

# THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
EDITED BY ALEX THORPE

## TEACHER PACK

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:



**READ**

Notes from the production, background info or extracts



**ACTIVITY**

A practical or open space activity



**WRITE**

A classroom writing or discussion activity

## ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

*The Comedy of Errors* is a First Encounters with Shakespeare production directed by Alex Thorpe. It opens on 15 October 2018 and will tour to theatres and schools across the UK.

The set has been created to represent a school playground. It looks and feels like an old shipyard and will have a number of cogs and pulleys suspended around it, making it feel slightly industrial.

The formation of tall 'mast' like structures, will enable the cast to weave in-between to create the different locations in the play and journey for the characters.

## IF YOU'RE SEEING THE PRODUCTION

Look out for some of the elements of the set and performance that have been created by young people from the local area.

Students will be performing part of Egeon's first speech and local young people were also asked to create a disc to be hung on the set, with a logo on it to represent Ephesus. The director and designer were keen that the logo created featured motifs and images that represented the local area. This might be something you could do with students before seeing the production. You could also ask them to compare their logos with the ones created by other local young people, thinking about how they have interpreted this challenge.

# EXPLORING THE STORY

*The Comedy of Errors* is one of Shakespeare's comedy plays and it centres around a lot of confusion and mistaken identity.

The premise of the play is that twenty-three years ago Egeon, who is a merchant in Syracuse, had twin boys. He found twin servants for them and bought them to grow up and serve his sons. During a shipwreck, Egeon lost one of his sons and one of their servants and never saw them again. He named the surviving son and servant after the missing son and servant - Antipholus and Dromio.

During the play, Antipholus goes to Ephesus in search of his lost brother taking his servant Dromio with him. They are unaware that his father Egeon has also gone there to search for them, but he is arrested on arrival and held to ransom. The missing twins, Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, have actually been living in the city for many years and so inhabitants of Ephesus start to greet the visitors and talk to them like they have known them for years, and so the confusion begins.

One way of exploring the story simply is to trace the story of the chain using the below activity. However, you can also take a look at our synopsis and invite students to create their own re-telling of all or part of the narrative.

[www.rsc.org.uk/comedy-of-errors/plot](http://www.rsc.org.uk/comedy-of-errors/plot)



## ACTIVITY 1: THE STORY OF THE CHAIN

- Organise students into groups of four and provide each of them with one of the scenes from the story of the chain in the resource materials.
- Ask students to read their part of the story together and to assign roles.
- Encourage each group to create a short performance of their scene using the lines from the text they have been given and working these in. Explain that they will need to make their part of the story as clear as possible and advise that they use a narrator for at least part of their scene.
- Allow students the opportunity to share their performances with the rest of the group, creating a whole class performance of the story of the chain.
  - It is also very helpful to use a prop to symbolise the chain, asking each group to pass it on to the next one to gain a sense of how the parts of the story all connect together.
- Reflect with students on the story they have performed and seen. You may want to run the first one through as a rehearsal before allowing students to work further on their scene, now knowing the full story.



## ACTIVITY 2: DISCOVERING THE CHARACTERS

- Divide students into pairs, providing them with the Character Facts for one of the characters, available in the resource section of this pack. Explain that these character facts introduce us to the character at the start of the play.
- Ask each pair to think about and create a statue of their character, with one of them taking on the role and the other acting as a director or sculptor.
- Encourage them to think about working in all the information they have about their character, using it to create their statue.
- Allow each pair to share their sculpture, with the director explaining their choices.
- Reflect with students, once the full character list has been completed, on who they think the most important characters are for comic value and for plot. Who is this story about?

# THE WORLD OF THE PLAY



## ACTIVITY 3: EGEON'S SPEECH

Egeon's opening speech, in which he talks about the events that lead to him losing his son and one of their servants, sets the scene for the whole play. In this production parts of the speech are staged by groups of young people, using props and objects that match the industrial theme of the set and the production design.

The following activity explores how students might be able to do the same thing in their classroom, thinking about how they can tell the story that Egeon recounts in his speech using everyday tools and objects.

