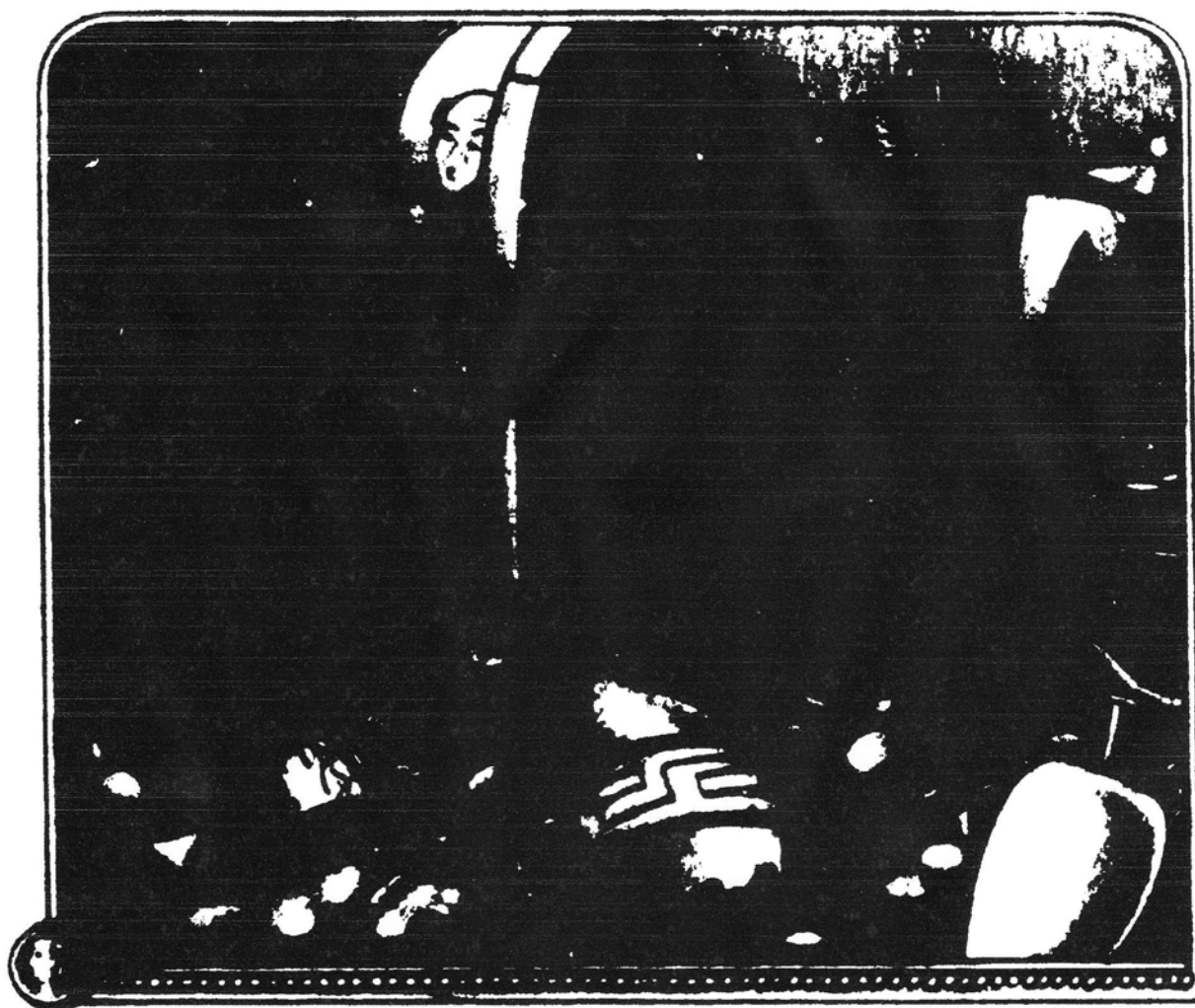


A THREE DOLLAR DAY



By Plautus





INTRODUCTION

This Roman comedy has an impostor, and impostors almost always are unmasked. There are other interesting characters, too, such as the ones representing Luxury and her daughter, Poverty. There is also a very, very lazy son named Lesbonicus. Much fun can be had with him. Luxury, Poverty, and others often speak to the audience, and when they do, they should speak sincerely and directly.

All comedies should be brightly lighted. Mood is not important—action and directness are the key elements in producing Roman comedies.

