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Dramatic Publishing

A One-Act Comedy

Rome Is Where the Heart Is

By

DAVID GROTE

&

ARTHUR WILMURT



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ROME IS WHERE THE HEART IS
A Farce in One Act
For Seven Men and Five Women

C H A R A C T E R S

CHARINUS	a young man
DEMIPHO	his father
PERISTRATA	his mother
PASICOMPSA	the love of his life
EUTYCHUS	his friend
LYSIMACHUS	father of Eutyclus, Demipho's neighbor
DORIPPA	wife of Lysimachus
SYRA	Dorippa's old servant
ACANTHIO	servant to Charinus
LYCISSA	servant to Peristrata
COOK	
ASSISTANT COOK	

The part of Acanthio may be played by either a man or a woman.

The Assistant Cook should be a big muscular male; it may be cut if such a person is not readily available.

PLACE: A street in Ancient Athens.

Rome Is Where The Heart Is

SCENE: A street in Athens. To the left is Demipho's house and to the right is the house of Lysimachus. The street runs across the stage below both houses; the road to the harbor is off right and the road to the country and to other parts of the city is off left.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: CHARINUS enters R, talking to himself.

CHARINUS. Lord, what a mess! If I don't think of something soon, I'll lose everything! (He notices audience, then tries to pretend they aren't there.) What am I going to do? (He notices audience again, stares at them, shrugs, comes to D C, and directly addresses them.) Look, this is all exposition, so I might just as well tell you straight out and save us both a lot of trouble. Not too long ago, I brought this -- ah -- "friend" home for dinner and a little party, while the folks were all out to dinner. But just as it was getting interesting, in come the folks, and you can imagine what happened then. Lots of screaming and yelling, you know. "Work all my life just to see some worthless good-for-nothing waste it! In my day, kids had to work for a living, not sit around and sponge off their parents. Why, I worked fifteen hours every day and was glad to get the job." And so on -- you can imagine the rest. Anyhow, he shipped me off to Rhodes to run the family firm there. I did okay, even made a little profit on the side for me, and met this new "friend." I made a down payment on her and brought her home with me. As soon as I make the last payment, I'll tell my father she's a new maid. But, till I find that money, I can't get her off of the ship. (There is a noise off R as if a man were running in great pain. CHARINUS looks off to see what it is.)

Ye gods! Here comes Acanthio! Something's wrong, I know it.
I am undone!

(ACANTHIO enters R, panting mightily. He is attempting to run, but is old and out of shape, and leans on his staff. He crosses directly to Demipho's house and does not see CHARINUS.)

CHARINUS. He's been running! It must be terrible.
(ACANTHIO reaches the door of the house and leans dramatically on his stick.)

ACANTHIO. Master! Master!

CHARINUS (to audience, chewing fingernails). It's even worse than I thought.

ACANTHIO (knocking on pillar and door with staff). Where's Charinus? Open the door! (CHARINUS crosses to ACANTHIO, who does not hear him.)

CHARINUS. What's the matter, Acanthio?

ACANTHIO. Dang it, the service around this place is terrible.

CHARINUS (grabbing ACANTHIO). Acanthio, what is the matter?

ACANTHIO. Oh, master, you are undone.

CHARINUS. That's a nice way to greet a friend.

ACANTHIO. Who's trying to be nice? (He sinks gradually to a sitting position on the ground, fanning himself with his hat.)

Boy, are you undone!

CHARINUS. Well? Go on.

ACANTHIO. I just told you. Can't a man have a little rest?

CHARINUS. Get on with it.

ACANTHIO. That's gratitude, after I bust a gut to get here.

CHARINUS (yelling). What is it?

ACANTHIO. It's terrible, just terrible – you're undone.

CHARINUS. That much you told me already.

ACANTHIO. All right, I'll be quiet. (He crosses his arms, and clamps his mouth shut. CHARINUS waits expectantly, but he is studiously ignored. ACANTHIO might even whistle a little tune. CHARINUS surrenders, kneels beside ACANTHIO.)

CHARINUS. Acanthio, you're a darling, a sweetheart. The nicest, kindest, most trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, and cleanly servant anybody ever had. Please tell me what happened. Pretty please.

ACANTHIO. Well, if you really want to know . . . remember your father?

CHARINUS. Of course I remember my father -- a fat man.

ACANTHIO. And you remember your girlfriend?

CHARINUS. Oh, no! What about her?

ACANTHIO. Your father's seen her.

CHARINUS. Oh, dear gods! I am undone.

