Wealth [Plutos]
By Aristophanes

Karion [slave of Chremylos]
Chremylos[1]
Wealth [*Plutos*][2]
Chorus [of poor old farmers]
Blepsidemos
Poverty [*Penia*]
Wife [of Chremylos]
A just man
A "sycophant" [term for a false accuser or informer, who harassed the rich with lawsuits in order to get money by settlements]
Old woman [the lines suggest she's a former courtesan—1029, 1083]
Young man [former lover of the old woman]
Hermes [the god]
A priest of Zeus

KARION: How grievous a business it is—Oh Zeus and gods!—
To become the slave of a master who has lost his wits!
For if the servant should happen to say what is best,
But the opinion of the owner is against doing these things,
The servant must necessarily share in the evils.
For the divinity doesn't allow the one who is sovereign
To rule over the body, but rather the purchaser.
So be it. . . . But Loxias,[3]
Who sings oracles from a tripod of beaten gold,[4]
I blame, with this just blame: that
Being a healer and a wise prophet, as they assert,
He sent my master away in a melancholy-mad state,
Who's following along behind a blind fellow,[5]
Doing the contrary of what it befits him to do!
For we who see are the guides of the blind,
But he follows, and also constrains me to do so,
And in regard to these things responds with not even a grunt![6]

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[1] In the words of the fifth "*hypothesis*," or summary of the play, found in the manuscripts (and dating from Hellenistic commentators), "Chremylos is constructed from *chreos* [debt] and *haimullo* [wily] as 'deceptive': so, 'the one who deceives his debtors on account of poverty'; and Karion is clearly Greek for 'slave,' . . . and Blepsidemos is a word signifying a beggar who's "looking" (*blepo*) always to the *demos* [populace]."

[2] Hesiod in his *Theogony* (967-74) commences his account of "Those goddesses who, having slept with mortal men/ Being immortal, gave birth to children like onto gods" with "Demeter Who, a goddess among goddesses, gave birth to Wealth [Plutos]/ Having mingled in erotic affection with the hero Iasion/ On a thrice-ploughed fallow field in the fertile land of Crete:/ He, noble one, goes across the earth and the wide back of the sea,/ Everywhere; and for whomever He encounters, and into whose hands He comes,/ He establishes abundance, and to him He annexes great riches." See also the end of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (488-89).

[3] "The Oblique One"—an epithet of Apollo, on account of the obliquity or ambiguity of his oracles.

[4] This sounds like a line from some tragedy.

[5] Literally, "blind human" (*anthropos*)—apparently, the divinity of Wealth is not altogether evident to Karion.

[6] This is Bentley's emendation of the obviously faulty reading of two of the three main manuscripts; the third manuscript has a reading that makes it Wealth whose silence is being referred to by Karios.

. . . [To Chremylos] Now there's no way that I'll remain silent,
If you will not explain why in the world we are following this fellow,
Master, but I will keep bothering you.
For you won't beat me while I'm wearing this wreath at least![7]

CHREMYLOS: By Zeus, I'll take off the wreath, if you cause me any grief,
So that you will suffer worse!
Kar.: Nonsense! I will *not* stop,
Until you explain to me *who* in the world *this* is;
For I ask this out of great goodwill towards you.

Chrem.: But I won't hide it from you; because, among my household
Slaves, I consider you the most trustworthy and thieving.
. . . I, being a god-revering and just man, have
Fared poorly and been impoverished.
Kar.: That I know.
Chrem.: But others are wealthy: temple-robbers, orators,
And sycophants, and rascals!
Kar.: I am persuaded of it.
Chrem.: So, I went to inquire of the god—
As regards my own miserable life,
Believing that the arrows had pretty much been shot;
But as regards my son, who happens to be my only one—
Inquiring if *he* ought to change *his* ways,
So as to be all around wicked, unjust, wholesome in not a single respect:
On the belief that this would be of advantage in life.

Kar.: What then did Phoebus pronounce, from the sacred wreaths?[8]

Chrem.: You will learn. For the god plainly said to me the following.
Whomever I might encounter when I first went out,[9]
He bade me not to leave off from this person anymore,
But to persuade him to follow me home.

Kar.: And who was the first you encountered?
Chrem.: This fellow.
Kar.: But didn't you understand the thought of the god,
Which was expressed—you most benighted one!—most plainly:
That your son was to practice the *local way*?!

Chrem.: On what do you base this judgment?
Kar.: It is so obvious that
Even a blind man is of the opinion that he knows that it is highly
Advantageous to practice nothing wholesome nowadays![10]

Chrem.: It is not *possible* that *that's* the drift of the oracle!
It must incline toward something else GREATER. But now, if to us
This fellow would explain whoever in the world he is, and why and

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[7] Worn for the ritual of consulting the oracle at Delphi, from which they are returning.

[8] Another line that sounds as if it comes from some tragedy. Phoebus is a name of Apollo.

[9] An echo of Euripides *Ion* 535ff.

[10] An echo of a fragment of Euripides (#696): "there is nothing just nowadays."

For what need he has come here, with us two,
We would learn what the oracle has in mind for us.

Kar.: [To the blind Wealth.] Hey, you! Explain yourself, who you might be,
Or do I do THIS!? You need to talk fast!

WEALTH: I say to you: go holler!
Kar.: Did you hear who he said he is?
Chrem.: He said this to *you*, not to *me*—obviously,
Because *you* inquired of him in an obscure and harsh fashion.
But [speaking to Wealth] if you are pleased by the ways of an
Oath-Keeping man, give the explanation to me.
Wealth: I for my part say to you: go scream!
Kar. Accept the man and the omen of the god.

Chrem.: By Demeter, you won't stay pleased!

Kar.: Because if you don't tell me, I will destroy you, evil one, in an evil fashion!
Wealth: Fellow, get away from me, both of you!
Chrem.: Oh yeah!?
Kar.: Now what I say is best, Master:
I shall exterminate this human, in the worst way!
For, having placed him on some cliff, I'll leave him
And go away, from whence he'll fall, breaking his neck!

Chrem.: So take him quickly!
Wealth: No way!
Chrem.: Will you not answer?
Wealth: But if you two should learn of me who I am, I know well that
You two will do me some harm, and will not let me go!

Chrem.: But by the gods, we will, if you wish it!

Wealth: First let go of me.
Chrem.: There, we let go of you.
Wealth: Now listen. For it seems that it is necessary for me
To utter what I was prepared to keep secret. . . .
For, I am . . . *Wealth*!
Chrem.: You most abominable
Of all men! You, being Wealth, kept silent about it?

Kar.: YOU are Wealth, in this miserable condition!?

Chrem.: Oh Phoebus Apollo, and gods and lesser divinities!—
And Zeus! What *are* you saying? YOU, in this state, are really *him*?
Wealth: Yes.
Chrem.: That One Himself?
Wealth: The very one.
Chrem.: From where, then, do you say
You are walking, in this squalid condition?
Wealth: I am coming from Patrocles'[11] place,

[11] The scholiast says that this refers to a tragedian satirized in Aristophanes' (lost) *Storks* as a wealthy miser; but this has no relevance to failing to bathe. The name also belongs to Socrates' younger half-brother (Plato *Euthydemus* 297e), who appears to have been a wealthy and prominent office holder during the struggles

Who has never bathed since he was born.

Chrem.: How did you come to suffer so badly? Tell me.

Wealth: Zeus did these things to me, out of envy for humans.
For when I was a lad, I vowed that
To the just and wise and orderly
Only would I go; and he made me blind,
So that I would not be able to distinguish any of these.
Just so, That One envies the worthy.

Chrem.: And yet it is on account of[12] the worthy alone, and the just,
That he is honored!
Wealth: I agree with you.
Chrem.: Look here,
If you could see again, as before,
Would you avoid the wicked?
Wealth: I do declare so.
Chrem.: And you would frequent the just?
Wealth: By all means.
For I have not seen them for a long time.

Chrem.: That's no wonder; neither have I, who can see!

Wealth: Now let me go. For you know about me.

Chrem.: By Zeus, so much the more will we hold you!

Wealth: Did I not proclaim that you two were going to give me trouble?
Chrem.: And you, I entreat, be persuaded,
And don't leave me! For you will not find,
In seeking, another man better in his ways than me.

Kar.: By Zeus, there isn't another, except me!

Wealth: That's what they all say. But when they
Truly happen upon me and become wealthy,
Their wickedness simply has no limits!

Chrem.: That's so—but not all are bad!

Wealth: But by Zeus, every single one!
Kar.: You'll grieve for that!
Chrem.: But to know how many good things will accrue to you, if
You stay with us, pay heed, so that you'll learn:
For I think—I think—with the god's help, be it said,[13]
That I shall rid you of this illness of the eyes,
And make you see!
Wealth: That may you never do,

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surrounding the tyranny of the Thirty (Isocrates 18.5-8; Nails, *People pf Plato*, 218-19)—and Socrates is repeatedly satirized as failing to bathe by Aristophanes: *Clouds* 836, *Birds* 1282.

[12] "On account of" translates the words *dia*, which can mean either "by means of," "through," or "on account of," "for the sake of"—and this ambiguity is repeatedly present in the lines that follow.

[13] The phrase echoes Euripides *Medea* 625.

Because I do not wish to see again!
Chrem.: What are you saying?!
Kar. This human is miserable by nature!

