

Shakespeare at Traquair

The Comedy of Errors - Synopsis

Act I Scene 1 - A public square in the city of Ephesus.

“Therefore merchant, I’ll limit thee this day to seek thy life by beneficial help.”

DUKE SOLINUS (1.1.151-152)

Aegeon, a merchant from Syracuse has been arrested in his cities rival port of Ephesus. According to the laws of that town any Syracusian who is caught there must be sentenced to death. However, before sentence is past the Duke invites Aegeon to relate the story of why he has come to Ephesus. It’s a tale of ship wrecks, two sets of twin brothers and a family separated by fate. Moved by this story the Duke suspends the sentence for one day to allow Aegeon to find the 1000 marks required to commute his sentence. This is a seemingly forlorn hope as Aegeon know no-one in the city.

Act I Scene 2 - The port of the city.

“They say this town is full of cozenage”

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE (1.2.97)

Another Syracusian, Antipholus, arrives in the city with his servant Dromio. The servant is sent to their lodgings to keep safe the gold they have brought with them, but seemingly returns moments later to urge Antipholus home to dine with a wife he knows nothing about and denying all knowledge of the gold. This seeming transformation in his loyal servant leads Antipholus to reflect on the many tales of sorcery and witchcraft told of this city.

Act II Scene 1 - Outside The Phoenix, home of Antipholus of Ephesus.

“Hath homely age the alluring beauty took from my poor cheek”

ADRIANA (2.1.89-90)

Adriana awaits the return of her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, home to dinner. She discusses with her sister Luciana her concerns for her marriage to Antipholus. Then Dromio returns with a strange tale of how his master knows no mistress but is only interested in some missing gold.

Act II Scene 2 - The city market place.

“What was I married to her in my dream? Or sleep I know, and think I hear all this?”

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE (2.2.191-192)

Antipholus of Syracuse meets Dromio in the market place and he seems to have ‘regained’ his memory of where their gold is stored. Then Adriana and Luciana arrive to hurry them ‘home’ to dinner.

Act III Scene 1 - *A street outside The Phoenix.*

“Plead on her part some cause to you unknown. And doubt not, sir, but she will well excuse why at this time the doors are made against you.”

BALTHASAR (3.1.91-93)

Running late Antipholus of Ephesus returns home to dinner with some friends apprehensive about the reception he'll receive. Only he finds his door barred against him. Outraged by this indignity he decides to take dinner with a female acquaintance at The Porcupine. To scorn his wife he asks Angelo the goldsmith to bring the gold chain he was making for her and bestow it upon his hostess at The Porcupine instead.

Act III Scene 2 - *The same.*

“I see a man here needs not live by shifts, when in the streets he meets such golden gifts”

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE (3.2.190-191)

After dinner Antipholus of Syracuse attempts to woo Luciana and Dromio returns to tell of a 'romantic' encounter with a kitchen wench. Dromio is sent to make preparations for their departure. Then Angelo the goldsmith arrives and presents Antipholus with a gold chain which, despite his protestations, he insists he takes.

INTERVAL

Act IV Scene 1 - *The city market place.*

“Consent to pay thee that I never had? Arrest me, foolish fellow, if thou darest.”

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS

Angelo the goldsmith is in debt to another merchant and he requires the gold owed to him for the chain in order to settle his account or face arrest. At a fortunate moment Antipholus arrives, only he now denies any knowledge of having received the chain and ends up under arrest in Angelo's place. He places his hope for release in Dromio returning home to collect the required gold, except he seems to be intent on leaving Ephesus by boat as soon as possible.

Act IV Scene 2 - *Outside The Phoenix.*

“This I wonder at, that he unknown to me should be in debt.”

ADRIANA (4.2.47-48)

Dromio returns to The Phoenix where Adriana and Luciana are shocked to learn of the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus.

Act IV Scene 3 - *Street outside The Porcupine, home of the Courtesan.*

“Satan, avoid! I charge thee, tempt me not!”

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE (4.3.48)

Antipholus of Syracuse continues to be confused that everyone in the city knows his name and greets him warmly. Then he and Dromio encounter an extremely friendly local who has a particular interest in the chain Antipholus wears around his neck and a ring which has apparently changed hands in payment for it.

Act IV Scene 4 - *A public square in the city.*

“Good Doctor Pinch, you are a conjuror. Establish him in his true sense again.”

ADRIANA (4.4.45-46)

Adriana, concerned by Dromio’s news that his master has been arrested as a debtor and the Courtesan’s tale of the theft of her ring, confronts her husband with the conjuror Pinch. Charged with curing her husband and his servant of their apparent madness, Pinch no sooner leads them off to captivity than they appear again wielding their swords!

Act V Scene 1 - *Precinct of the Temple of Diana in the city of Ephesus.*

“I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me.”

ADRIANA (5.1.332)

As the hour of Aegeon’s execution approaches, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse seek sanctuary in the Temple of Diana, pursued by mysterious wives and creditors. Will the days ‘errors’ be resolved in time to save the life of the Syracusan merchant?