- Provide students with a copy of the speech and allow them the opportunity to read it through together once as a group, standing in a circle and speaking chorally.
- Allocate each student a line around the circle and ask them to think of an image that they can use and create with their body for their line. It might be an image that represents a word in that line that stands out or it might be that the line reminds them of something.
- Ask students to read the speech chorally again, but this time the student whose line it is should step forward and show everyone their image. It doesn't need to tell the story, only represent what they think Egeon is trying to say.
- Reflect with students on the tone of the speech and the types of images they have seen being created. How do they think Egeon feels at this point in the play? What emotions is he displaying in his choice of language? Why do they think Shakespeare includes this speech as part of the set up to the play?
- Organise students into groups of three or four and ask them to create their own version of the speech using props, just as the groups of young people do in the production.
  - The speech can also be divided up into sections so that each group works on part of the speech rather than the whole piece.

A list of suggested props, used in the show to symbolise industry, can be found below but if you are unable to find these items, or make them safe for use, you can adapt this.

- Ball
- Chain
- Sack
- Shoes
- 3 empty bottles
- Spanner
- Pliers
- Netting
- Explain to each of the groups that they will have 20 minutes to create their own version of the speech, using the props. They can narrate it together using one or more of their voices, but all of the action will need to be conveyed using the materials provided.
- Provide students with the opportunity to share their staging of the speech, allowing each group the opportunity to perform.
- Reflect with students on the different approaches the groups have taken. What effect does it have taking Egeon's character out of the speech and telling the story in a different way? In the production Egeon delivers the opening of the speech and a section of it will then be performed in this way, using similar objects. Do they think the use of props changes the meaning or atmosphere created by the speech? Given more time, how could they develop this for the stage to set the scene for the story?

- Ask students to think about the choices the young people in the performance have made when they see the production. How different are they from their own?



## ACTIVITY 4: PLAYING TWINS

A lot of the action in *The Comedy of Errors* centres around the confusion between the two sets of twins, the Dromios and the Antipholuses, who are easily confused as each other when they are all in Ephesus.

- Invite students to work in pairs.
- Ask one person in each pair to step to the side of the room and the other person to move around the space at their own pace. Encourage them to think about:
  - Pace
  - Their limbs
  - Their head
  - Their hands
- Encourage the students who are watching to pay careful attention to the way everyone is moving and once the person watching feels like they can match and copy their partner's movement exactly, invite them to join in and walk behind them. Remind them they need to be moving in exactly the same way, not creating a parody or comedy version of their partner's walk.
- Allow students the opportunity to switch roles, with the other person in the pair starting and the other person stepping in to copy them when they are confident.
- Invite one or two pairs of students to share their walks and paired movement.
- Reflect with students on what was similar and what wasn't. Was it difficult for them to do themselves? Would they think that these people are twins? If not, why not?
- Explain that when staging this play, where several people mistake one twin for another, director Alex Thorpe is working with two actors who do not look alike but together they have to make it believable that the other characters may think they are. One of the ways they can do this is by thinking about how the two characters move in a similar way.
- Ask students to think about how else they might do this? As well as walking and moving, what else might make it easier to believe the twins could be mistaken for each other?
  - Suggestions may include accents or phrases, habits, clothing, attitude etc.



## ACTIVITY 5: COMEDY AND CONTROL

In the following scene study students can explore the impact of the twins' arrival in Ephesus. It will allow them to explore a scene between Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse, who she mistakes for her friend's husband Antipholus of Ephesus.

- Organise students into pairs and provide each pair with a copy of the Act 3 Scene 2 extract in the Resource materials.
- Invite them to read it aloud together first, with each of them taking one part.
- Encourage them to then try reading the conversation again, this time only reading the last word of each of their lines.

- Allow students to reflect together on what this tells them about the conversation. What do they think is happening and how does each character feel about it?
- Ask pairs to repeat the exercise, this time reading the full lines, and beginning each time by repeating the last word of the previous line. What do they notice when they do this? They may mention that there is already quite a bit of repetition, from both characters. Why do they think that is? What causes a speaker to repeat the words used by another character?
- Repeat the reading one final time, explaining to students that this time they can start to move as they speak. However, they should only move if they think their character has the upper hand or is controlling the situation and only one person in the pair can move at any given time. Encourage them to think about the fact that it won't always be the speaker that has the most control, even if they start by trying to take it back.
- Allow one or two pairs to show their readings, looking at the power and control in this scene.
- Reflect with students on how quickly the power and control moves between these two characters. Who seems to be more naturally in control? How does Luciana try to establish control over the situation and is she successful? How does Antipholus try to make sense of what is happening? Does his confusion affect his control of the conversation?
- Discuss with students at the end of their reflections – how Shakespeare has used language in this scene to create comedy and confusion. Are there any particular moments that have stood out for them in the readings they have done, that they think could be comic moments on stage?

