THE BROTHERS MENAECHMUS (2 M)

MENAECHMUS (MEN-EK-MUSS)  
PENICULUS (PENN-ICK-YOU-LUSS)

PENICULUS. By local boys I'm called Peniculus the sponge,

For at the table, I can wipe all platters clean.

*[A philosophical discourse]* The kind of men who bind

their prisoners with chains,

Or clap the shackles on a slave that's run away,

Are acting very foolishly-in my own view.

If you compound the wretchedness of some poor wretch,

Why, all the more he'll long to flee and do some wrong.

For one way or another, he'll get off those chains.

The shackled men will wear the ring down with a file,

Or smash the lock. This kind of measure is a joke.

But if you wish to guard him so he won't run off,

You ought to chain the man with lots of food and drink.

Just bind the fellow's beak right to a well-stocked table,

Provide the guy with eatables and drinkables,

Whatever he would like to stuff himself with every day.

He'll never flee, though wanted for a murder charge.

You'll guard with ease by using chains that he can chew.

The nicest thing about these chains of nourishment-

The more you loosen them, the more they bind more tightly.

[End of discourse] I'm heading for Menaechmus; he's the

man to whom

I've had myself condemned. I'm hoping that he'll chain me.

He doesn't merely feed men, he can breed men and

Indeed men are reborn through him. No doctor's better.

This is the sort of guy he is: the greatest eater,

His feasts are festivals. He piles the table so,

And plants so many platters in the neatest piles

To reach the top, you have to stand up on your couch.

And yet we've had an intermission for some days

And tabled at my table, I've expended it.

I never eat or drink-except expensively.

But now my army of desserts has been deserting me.

I've got to have a talk with him. But wait-the door!

Behold, I see Menaechmus himself now coming out.

*(Enter MENAECHMUS, still facing indoors. berating*

*someone. We will soon see that he is hiding a*

*lady's dress under his usual garments.)*

MENAECHMUS *[singing, in anger at his wife in the house].* If

you weren't such a shrew, so uncontrolled, ungrateful too,

Whatever thing your husband hated, you'd find hateful too.

And if you act up once again, the way you've acted up today,

I'll have you packed up-back to Daddy as a divorcee.

However often I try to go out you detain me, delay me,

demand such details as

Where I'm going, what I'm doing, what's my business all about,

Deals I'm making, undertaking, what I did when I was out.

I don't have a wife, I have a customs office bureaucrat,

For I must declare the things I've done, I'm doing, and all that!

All the luxuries you've got have spoiled you rotten. I want

to live for what I give:

Maids and aides, a pantry full,

Purple clothing, gold and wool:

You lack for nothing money buys.

So watch for trouble if you're wise;

A husband hates a wife who spies.

But so you won't have watched in vain, for all your diligence and care,

I'll tell you: 'Wench to lunch today, lovely dinner off somewhere.'

PENICULUS. The man now thinks he hurts his wife; it's me he hurts:

By eating dinner somewhere else, he won't give me my just desserts!

MENAECHMUS *[looks into house, satisfied, then turns to*

*audience with a big grin].* My word barrage has put the

wife in full retreat. It's victory!

Now where are all the married 'lovers'? Pin your medals right on me!

Come honour me en masse. Look how I've battled with such guts,

And look, this dress I stole inside-it soon will be my little slut's.

I've shown the way: to fool a guard both hard and shrewd takes aptitude.

Ob, what a shining piece of work! What brilliance, glitter, glow and gloss!

I've robbed a rat-but lose at that, for my own gain is my own loss!

[Indicates the dress] Well, here's the booty-there's my foes,

and to my ally-now it goes.

PENICULUS. Hey, young man! Does any of that stolen booty go to me?

MENAECHMUS. Lost-I'm lost-and caught in crime!

PENICULUS. Oh, no, you're found-and found in time.

MENAECHMUS. Who is that?

PENICULUS. It's me.

MENAECHMUS. Oh, you-my Lucky

Charm, my Nick-of-Time! Greetings.

*[Rushes to him; they shake hands vigorously]*

PENICULUS. Greetings.

MENAECHMUS. Whatcha doing?

PENICULUS. Shaking hands with my good-luck charm.

MENAECHMUS. Say-you couldn't come more rightly right on

time than you've just come.

PENICULUS. That's my style: I know exactly how to pick the nick of time.

MENAECHMUS. Want to see a brilliant piece of work?

PENICULUS. What cook concocted it?

Show me just a titbit and l'll know if someone bungled it.

MENAECHMUS. Tell me, have you ever seen those frescos

painted on the wall Ganymede snatched by the eagle, Venus... likewise...

with Adonis?

PENICULUS. Yes, but what do those damn pictures have to do with me?

MENAECHMUS. Just look. *(He strikes a pose, showing off his dress)*

Notice something similar?

PENICULUS. What kind of crazy dress is that?

MENAECHMUS [very fey]. Tell me that I'm so attractive.

PENICULUS. Tell me when we're going to eat.

MENAECHMUS. First you tell me-

PENICULUS. Fine, I'll tell you: you're attractive. So attractive.

MENAECHMUS. Don't you care to add a comment?

PENICULUS *[a breath].* Also witty. Very witty.

MENAECHMUS. More!

PENICULUS. No more, by Hercules, until I know what's in it for me.

Since you're warring with your wife, I must be wary and beware.

MENAECHMUS. Hidden from my wife we'll live it up and burn this day to

ashes.

PENICULUS. Now you're really talking sense. How soon doI ignite the pyre?

Look-the day's half dead already, right to near its belly button.

MENAECHMUS. You delay me by interrupting-

PENICULUS. Knock my eyeball through my ankle, Mangle me, Menaechmus,

if I fail to heed a single word.

MENAECHMUS. Move-we're much too near my house.

*[Tiptoes to centre stage. motions to PENICULUS)*

PENICULUS [follows MENAECHMUS]. Okay.

MENAECHMUS [moves more. motions]. We're still too near.

PENICULUS [follows]. How's this?

MENAECHMUS. Bolder, let's go further from the bloody mountain lion's

cave.

PENICULUS. Pollux! You'd he perfect racing chariots-the way

you act.

MENAECHMUS. Why?

PENICULUS. You're glancing back to see if she's there, riding after you.

MENAECHMUS. All right, speak your piece.

PENlCULUS. My piece? Whatever piece you say is fine.

MENAECHMUS. How are you at smells? Can you conjecture from a simple

sniff?

PENICULUS. Sir, my nose knows more than all the city prophets.

MENAECHMUS. Here now, sniff this dress I hold. What do you smell? You

shrink?

PENICULUS. When it comes to women's garments, prudence bids us smell

the top.

MENAECHMUS. All right, smell up here, you're such a fussy one.

PENICULUS. All right, I sniff.

MENAECHMUS. Well? What do you smell? Well-

PENICULUS *[quickly].* Grabbing, grubbing, rub-a-dub-dubbing. Hope I'm

right.

MENAECHMUS. I hope so too....Now I'll take this dress to my beloved

wench, Erotium, with the order to prepare a banquet for us both.

PENICULUS. Oh, good!

MENAECHMUS. Then we'll drink, we'll toast until tomorrow's morning star

appears.

PENICULUS. Good, a perfect plan! May I proceed to pound the portals?

MENAECHMUS. Pound. No no-wait!

PENICULUS. Why wait? The flowing bowl's more than a mile away!

MENAECHMUS. Pound politely.

PENICULUS. Why? You think the door is made of pottery?

MENAECHMUS. Wait, wait, wait, by Hercules. She's coming out. Oh, see the

sun! How the sun's eclipsed by all the blazing beauty from her body.