STAGING

As is typical of Roman comedies, the stage has houses. Here two houses and an annex are called for. The center and left doors represent homes of wealth, while the door to the annex on the right represents poverty. The wealthy doors can be draped with bright cloth, a large bow, a large flower, or some other colorful decoration. The annex door can consist of rags and perhaps be smaller in size. To clearly show ownership of the houses, tack large signs above the doorways. For example, the name of Charmides, the original owner of the center door, can be crossed off and Callicles' name written underneath it.

COSTUMES

The parents and elderly characters wear floor-length togas, while the teenagers can wear shorter garments. Much imagination can be used in designing the costumes for Luxury and Poverty. When given plenty of freedom, students never fail to develop a creative approach to these characters.





VOCABULARY

advantage	dowry	opinion
annex	eavesdrop	pauper
associate	elderly	personality
assure	entrusted	poverty
avoid	extravagant	propose
berserk	extremely	prosperity
concerns	financial	prudent
concur	flaunting	rash
confide	foreigner	regard
confidential	generation	represents
conscience	gossip	reputation
consent	guardian	ruination
consumes	hoard	scoundrel
contemporary	impostor	severely
contract	ingenious	spirit
critical	intention	squandered
deeds	irresponsible	status
deficit	knowledge	swindle
destitute	luxuriously	trustworthy
determined	mongers	
disaster	obnoxious	

CHARACTERS

Luxury

Poverty, Luxury's daughter

Megaronides, an elderly gentleman

Callicles, Megaronides' neighbor

Lesbonicus, Charmides' son

Charmides, Lesbonicus' father

Lysiteles, Lesbonicus' best friend

Philo, Lysiteles' father

Stasimus, servant of Charmides and Lesbonicus

An Impostor



A THREE DOLLAR DAY

Luxury: Come this way, my daughter. Come with me and play your role.

Poverty: I'm coming, mother, but I'd like to know what I am supposed to do.

Luxury: Do you see that house over there? (Points to the annex.) That is where you are going. I want you to go in there right now. Yes, now. (Poverty slowly enters the annex.) Well, my dear audience, I see you are confused. You are wondering what all of this is about. Pay attention, and I will make things crystal clear to you. According to Plautus, who wrote this comedy, I am playing the role of Luxury. You can see by how luxuriously I am dressed that I'm very rich. That other girl who entered the house is playing the part of Poverty. She is very poorly dressed. Now I will tell you the reason for sending her into the annex of that house. Listen carefully. . . . In that house lives a young man who has foolishly squandered all his money. Since I represent luxury, I no longer associate with that person or house, but my daughter, who represents poverty, will fit in nicely. As the spirit of the rich, I associate with the rich, but my daughter, who is the spirit of the poor, associates with the poor. She is in rags as you saw, and the poor young man has no money left. To make things clearer for you, two old gentlemen will soon be having a conversation. Why don't you eavesdrop and find out more? Be silent and use your ears. (Exits. Enter Megaronides from his house.)

Megaronides: (To the audience.)
I now must do a very difficult thing. I must be critical of a friend, and you know how hard that is. This is what I have to do today. (Enter Callicles from his house.) See that man? He is the friend with whom I must find fault. He has been acting poorly and deserves punishment. I will speak to him about the matter that concerns me, but first I will make polite conversation. Good day, Callicles.

Callicles: Oh, it's you my old friend and contemporary. I trust you are enjoying good health?

Megaronides: Thank you, I am. And the same with you, I trust?

Callicles: And your wife?

Megaronides: Fine! She's fine. But enough of this nonsense . . . I have something very urgent and important to discuss with you.

Callicles: What is it?

Megaronides: I'm afraid I have something most unpleasant to say to you. Actually, I plan to scold you severely.

Callicles: Me?

Megaronides: Is there anyone else here but us?

Callicles: No.

Megaronides: Then why do you ask if it is you? You don't think I want to scold myself, do you?

Callicles: What do all your words mean, friend Megaronides?

Megaronides: First of all, you are the target of much ugly gossip in the city. The citizens are calling you a money grabber, and some have even gone so far as to call you a vulture.

Callicles: I can't stop people from speaking evil of me, but I can assure you they have no reason to speak of me in such a fashion.

Megaronides: Answer me this . . . was my neighbor, Charmides, a friend of yours?

