

from ***Rome Is Where the Heart Is***

adapted from Plautus's *Mercator*²³

by David Grote and Arthur Wilmurt

Lysimachus is a middle-aged businessman who, as a favor to his neighbor, has hidden a female slave in his house while Dorippa,²⁴ the wife of Lysimachus, has gone for a visit to her parents in the country. Unfortunately, Lysimachus has taken a fancy to the beautiful young girl and is planning a party that evening when Dorippa unexpectedly returns. The Cook and Assistant may be either male or female.



200 B.C. Roman



200 B.C.-A.D. 200
approx. Roman

DORIPPA. Where are you off to? (*He stops, turns to her, waves innocently.*)

Got another lawsuit someplace?

LYSIMACHUS. Well, hello, darling. I didn't know you were back.

DORIPPA (*crossing to C*). I can see that.

LYSIMACHUS (*crossing to her*). And how is everything in the country?

DORIPPA. Just fine. And how is everything here?

LYSIMACHUS. Fine, fine, fine.

DORIPPA. Busy, I take it?

LYSIMACHUS. Oh, yes, you know how it is—always something going on.

DORIPPA. So I see. Who's the woman who has been in my house?

LYSIMACHUS. Ah, yes, you noticed. Ah, well, now . . .

DORIPPA. I'm waiting. (*She crosses her arms, and taps her foot, all very ominously.*)

LYSIMACHUS. Well, yes, you see, I can explain that . . . (*He trails off into stammering, and then silence.*)

DORIPPA. Well? (*No answer.*) Any time now. (*Still no answer.*) I'm waiting. (*Pause.*) Who is she?

LYSIMACHUS (*dropping to his knees and protecting his head with his arms*).
I don't know.

DORIPPA. Then what was she doing in there?

LYSIMACHUS. Now, dear, don't jump to conclusions.

DORIPPA. I'll jump to anything I want, if you can't do better than that.

LYSIMACHUS. Well, you see, the fact is, I've been working on this real-estate deal, and a lady friend of a gentleman friend just came by, and she left some of her things, as a deposit, until she can bring the cash by later.

DORIPPA. That's the best you can do?

LYSIMACHUS (*rising*). It's the truth, my pet.

DORIPPA. Hah!

LYSIMACHUS. Surely you don't think that I . . .

DORIPPA. That you what?

LYSIMACHUS. That the girl . . . and me . . . us . . . ha, ha, ha.

DORIPPA. Of course not . . . Ha. Ha. Ha.

LYSIMACHUS. My dear, I swear, I promise you, I have nothing to do with this. I'm absolutely innocent . . .

(*COOK enters L, followed by the ASSISTANT COOK.*)

COOK. Come on, hurry it up. We're cooking for an old buzzard who's fallen in love, and you know how impatient they get.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

LYSIMACHUS. Oh, no! (*The COOK spies LYSIMACHUS, and crosses to him.*)

COOK. Sir, we are here at your command.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

LYSIMACHUS. Are you talking to me?

COOK. Surely you remember us.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

LYSIMACHUS. Never saw you before in my life.

COOK. But you hired us to cook dinner.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

LYSIMACHUS (*out of the corner of his mouth*). Go away.

COOK. Did you say "go away"?

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

LYSIMACHUS (*shouting*). Go away!

DORIPPA (*who has been watching with interest*). What's this, another rental deposit?

COOK (*crossing to DORIPPA*). I'll bet this is the little lady, isn't it?

ASSISTANT COOK. Right. (*LYSIMACHUS is desperately trying to signal the COOK to be quiet, to no avail.*)

COOK. Madam, you are indeed fortunate to have this gentleman for your—ha, ha—"friend". . .

LYSIMACHUS. Oh, no!

COOK. . . Since he had the good taste to hire us, the finest cooks in all of Athens.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

COOK. And we cook only for the ladies of the finest men in the town.

LYSIMACHUS. Will you please shut up?

COOK (*to him*). My, aren't we a bit shy this afternoon. No need to be embarrassed. She's a bit more substantial than we usually see . . .

ASSISTANT COOK. Right! (*DORIPPA turns her glare on him, and he quails.*)

COOK. . . But, to each his own, I always say.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

COOK. I assume the crocodile is still in the country? (*LYSIMACHUS tries to make himself very small.*)

DORIPPA. What crocodile?

COOK. His wife, of course.

DORIPPA (*looking at LYSIMACHUS*). So, his wife is a crocodile, is she?

COOK. That's what he called her.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

DORIPPA. And she's still in the country, is she?

LYSIMACHUS (*very sickly*). No, she isn't.

COOK. Oh?

LYSIMACHUS (*pointing*). My wife.

COOK (*recovering quickly*). Charmed, madam.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.



1st Century A.D.
Roman



2nd Century A.D.
Roman

LYSIMACHUS. Now, will you please go?

COOK. You mean you don't want us?

LYSIMACHUS. No, no, a thousand times no!

COOK. Of course, you'll still have to pay us.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right.

LYSIMACHUS. Pay you? *(The ASSISTANT COOK walks over to LYSIMACHUS threateningly, but LYSIMACHUS no longer has anything to lose, and laughingly knocks the ASSISTANT COOK aside.)*

COOK. We could sue.

ASSISTANT COOK *(staggering up).* Right. *(LYSIMACHUS throws the ASSISTANT COOK who rolls into a food sack.)*

LYSIMACHUS. Get out of here!

COOK. I think he wants us to leave.

ASSISTANT COOK *(weaving now).* Right. *(He picks up the sack and starts to leave. COOK grabs him and pulls him back and both sit down.)*

COOK. Not till we get paid.

ASSISTANT COOK. Right. *(They sit, glaring at LYSIMACHUS. He glares at them. Then he feels DORIPPA's eyes boring into him, too, and he begins to surrender.)*

LYSIMACHUS. All right, all right! *(He throws the COOK a small purse of coins. COOK and ASSISTANT COOK rise.)*

COOK. Leave the food. He's paid for it.

ASSISTANT COOK *(dropping the sack).* Right. *(They exit L. LYSIMACHUS smiles wanly at DORIPPA.)*

DORIPPA *(she crosses arms and glares at LYSIMACHUS).* A crocodile, am I?

LYSIMACHUS. My dearest, I can explain everything. You see, some friends of mine . . .

DORIPPA. You and your friends! See if you can keep this house respectable while I go get my father. *(DORIPPA charges toward L exit. LYSIMACHUS tries desperately to block her way.)*

LYSIMACHUS. Now, sweetheart, there's no need for that. I can explain everything.

DORIPPA. Call me a crocodile, you snake in the grass! *(She slams LYSIMACHUS with an enormous roundhouse blow to the stomach, which doubles him over in sudden pain. As he gasps and tries to get his breath back, she stomps out L. LYSIMACHUS sinks to his knees in agony.)*