Wealth: Zeus, knowing about the follies of these people, if he should learn,
Would rub me out!
Chrem.: But doesn't he do that *now*,
He who lets you stumble around?

Wealth: I don't know. I shudder very much at *That* One.

Chrem.: In truth?—you most cowardly of all divinities!
For do you suppose that the tyranny of Zeus,
And the thunderbolts, would be worth a farthing,
If you were able to see again for even a short time?

Wealth: Don't say these things, you rascal!
Chrem.: Remain calm;
For I shall demonstrate that YOU are *much* more powerful
Than Zeus!
Wealth: You mean *me*?
Chrem.: By Heaven [Uranos], Yes!
Look, [to Karion] on account of *what* does Zeus rule over the gods?

Kar.: On account of money; because he has most of it.

Chrem.: Come, who is it that provides it to him?
Kar.: This One!
Chrem.: And on account of whom do they sacrifice to him? Isn't it on account of This One?

Kar.: And by Zeus, they straightaway pray to become wealthy!

Chrem.: So isn't This One the cause, and couldn't he easily
Make these things cease, if he wished?
Wealth: What do you mean?
Chrem.: That not a single one among humans would sacrifice anymore—
Not an ox, not a cake, not a single thing,
If you didn't wish it!
Wealth: How so?
Chrem.: How so? There's no way
How anyone will be able to *buy* from anywhere, if you aren't
Present yourself, to give the money! So that
The power of Zeus, if he should give you any grief, you can by yourself dissolve!

Wealth: What are you saying? On account of *me*, they sacrifice to Zeus?

Chrem.: That's what I'm asserting. And by Zeus, if anything is shining,
And beautiful, or charming for humans, it comes about on account
Of you. For all things are subservient to wealth.

Kar.: In my own case, it is on account of a teeny bit of money that
I have become a slave—on account of not being equally wealthy.[14]

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[14] A scholium at this point leads some to substitute for the phrase after the dash a different phrase: "having been a freeman before."

Chrem.: And they say that the Corinthian courtesans,
When some poor bloke tries to engage them,
Pay him no mind; but if he's wealthy,
They turn the asshole to him straightway on this account.

Kar.: And they say the boys do this very same thing,
For the sake, not of their lovers, but of the money.

Chrem.: The worthy ones don't, but the whores; since
The worthy don't ask for money.
Kar.: For what, then?
Chrem.: One for a good horse; and one for hunting dogs.

Kar.: That's probably because, being ashamed to ask for money,
They gloss the baseness over with a name.

Chrem.: On account of *you*, all arts and clever crafts
That exist among humans have been discovered:
For one of us sits making shoes—

Kar.: And there's another who works at bronze, and one as carpenter—

Chrem.: And one smelts gold, taking the gold from *you*—

Kar.: And one's a thief, by Zeus, and one's a burglar—

Chrem.: And one's a fuller—
Kar.: And one washes fleece—
Chrem.: And one tans hides—
Kar.: And one sells onions—

Chrem.: And on account of *you*, the nabbed adulterer is plucked![15]

Wealth: Alas, miserable me! This has for a long time escaped my notice!

Kar.: Isn't it on account of This One that the Great King preens himself?

Chrem.: Isn't it on account of This One that the assembly meets?

Kar.: What about the triremes? Don't you fill them? Tell me!

Chrem.: Isn't it This One who feeds the foreign legion in Corinth?[16]

Kar.: Won't Pamphilos[17] come to grief on account of This One?

Chrem.: And The Needle-seller along with Pamphilos?

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[15] An adulterer caught by the husband could be put to death; "plucking" presumably refers to his paying a large sum to avoid this fate.

[16] A force placed in Corinth by the Athenian general Iphicrates after a Spartan attack in 390 B. C.: Xenophon *Hellenica* 4.5 (the *Wealth* as we have it was first produced in 388 B. C.)

[17] An Athenian general who led a force to Aegina in 389 B. C. (Xenophon *Hellenica* 5.1.2), and who was apparently charged with theft of public funds (see frag. #14 of the comic poet Plato); his associate Aristoxenus was known as the "needle-seller."

Kar.: Doesn't Agyrrios fart on account of This One?

Chrem.: Does not Philepsius relate his stories for your sake?[18]

Kar.: Isn't the alliance with the Egyptians on account of you?[19]

Chrem.: Doesn't Lais love Philonides for your sake? [20]

Kar.: And the tower of Timotheus[21] **. . .**
Chrem.: —may it fall on you!
But are not all affairs brought about on account of *you*?
For, that *you*, most singularly, are the cause of all,
Both of bad things and of good, know well.

Kar.: For certainly the ones who get the best of their enemies in war,
on each occasion,
Are those who have This One alone sitting on their side!

Wealth: Do I, single-handed, have the power to do so many things?

Chrem.: Yes, by Zeus, and many *more* than these!
So that no one has ever become full of you!
For of all the other things there is surfeit:
Of erotic love—
Kar.: of bread—
Chrem.: of music—
Kar.: of sweets—
Chrem.: Of honor—
Kar.: of cakes—
Chrem.: of manliness—
Kar. of dried figs—
Chrem.: Of ambition[22]**—**
Kar.: of barley-bread—
Chrem.: of generalship—
Kar.: of pea soup—
Chrem.: But of *you*, no one has ever become full!
No, if someone might get thirteen talents,
He desires all the more to get sixteen;
And if he accomplishes this, he wants forty,
Or claims that life would not be worth living for him.

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[18] Demosthenes (24.134-35) refers to Philepsius and Agyrrios as prominent political figures, and reports that the former was thrown into prison for embezzlement; his "stories" would presumably be the excuses he gave to the court; Agyrrios is satirized in *Assemblywomen* 102ff.

[19] Athens allied with the king of Cyprus and the Pharaoh of Egypt against Persia in 391 B. C. (Xenophon *Hellenica* 4.8.24 and 5.1.10).

[20] Lais was a legendary courtesan residing in Corinth (see also below, 303-6); Philonides of Melite was an ugly rich man ridiculed in several comic fragments.

[21] A very wealthy son of the great general Konon; he will later become a major political and military figure. He apparently built in Athens a tower dedicated to Fortuna.

[22] Literally, "love of honor."

Wealth: Well, to me at least you two seem to speak well;
Except there is one thing only that I fear.
Chrem.: Explain, concerning what?
Wealth: How, over this power that you assert
I have, I would become master.

Chrem.: By Zeus! But they all do say
That Wealth [Wealth] is most cowardly![23]
Wealth: No! Least! But I
Am slandered by some burglar! For once when he had broken
And entered, he had nothing to take in the house,
Finding everything locked up;
And so he called foresight on my behalf cowardice.

Chrem.: Do not now worry about anything; if you become
A spirited, real man in the affair,
I will show you to be sharper in your sight than Lynceus.[24]

Wealth: How will you, being a mortal, have the power to do this?

Chrem.: I have a certain good hope on account of the things
Said to me by Phoebus [Apollo] "Himself, shaking the Pythian wreath."[25]

Wealth: And *That One* also knows about these matters?
Chrem.: So I assert.
Wealth: Watch out!
Chrem.: Don't give it any thought, Good Fellow!
For I—know it well—even if I have to die,
Myself shall do these things!
Kar.: And, if you wish, me too!

Chrem.: And many will be the allies on either side of us—
As many as are just and without a pearl of barley.

Wealth: Alas! You speak of rascally allies for us!

Chrem.: Not if they become wealthy again as at the beginning!
But you [to Karion], running swiftly, go—
Kar.: What shall I do? Tell me!

Chrem.: Summon the fellow farmers, whom you will probably find
In the fields, miserably toiling,
So that each, being present here, equally
Would have a share with us in this Wealth.

Kar.: I am on my way; this little piece of meat[26] here
Let someone from within take and bring in.

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[23] See Euripides *Phoenician Women* 597: "Wealth is a coward."

[24] One of the Argonauts, who had eyes that could see into the earth (see Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonauts* 1.153-55).

[25] From an unknown tragedy.

[26] The left-over from the sacrifice to Apollo that Chremylos made before the action of the play began.

Chrem.: I'll take care of *that*; but you run and get it done.
But you, Wealth, most mighty of all divinities,
Come inside here with me; for this house
It is, that today you must
Make full of money, through just and unjust means!

Wealth: But I am on each occasion pained—by the gods!—to enter
Someone else's house;
For I never reap any good from it.
For if I happen to go into a thrifty man's,
Immediately he buries me in the earth;
And then if some worthy human who is a friend comes along
Asking for a little bit of money to take,
He's denying that he ever saw me.
But if I happen to go into a mad human's,
I am cast among whores and dice,
And thrown naked out the door in no time.

Chrem.: For you have never happened upon a man of measure.
This is in a sense always my way;
For I have no man who's my rival in enjoying being thrifty—
But also, in turn, at spending, when this is needed.
But let's go in, as I want you to see
Both my wife and my only son,
Whom I love very much, after you.
Wealth: I believe it.
Chrem.: For why would anyone not speak to you what is true?

[Exit Chremylos and Wealth; enter Karion, with Chorus]

Kar.: Oh you who've often eaten thyme with my master,
Men who are friends and neighbors and lovers of toiling,
Hasten energetically, for the occasion does not admit delay,
But this is the peak moment, when it is necessary to show up and defend him!

CHORUS (leader): Don't you see that we have been for some time hurrying,
Eager in spirit, insofar as is possible for feeble old men?
But you probably would demand that I run, before you have explained to me,
Why your master has called me hither!

