periphanes:** He's made fools of you and me in countless ways today. And the way he emptied my money chest!

**Apoecides:** Just keep him away from me! He's a son of the fire god Vulcan. Whatever he touches burns right up. If you're near him, he scorches you with his fire.



**Epidicus:** [*speaking out of the old men's hearing*] All the immortal gods in heaven plus another twelve are lined up in military order to help me out now.<sup>89</sup> No matter what I've done wrong, I've got help and support here at home. I give that [*making a kicking motion*] to all my enemies.

**Periphanes:** Where in the world will I find that slave?

**Apocides:** So long as you look for him without involving me, for all I care you can look in the middle of the sea even.

**Epidicus:** [*walking up to them unconcernedly*] Why are you going to such trouble looking for me? Why are you worrying this guy [*gesturing to Apocides*]? Here I am. I haven't run away, have I? I'm not absent without leave, am I? I'm not out of your sight, am I?

\*[*some text missing*]\* I'm not begging you to pardon me. Do you want to put me in bonds? Here are my hands [*holding out his hands as though ready to be handcuffed*]. You've got the leather straps, because I saw you buy them. Why are you backing away? Tie my hands.

**Periphanes:** [*confused*] It's no use — he's practically offering me bail!

**Epidicus:** Why aren't you going to bind me?

**Apocides:** By Pollux, what a shameless slave you own!

**Epidicus:** [*teasing*] No really, Apocides, you don't need to intercede for me.

**Apocides:** [*sarcastically*] OK, you've easily persuaded me not to, Epidicus.

**Epidicus:** Are you going to do anything, or not?

**Periphanes:** What, to please you?

**Epidicus:** By Hercules, yes, it's not to please you that these hands of mine should be tied up today.

**Periphanes:** [*looking sulky*] Well, I don't feel like tying your hands.

**Apocides:** [*warningly*] He's about to skewer you — he's up to some sort of trick.

**Epidicus:** You're wasting time, while I'm standing around, free to move around. [*doing a few impudent jumping jacks*] Go on, I say — put me under restraint.

**Periphanes:** [*stiffly*] I'd prefer to interrogate you while you're not under restraint.

**Epidicus:** Then I won't tell you anything.

**Periphanes:** [*hissing to Apocides*] What should I do?

89 In line 610 Epidicus complained that the mere twelve Olympian gods couldn't save him; now that he has been saved (by his discovery of the real Telestis), he claims that an extra twelve

**Apoecides:** What should you do? Do what he wants.

**Epidicus:** [*patronizingly*] You're a thrifty, dependable guy, well done Apoecides!<sup>90</sup>

**Periphanes:** OK, hold out your hands.

**Epidicus:** [*holding them out*] My hands have no objection! Tie them tightly now, have no mercy!

**Periphanes:** Keep your advice till I've finished! [*tying Epidicus's hands together*]

**Epidicus:** [*approvingly*] Nicely done. Now interrogate me. Ask me whatever you want.

**Periphanes:** What kind of impudence made you dare to claim that the slave-girl you bought the day before yesterday was my daughter?

**Epidicus:** Well, I felt like it. That's what kind of impudence made me dare to do it.

**Periphanes:** What are you saying? You "felt like it"?!

**Epidicus:** Yup. If you want we can have a bet on whether or not she's the daughter.

**Periphanes:** Oh come on, when the mother doesn't even recognize her?

**Epidicus:** I'll bet you a sestertius against sixty *minae*<sup>91</sup> that she's her mother's daughter.

**Periphanes:** [*muttering anxiously*] It's a trick, I know it is. [*aloud*] But who IS the woman?

**Epidicus:** [*sighing*] She's your son's girlfriend, OK?

**Periphanes:** Didn't I give you the thirty *minae* to buy my daughter?

**Epidicus:** Well, yes, I admit that you gave me the money, and that I used it to buy your son's lyre-player girlfriend instead of your daughter. So I cheated you out of thirty *minae*.

**Periphanes:** You made a total fool of me with that hired lyre-player, too!

**Epidicus:** [*smirking*] By Hercules, I did, and I was right to do so.

**Periphanes:** What did you do with the money<sup>92</sup> I gave you?

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gods have rallied to his side, along with the standard twelve Olympian gods.

90 Epidicus here patronizingly calls Apoecides a *frugi homo*, which is what masters called their hard-working slaves who saved their money in order to eventually buy their freedom (see note 71 on page 157).