# RESOURCES

## THE STORY OF THE CHAIN

### The Chain is Made

Angelo the Goldsmith is making a beautiful Gold Chain for Antipholus of Ephesus, so he can give it to his wife. Antipholus realises he's late for dinner and asks Angelo to say to his wife that he was just watching the chain being made.

**Antipholus of Ephesus (to Angelo):**

*Say that I lingered with you at your shop  
To see the making of her carcanet,  
And that tomorrow you will bring it home*

### The Chain is promised to another person

Antipholus of Ephesus is locked out of his house by his wife because she has confused Antipholus of Syracuse with her husband. Antipholus of Ephesus is so cross about this he goes to the pub and promises the chain to another lady he knows, a courtesan.

**Antipholus of Ephesus (to Angelo):**

*That chain will I bestow-  
Be it for nothing but to spite my wife-  
Upon mine hostess there.*

**Angelo:**

*I'll meet you at that place some hour hence.*

### Angelo gives the Chain to the wrong person

On the way to deliver the chain to Antipholus of Ephesus, Angelo bumps into Antipholus of Syracuse. He gives a confused Antipholus of Syracuse the chain and says he will collect the money from Antipholus' house.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:**

*Made it for me sir? I bespoke it not.*

**Angelo (to Antipholus of Syracuse):**

*Not once, not twice, but twenty times you have.  
Go home with it and present your wife withal,  
And soon at supper time I'll visit you,  
And then receive the money for the chain.*

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### **Angelo is asked for money which he owes**

Balthazar demands money from Angelo which he owes. Angelo promises he can have it once Antipholus pays and they set off together to Antipholus' house.

#### **Angelo (to Balthazar):**

*Pleaseth you walk with me down to his house,  
I will discharge my bond, and thank you too.*

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### **Antipholus of Ephesus is arrested for not paying for the chain**

Antipholus of Ephesus bumps into Angelo in the street. He is angry because Angelo did not meet him in the pub as he promised. Angelo demands his money, believing that he has already given Antipholus the Chain. Eventually Angelo has Antipholus arrested.

#### **Antipholus:**

*Arrest me foolish fellow, if thou dar'st.*

#### **Angelo:**

*Arrest him, officer.  
I would not spare my brother in this case.*

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### **Dromio of Syracuse is sent to Adriana's House to get bail for Antipholus of Ephesus**

Dromio of Syracuse is sent by the arrested Antipholus to get bail for the chain. Adriana gives him the money and gives Dromio strict instructions to bring Antipholus straight home.

#### **Adriana (to Dromio):**

*Go Dromio, there's the money. Bear it straight,  
And bring thy Master home immediately.*

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### **Antipholus of Syracuse, wearing the Chain, bumps into the Courtesan Antipholus of Ephesus promised the Chain to.**

Antipholus of Syracuse, oblivious to the chaos his having the chain is causing, wears the chain proudly around his neck. Unfortunately for him he bumps into the other lady that Antipholus of Ephesus promised the chain to. She demands the chain but he refuses to give it to her and calls her a witch. The lady is very upset and decides she will tell Antipholus' wife that Antipholus is mad and robbed her.

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**Courtesan (Alone):**

*My way now is to hie home to his house,  
And tell his wife that, being lunatic,  
He rushed into my house and took perforce  
My ring away. This course I fittest choose,  
For forty ducats is too much to lose.*

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**Confusion reigns as the characters meet and argue about the course of events**

Dromio of Ephesus meets the arrested Antipholus of Ephesus. His master demands to know where the money is to pay his way out of jail; Dromio is confused, he had only been sent to buy a rope. Antipholus flies into a rage and tries to beat Dromio. He is stopped in his tracks by the sudden appearance of Adriana, Luciana, and the Courtesan. Antipholus argues with Adriana: she claims that he dined at home, while her husband tells her that he was shut out of his own house.

**Adriana:**

*O husband, God doth know you dined at home*

**Antipholus of Ephesus:**

*Dined at home? Thou, villain, what sayst thou?*

**Dromio of Ephesus:**

*Sir, sooth to say, you did not dine at home*

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**Antipholus and Dromio are locked up and then seem to break out of Jail**

The Officer explains to Adriana that Antipholus of Ephesus owes money to Angelo the goldsmith for a gold chain. Adriana promises the officer that she will pay what her husband owes. Dromio and Antipholus of Ephesus are locked up until the debt has been paid. The Courtesan says that she saw Antipholus wearing the chain.