Kar.: But have I not told you long ago?! But you do not listen!
For the master declares, that all of you will in pleasure
Live, leaving behind a cold and harsh life!

Chor.: But what, and from what, is this business he declares?

Kar.: You rascals, he's coming here with a certain old man in tow,
Who is filthy, stooped, miserable, shriveled, bald, toothless;
And I think, by Heaven [Uranos], that he's even all hard-on!

Chor.: Oh messenger bearing golden words, what do you mean?
Explain to me again.
You are making it clear that he is coming with a sack of money!?

Kar.: I am saying that he has a sack of elderly evils!

Chor.: So then: you, for your trickery, wouldn't deserve to get away
Without punishment, when I have this stick?!

Kar.: Now do you regard me as a human who is by nature such,
In every respect, and would you believe me capable of saying what
is in no way sound?!
Chor.: Look how solemn this worn out fellow is! Your shins cry
"Ouch, ouch!" and your feet are longing for the shackles!

Kar.: You've drawn the lot, for jury duty, in your *coffin*,
So why don't you go?! Charon will give you your meal ticket![27]

Chor.: Split yourself! You're a Helot brat and by nature impudent!
A trickster, who doesn't have the stomach to explain to us—
Who, wearied with much toil, and not having leisure, have come
Here eager in spirit, having passed by many thyme plants!

Kar.: But I will no longer hide it from you. For, men, it is *Wealth*
Whom my master, who's going to make you wealthy, comes bringing!

Chor.: Is it really possible for all of us to be wealthy?!

Kar.: By the gods, very Midases (if you'll take the ears of an ass[28]).

Chor.: How pleased I am, and delighted!—and I want to dance
For pleasure, if indeed you are really saying true things!

Kar.: And I for my part will want—"THRETTANELO!"—to
Mimic the Cyclops, and, with my two feet thus stamping in rhythm,
Lead you![29] But come, children, shout repeatedly,
Bleating the songs of sheep
And of stinking goats:
Follow with uncovered, erect pricks; and you goats will have
your breakfast![30]

Chor.: And we for our part—"THRETTANELO!"—will seek you, Cyclops;
And when we, bleating, find you—hungering,
With your leather wallet and watery wild herbs, hung over,
Leading your sheep, and
Happening to fall asleep somewhere—
We'll take a great burning stake, and put out your eye!

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[27] A citizen would draw a letter-lot designating which court he would serve in for the day as juryman, and he would get a ticket at the end of the day that entitled him to receive his pay. Charon is the ferryman who conveys the souls of the dead across the river Styx to their permanent abode in the underworld.

[28] Midas, famously given by Dionysus a touch that turned everything to gold, was also cursed with ass's ears by Apollo, as punishment for having dared to judge the latter god the just loser in the great contest with the satyr Marsyas over who had greater musical wisdom.

[29] The scholiast explains that the references are parodying a dithyramb of Philoxenus of Cythera, entitled *Loves of Galatea and Cyclops*, in which the word "threttanello" is used to imitate the sound of the harp, and the Cyclops, dancing the so-called "Cyclops dance," was depicted with a wallet and herbs (see line 298 below).

[30] Literally, "drink wine neat": as the scholiast explains, this was a word for breakfasting, because that meal often or usually included bread dipped in wine.

Kar.: And for my part, that Circe who mixed the poisons,
Which once in Corinth persuaded the companions of Philonides
That they were swine,
And ate kneaded shit, which she kneaded for them,
I shall imitate in all ways![31]
And do you, grunting with love of pleasure,
Follow mother, piggies!

Chor.: And then you, the Circe who mixed the poisons,
And bewitched and corrupted the companions,
We will catch by love of pleasure;
Mimicing the Son of Laertes,[32] we shall hang you up by the balls,
And befoul your nose with dung like a goat!
A very gaping Aristyllus,[33] you will say:
"Follow mother, piggies!"

Kar.: But enough now: leave off the jesting,
And turn to another style;
I, going now in secret
Want to take from the master
Some bread and meat—
Which having chewed, it's back to the toil.

[Karion goes inside]

[A Short Dance and Song by the Chorus]

[Chremylos comes out]

Chrem.: To bid you "cheerful welcome," men who are neighbors,
Is now old-fashioned and musty;
But I salute you, because you have come, eager in spirit,
And keyed up, and in no slothful fashion!
See that you stand by me in the rest,
And become really the saviors of the god!

Chor.: Be bold: for you will seem to see in me Ares!
For terrible would it be, if for the sake of three obols in money
We used to jostle one another in the assembly each time,
But I would let Wealth himself be taken!

Chrem.: And now I see Blepsidemos here
Approaching also. It's obvious that
He has heard something of the affair, by his pace and speed.

BLEPSIDEMOS: What's afoot then? From whence and in what way
Has Chremylos suddenly become wealthy? I don't believe it!
But—by Heracles!—there was much talk among those sitting in the barbers' shops,

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[31] This mingles the legend of Odysseus with that of Philonides.

[32] In the *Odyssey* (22.178), Melanthius is hung up, with his hands and feet tied to a board, by Odysseus.

[33] The scholiast indicates that the "gaping" of Aristyllus refers to his notoriety in oral sex, apparently as a coprophiliac—referred to also in *Assemblywomen* 647, and Fragment 551.

To the effect that the man has suddenly become wealthy!
But this is to me the wonder: that
Having done something worthy, he should call in his friends!
This is not what's done, according to local custom anyway!

Chrem.: But I will speak hiding nothing:[34] by the gods,
Oh Blepsidemos, we are faring better than yesterday,
So that it's possible to share! For you are one of the friends.

Blep.: But have you truly become, as they say, wealthy?!

Chrem.: I will be, very shortly, if the god is willing—
For there is, . . . there is, . . . a certain risk in the business.

Blep.: What's that?
Chrem.: What?
Blep.: Speak and finish whatever you were just saying!
Chrem.: If we get things right, it's prosperity forever!
But if we slip, totally rubbed out!

Blep.: The business appears evil,
And does not please me; because immediately
To become thus over-wealthy, and at the same time to be fearful,
Is not at all healthy for a working man.

Chrem.: How not at all healthy?
Blep.: If you come having stolen—by Zeus!—
Some silver or gold from
The god there, and then perhaps you have remorse . . .

Chrem.: Apollo shield me from such! By Zeus, I have not!

Blep.: Stop chattering, good fellow; for I know clearly!

Chrem.: Do not suspect any such thing of me!

Blep.: Alas! That there is nothing simply sound about anyone,
But all are overcome by gain!

Chrem.: By Demeter, *you* don't seem healthy to me!

Blep.: How greatly he has changed from his former ways!

Chrem.: By Heaven [Uranos], fellow, you're mad with melancholy!

Blep.: His look doesn't stay fixed;
It is obvious that some completely wicked thing has been done.

Chrem.: I know what you're croaking about!—Supposing me to have
Stolen something, you're seeking a share!
Blep.: Seeking to share?—In what?
Chrem.: Well that's not it, but something else is afoot.

Blep.: So it's not theft—but violent robbery?!
Chrem.: You're possessed by an evil divine spirit!

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[34] An echo of Euripides *Phoenicians* 701.

Blep.: So you haven't committed any fraud at all?

Chrem.: Not me!
Blep.: Heracles! Come, where should one turn?
For you're not willing to explain the truth!

Chrem.: You're accusing before knowing from me what the affair is!

Blep.: Look, man, for only a little trifle,
I am willing to take care of this—before the city learns:
I'll seal the mouths of the orators with some coins!

Chrem.: And—by the gods!—you seem to me to be ready
To spend three minas and reckon it twelve!

Blep.: I envisage one who is sitting on the rostrum,
Holding the bough of supplication, with his children
And his wife—no different from
The Heraclidae of Pamphilus![35]

Chrem.: No, you who are beset by an evil divine spirit! But it is
Only the worthy and the just and the moderate-thinking,
Whom I am going to make wealthy henceforth!
Blep.: What are you saying?
You've stolen that much?!
Chrem.: Ai yi yi! With these evils
You are destroying me!
Blep.: You are destroying yourself, it seems to me!
Chrem.: No indeed, since it is Wealth, you villain, that I have!

Blep.: YOU have wealth? Of what sort?
Chrem.: The god Himself!
Blep.: And where is he?
Chrem.: Inside.
Blep.: Where?
Chrem.: My place.
Blep.: YOUR place!?
Chrem.: Certainly.
Blep.: Won't you go to the crows!? Wealth, at your place!!
Chrem.: By the gods!
Blep.: Are you speaking the truth?
Chrem.: I declare it.
Blep.: In the name of Hestia?
Chrem.: By Poseidon.
Blep.: You mean the sea god?
Chrem. If there is another Poseidon, then by that other!

Blep.: But you aren't sending him around to us, your friends?!

Chrem.: This is not yet what's to be done at this time.
Blep.: What do you mean? Not time for sharing?
No, by Zeus!—because what's necessary first . . .
Blep.: Is what?

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[35] Apparently the famous painter Pamphilus portrayed, in a scene from mythic tradition, the children of the dead Heracles with their grandmother supplicating the king of Athens for protection from the persecution of Eurystheus, a powerful Mycenean king.

Chrem.: Is for us two to make him see.
Blep.: Who see? Explain!
Chrem.: Wealth—even as before, somehow.

Blep.: Because he really is blind?
Chrem.: Yes, by Heaven [Uranos]!
Blep.: So it's not without reason then that he never comes to me!