91 "I'll bet you a sestertius against sixty *minae*" is a translation of *in meum nummum, in tuum talentum pignus da*, which translated more literally means "bet me a talent (26–32.5kg of silver, or about sixty *minae*) for a coin (of unknown but not high value)".

92 "The money" is the fifty *minae* Periphanes gave Epidicus in lines 296–297.

**Epidicus:** Well, I'll tell you: I gave it to someone who's not a bad guy — and not a great guy either... I gave it to your son Stratippocles.

**Periphanes:** How DARE you?!

**Epidicus:** Well, I felt like it.

**Periphanes:** What is all this shamelessness, you worthless scum!

**Epidicus:** Why am I getting yelled at, just as though I were a slave?

**Periphanes:** [*with exaggerated sarcasm*] Oh, well, if you're a free man, I'm very happy for you!

**Epidicus:** I've certainly earned my freedom.

**Periphanes:** You? You've earned it?!

**Epidicus:** Go indoors: I promise you'll find out that I have.

**Periphanes:** What IS all this?

**Epidicus:** [*looking smug*] You'll find out. Just go indoors.

**Apoecides:** Oh go on [*gesturing towards Periphanes's house*]. There must be some explanation in there.

**Periphanes:** Keep watch on him, Apoecides [*goes indoors*].

**Apoecides:** What's going on, Epidicus?

**Epidicus:** [*looking hurt*] I'm standing here most unfairly, by Hercules, with my hands tied, when today, by my own efforts, I found this daughter of his.

**Apoecides:** [*stunned*] Are you telling me you've found his daughter?

**Epidicus:** I found her, and she's here in the house. But [*looking plaintive*] it's a bit much when a person gets this sort of reward [*gesturing to his tied hands*] for doing a good deed.

**Apoecides:** [*still incredulous*] You mean that girl we exhausted ourselves looking for in the city today?

**Epidicus:** Well, I exhausted myself FINDING her, you exhausted yourselves LOOKING for her.

**Periphanes:** [*coming out of his house but speaking to his son, and to Telestis and Philippa, who are still indoors*] Why are you pleading for him so much? I realize that I need to treat him as he deserves. [*to Epidicus*] Hold out your hands so I can untie them.

**Epidicus:** [*turning a shoulder coldly*] Don't you touch them.

**Periphanes:** Just hold them out.

**Epidicus:** I won't.

**Periphanes:** [*pleading*] Now, you're not being fair.

**Epidicus:** By Hercules, I'll never let you untie me today unless you beg my pardon.

**Periphanes:** [*eager to please*] You ask what is very reasonable and good. I'll give you some indoor shoes, a tunic, and a cloak!

**Epidicus:** And...?

**Periphanes:** [*hastily*] And your freedom.

**Epidicus:** And...? A newly freed slave has still got to eat.

**Periphanes:** Granted! I'll see you're fed.<sup>93</sup>

**Epidicus:** [*still refusing to relent*] By Hercules, you'll never untie me today unless you beg me.

**Periphanes:** [*meekly*] I beg you, Epidicus, to forgive me, if I unknowingly did wrong because of my own fault. Because of it, I declare you to be a free man.

**Epidicus:** [*grudgingly*] Well... I don't want to forgive you, except that I'm forced by necessity. [*holding out his hands condescendingly*] Untie me, however, if you want to.

**All the actors in unison:** [*pushing the actor who played Epidicus to the front of the stage to take a bow*] This is a man who won his freedom thanks to his bad behaviour! Give us a round of applause now, and fare well. Get up and stretch your loins!

THE END

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<sup>93</sup> A former master was supposed to continue to look after his freed slaves (and the freed slaves owed them specific duties in return), but some former masters abandoned their freed slaves to fend for themselves. Epidicus is insisting on Periphanes behaving toward him as he ought.

# Argumentum (Plot Summary)

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*The argumentum (plot summary) usually given at the beginning of the play was composed centuries after Plautus (perhaps around 150 CE). It formed an acrostic, whereby the first letter of each line spells out the title of the play. The acrostic has to be extremely concise, given that there are only eight letters in the name Epidicus.*

Emit<sup>1</sup> fidicinam,<sup>2</sup> filiam credens, senex

Persuasu<sup>3</sup> serui, atque conductam<sup>4</sup>

Iterum<sup>5</sup> pro<sup>6</sup> amica ei<sup>7</sup> subiecit<sup>8</sup> filii.