Callicles: Certainly he was and still is. I'll even give you the facts to prove it. Remember when his wife died, and he had his grown daughter to look after as well as his son who was squandering the family fortune? Well, Charmides had to take a long business trip to make some money. Charmides realized I was a trustworthy friend of his, so he asked me to keep an eye on his daughter, his property, and his irresponsible son. Now I ask you, Charmides wouldn't have asked me to do this if he didn't think I was a true friend, would he?

Megaronides: I still say you have been acting like a scoundrel!

Callicles: You are speaking in riddles, my friend.

Megaronides: The house you just came out of belonged to your friend Charmides, but didn't you just buy the house from his son? Answer that if you can!

Callicles: Yes, you are correct, but I paid him good money for it.

Megaronides: That's exactly my point. You actually gave his son, Lesbonicus, the money?

Callicles: Yes, I did.

Megaronides: My dear Callicles, to place money in that boy's hand is like giving him a sword to kill himself. You know he has no self-control. You are sending him to his ruination!

Callicles: Are you trying to say that I shouldn't have paid him what I owed him?

Megaronides: You should definitely not have paid him! His father named you the guardian of his home, son, and daughter, and you have bought the house and turned everything to your advantage.

Callicles: Those are harsh words coming from you, Megaronides. And now I will confide in you and tell you the secret behind all this affair. Charmides, before he left, entrusted me with a very important secret, swearing me to silence.

Megaronides: You can trust me, Callicles. The secret will be completely safe with me.

Callicles: You check that side, and I'll check this side to be sure no one is listening. We must be extremely careful.

(They look around the stage carefully.)

Megaronides: I didn't find a soul around. Speak forth the secret. I'm sure we can trust our good friends in the audience not to tell. Speak freely, Callicles.

Callicles: (Whispering into Megaronides' ear.)
All right, listen. Just before Charmides left on his trip, he showed me a certain room in his house, and in that

room, was a hoard of money. Quick, look around before I continue with my story.

(They both look about the stage again.)

Megaronides: I can assure you no one is listening.

Callicles: With tears in his eyes, Charmides pleaded with me to keep the secret of this room to myself and to be sure his son never discovered the gold in it. The money was to be kept safe until Charmides returned from his business trip. It was to be a dowry for his daughter when she married.

Megaronides: These few words have changed my opinion of you.

Callicles: That young rascal, Lesbonicus, has made things difficult for me.

Megaronides: What has he done now?

Callicles: While I was away for a few days, that young whippersnapper put up the house for sale. He did all this without my knowledge or consent. By selling the house, he would get money to spend foolishly.

Megaronides: Poor Charmides, to have such a son.

Callicles: You see the position I was in. I couldn't let him sell the house with the secret room full of gold. I couldn't tell him about the treasure, so all I could do was buy the house myself. That is why I handed Lesbonicus a fist of money for the house, but at least the secret room full of gold is still safe waiting for Charmides to return. Right or wrong, Megaronides, that is what I did.

Megaronides: You have silenced me, Callicles. Where is the young rascal living now?

Callicles: He is living in that (pointing) small annex behind the house, which was not included in the sale.

Megaronides: And Charmides' daughter?

Callicles: She is living with my family, safe and sound. Any other questions before I leave?

Megaronides: Thank you, Callicles, for sharing the secret with me. (Callicles exits. To the audience.) You see how evil and wicked gossip is? Some people who think they know everything cause much trouble. They nearly ruined my friendship with Callicles. Those gossip mongers should be punished. I realize I'm wasting your time lecturing you about gossip, for I know you people don't gossip. (Exits. Enter Lysiteles.)

Lysiteles: (To the audience.) My name is Lysiteles, and I am a friend of Lesbonicus, the young chap who spends money freely. Ah, but here comes my father. (Enter Philto.) Greetings father. What can I do for you? I am at your service. I am not attempting to avoid you.

Philto: I hope not! A well-behaved son should have constant regard for his father. And you are a good son. I hope you never associate with bad company. I know what young people are like these days. The young generation today is hopeless. I'm sorry to have lived to have seen such times. Always do as I tell you, my son. Listen to all my advice, and you will always have a clear conscience.

Lysiteles: I have always been obedient, father, and I shall continue to be so. Your word is my law. Haven't I always dressed neatly? I don't steal. I come home early at night.

Philto: All I tell you is for your own good.

Lysiteles: Father, I have a favor to ask of you.

Philto: What is it?

