*Aristophanes*

**THE FROGS**

*[The play opens on a street leading to Hades, with a door in the centre of the backstage area. Enter The God Dionysus, appearing as a middle-aged man with a noticeable paunch. He is out of shape, and is trying to hide it by dressing like the mythical warrior Hercules, by wearing a yellow tunic and over that a lion skin. He’s carrying a huge club, one commonly associated with Hercules. Behind him comes his slave Xanthias riding on a donkey and carrying a huge amount of luggage. Xanthias notices the audience]*

XANTHIAS  
Look, master, an audience! Shouldn’t I say something?  
Tell them one of those jokes they always fall for?

DIONYSUS  
O, all right—say what you like. Only no jokes  
about how you’re dying to fart. I can’t stand those—  
they’re all so *rotten and stale.*

XANTHIAS  
 What about my other jokes?

DIONYSUS  
Go ahead—just nothing about farts, or your bladder,  
about how it’s going to burst.

XANTHIAS              What? You mean I can’t tell  
that really funny one . . .

DIONYSUS                       I suppose so—  
but don’t say anything about your gas.

XANTHIAS  
 What gas?

DIONYSUS  
The bit about how you need to shift your load 10  
to fart.

XANTHIAS            Not even this one—  
"Here I am transporting such a load  
if I get no relief I may explode."             [10]

DIONYSUS  
Please, please, don't say that one—  
not unless I’m sick and need to throw up.

XANTHIAS  
Then what’s the point of my being here like this?  
Why do I get to carry all the heavy baggage  
if I can’t tell the usual porter jokes—you know,  
the ones about 20  
the slave who carries all the bags.

DIONYSUS  
Just don’t. Those jokes are all so feeble—  
when I have to watch a play and hear them  
by the time I leave I’ve aged at least a year.

XANTHIAS *[striking a heroic tragic pose]*  
Alas, for my back beneath this heavy damned yoke.  
I suffer all this pressure and can’t tell my joke.                     [20]

DIONYSUS  
Your jokes are bad, but It’s an outrage, sheer insolence, that I,  
Dionysus, have to walk like this,  
sweating along so my slave can ride at ease  
without a care and carrying no load.

XANTHIAS  
What!?                 30  
Aren’t I carrying the load?

DIONYSUS               How can you be?  
You’re riding on a donkey!

XANTHIAS               Still, I’m loaded down.  
All this stuff on my back . . .

DIONYSUS  
  What do you mean by that?

Isn’t the donkey carrying our load?

XANTHIAS  
No, no way. Not the load I’m holding on my own back

DIONYSUS

         How come?  
How can you be carrying anything at all  
when someone else is carrying you?

XANTHIAS                      I’ve no idea.  
But my shoulder’s sore so I must be carrying something!                    [30]

DIONYSUS                   All right, then.  
Since you claim the donkey’s useless to you,                      40  
why not take your turn and carry the animal?

XANTHIAS                What a wretched life!  
I should have gone away to fight at sea—  
then I’d be free and I’d have told you straight  
what you could do with this ugly ass of yours.

DIONYSUS  
Get down, you useless idiot! We’re here.

*[Dionysus knocks very aggressively on the door and the door opens and Hercules steps out, wearing a lion’s skin and carrying a club. He’s amazed that someone is dressed up to resemble him]*

HERCULES  
Who’s banging on this door—smashing at it  
like some wild centaur. My god, what’s this?

*[Hercules inspects Dionysus’ outfit and starts to laugh uproariously]*

DIONYSUS  
Hey, Xanthias . . .

XANTHIAS  
                   What?

DIONYSUS              Don’t you see?

XANTHIAS  
See what?                         50 [40]

DIONYSUS  
How scared he is of me?

XANTHIAS               Yes, by god, he was,  
scared you’re insane!

HERCULES *[doubling up with laughter]*  
 By holy Demeter,  
I can’t stop laughing. I’ll try biting my lip.  
No, no use. I can’t stop laughing at you.

DIONYSUS  
Come here, my good man. I need something from you.

HERCULES *[still laughing out of control]*I can’t help myself—you’re so ridiculous.  
Seeing that lion skin above that yellow dress.  
What’s going on? Do people with large clubs  
now walk around in leather booties?                
Where on earth do you think you’re going?                       60

DIONYSUS  
I was on board a ship  
reading the poetry of Euripides to myself aloud, when suddenly  
a huge urge seized my heart. You’ve no idea how strong.

HERCULES  
An urge? How big was it?

DIONYSUS           

Huge

HERCULES  
Was the urge for a woman?

DIONYSUS  
                   No, no.

HERCULES   A young lad, then?

DIONYSUS  
Certainly not.

HERCULES  
 Well, then, a man?

DIONYSUS         Ugh!                           70

HERCULES                          So Tell me,  
my little brother, what’s it like?

DIONYSUS                         I can’t explain to a large idot like you, but  I’ll try to show you by analogy.  
Have you ever had a craving for some stew?

HERCULES  
For stew? In my life maybe ten thousand times.

DIONYSUS  
Is that explanation clear enough to you?  
Or shall I try some other way?

HERCULES  
Stew!              
That I understand completely.

DIONYSUS  
 Well then  
that’s how much I’m eaten up with my desire  
for the poet Euripides.

HERCULES  
Euripides? He’s dead!

DIONYSUS  
Even so no one’s going to talk me out of it—  
I have to find him.

HERCULES  
Right down in Hell?

DIONYSUS  
Or even lower,  
by god, if there’s such a place. [70]

HERCULES  
What’s the point of that?

DIONYSUS  
I need a clever poet. There’s none around.  
The ones we’ve got are all so lousy.

HERCULES  
If you’ve got to take a playwright back,  
why not Sophocles? He’s better than Euripides.

DIONYSUS  
Sophocles, is too good a person – he is in Hell, and he will want to stay there. Euripides  
is such a rascal he may try to flee Hades        [80]  
and come with me. But Sophocles was nice—  
easygoing while on earth and down there, too.