Chrem.: But if the gods are willing, he'll arrive now!

Blep.: So isn't it necessary to bring in some doctor?

Chrem.: What doctor is there in the city now?
For there's no pay, and so no practice of the art.

Blep.: Let's look. [He looks around the audience]
Chrem.: But there isn't any!
Blep.: Nor does there seem to me to be.
Chrem.: But by Zeus, what has been planned for a while
By me—to have him lie down in the temple of Ascelpius—
Is what is most effective.
Blep.: Yes, by far, by the gods!
Don't spend time now, but accomplish it!

Chrem.: Indeed, I'm on my way!
Blep.: Hurry!
Chrem.: I shall! [Starts to hurry off.]
POVERTY [Penia]: Oh, it is a brazen deed, and impious, and against the law,
That you two little humans, beset with an evil divine spirit, dare to do!
Where, oh where, are you fleeing? Why aren't you staying?
Blep.: Heracles!
Pov. I shall destroy you evil ones, in an evil fashion!
For you two have dared a piece of daring that is intolerable,
Such as no one else ever has done,
Neither god nor human. As a consequence, you two shall die!

Chrem.: But WHO are *you*!? For you seem to me to be ghastly pale!

Blep.: Perhaps she's a Fury from tragedy;[36]
She stares in a mad and tragic way, at any rate.

Chrem.: But she doesn't have torches.
Blep.: Well then, she'll weep!
Pov.: Who do you *suppose* Me to be?
Chrem.: A tavern hostess,
Or a pudding-seller. Otherwise you wouldn't be
Yelling so much at us when you've been done no injustice!

Pov.: In truth?! So you two haven't committed the most terrible of
Things, in seeking to throw me out of the entire land?!

Chrem.: Well, wouldn't the pit for criminals' corpses be left for you?
But you better tell who you are, very quickly!

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[36] Perhaps a reference to the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus. When it is pointed out to Blepsidemos that she does not have the torches that Furies were believed to carry, he ceases to fear her.

Pov.: I am SHE who will today make you two pay the judicial penalty,
For seeking to make *me* vanish from here!

Blep.: So then is she that neighborhood barmaid,
Who's always cheating me with the cup-measures?

Pov.: I'm *POVERTY*—who've been living with you two all these many years!

Blep.: Leader Apollo and gods! Where might one flee?

Chrem.: Here, what are you doing? Oh you most cowardly of beasts!
Will you not stay?!
Blep.: Least of all!
Chrem.: You're not staying?!—
But we, two real men, are going to flee one woman?!

Blep.: Yes, for she's *Poverty*, you rascal!—Than whom no
Animal more destructive has ever existed by nature!

Chrem.: Stand! I beseech you, stand!
Blep.: By Zeus, not me!
Chrem.: Now I say that it will be the most terrible deed by far,
Of all deeds, that we will be doing, if
Leaving the god deserted, we will flee,
Fearing this woman, and won't fight!

Blep.: Trusting in what sort of weapons or power?
For what breast plate, what shield,
Has this most abominable one not made to be pawned?

Chrem.: Be bold! For I know that this god by himself
Will set up a victory trophy over her ways!

Pov.: You two dare to mutter, you rubbish,
Having been caught in the act of doing terrible things?

Chrem.: And you, Oh most evil off-scouring, why do you revile
Us, coming forward when you have been done nothing unjust?

Pov.: Nothing! Oh before the gods! Do you believe
You do me no injustice in trying to make Wealth
See again?
Chrem.: Why in this are we doing you an injustice,
If we provide for all humans
Good?
Pov.: What good would you two devise?
Chrem.: What?—First, throwing *you* out of Greece!

Pov.: Throwing Me out! And what would you two believe
Would be a greater evil you could do to humans?

Chrem.: What?—Well, if we were going to *forget* to do this very thing!

Pov.: And now about this, I am willing to enter into a debate with you two,
First off; and I would demonstrate that I alone
Am the cause of all good things for you,
And that through me you live! And if not,
You two do now whatever this is that seems best to you.

Chrem.: You dare to say this, you most abominable one?!

Pov.: And *you* will learn it! For I think that I'll rather easily
Demonstrate all the grave errors you commit,
If you claim that you will make the just wealthy.

Chrem.: Oh cudgels and stocks, won't you come help?

Pov.: You shouldn't rage and shout before you've learned.

Chrem.: And who could refrain from shouting "Ho, ho!"
When he hears such things?
Pov.: He who thinks well.

Chrem.: What judicial penalty shall I write up for you,
If you're defeated?
Pov.: Whatever suits your opinion.
Chrem.: Nobly spoken.
Pov.: For it is the same that you two ought to suffer, if you two lose.

Chrem.: Do you believe twenty deaths sufficient?

Blep.: For her, yes; but for us two, only two will suffice.

Pov.: It won't be long before you undergo this, for what
Just thing would anyone still have to say on the other side?

Chorus Leader: But now you must say something wise by which you can win against her,
By speaking opposing arguments, and showing no softness!

Chrem.: For my part I think that this is known plainly to all alike:
That it is just for the worthy among humans to prosper;
And for the wicked and the atheists, surely the contrary.
Now it is this that we, desiring, have with toil figured out, so
That there has come into being a plan that is noble, and well-born, and useful for every work.
For, if Wealth now should see, and not wander about being blind,
He will go to the good among humans and will not leave,
While He will flee the wicked and the atheists; and then he will make
Everyone worthy and wealthy, surely, and reverencing the divine.
And who would ever devise something better for humans than this?

Blep.: No one! I am a witness of this on your behalf. Don't ask *her* this!

Chrem.: For, as life *now* is disposed for us humans,
Who would not consider it to be mad and beset with an evil divine spirit?
For many humans are wealthy, being rogues,
Having acquired unjustly; and many who are very worthy
Fare badly, starve, and spend most of the time with You.
I assert that this would not thus be, if Wealth were once to see, and stop her!—
Taking a path by which he would provide great good to humans.

Pov.: Oh you two—of all humans the most easily persuaded, to become unsound!
Two old men, partners in driveling and missing the point!

If what you two long for were to come to pass, I assert that it would not be to your profit.
For if Wealth were to see again, and to divide himself equally,
No one among humans would care for art or wisdom;
And if both of these disappear for you, then who will be willing
To work in bronze, or to build ships, or to sew, or to make wheels,
Or to make shoes, or to work in stone, or to launder, or to tan hides,
Or, having broken the surface of the earth with ploughs, to harvest the fruit of Demeter—
If it were possible for you to live in idleness, careless of all these?

Chrem.: You are driveling drivel! For all these things you have gone through now
The servants will toil at for us!
Pov.: From where will you have servants?
Chrem.: We'll buy them with the money, of course!
Pov.: Who'll be the first seller,
When he too has money?
Chrem.: Some merchant wishing to gain,
Who arrives from Thessaly, where there are the most slaves.

Pov.: But in the first place, no one at all will be a slaver,
According to the argument you're uttering. For who of the rich will be willing to
Do this, risking his own life [lit., "soul"]?
So you yourself will be constrained to plow and to dig and to toil at the other things,
Wearing out a life much more painful than the one now!
Chrem.: Let this curse be on your head!
Pov.: In addition, you won't be able to sleep in a bed, because there won't be any;
Nor even in covers; because who'll be willing to weave when there's gold?
Nor will you two be able to perfume with drops of scent your bride when you lead her home,
Nor to adorn her with the expenses of variegated dyed dress.
And indeed what more is there to wealth if you lack these things?
But by me, all these things that you two need are readily provided;
For I sit like a mistress constraining the craftsman
Through need and poverty to seek a livelihood.

Chrem.: What good are *you* able to provide?—except burns from the bath,[37]
And the uproar from starving little kids and old hags?
And I can't count for you the number of the lice and the mosquitoes and the fleas
Who torment, humming around the head,
Waking one up and saying, "you're starving, but get up!"
Besides these things, instead of a cloak, one has a rag; instead of a bed,
Straw full of bugs who wake up the sleepers;
And you have a rotten rush mat instead of a rug; instead of a pillow,
A big stone for your head; instead of bread, you'll eat
Mallow shoots; and instead of cakes, withered radish leaves;

[37] The poor had to crowd one another around the stove in the public baths.

Instead of a bench, the top of a shattered jug; instead of a kneading trough,
The rib of a wine cask—and that broken! So then don't I
Show you to be the cause of many goods for all humans?

Pov.: You haven't been speaking of *my* life, but knocking that of beggars!

Chrem.: Don't we declare that Poverty is sister to Beggary?

Pov.: You're the ones who say that Dionysius is the same as Thrasybulus![38]
But my life doesn't suffer these things—by Zeus!—nor will it!
For the life of a beggar, about which you speak, is to live having nothing;
But the life of the poor man is to live frugally and with labors,
And there is no surplus for him, but neither does he lack.

Chrem.: How blessed—by Demeter!—is his life as you go through it,
If, having been frugal, and toiled, he leaves not enough for a tomb!

Pov.: Try to joke and make a comedy, careless of being serious—
Not knowing that I produce better real men than does Wealth,
Both in judgment and in form. For through *him* they have gouty feet,
And they're pot-bellied, and fat in the calves, and licentious fatsos;
While with *me* they're lean, wasp-waisted, and baleful for enemies!

