

410 BC
LYSISTRATA
by Aristophanes
anonymous translator

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

LYSISTRATA
CLEONICE
MYRRHINE
LAMPITO
MAGISTRATES
CINESIAS
CHILD OF CINESIAS
HERALD OF THE LACEDAEMONIANS
ENVOYS OF THE LACEDAEMONIANS
AN ATHENIAN CITIZEN
CHORUS OF OLD MEN
CHORUS OF WOMEN

LYSISTRATA

(SCENE:-At the base of the Orchestra are two buildings, the house of LYSISTRATA and the entrance to the Acropolis; a winding and narrow path leads up to the latter. Between the two buildings is the opening of the Cave of Pan. LYSISTRATA is pacing up and down in front of her house.)

LYSISTRATA

Ah! if only they had been invited to a Bacchic revelling, or a feast of Pan or Aphrodite or Genetyllis, why! the streets would have been impassable for the thronging tambourines! Now there's never a woman here-ah! except my neighbour Cleonice, whom I see approaching yonder.... Good day, Cleonice.

CLEONICE

Good day, Lysistrata; but pray, why this dark, forbidding face, my dear? Believe me, you don't look a bit pretty with those black lowering brows.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, Cleonice, my heart is on fire; I blush for our sex. Men will have it we are tricky and sly....

CLEONICE

And they are quite right, upon my word!

LYSISTRATA

Yet, look you, when the women are summoned to meet for a matter of the greatest importance, they lie in bed instead of coming.

CLEONICE

Oh! they will come, my dear; but it's not easy, you know, for women to leave the house. One is busy pottering about her husband; another is getting the servant up; a third is putting her child asleep or washing the brat or feeding it.

LYSISTRATA

But I tell you, the business that calls them here is far and away more urgent.

CLEONICE

And why do you summon us, dear Lysistrata? What is it all about?

LYSISTRATA

About a big thing.

CLEONICE (*taking this in a different sense; with great interest*)

And is it thick too?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, very thick.

CLEONICE

And we are not all on the spot! Imagine!

LYSISTRATA (*wearily*)

Oh! if it were what you suppose, there would be never an absentee. No, no, it concerns a thing I have turned about and about this way and that so many sleepless nights,

CLEONICE (*still unable to be serious*)

It must be something mighty fine and subtle for you to have turned it about so!

LYSISTRATA

So fine, it means just this, Greece saved by the women!

CLEONICE

By the women! Why, its salvation hangs on a poor thread then!

LYSISTRATA

Our country's fortunes depend on us-it is with us to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.

CLEONICE

That would be a noble deed truly!

LYSISTRATA

To exterminate the Boeotians to a man!

CLEONICE

But surely you would spare the eels.

LYSISTRATA

For Athens' sake I will never threaten so fell a doom; trust me for that. However, if the Boeotian and Peloponnesian women join us, Greece is saved.

CLEONICE

But how should women perform so wise and glorious an achievement, we women who dwell in the retirement of the household, clad in diaphanous garments of yellow silk and long flowing gowns, decked out with flowers and shod with dainty little slippers?

LYSISTRATA

Ah, but those are the very sheet-anchors of our salvation-those yellow tunics, those scents and slippers, those cosmetics and transparent robes.

CLEONICE

How so, pray?

LYSISTRATA

There is not a man will wield a lance against another...

CLEONICE

Quick, I will get me a yellow tunic from the dyer's.

LYSISTRATA

...or want a shield.

CLEONICE

I'll run and put on a flowing gown.

LYSISTRATA

...or draw a sword.

CLEONICE

I'll haste and buy a pair of slippers this instant.

LYSISTRATA

Now tell me, would not the women have done best to come?

CLEONICE

Why, they should have flown here!

LYSISTRATA

Ah! my dear, you'll see that like true Athenians, they will do everything too late.... Why, there's not a woman come from the shore, not one from Salamis.

CLEONICE

But I know for certain they embarked at daybreak.

LYSISTRATA

And the dames from Acharnae! why, I thought they would have been the very first to arrive.

CLEONICE

Theagenes' wife at any rate is sure to come; she has actually been to consult Hecate.... But look! here are some arrivals-and there are more behind. Ah! ha! now what countrywomen may they be?

LYSISTRATA

They are from Anagyras.

CLEONICE

Yes! upon my word, 'tis a levy en masse of all the female population of Anagyras!

(MYRRHINE enters, followed by other women.)

MYRRHINE

Are we late, Lysistrata? Tell us, pray; what, not a word?

LYSISTRATA

I cannot say much for you, Myrrhine! you have not bestirred yourself overmuch for an affair of such urgency.

MYRRHINE

I could not find my girdle in the dark. However, if the matter is so pressing, here we are; so speak.

CLEONICE

No, let's wait a moment more, till the women of Boeotia arrive and those from the Peloponnese.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, that is best.... Ah! here comes Lampito.

(LAMPITO, a husky Spartan damsel, enters with three others, two from Boeotia and one from Corinth.)

Good day, Lampito, dear friend from Lacedaemon. How well and handsome you look! what a rosy complexion! and how strong you seem; why, you could strangle a bull surely!

LAMPITO

Yes, indeed, I really think I could. It's because I do gymnastics and practise the bottom-kicking dance.

