

1.1

EGEON

DUKE

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Well, Syracusan, say in brief the cause
Why thou departed'st from thy native home,
And for what cause thou cam'st to Ephesus.

EGEON

A heavier task could not have been imposed
Than I to speak my griefs unspeakable.
Yet, that the world may witness that my end
Was wrought by nature, not by vile offence,
I'll utter what my sorrow gives me leave. 35
In Syracuse was I born, and wed
Unto a woman happy but for me,
And by me happy, had not our hap been bad.
With her I lived in joy, our wealth increased
By prosperous voyages I often made 40
To Epidamnum, till my factor's death,
And the great care of goods at random left,
Drew me from kind embracements of my spouse,
From whom my absence was not six months old
Before herself±±almost at fainting under 45
The pleasing punishment that women bear±±
Had made provision for her following me,
And soon and safe arriveÁd where I was.
There had she not been long but she became
A joyful mother of two goodly sons; 50
And, which was strange, the one so like the other
As could not be distinguished but by names.
That very hour, and in the selfsame inn,
A mean-born woman was deliver'd
Of such a burden male, twins both alike. 55
Those, for their parents were exceeding poor,
I bought, and brought up to attend my sons.
My wife, not meanly proud of two such boys,
Made daily motions for our home return.
Unwilling, I agreed. Alas! Too soon 60
We came aboard.
A league from Epidamnum had we sailed
Before the always-wind-obeying deep
Gave any tragic instance of our harm.
But longer did we not retain much hope, 65
For what obscureÁd light the heavens did grant
Did but convey unto our fearful minds
A doubtful warrant of immediate death,
Which though myself would gladly have embraced,

Yet the incessant weepings of my wife±± 70
 Weeping before for what she saw must come±±
 And piteous plainings of the pretty babes,
 That mourned for fashion, ignorant what to fear,
 Forced me to seek delays for them and me.
 And this it was±±for other means was none: 75
 The sailors sought for safety by our boat,
 And left the ship, then sinking-ripe, to us.
 My wife, more careful for the latter-born,
 Had fastened him unto a small spare mast
 Such as seafaring men provide for storms. 80
 To him one of the other twins was bound,
 Whilst I had been like heedful of the other.
 The children thus disposed, my wife and I,
 Fixing our eyes on whom our care was fixed,
 Fastened ourselves at either end the mast, 85
 And floating straight, obedient to the stream,
 Was carried towards Corinth, as we thought.
 At length the sun, gazing upon the earth,
 Dispersed those vapours that offended us,
 And by the benefit of his wisheÁd light 90
 The seas waxed calm, and we discovereÁd
 Two ships from far, making amain to us:
 Of Corinth that, of Epidaurus this.
 But ere they came±±O let me say no more!
 Gather the sequel by that went before. 95

DUKE

Nay, forward, old man; do not break off so,
 For we may pity though not pardon thee.

EGEON

O, had the gods done so, I had not now
 Worthily termed them merciless to us.
 For, ere the ships could meet by twice five leagues, 100
 We were encountered by a mighty rock,
 Which being violently borne upon,
 Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst,
 So that in this unjust divorce of us
 Fortune had left to both of us alike 105
 What to delight in, what to sorrow for.
 Her part, poor soul, seeming as burdeneÁd

With lesser weight but not with lesser woe,
Was carried with more speed before the wind,
And in our sight they three were taken up 110
By fishermen of Corinth, as we thought.
At length another ship had seized on us,
And, knowing whom it was their hap to save,
Gave healthful welcome to their shipwrecked guests,
And would have reft the fishers of their prey 115
Had not their barque been very slow of sail;
And therefore homeward did they bend their course.
Thus have you heard me severed from my bliss,
That by misfortunes was my life prolonged
To tell sad stories of my own mishaps. 120

DUKE

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

EGEON

My youngest boy, and yet my eldest care,
At eighteen years became inquisitive 125
After his brother, and importuned me
That his attendant±±so his case was like,
Reft of his brother, but retained his name±±
Might bear him company in the quest of him;
Whom whilst I laboured of a love to see, 130
I hazarded the loss of whom I loved.
Five summers have I spent in farthest Greece,
Roaming clean through the bounds of Asia,
And coasting homeward came to Ephesus,
Hopeless to find, yet loath to leave unsought 135
Or that or any place that harbours men.
But here must end the story of my life,
And happy were I in my timely death
Could all my travels warrant me they live.

DUKE

Hapless Egeon, whom the fates have marked 140
To bear the extremity of dire mishap,
Now trust me, were it not against our laws±±
Which princes, would they, may not disannul±±
Against my crown, my oath, my dignity,

My soul should sue as advocate for thee. 145
But though thou art adjudgeÁd to the death,
And passeÁd sentence may not be recalled
But to our honour's great disparagement,
Yet will I favour thee in what I can.
Therefore, merchant, I'll limit thee this day 150
To seek thy health by beneficial help.
Try all the friends thou hast in Ephesus:
Beg thou or borrow to make up the sum,
And live. If no, then thou art doomed to die.
Jailer, take him to thy custody. 155

JAILER I will, my lord.

EGEON

Hopeless and helpless doth Egeon wend,
But to procrastinate his lifeless end.

Exeunt