Chrem.: For it is probably from starvation that you provide them the wasp-waists!
Pov.: I now conclude, concerning moderation; and I teach you two,
That orderliness dwells with me—but with Wealth is *hubris*.

Chrem.: It's certainly very orderly to steal and to break through house walls!
Blep.: By Zeus, how is it not orderly, if one has to escape notice?

Pov.: And now consider the orators in the cities, how when
They are poor, they are just, as regards the populace and the city,
But when they get rich from the common funds, they immediately become unjust:
Plotting against the majority, and making war on the populace.

Chrem.: But as regards none of these things, at least, do you lie, even if you are a malicious slanderer.
Still, don't preen yourself on this account; you shall weep,
Because you seek to persuade us of this—that Poverty is better than Wealth.
Pov.: And you at any rate have in no way been able to refute me in this matter,
But you chatter and flap about!
Chrem.: And why does everyone *flee* you?
Pov.: Because I make them better! The evidence is seen especially in
Children: for they flee their fathers when the latter are prudently thinking about what is best for them.
Thus it is a difficult task to discern the just.

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[38] Dionysius is a famous tyrant; Thrasybulus led the liberation of Athens from The Thirty tyrants.

Chrem.: So then You will assert that Zeus does not correctly discern
what is superior;
For That One also has Wealth!
Blep.:—And HER, he sends to us!
Pov.: You are both blind in your thinking, with the blindness of Kronos![39]
Zeus is surely poor—and *this* I shall now plainly teach you.
For if he were rich, how is it that when he himself made the
Olympic contest,
So that all the Greeks would gather every five years,
He announced that he would crown the winners among the
contestants
With an *olive wreath*? Surely, he would have required gold, if he'd
been rich!
Chrem.: It's exactly by this that That One clearly honors Wealth!
Being thrifty and wishing not to spend any of him,
He lavishes nonsense on the victors and keeps Wealth for
himself!
Pov.: You seek to tar him with a shame greater than that of Poverty,
If he, being wealthy, is so illiberal and so fond of gain!

Chrem.: But may Zeus destroy you, after crowning you with an olive
wreath!
Pov.: You have the gall to deny that all good things come to you
Through Poverty!
Chrem.: It's possible to learn this from Hecate—that is,
Whether being wealthy or being poor is better: for she tells
Those who have, and are wealthy, to send her a monthly meal,
While the poor among humans steal it before it's set down![40]—
But perish, and cease to mumble
Anymore about anything;
For you will not persuade, not even if you were to persuade!

Pov.: Oh city of Argos, listen to what sort of things he is saying![41]

Chrem.: She's calling Pauson[42] to be her messmate!

Pov.: The suffering I am enduring!

Chrem.: Go from us to the crows, quickly!

Pov.: Where on earth shall I go?

Chrem.: Go to the pillory! But you shouldn't delay—
Get it over with!

Pov.: Yet you two shall send for me,

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[39] Implying antiquated thinking, belonging to the eon (the reign of Kronos) before the reign of Zeus.

[40] On the thirtieth day of every month, the rich were supposed to have a meal put at one of the shrines to Hecate (a goddess of magic—cf. *Wasps* 804) situated where three roads met; and these meals (actually scraps, according to Demosthenes—54.39) became a dole for paupers.

[41] An echo of Euripides' *Telephus*—of which we possess only fragments. Cf. *Knights* 813.

[42] A painter, who is also teased for his poverty at *Acharnians* 854 and *Thesmophoriazusae* 949.

To come back here again!

Chrem.: Come home at that time; but now be hanged!
It is better for me to be wealthy,
And to let you bewail at length Your own head!

Blep.: By Zeus, I for my part am willing, being wealthy,
To enjoy festivity with my children
And wife; and, having bathed,
To proceed glistening from the baths—
And to the craftsmen,
And to Poverty—blow a fart!

[Poverty exits]

Chrem.: This worn out hag has left us.
But let's me and you as quickly as possible
Lay the god down in the temple of Asclepius!

Blep.: And let's certainly not take any time, lest someone else
Should come, preventing the doing of some of the work at hand.

Chrem.: Boy! Karion! You need to carry out the blankets,
And bring the god Himself, with customary observances,
And whatever else is well arranged within.

[A Short Dance and Song by the Chorus]

[The following morning . . .]

Karion: Oh you old men who have sopped up the most soup
With the smallest barley cakes at the feasts of Theseus![43]
How good your fortune is! How blessedly you fare!—
As do others, who partake of worthy character!

Chorus: What is it, you best fellow, regarding your friends?
For you evidently come as a messenger of something worthy!

Kar.: A very lucky deed has been accomplished by the master,
Or rather by Wealth Himself: for "instead of being blind
The pupils of his eyes are opened and made bright,
Through chancing upon a propitious healing song of Asclepius!"[44]

Chor.: What you say brings me joy, what you say makes me cheer!

Kar.: Joy it is, whether you wish it or you don't!

Chor.: I will cheer for Asclepius, favored in his offspring,[45]
And a great beacon for mortals!

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[43] The feasts of Theseus included meager public meals for the poor, consisting of soup and barley cakes, hollowed as scoops.

[44] The scholiast says that this contains a quotation from Sophocles' lost play *Phineus*.

[45] A reference to families of doctors spread over Greece, who were reputed to be descendants of Asclepius.

WIFE [OF CHREMYLOS]: What ever is the shouting about? Is there a
Report of something worthy? For it is this I have been longing for,
During the time I've been sitting within, waiting for him.

Kar.: Quickly, quickly bring wine, Mistress, so that
You too can drink! For you very much like to that!
And I bring you all good things together!

Wife: And where is it?
Kar.: In what's to be said you will soon know.
Wife: Well then, finish whatever you have to say!

Kar.: Just listen, as I relate to you
The entire affair, from the feet to the head.

Wife: Not on my head![46]
Kar.: Not even the good things
Which have now come to pass?
Wife: Not THAT business, now!

Kar.: Well: as quickly as possible we arrived at the god,
Bringing this man who was so miserable then,
But now is blessed and happy if anyone is—
First, indeed, we took him to the sea,
And then washed him.
Wife: By Zeus, he was then
Happy!?—an old man, being washed in the cold sea!?

Kar. And then we went to the sanctuary of the god;
And when on the altar a cake and preparatory sacrifices
Had been consecrated—"fuel for the Hephaestean flame,"[47]
We laid Wealth down, as was suitable.
And each of us put together a bed of straw.

Wife: And were there others beseeching the god?

Kar.: There was one, Neoclides,[48] who's blind,
But in stealing overshoots those who see;
And many others, who had all sorts of illnesses.
And as he put out the lamps,
The servant of the god enjoined us to sleep,
Saying, that if anyone perceived a noise
He should keep silent. We all lay down in orderly fashion.
But I wasn't able to sleep; I was distracted
By a pot of porridge that lay
A little above the head of an old hag—
And to which I had a preternatural desire to creep.
Then, opening my eyes, I saw the priest
Stealing the muffins and the figs
From the sacred table! After this,
He circled around to all the altars

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[46] "On your head" was a common phrase used to curse.

[47] A quotation from some unknown tragedy.

[48] An orator and "sycophant": see *Assemblywomen* 254, 398-407.

Upon which were left any cake—
Then he "consecrated" these in a certain sack.
So I, believing that there was much piety in the deed,
Went after the pot of porridge.

Wife: You greatest wretch among men! Didn't you fear the god?

Kar.: By the gods, I did—lest
He should get to the pot ahead of me, with his chaplets;
Because this priest had previously instructed me!
But the old hag, when she perceived my noise,
Stretched out her hand; and I, hissing,
Took it with my teeth as if I were a brown snake;[49]
She drew back her hand at once,
And lay wrapping herself up quietly,
Farting from fear with a stench worse than a weasel!
At that point I gulped much of the porridge,
And, when I was full, ceased.

Wife: The god didn't appear to you?
Kar.: Not yet.
After this I did do something ridiculous.
For as he approached, I
Farted a great fart (because my stomach was inflated).

Wife: Well, surely on account of that he was revolted by you!

Kar.: Nope; but Iaso,[50] **who was following, blushed a bit,**
And Panacea turned away,
Holding her nose: because I don't fart frankincense!

Wife: But He Himself?
Kar.: Oh, by Zeus, he didn't mind!

Wife: Well then, you're saying the god is a rude fellow!

Kar.: By Zeus, I am not! After all, he IS a shit-eater.[51]
Wife: You wretch!
Kar.: After these things, I at once hid myself,
In fear; and That One went around
Examining all the illnesses in a very orderly fashion.
Then a boy placed before him a stone pestle,
And mortar, and a little box.

Wife: Stone?
Kar.: By Zeus, not the box!
Wife: But how did you see, you worst of lost ones,
When you claim you had hidden yourself?!
Kar.: Through my cloak:
For by Zeus, it has not a few holes!

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[49] These snakes were ritually kept in sacred precincts, and twin snakes were closely associated with Asclepius, whose famous doctor's symbol is the staff around which two snakes are entwined.

[50] Iaso and Panacea were daughters of Asclepius.

[51] The scholiast explains that this refers to the fact that doctors examine excretion.

He first of all went about
Grinding a medicinal ointment for Neoclides, into which he put
Three heads of Tenian garlic; then he pounded
And mixed, in the mortar, fig-tree sap
And mastich; then, moistening it with Sphettian vinegar,
He turned up his eyelids and applied it to him—
So that the pain would be greater; and he screamed
And shouted, sprang up, and ran away. The god said laughing:
"Now sit there plastered,
So that I stop you from swearing oaths[52] in the assemblies!"