ACANTHIO. So I was telling you. (Overcome, CHARINUS retreats to pure panic, and sucks his thumb. ACANTHIO rises, slowly and carefully, to impress upon his master his state of exhaustion. CHARINUS slowly recovers his composure.)

CHARINUS. How could he?

ACANTHIO. With his eyes, I suppose.

CHARINUS. I mean, how did it happen?

ACANTHIO. I guess he just opened them.

CHARINUS. Where was she?

ACANTHIO. On the poop deck. They had quite a little talk.

CHARINUS. What happened?

ACANTHIO. Right away he started asking who owned her. So I told him you'd bought her to be a servant for your mother.

CHARINUS. Do you think he believed you?

ACANTHIO. I know he did.

CHARINUS. How?

ACANTHIO. Right away he made a pass at her.

CHARINUS. Oh, I am undone! (And he begins to pound his forehead with his fist, while ACANTHIO starts toward the house again.)

ACANTHIO. Somehow I thought you would be.

(PERISTRATA enters through the door, followed by LYCISSA. LYCISSA and ACANTHIO greet vociferously. PERISTRATA opens her arms and crosses to CHARINUS at C.)

PERISTRATA. Charinus, darling boy, how divine that you've come home. (She stops just short of a hug, and offers her cheek for a kiss instead. CHARINUS ignores this.)

CHARINUS. Mother, help me! I've brought you a present.

PERISTRATA. Oh, how nice. Lycissa, you can help the master . . .

CHARINUS. Oh, no, I don't need any help -- I can walk it home. But . . . well, you see, there's a final installment to pay on her and . . . well, I'm broke.

PERISTRATA. Her, did you say? But, son, another woman present . . .

CHARINUS. This one's personal, Mother, just for you.

PERISTRATA. But what would I do with a thing like . . .

CHARINUS. For your own rooms. You know how busy Lycissa always is with Father.

PERISTRATA. I don't know, and although I have my suspicions, I really don't think . . .

CHARINUS. Mother, if I don't make that payment in the flicker of a sundial, she'll be snapped up.

PERISTRATA. Will you let me complete a sentence? I don't think I can afford a present from you just at this time.

CHARINUS. You're not broke, too? Oh, Zeus, I am undone! (He crosses to the door and calmly, but persistently, begins to knock his head against the frame, a la Charlie Brown.)

PERISTRATA. Oh, you are intense about this, aren't you? (Crossing to him.) Well, come inside. (He stops banging his head against the door frame.) Let's see if there's anything left in the emergency fund.

CHARINUS. Mother, there is one more thing. I don't want Father to know about this until the deal is closed. You understand.

PERISTRATA. Dear boy, have you forgotten our routine? We never tell your father anything. (She sweeps out through L doorway and CHARINUS follows.)

LYCISSA. Poor boy. Hasn't changed a bit, I see.

ACANTHIO. Not a bit.

LYCISSA. Too bad there's no emergency fund left.

ACANTHIO. So she won't be able to buy her boy his candy?

LYCISSA. Not this time.

ACANTHIO. He'll see her again soon enough.

LYCISSA. What do you mean?

ACANTHIO. I'll tell you. You see, we were in the market one day . . . (And they exit together into Demipho's house.)

(LYSIMACHUS and SYRA enter from the house on the R. LYSIMACHUS crosses to C but must wait for SYRA to reach him. She takes every possible advantage of her age and walks as slowly as possible.)

LYSIMACHUS. Tell my wife not to expect me and to stay where she is. Tell her all my lawsuits are up in court and I'm as busy as a one-armed lion tamer.

SYRA. Anything else?

LYSIMACHUS. No, that's all. (SYRA exits L. This should take an incredibly long time as she hobbles along with great energy but very little progress. She should stop to rearrange her scarf before she exits, just to prolong things. Finally she makes it off stage and LYSIMACHUS relaxes visibly.) That should hold the old harpy for a while.

(There is the sound of singing off R and LYSIMACHUS turns to see DEMIPHO skip in, joyously singing. DEMIPHO skips and sings in a circle around LYSIMACHUS, coming to rest L of him.)

DEMIPHO (finishing his song and dance). Hail, Lysimachus. All hail.

LYSIMACHUS. Oh, hello, Demipho. How are you?

DEMIPHO. How am I? Can't you tell?

LYSIMACHUS. Something's wrong, isn't it?

DEMIPHO. Wrong? How can you think such a thing? I've never felt so wonderful in my life.

LYSIMACHUS. What brought all this on?

DEMIPHO. Lysimachus, I'm in love.