Dat erili<sup>9</sup> argentum. eo<sup>10</sup> sororem destinat<sup>11</sup>

Inprudens<sup>12</sup> iuuenis. compressae<sup>13</sup> ac militis

Cognoscit<sup>14</sup> opera<sup>15</sup> sibi senex os sublitum<sup>16</sup>

(Vt<sup>17</sup> ille<sup>18</sup> amicam, haec<sup>19</sup> quaerebat<sup>20</sup> filiam),

Sed inuenta<sup>21</sup> gnata<sup>22</sup> seruolum<sup>23</sup> emittit manu.<sup>24</sup>

Translation notes appear on the following page

- 1 *ēmit* (third-person perfect active indicative) < *emo*, -ere, *emi*, *emptum*: “buy”.
- 2 *fidicina*, -ae (f.): a woman trained in playing the lyre, who was usually a slave or freedwoman and who was assumed, like all female performers, to be a sex worker.
- 3 *persuasus*, -us (m.): “persuasion”, “inducement”.
- 4 *conductus*, -a, -um: “hired”.
- 5 *iterum* (adverb): “in turn”, “again”.
- 6 *pro*: “instead of”, “in place of” (+ ablative).
- 7 *ei* (dative of reference, referring to the old man).
- 8 *subicio*, -ere, *subieci*, *subjectum*: “substitute” (the slave is the subject of this verb).
- 9 *erilis*, -e (adjective): “relating to the *erus* (master)”; here referring to the young master, or master’s son, Stratippocles.
- 10 *eo* (ablative of means, referring to the money).
- 11 *destino*, -are, -aui, -atum: “intend to buy”.
- 12 *inprudens/imprudens, imprudentis/imprudentis*: “unknowing”, “oblivious”.
- 13 *compressae*: “of a woman he’d had sex with” (< *comprimo*, -ere, -essi, -essum: “[of a male] have sexual intercourse with [someone]”; the passive, and possibly non consenting role of the woman is assumed with this verb).
- 14 *cognosco*, -ere, *cognoui*, *cognitum*: “find out”.
- 15 *operā*: “thanks to the efforts of [*compressae ac militis*]”.
- 16 *cognoscit ... sibi senex os sublitum*: “the old man finds out that he has been made a fool of”; *alicui os sublinere* literally means “to smear someone’s face”, but figuratively means “to make a fool of someone”, “outwit someone”.
- 17 *ut*: “as”, “considering that”.
- 18 *ille* (referring to the soldier).
- 19 *haec* (referring to the *compressa* mentioned above in line 5, that is, the woman with whom the old man had had a sexual encounter in the past).
- 20 *quaero*, -ere, *quaesiui*, *quaesitum*: “seek”, “look for” (the verb is used twice, once with the subject *ille* and object *amicam*, and a second time with the subject *haec* and the object *filiam*).
- 21 *inuentā* (ablative feminine singular perfect passive participle) < *uenio*, -ire, *inueni*, *inuentum*: “find”.
- 22 *gnatā* (ablative singular) < *gnata*, -ae (f.): “daughter”.
- 23 *seruolus*, -i (m.): “young/mere/worthless slave”.
- 24 *manu emittere aliquem*: “to set someone free”, “to emancipate someone”.

# Acrostic Translation of the *Argumentum*

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Entrapped by his trickster slave, an old man

Purchased a lyre-playing slave-girl thinking she was his daughter.

In place of the young master's girlfriend, meanwhile, the slave brings back a

Day-hire musician and gives money to the son to buy a different slave-girlfriend,

Ignorant of the fact that she's his sister. The old man's former sweetheart appears,

Crying for their lost daughter (whom a soldier hopes to buy). The old man is

Upset at being fooled, but when he realizes that he has found his daughter he's

So happy he rewards the slave with freedom.





# Literal Translation of the *Argumentum*

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*Note: for the purposes of clarity, the names of the characters are added in parentheses, and, where needed, pronouns are replaced by proper nouns in square brackets.*

Believing her to be his daughter (Telestis), an old man (Periphanes) bought a lyre-playing slave girl (Acropolistis) since he was tricked by his slave (Epidicus); the slave then substituted a freelance lyre-player for the son's girlfriend (Acropolistis). [The slave Epidicus] gives money to the young master (Stratippocles). The young man (Stratippocles) unknowingly buys his own sister (Telestis). The old man (Periphanes) finds out he's been fooled thanks to the efforts of his former sweetheart (Philippa) and a soldier, as she was seeking their daughter (Telestis) and the soldier was looking for a girlfriend (Telestis). But when his daughter (Telestis) is found, [the old man Periphanes] sets the young slave (Epidicus) free.