As they talk, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse rush in with drawn swords, and everyone runs away, mistaking them for Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus, who they think have somehow escaped their imprisonment. Antipholus of Syracuse orders his slave to take their belongings on board a ship.

**Antipholus of Syracuse:**

*I will not stay tonight for all the town;  
Therefore away, to get our stuff aboard.*

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## **Angelo and Balthazar bump into Antipholus of Syracuse with the Chain**

Angelo is busy trying to explain to Balthazar that, despite having given Antipholus the Chain, he hasn't yet received any money when Antipholus of Syracuse appears wearing the chain. Angelo confronts him about denying the existence of the Chain. Antipholus fights back saying he never denied having it. At that moment Adriana, Luciana and the Courtesan arrive. Dromio and Antipholus decide to hide in a priory.

### **Dromio of Syracuse:**

*Run, master, run!*

*In, or we are spoiled.*

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## **The truth is revealed**

Just as the Duke appears, Adriana, seeing the Duke, appeals to him for aid in removing her husband from the abbey, describing his madness and their attempts to control him. The Duke, remembering promises that he made to Adriana when she married Antipholus, agrees to mediate--but just then a messenger comes in, with news that Antipholus and Dromio (of Ephesus) have escaped. Adriana calls him a liar, saying that her husband is in the abbey, but then Antipholus himself rushes in, accompanied by his slave and demanding that the Duke grant him justice against his wife, who has locked him out of the house, allowed him to be arrested, and then had him locked up. There is a flurry of charges and countercharges, and the Duke summons the Abbess, hoping that she can untangle the mess.

Egeon, meanwhile, goes up to Antipholus of Ephesus, mistaking him for the son he brought up. Antipholus is confused and says that he never saw his father in his life, and that he has always been a citizen of Ephesus. Then, the Abbess enters, bringing with her Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse. The Abbess greets Egeon and declares that she is his wife, Emilia, long separated from him, and that the identical men are their twin sons. The rest of the tangle is quickly explained: the ring is returned to the Courtesan and the gold chain is finally paid for.

### **Antipholus of Syracuse:**

*I was ta'en for him, and he for me,*

*And thereupon these errors are arose.*

## CHARACTER STATUSES

<b>SOLINUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duke of Ephesus.</li> <li>• Casts judgement on criminal activity and the behaviour of the citizens</li> <li>• Grants Egeon a day to find the money to pay for his fine</li> </ul> <p><i>If any Syracusian born Come to the bay of Ephesus, he dies</i></p>
<b>EGEON</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father of the Antipholus twins</li> <li>• Separated from one of his sons and his wife in a shipwreck</li> <li>• Has lived in Syracuse since the shipwreck</li> <li>• Arrested on arrival in Ephesus for being a citizen of Syracuse</li> <li>• Has a wife called Emilia whom he has not seen since the shipwreck</li> </ul> <p><i>Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, And by the doom of death end woes and all.</i></p>
<b>ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHEBUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of a pair of twins, separated at sea.</li> <li>• Has a servant called Dromio</li> <li>• Landed in Ephesus with his mother after the shipwreck</li> <li>• Married to Adriana</li> <li>• Lives with his wife and her sister Luciana and Dromio</li> <li>• Is friends with the Courtesan</li> </ul> <p><i>I pray you, to the Porpentine, That chain will I bestow Be it for nothing but to spite my wife - Upon my hostess there.</i></p>
<b>ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of a pair of twins, separated at sea.</li> <li>• Has a servant called Dromio</li> <li>• Landed in Syracuse with his father after the shipwreck</li> <li>• Has been looking for his brother since his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.</li> <li>• Falls in love with Luciana</li> </ul> <p><i>I to the world am a drop of water That in the ocean seeks another drop</i></p>
<b>DROMIO OF EPHEBUS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of a pair of twin servants, separated at sea.</li> <li>• Has a master called Antipholus</li> <li>• Is beaten for the mistakes he makes</li> <li>• Landed in Ephesus with Antipholus</li> <li>• Has a girlfriend called Nell who works in the kitchen</li> <li>• Lives with Antipholus, Adriana and her sister Luciana</li> </ul>

