

PHEIDOLOS

Oh lord, I need a genuinely subtle gimmick
to wangle a place with those clowns at the public trough
without giving up what's mine.

Now, what?*

His eye lights on the chamber pot.

Of course!

I see it all.

He grabs up the pot.

But I'd better dash. I'll have to

go in to dinner when they do. No time to waste.

Clutching Chremes' chamber pot, he races off right.

CHORAL INTERLUDE

*House II is now the home of a Hag, who appears
on the roof and tries, with no success, to
assume an alluring posture. She may be succinctly
described as the third ugliest woman in the world.*

HAG

Why don't the Men get here? They're way overdue.
And here I am, ready and waiting, with all this beauty
going to waste. My complexion's slathered with pancake,
my figure's trim and firm in my best yellow shrug,
I'm humming a song in my heart . . .
but it's not for real.

It needs a *Man*. And so do I—a *Man*
to snag as he goes by here.

—O Muses, descend
right into my mouth. Bring along an Ionian song . . .
pretty, and not too loud, but pretty Jewd.

*A Sweet Young Thing appears on the roof of
House III. Her prettiness matches the ugliness
of the Hag, whom she addresses.*

SWEET YOUNG THING

Oh, look; Dry Rot's set in. My, aren't we up early?
You thought you'd slip in and poach a little while I
was out; inveigle some poor egg upstairs
with your singing. All right, then, sing—and I'll come on
with a song in rebuttal.

Aside.

—I know this antiphonal bit
is liable to bore the audience stiff, but it's really
pleasant enough. No comedy should be without it.

HAG

*Showing a large leather phallos.**
Here's a friend, little girl; run off and play
with yourself.

—MUSIC!

A fluteplayer appears.

Vamp an accompaniment, honey;
blow me a tune that does us both some credit.

She sings to the flute's accompaniment.

If pleasure's your aim, drop into my bed,
where satisfaction is guaranteed.
Don't try it with girls—they're limited;
a Woman responds to your every need.
Girls are stiff, and they cool down fast;
girls run off when other men call.
But Women smolder, and women last:
Maturity makes it; ripeness is all.

SWEET YOUNG THING

Singing.
You can't fight nature; don't criticize
the girls. True sensuous feminine bliss
buds on their breasts and blooms in their thighs,
while you spread powder and paint by the pot
to putty time's craters, and make you the kiss
of death. Confess it; Ripeness is rot.

HAG

Singing to the same tune.
I wish you some very unnatural shocks
when you lie fallow and rich to be plowed:
I wish you a suddenly vanishing box,
a suddenly crumbling bed to match,
and the clammy touch, all curled and cowed,
of a snake who never comes up to scratch.

The tune changes.

SWEET YOUNG THING

What shall I do for pleasures?
My lover hasn't come.
I'm left to my own resources,
and Mother isn't home . . .

*She breaks off the song and looks around indignantly,
as if for someone connected with the
production of the play. She speaks.*

—I'm certainly not supposed to deliver the rest of this?

Start

An obdurate silence. She shrugs resignedly and returns to the song.

So Granny, please, a favor:
Bring up that great reliever,
the lonely woman's savior
and send it right on over
to maneuver
with me.

HAG
Holding the leather phallos, she sings to the same tune.¹⁶

You've caught the fatal itching
(your lover hasn't come),
that decadent Eastern leeching
(your mother isn't home) . . .

Speaking.

—There pants a girl who's ready to put the L in Lesbos.*

Returning to the song, she clutches the phallos defensively.

You can't abduct my lover,
my clever little shaver . . .

SWEET YOUNG THING
I'm beautiful as ever,
and that's what you can never
take over
from me.

The music ends.

HAG
Sing all you want. Keep popping in and out
like a weasel in rut. You can't attract a man
before he drops in on me.

SWEET YOUNG THING
To pay his last
respects?
Confess it, crowbait, that was a new one.

HAG
Oh no, it wasn't.
SWEET YOUNG THING
Why waste new jokes on a worn old
bag like you?

HAG
My age won't bother you a bit.

END

SWEET YOUNG THING
What will? That slobbered rouge? That plaster that's plugging
the cracks?

HAG
This idle chatter is perfectly pointless.

SWEET YOUNG THING
Your presence is perfectly pointless. Why are you perching
there—what's up?

HAG
Just humming a song for Epigenes—
he's my young man.

SWEET YOUNG THING
I thought your only man
was eaten by moths years back.*

HAG
my boy'll be here in a bit.
Just wait. You'll see;

Looking off right.
And here he comes now.

SWEET YOUNG THING
For you? Oh, no. Whatever he needs, it's not
a case of plague.

HAG
I'm just what he lacks.

SWEET YOUNG THING
Like hemlock.
But let him tell you himself. I'm leaving.

HAG
You'll see that I know what I'm doing. Better than you.
Me, too.

They disappear into their houses. Epigenes enters right, carrying a torch, still garlanded from the banquet. He is very young, very drunk, and very ithyphallic. He sings.

EPIGENES
I want to make sweet music tonight,
I want my baby in bed.
I don't want to hump some rickety lump
or overage eyesore instead.
I'm Athenian, male, of age, and free;
I won't put up with sex by decree.