Wife: What a lover of the city is the Divinity, and wise!

Kar.: After this, he sat down next to Wealth,
And first he touched his head,
And then, taking a clean cloth,
He wiped around the eyes; and Panacea
Spread a red cloth over his head
And his whole face; then the god whistled,
And there darted out of the sanctuary two serpents,
Of a size more than natural!
Wife: Oh dear gods!
Kar.: These two, quietly plunging under the cloth,
Licked his eyelids, as it seemed to me;
And before it would be possible for you to drink ten goblets of wine,
Oh Mistress, Wealth stood up seeing!
And I clapped my hands with pleasure,
And woke the Master. But the god immediately
Made himself disappear, along with the serpents, into the sanctuary.
And how do you suppose the ones lying with him
Embraced Wealth, and stayed up the whole night,
Until the day broke!
And I praised the god very much,
Because he quickly made Wealth see,
But made Neoclides rather blind.

Wife: What power You have, Master and Leader!
But tell me, where is Wealth?
Kar.: He's coming.
But there was a crowd around him of more than natural size.
For the just, who before had a scanty life,
Greeted him and
All took his hand out of delight;
But as many as were wealthy and had much,
Having acquired the life by unjust means,
Knitting their brows, looked angry.
The others, however, followed along—wreathed,
Laughing, and speaking phrases of good omen; and
The shoes of the old men beat a rhythmic step.—
But come! [to chorus] All together with one voice,
Dance and jump and make a choral procession!
For no one will come in bringing to you the message,
That there is no barley in the bag!

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[52] The meaning of the Greek term is uncertain; it seems to signify some sort of obstructive affidavit procedure in the assembly.

Wife: By Hecate, and I want to crown
You—with a chain of barley cakes[53]—as a reward for good tidings,
For having brought such reports!
Kar.: Don't delay anymore,
As the men are near the doors already!

Wife: Come, I'm going in to fetch welcoming sweets,
As if for newly-purchased—eyes![54]

Kar.: And I want to go to meet them!

[A Short Song and Dance by the Chorus]

Wealth: And I make obeisance first to the Sun,
Then to the famous plain of Pallas Athena,
And the entire land of Cecrops,[55] that welcomes me.
And I am ashamed of my misfortunes,
Of the sort of humans with whom I consorted without realizing it—
While those who were deserving of my company,
I avoided, knowing nothing! Alas for me,
That neither the former nor the latter did I do correctly!
But now, reversing all these things,
I will show henceforth to all humans that
I gave myself to the wicked involuntarily.

[Enter Chremylos]

Chrem.: Go to the crows! —How difficult are the friends
Who show up immediately when one is prospering!
For they prod and they crush my calves,
Each displaying some goodwill.
Who has not greeted me?! What an elderly mob
Has encircled me in the agora!

Wife: Oh dearest of men—welcome to you—and to you!
Come now, it is the lawful custom:
Taking hold of You, I pour the sweets over you, thus!

Pl.: No way! For when I am entering a house
For the first time with sight, it is
Fitting that nothing be carried out, but only carried in.

Wife: Then You won't receive the sweets?!

Pl.: Inside, next to the hearth, as is the lawful custom!
And then we would get away from the trash.
For it is not fitting for The Teacher[56]

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[53] Bringers of good tidings were customarily crowned; the barley cakes are peculiarly suited to Karion, with his focus on food.

[54] It was a custom to welcome newly purchased slaves by showering them with sweets as they entered the house for the first time.

[55] The first legendary king of Attica.

To throw little figs and sweets to the spectators,
And with these to force a laugh from them.

Wife: You speak very well; for Dexinikos[57] there
Was getting up from his seat to rob the sweetmeats!

[They go in]

[A Short Dance and Song by the Chorus]

Kar.: How sweet it is, men, to fare happily,
And without any outlay from home!
For a heap of good things has into our homes
Burst, without us doing anything unjust!
To be wealthy thus is indeed a sweet affair!
The flour bin is full of white barley,
And the amphora of dark, flower-scented wine.
And with silver and gold are all our
Little containers full, in wondrous fashion.
And the well is full of olive oil; and the little cups
Teem with myrrh, and the attic with dried figs.
Every cruet and platter and pot
Has become bronze; the rotten trenchers
For fish are seen to be silver.
The privy has suddenly become ivory for us.
And we servants gamble with golden coins.
We wipe our bottoms no longer with stones,
But with garlic stalks, out of luxury, each time.
And now the master, wreathed, is inside slaying for sacrifice
A pig and a billy-goat and a ram.
The smoke has driven me out. I could no longer
Remain within. For it pained my eyes.

JUST MAN: Follow along with me, boy, so that to the god
We may come.
Kar.: Well, who's this coming here?

JM: A man who before was miserable, but is now fortunate!

Kar.: Obviously you are one of the worthy, as you appear.

JM: Very much so.
Kar.: So what do you need?
JM: To the god
I'm coming; for he is the cause for me of great goods!
For I, inheriting from my father sufficient property,
Came to the aid of friends in need,
Believing it to be useful in life.

Kar.: And presumably the money quickly left you!

JM: Exactly!

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[56]The producer, who would be Aristophanes himself. The producer was designated "The Teacher" because his main concern was instructing the chorus and actors.

[57] Some otherwise unknown member of the original audience.

Kar.: So after this, you were miserable.
JM: Exactly! And I thought that those whom for so long
I benefited, when they were needy, I would have as friends
Who were really firm, if I should ever be in need;
But they turned away and seemed not to see me.

Kar.: And did it laughing!—I know!
JM: Exactly!
For the drought being in my vessels was destroying me.

Kar.: But not now!
JM: Which is why I am to the god
Coming to give a just prayer of thanks here.

Kar.: But what, in the name of the gods, is the old cloak for,
Which this boy is carrying with you? Explain.

JM: This too I am going to dedicate to the god.

Kar.: So presumably you were initiated into the greater mysteries while wearing it?[58]

JM: No, but I shivered in it for thirteen years!

Kar.: And the shoes?
JM: And these have spent winters with me.
Kar.: So you're bearing these also to dedicate?
JM: Yes, by Zeus!

Kar.: Refined gifts that you've come bearing for the god!

[Enter Sycophant, accompanied by another man]

SYCOPHANT: Alas! Beset by an evil divine spirit, how wretchedly I've been destroyed!
And thrice beset by an evil divine spirit, and fourfold, and fivefold,
And twelvefold, and a thousandfold! Ai yi yi!
With thus prolific a divine spirit am I bound up!

Kar.: Apollo and the dear gods avert it!
Whatever evil is it that the fellow has suffered?

Syc.: Have I not now suffered harsh evils,
With everything in my home utterly taken,
On account of this god—Who will be blind
Once again, if acts of court justice be not lacking!

JM: In my opinion I am pretty sure I know what's the matter.
For a certain man arrives who's faring badly;
And it's likely to be a mark of wickedness.

Kar.: Well by Zeus, his destruction is nobly done!

Syc.: Where, where is he who promised that through himself alone

---

[58] The mystery rite of initiation, celebrated at Eleusis, where it was the custom to wear and dedicate old clothes (see *Frogs* 404-7).

He would make us all wealthy immediately,
If again as at the beginning he had sight? But he
Has much rather destroyed some!

Kar.: And to whom has he done this?
Syc.: ME! Here!

Kar.: But you were one of the wicked and the housebreakers?

Syc.: By Zeus, there's no soundness in any of you,
And there's no way that you don't have my goods!

Kar.: How arrogantly—Oh Demeter!—has the sycophant
Entered! He's plainly suffering from extreme hunger.

Syc.: You shall not delay in proceeding at once to the agora,
For there you must be racked on the wheel to
Make you say what crimes you have committed!
Kar.: You'll howl for that!
JM: By Zeus the Savior! Deserving of much
From all the Greeks is the god who
Evilly destroys the evils of sycophants!

Syc.: Alas, alas! *You*, too, are partaking in the laughter?!—
For from where did you take this cloak?!
Yesterday I saw you wearing a rag!

JM: I don't hold you in awe, for I bought
This ring-amulet from Eudamus for a drachma.[59]

Kar.: But there's nothing in it against the bite of a sycophant!

Syc.: But is this not great hubris?! You two jeer,
But what the two of you're about here you have not said:
For you're not up to any good here!

JM: By Zeus, not for you, you can know for sure!

Syc.: For you two are about to feast from my goods, by Zeus!

Kar.: May you in truth, along with your witness,
Burst yourselves from emptiness!

Syc.: Do you deny it? There is within, you most cursed one,
Much stuff of salted fish and roasted meat!
Sniff-sniff, sniff-sniff, sniff-sniff, sniff-sniff, sniff-sniff.

Kar.: What are you—beset by an evil divine spirit—smelling?
JM: Maybe it's the cold—
Since he's wearing such a rag!

Syc.: Are these things to be tolerated, Oh Zeus and gods?!—
That these people are insolent to ME?! Alas, how I am pained,
That being a worthy man and a friend to the city I suffer evilly!

---

[59] According to Theophrastus (*Enquiry into Plants* 9.17.2), "Eudamus the seller of medicines had a great reputation in the art"; a drachma is not a cheap price.