Lysiteles: I have a friend named Lesbonicus who lives in that house, and he has been having problems of late. Father, I would like to give him a helping hand. Will you permit me to assist him?

Philto: I suppose you wish to lend him some money?

Lysiteles: Yes, he's broke.

Philto: I suppose at one time he had plenty of money?

Lysiteles: Yes.

Philo: And pray tell, how did he lose all his money?

Lysiteles: He was a bit too extravagant with his money, and I'm afraid he spent it foolishly.

Philo: Well, I must say, that's a fine friend you have . . . a beggar who is broke! I tell you, Lysiteles, I won't have you associating with that kind of person.

Lysiteles: But father, I assure you he's a good fellow.

Philo: You're only throwing your money away, helping such a person.

Lysiteles: Father, I would be ashamed to desert a friend in trouble.

Philo: I'd rather have you ashamed than sorry.

Lysiteles: But father, we have so much money, thanks to the gods. We have so much money that it would take two lifetimes to spend it all.

Philo: My dear boy, do you think great wealth grows greater if you subtract it?

Lysiteles: But father. Please!

Philo: All right! All right! Who is your friend who is so destitute that needs your help?

Lysiteles: He is the son of Charmides, Lesbonicus, who lives in that house.

Philo: That one! Oh, no! Not him! He consumes everything near him. Money is like water to him.

Lysiteles: Don't blame him completely, father. Lesbonicus is only a youth.

Philo: So are you only a youth, but you don't act like he does.

Lysiteles: Perhaps the gods smile more upon me.

Philo: Very well. How much do you want to give him?

Lysiteles: Father, I don't want to give him anything. My request is for you to forbid me to accept something from him.

Philo: Accept something from him? Please explain more clearly what you are attempting to say.

Lysiteles: Do you know his family, father?

Philo: Yes, an excellent family. His father, Charmides, is a most upright citizen.

Lysiteles: Well, Lesbonicus has a sister, and I want to marry her, even though she has no dowry.

Philo: What? Marry a wife without a dowry?

Lysiteles: Please don't refuse.

Philo: I can't believe my ears . . . a wife without a dowry?

Lysiteles: Yes.

Philo: I could lecture you for hours about how wrong you are wishing such disaster upon yourself, but I will not oppose you. Have it your way.

Lysiteles: May I ask you for one more favor?

Philo: You mean there's more to all of this?

Lysiteles: Would you go to Lesbonicus yourself and do the asking?

Philo: This is what I get giving in to you . . . more trouble! All right, I'll do it.

Lysiteles: You're a real father! I'll wait for you at home.

(Exits.)

Philo: (To the audience.)
My poor son! What a mess he is inflicting upon himself. Well, that's the way he wants it, and that's the way he will have it! (Enter Lesbonicus with Stasimus.) Well, well, here comes Lesbonicus with his servant.

Lesbonicus: Tell me, Stasimus, where has all the money gone?

Stasimus: The baker, the butcher, the grocer. Money soon disappears, master, when you give party after party.

Lesbonicus: Did everything cost that much?

Stasimus: Money doesn't last forever, master, when you spend it freely.

Philo: (To the audience.)
A very rash young man!

Lesbonicus: What a deficit! What a mess!

Stasimus: You have spent all the money you received from Callicles when he purchased your house.

Lesbonicus: I'm afraid you're right.

Philo: (To the audience.)
Good grief! When his poor father Charmides returns, what a blow this will be to him. Poor old man! He will find himself so poor that he will have to become a beggar at the city gate.

Stasimus: And remember you owe the bank quite a bit, too!

Lesbonicus: Right again.

Philo: (To the audience.)
I will speak to him. Greetings Lesbonicus and Stasimus.

Lesbonicus: Greetings to you, sir, and how is your son, Lysiteles?

Philo: He sends you his very best wishes.

Stasimus: (To the audience.)
Good wishes aren't very much without good deeds attached. I wish to be free, but what good does my wish do me? My master wishes to be more prudent with his money, but he might as well wish for the moon.

Philo: I am now speaking for my son. He wishes to marry your sister, and I concur with his wish.

Lesbonicus: Are you flaunting your prosperity in my face? Are you insulting my poverty?

Philo: My dear, Lesbonicus, son of Charmides, I have no intention of insulting you. I repeat, my son, Lysiteles, sincerely wishes to marry your sister.

Lesbonicus: I'm sorry, sir, but my family does not have the same status as yours. We are poor. Look somewhere else for a match for your son.