	<i>I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but blows.</i>
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<b>DROMIO OF SYRACUSE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of a pair of twin servants separated at sea</li> <li>• Has a Master called Antipholus</li> <li>• Is beaten for the mistakes he makes</li> <li>• Has been travelling with Antipholus to help find his brother</li> <li>• Landed in Syracuse after the shipwreck</li> <li>• Is mistaken for his twin by Nell, his brother's girlfriend</li> </ul> <p><i>I am an ass, I am a woman's man and besides myself</i></p>
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<b>BALTHAZAR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is owed money by Angelo the goldsmith</li> <li>• Is promised the money after Antipholus pays for the chain.</li> <li>• Suggests that Antipholus goes to the pub when he gets locked out of his house</li> </ul> <p><i>Depart in patience, And let us to the Tiger all to dinner,</i></p>
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<b>ANGELO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the chain for Antipholus of Ephesus</li> <li>• Owes Balthazar money</li> <li>• Witnesses Antipholus of Ephesus getting locked out of his house</li> <li>• Gives the chain to the wrong Antipholus</li> </ul> <p><i>Here's the note How much your chain weighs to the utmost carat, The fineness of the gold, and chargeful fashion, Which doth amount to three odd ducats more</i></p>
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<b>EMILIA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wife of Egeon</li> <li>• Since being separated in the shipwreck has lived like an Abbess in Ephesus</li> </ul> <p><i>Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail Of you my sons, and till this present hour My heavy burden ne'er delivered.</i></p>
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<b>ADRIANA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antipholus of Ephesus' wife</li> <li>• Promised a gold chain</li> <li>• Fed up because her husband is always back late from the market</li> </ul> <p><i>Neither my husband nor the slave returned, That in such haste I sent to seek his master? Sure Luciana, it is two o'clock.</i></p>
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<b>LUCIANA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adriana's sister</li> <li>• Has to calm her sister down when she gets upset because Antipholus is late</li> <li>• Stands up for her sister in front of Antipholus</li> </ul>
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	<i>When were you wont to use my sister thus? She sent for you by Dromio home to dinner.</i>
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## EGEON'S SPEECH

The below speech can be divided into sections.

The lines in green here are the lines performed by young people in the production.

### EGEON

In Syracuse was I born, and wed  
Unto a woman, happy but for me.  
With her I lived in joy, our wealth increased  
By prosperous voyages I often made  
To Epidamium,  
From whom my absence was not six months old  
Made provision for her following me,  
And soon and safe arrivèd where I was.  
There had she not been long, but she became  
A joyful mother of two goodly sons,  
And, which was strange, the one so like the other,  
As could not be distinguished but by names.  
That very hour, and in the self-same inn,  
A mean woman was deliverèd  
Those, 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 we came aboard.  
A league from Epidamium had we sailed  
Before the always wind-obeying deep  
Gave any tragic instance of our harm.  
But longer did we not retain much hope,  
For what obscurèd light the heavens did grant  
Did but convey unto our fearful minds  
A doubtful warrant of immediate death,  
My wife, more careful for the latter-born,  
Had fastened him unto a small spare mast,  
Such as seafaring men provide for storms:  
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,  
And floating straight, obedient to the stream,  
Were 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 wished light,  
We were encountered by a mighty rock,  
Which being violently borne up upon,  
Our helpful ship was splitted in the midst,  
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  
By fishermen of Corinth, as we thought.  
At length, another ship had seized on us,  
My youngest boy, and yet my eldest care,  
At eighteen years became inquisitive  
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

## ACT 3 SCENE 2 EXTRACT

*Enter Luciana with Antipholus of Syracuse*

### **LUCIANA**

And may it be that you have quite forgot  
A husband's office? Shall Antipholus,  
Even in the spring of love thy love-springs rot?  
If you did wed my sister for her wealth,  
Then for her wealth's sake use her with more kindness.

### **ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

Sweet mistress, what your name is else I know not,  
Nor by what wonder you do hit of mine.  
Teach me dear creature, how to think and speak.  
Are you a god? Would you create me new?  
Transform me then and to your power I'll yield.

### **LUCIANA**

What, are you mad, that you do reason so?

### **ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

Not mad, but mated. How I do not know.

### **LUCIANA**

It is a fault that springeth from your eye.

### **ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

For gazing on your beams, fair sun, being by.

### **LUCIANA**

Gaze where you should, and that will clear your sight.

### **ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

As good to wink, sweet love, as look on night.

### **LUCIANA**

Why call me 'love'? Call my sister so.

### **ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

Thy sister's sister.

### **LUCIANA**

That's my sister.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

No.

It is thyself, mine own self's better part,  
Mine eye's clear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart.

**LUCIANA**

All this my sister is, or else should be.

**ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE**

Call thyself sister, sweet, for I am thee.  
Thee will I love, and with thee lead my life.

**LUCIANA**

Of soft sir, hold you still.  
I'll fetch my sister to get her good will.