JM: YOU are a friend to the city and worthy?!
Syc.: Like no other man!
JM: So answer my questions—
Syc.: About what?
JM: Are you a farmer?
Syc.: Do you suppose me so melancholy-mad?
JM: Then a merchant?
Syc.: Ye-e-s, or at least, that's my excuse, when chance requires.[60]

JM: What then?—have you learned some craft?
Syc.: By Zeus, no!
JM: So how do you support yourself, or from what source,
since you do nothing?
Syc.: I am one who cares for the affairs of the city,
And of all the private persons!
JM: You! Having learned *what*?
Syc.: "I will!"[61]
JM: How then would you be worthy, you housebreaker,
If you make yourself hated, through what is not at all your business?

Syc.: Because is it not fitting that my own city be by me
Done good deeds as much as is in my strength, featherbrain?

JM: So being a busybody is doing good deeds?!

Syc.: Indeed: coming to the aid of the established laws,
And not leaving it to another if someone does wrong.

JM: Are there not jurors for that purpose whom the city
Appoints to rule?
Syc.: But who prosecutes?
JM: "The one who wills."
Syc. So then I am that one!
Therefore the affairs of the city fall on me.

JM: By Zeus, then it has a wicked leader!
But would you not "will" *this*: keeping quiet
To live in idleness?
Syc.: But you are speaking of the life of a sheep,
If no occupation is evident in life!

JM: You would not learn new ways?
Syc.: Not if you would give me
Wealth Himself and the fennel of Battus![62]

JM: Quickly lay down your cloak! . . .
Kar.: It's YOU he's speaking to!
JM: Then undo your sandals! . . .
Kar.: All these things are said to YOU!

---

[60] To be a merchant could exempt one from military service (cf. *Assemblywomen* 1027).

[61] This is a legal formula referring to the right any citizen ("he who wills") had to initiate a legal action in certain cases—which enabled the "sycophants" to bring their lawsuits against the rich.

[62] Silphium or giant fennel was the source of the wealth of Cyrene, whose founder was Battus.

Syc.: Let him among you come against me here
"Who wills!"
Kar.: So then I am that one!!
Syc.: Alas, alas! I'm being stripped in daylight!

Kar.: For you would deserve it, eating by meddling in others' business!

Syc.: [To his witness] Do you see the things he's doing? I call you to witness these things!
JM: But he's leaving in flight—the one you brought to be a witness!

Syc.: Alas I'm alone and surrounded!
Kar.: Now do you shout?
Syc.: Alas, alas again!
Kar.: You, give me the rag,
So that I can clothe this sycophant.

JM: No indeed! For it's been sacred to Wealth for some time.

Kar.: But where will it be offered up more nobly,
Than draped around a wicked man and a housebreaker?
But Wealth it is fitting to adorn with august robes.

JM: What's to be done with this footwear? Tell me.

Kar.: These on his forehead immediately
I shall nail, as on an olive tree.[63]

Syc.: I am leaving. For I know that I am much weaker than
You. But if I get some partner,
Even if he's fig-wood,[64] **this strong god**
I shall make pay a judicial penalty today,
Because he, being one alone, is plainly dissolving
The democracy, trusting neither to the council
Of the citizens nor to the assembly!

JM: And now, since it's with my panoply
That you are going, run to the bath;
And then stand there as the coryphaeus of warmth.
For I held that station once.

Kar.: But the keeper of the bath will grab him by the balls
And throw him out the door; for on seeing him he'll recognize
The mark of wickedness!
But now let's go in, so that you may pray to the god.

[A Short Dance and Song by the Chorus]

OLD WOMAN: Have we then, you dear old men,
Really arrived at the house of this new god,
Or have we completely missed the way?

---

[63] Offerings were often nailed to olive trees in sanctuaries.

[64] A play on the word "fig-wood" (*sykinos*)—a word used metaphorically for something cheap and worthless—and the word "sycophant."

Chor.: But know, that you have arrived at the very doors—
Young lady: for you inquire as one in bloom.

[Chremylos comes out]

OW: Well, I'll call now for someone of those within.

Chrem.: No indeed—for I myself have come out.
But you ought to say why exactly you have come.

OW: Dearest one, I have suffered terrible things, against the law!
For from the time when this god began to see,
He has make life unlivable for me!

Chrem.: What's the matter? —Or is it not, presumably, that you too
Were "sycophanting,"[65] amongst the women?
OW: By Zeus, I was not!
Chrem.: But you were drinking, when you hadn't drawn a lot?[66]

OW: You're mocking. But I am being torn apart in a pitiable fashion!

Chrem.: Won't you then speak and finish the account of the tearing apart?
OW: Listen now: I had a dear youth,
Poor, but otherwise handsome and noble and
Worthy; for if I was in need of something,
He did it all for me in a lovely and beautiful way;
And I served him, in all these ways.

Chrem.: What was it in particular that he needed each time from you?

OW: Not many things. For he was uncustomarily bashful in regard to me.
But he would ask for twenty silver drachmas,
For a cloak, and eight, for shoes;[67]
And for his sisters he would ask to buy a little garment,
And for his mother a little cloak.
And he would need four bushels of wheat.

Chrem.: By Apollo, these are not many things that
You've mentioned, but it is clear that he *was* bashful in regard to you!

OW: And these things he asked me for, not out of greed,
He said, but out of affection,
So that by wearing my cloak he would be reminded of me!

Chrem.: You describe a fellow uncustomarily passionate in love!

OW: But now, the brute is no longer of the same mind,
But very altered entirely!
For when I sent to him this flat cake,[68]

---

[65] Here there is a double-entendre: the verbal form of "sycophant" was slang for sexual congress.

[66] A jesting reference to the lots by which citizens were assigned to juries, the pay for which supported many of the poor: a woman would not of course participate.

[67] These are moderate prices: in the *Assemblywomen* 413 it is said that the cheapest cloak cost 16 drachmas.

And the other sweets on the board,
Promising that I would be
Coming in the evening, —
Chrem.: What'd he do to you? Tell me!
OW: He sent back to us this milk cake,
On the condition, that I never again go there,
And in addition to these things, said, on sending them back, that
"It was long ago that the Milesians once were brave."[69]

Chrem.: It's obvious that he's someone not wicked in his ways,
But now that he's wealthy, he's no longer pleased by lentils!
Before, on account of poverty, he'd eat anything!

OW: And yet, before, every day—by the twin goddesses![70]**—**
He always came to my door!

Chrem.: To see if you were being carried out [to your funeral]?
OW: By Zeus, only out of passionate love to hear my voice!
Chrem.: (So as to get a gift.)
OW: And by Zeus, if he perceived me out of sorts,
He would call me the baby-names "duckling" and "little dove!"

Chrem.: (And then probably ask you about shoes.)

OW: And at the Great Mysteries, when I was riding
In my cart,[71] **if someone looked at me,**
I would be beaten[72] **the whole day on account of this—**
So jealous the youth was!

Chrem.: (Because he liked to feed alone, probably!)

OW: And he said I had altogether beautiful hands.

Chrem.: (When they stretched forth twenty drachmas.)

OW: And he said of my skin that it was sweet to smell.

Chrem.: (If you poured Thasian wine, in all likelihood, by Zeus!)

OW: And how I had a look that was soft and beautiful!

Chrem.: (The fellow wasn't a fool, but knew
That the old lady was a rutting sow, and he fed himself off the proceeds.)

---

[68] There is a double entendre, to which the old woman is oblivious, in the words for "flat cake," "sweets," and "milk cake," which are all slang for the female genitalia.

[69] A proverb—originally a line of the poet Anacreon.

[70] Demeter and her daughter Persephone.

[71] In the ritual procession—cf. *Frogs* 401; only the rich could afford carts.

[72] There is a double entendre, unintended by the old woman, in the Greek verb (which is slang for sexual congress).

OW: So, my dear man, in doing these things the god acts incorrectly,
While claiming always to help those who are done injustice.

Chrem.: Well, what *shall* he do? Say, and its done!

OW: It's just, by Zeus, to compel
The one done well by me to requite by doing well to me,
Or else it is not just that he have any good.

Chrem.: Didn't he pay you every night?

OW: But he declared that he would never leave me so long as I lived!

Chrem.: (Rightly indeed; but now he thinks that you no longer live.)

OW: Oh dearest one! I have melted away with pain!

Chrem.: (It's rather that you've rotted away, it seems to me!)

OW: You could draw me through a ring!

Chrem.: (If the ring happened to be a barrel hoop!)

OW: And now here comes the youth,
The one I happen to have been accusing for so long!
Likely going to a revel.
Chrem.: So he appears.
He proceeds wreathed, and holding a torch.

YOUNG MAN: I greet you!
OW: What's he say?
YM: Dear ancient one,
You have swiftly become grey, by Heaven [Uranos]!

OW: I am made wretched by suffering such hubris!

Chrem.: It's probably been a long time since he's seen you.

OW: What time, you wretch!—He was with me yesterday!

Chrem.: Then he has undergone the opposite of what happens to the many;
For being drunk, as is likely, he sees more sharply.

OW: No, but he is always unrestrained in his ways!

YM: Oh Poseidon of the sea and elderly gods!
How many wrinkles she has in her face!

OW: Ai yi yi!
Don't bring the torch close to me!
Chrem. (Well spoken indeed!
For if only one spark seizes her,
She'll burn like an ancient harvest-wreath!)

YM: Do you want to fool around with me for a while?
OW: How?—You wretch!
YM: Right here, taking hold of the nuts.

OW: What game?

YM: How many teeth you have![73]

Chrem.: But even I know that:
For she has maybe three or four!

YM: Pay up! For she has only one molar!

OW: You wretch among men! In my opinion, you're not sane,
To make me a washing-pit before so many men!

YM: You would profit from it, is someone were to wash you!

Chrem.: No indeed; since now she's dolled up for sale;
But if this white makeup were washed off,
The tatter of her face would be plain!

OW: For an old man, you don't seem to me to be sane!

YM: He's maybe testing you, and feeling your tits,
Thinking he's escaping my notice.

OW: By Aphrodite, not mine, you crude fellow!

Chrem.: By Hecate, no! For I'd be crazy!
But young man, I won't let this girl
Be hated by you.
YM: But I am excessively fond of her!
Chrem. Yet she accuses you.
YM: What's the accusation?
Chrem.: She asserts that you're hubristic, and that you say,
"It was long ago that the Milesians once were brave."

YM: I won't fight with you over her.
Chrem.: What do you mean?
YM: I'm abashed by your age, since
I would never allow another to do this;
But now, go away, take the girl and enjoy yourself!

Chrem.: I know, I know what's in your mind! You probably don't think
It's worthwhile to be with her anymore.
OW: Who's the one "allowing?"
YM: I won't get into a discussion with a woman who's been thoroughly screwed
By thirteen thousand years/comrades![74]

Chrem.: All the same, since you considered it worth it to drink the wine,
You have to drink the dregs also.

YM: But she is completely ancient and rotten dregs!

Chrem.: Then a straining cloth will remedy everything!

YM: But I'm going inside; for I want to go to the god

---

[73] A common child's game was betting on guessing the number of nuts someone held.

[74] The word has this twofold meaning.

To dedicate these wreathes that I have.

OW: And I for my part also wish to say something to Him!

YM: But then I am not going in!
Chrem.: Pluck up, don't be afraid!
For she won't rape!
YM: You speak very nobly!
For I spent enough time before, lubricating her down below!

OW: Go ahead; I'll go in behind you.

Chrem.: How intently—Oh Zeus the King!—does the old woman,
Like a barnacle, stick to the youth!

[A Short Dance and Song by the Chorus]

Kar.: Who's knocking at the door? . . . What is this? . . .
Looks like no one! But indeed the door
Will wail with sorrow for having made an untoward noise!
HERMES: You! I say:
Karion! Stay!
Kar.: Tell me, you:
Were you the one knocking so hard on the door?

H.: By Zeus, I was about to; but you anticipated me by opening!
But run fast and call the master,
And then the wife and the children,
And then the servants, and then the dog,
And then yourself, and then the pig!
Kar. Tell me,
What's up?
H.: Zeus, you rascal, wishes
To grind you up together in the same bowl,
All at once, and throw you into the pit![75]

Kar.: Let the tongue be cut of the herald of these things!
For what reason does he plan to do these things to us?

H.: Because you have carried out the most terrible of actions!
For from the beginning of the time when Wealth has started to have
Sight, no one has offered incense, or laurel,
Or barley-cake, or consecrated animal, or any other single thing,
As sacrifice to us gods anymore!
Kar.: By Zeus, nor
Will offer sacrifice! For before, you exercised bad providential
care of us!
H.: The other gods are of less concern to me,
But me! —I'm finished, I'm worn out!
Kar.: You're prudently moderate.
H.: For before, I had from the barmaids
All good things, starting from dawn: wine cake, honey,
Figs—as many things as it was likely that Hermes would eat.
But now, I'm starving and cooling my heels.

---

[75] Reminiscent of the threats Hermes utters in the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, 994; see also Aristophanes *Peace* 228-31.

Kar.: Isn't that just, for you who used to punish
Sometimes, when you had such goods?
H.: Alas, alas!
Alas—for the flat cake that is cooked on the fourth![76]

Kar.: "You long for what is not present, and you call in vain."[77]

H.: Alas for the ham that I used to eat!

Kar.: Hop on the inflated bladders![78]

H.: For the hot innards that I used to eat!

Kar.: There's probably some pain churning in *your* innards!

H.: And alas for the cup with equal parts water and wine!

Kar.: If you take a sip from this, and then run off, you won't be going too soon!
H.: Wouldn't you help your friend a little?

Kar.: If he needs something and I'm able to be of assistance.

H.: If you could just provide me with some well-baked bread,
And if you could give me some fresh meat to devour,
From what you're sacrificing within.
Kar.: But it's not for export!
H.: And when you lifted some little pot of the master's,
I always made you escape notice!

Kar.: On condition that you got a share, you housebreaker![79]
For a firm, well-baked cake always came to you!

H.: And then you yourself would eat this!

Kar.: For you did not share equally with me in the whippings,
When I was caught being a thorough rascal!

H.: Don't be a bearer of grudges, if you've captured Phyle;[80]
But in the name of the gods, receive me into the household!

Kar.: Then will you leave the gods and remain here?

---

[76] The fourth day of each month was traditionally celebrated as the birthday of Hermes, when these cakes were dedicated to him.

[77] According to the scholiast, a line from a (lost) tragedy, referring to Heracles seeking his beloved, Hylas.

[78] A play on words: at a Dionysian festival day named "Askolia"—a word that sounds as if it could mean "ham-less"—a game was played of hopping on inflated bladders.

[79] Hermes was the god of thieves and thievery.

[80] The taking of Phyle was the first big stage in the overthrow of the Thirty tyrants by the democrats, after which there was declared a general amnesty.

H.: For it is much better with you.

Kar.: What? Does deserting seem to you to be civic?

H.: For every fatherland is wherever one prospers![81]

Kar.: What benefit would you be to us by being here?

H.: You will install me as the Hinge-god by the door.

Kar.: The Hinge-god? But there's no work for the "shifty."[82]

H.: But as the Commerce-god.
Kar.: But we're wealthy; why
Do we need to provide for Hermes the Retailer?

H.: But as the Deceiver.
Kar.: Deceiver?! Least of all!
For now there's no work of deception, but straightforward mores.

H.: But as the Guide.
Kar.: But the god now sees,
With the result that we don't need a guide anymore.

H.: Well, I'll be the Contest-god. Now what will you say?
For this is most congenial to Wealth,
To provide musical and gymnastic contests![83]

Kar.: How good it is to have many epithets!
For this one has discovered how to make a living for himself!
Not without reason do all the jurors frequently
Hasten to get themselves enrolled in many drawings!

H.: So I can come in on these terms?
Kar.: And also you wash
The tripe yourself, after you've gone to the well—
So that you'll immediately seem to be The Server.[84]

[A Short Dance and Song by the Chorus]

PRIEST: Who can tell me clearly where Chremylos is?

Chrem.: What is it, best one?
P.: What else but bad news?
For from the time when this Wealth began to see,
I've been destroyed by hunger! For I have nothing to eat,

---

[81] This sounds like a line from some tragedy.

[82] "The Hinge-god" designates a traditional role of Hermes, whose statues were placed next to the hinges of the outer door of homes, to ward off other thieves; the words for "hinge" and "shifty" are related, and there is a pun here. In what follows, Hermes tries to find employment by mentioning a series of his traditional roles.

[83] The wealthiest citizens paid for the public contests.

[84] Hermes had a traditional role as personal servant to Zeus: Aeschylus *Prometheus* 963.

And I'm suffering these things while being a priest of Zeus the Savior!

Chrem.: And what's the reason, in the name of the gods?

P. No one thinks it worthwhile to sacrifice!
Chrem.: Why is that?
P. Because all are rich! And indeed before,
When they had nothing, the merchant would come
To sacrifice of something because he was preserved; and another
Because he had been acquitted in a case of justice; and one who had
Fine auspices from his sacrifice would invite me, the priest; but now,
Not a single one sacrifices anything at all, nor comes in—
Except that more than a myriad use it to relieve themselves in!

Chrem.: Well, don't you receive the lawful share from these?

P.: So I myself have decided to bid good-bye to Zeus the Savior,
And to settle down right here!

Chrem.: Pluck up! For you'll do so in noble fashion, if the god is willing,
For Zeus the Savior is himself here,
Having come of his own accord.
P.: What you say is all good!
Chrem.: Now we're this moment about to perform—stay around—the
Installation of Wealth, where formerly He was installed—
Always guarding the back chamber of the goddess.[85]
But let someone give out here lit torches,
So that you can lead the god's procession with one!
P.: Certainly
These are the things that ought to be done!
Chrem.: Someone call Wealth outside!
OW: And me, what shall I do?
Chrem.: Take the pots that we'll use in the
Installation of the god and carry them on your head
Solemnly. —And you've come with your festive dress!

OW: But what about the *reason* I came?
Chrem.: All will be taken care of for you.
For the youth will come to you in the evening.

OW: But if indeed—by Zeus!—you pledge to me that
He is coming to me, I *will* carry the pots!

Chrem.: And now these pots are doing the opposite of what other
Pots do: for in other pots the "old woman"[86] **is on the top,**
But now the pots are on top of this old woman!

Chor.: We also shouldn't tarry, but take up
The rear; for we need to follow behind these, singing.

—Actors and Chorus dance and sing in procession out—

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[85] Athena, in the back room of whose temple on the acropolis the city's treasure was stored in the days of the Athenian empire—whose wealth is now to be more than restored.

[86] The word for "old woman" is also a word for the scum that forms on the top of heated or cooked liquids in pots.