CLEONICE (*opening LAMPITO'S robe and baring her bosom*)

And what superb breasts!

LAMPITO

La! you are feeling me as if I were a beast for sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA

And this young woman, where is she from?

LAMPITO

She is a noble lady from Boeotia.

LYSISTRATA

Ah! my pretty Boeotian friend, you are as blooming as a garden.

CLEONICE (*making another inspection*)

Yes, on my word! and her "garden" is so thoroughly weeded too!

LYSISTRATA (*pointing to the Corinthian*)

And who is this?

LAMPITO

'Tis an honest woman, by my faith! she comes from Corinth.

CLEONICE

Oh! honest, no doubt then-as honesty goes at Corinth.

LAMPITO

But who has called together this council of women, pray?

LYSISTRATA

I have.

LAMPITO

Well then, tell us what you want of us.

CLEONICE

Yes, please tell us! What is this very important business you wish to inform us about?

LYSISTRATA

I will tell you. But first answer me one question.

CLEONICE

Anything you wish.

LYSISTRATA

Don't you feel sad and sorry because the fathers of your children are far away from you with the army? For I'll wager there is not one of you whose husband is not abroad at this moment.

CLEONICE

Mine has been the last five months in Thrace-looking after Euclates.

MYRRHINE

It's seven long months since mine left for Pylos.

LAMPITO

As for mine, if he ever does return from service, he's no sooner home than he takes down his shield again and flies back to the wars.

LYSISTRATA

And not so much as the shadow of a lover! Since the day the Milesians betrayed us, I have never once seen an eight-inch gadget even, to be a leathern consolation to us poor widows.... Now tell me, if I have discovered a means of ending the war, will you all second me?

CLEONICE

Yes verily, by all the goddesses, I swear I will, though I have to put my gown in pawn, and drink the money the same day.

MYRRHINE

And so will I, though I must be split in two like a flat-fish, and have half myself removed.

LAMPITO

And I too; why to secure peace, I would climb to the top of Mount Taygetus.

LYSISTRATA

Then I will out with it at last, my mighty secret! Oh! sister women, if we would compel our husbands to make peace, we must refrain...

CLEONICE

Refrain from what? tell us, tell us!

LYSISTRATA

But will you do it?

MYRRHINE

We will, we will, though we should die of it.

LYSISTRATA

We must refrain from the male altogether.... Nay, why do you turn your backs on me? Where are you going? So, you bite your lips, and shake your heads, eh? Why these pale, sad looks? why these tears? Come, will you do it-yes or no? Do you hesitate?

CLEONICE

I will not do it, let the war go on.

MYRRHINE

Nor will I; let the war go on.

LYSISTRATA (to *MYRRHINE*)

And you say this, my pretty flat-fish, who declared just now they might split you in two?

CLEONICE

Anything, anything but that! Bid me go through the fire, if you will,-but to rob us of the sweetest thing in all the world, Lysistrata darling!

LYSISTRATA (to *MYRRHINE*)

And you?

MYRRHINE

Yes, I agree with the others; I too would sooner go through the fire.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, wanton, vicious sex! the poets have done well to make tragedies upon us; we are good for nothing then but love and lewdness! But you, my dear, you from hardy Sparta, if you join me, all may yet be well; help me, second me, I beg you.

LAMPITO

'Tis a hard thing, by the two goddesses it is! for a woman to sleep alone without ever a strong male in her bed. But there, peace must come first.

LYSISTRATA

Oh, my darling, my dearest, best friend, you are the only one deserving the name of woman!

CLEONICE

But if-which the gods forbid-we do refrain altogether from what you say, should we get peace any sooner?

LYSISTRATA

Of course we should, by the goddesses twain! We need only sit indoors with painted cheeks, and meet our mates lightly clad in transparent gowns of Amorgos silk, and perfectly depilated; they will get their tools up and be wild to lie with us. That will be the time to refuse, and they will hasten to make peace, I am convinced of that!

LAMPITO

Yes, just as Menelaus, when he saw Helen's naked bosom, threw away his sword, they say.

CLEONICE

But, oh dear, suppose our husbands go away and leave us.

LYSISTRATA

Then, as Pherecrates says, we must "flay a skinned dog," that's all.

CLEONICE

Fiddlesticks! these proverbs are all idle talk.... But if our husbands drag us by main force into the bedchamber?

LYSISTRATA

Hold on to the door posts.

CLEONICE

But if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA

Then yield to their wishes, but with a bad grace; there is no pleasure in it for them, when they do it by force. Besides, there are a thousand ways of tormenting them. Never fear, they'll soon tire of the game; there's no satisfaction for a man, unless the woman shares it.

CLEONICE

Very well, if you must have it so, we agree.

LAMPITO

For ourselves, no doubt we shall persuade our husbands to conclude a fair and honest peace; but there is the Athenian populace, how are we to cure these folk of their warlike frenzy?

LYSISTRATA

Have no fear; we undertake to make our own people listen to reason.

LAMPITO

That's impossible, so long as they have their trusty ships and the vast treasures stored in the temple of Athene.

LYSISTRATA

Ah! but we have seen to that; this very day the Acropolis will be in our hands. That is the task assigned to the older women; while we are here in council, they are going, under pretence of offering sacrifice, to seize the citadel.

LAMPITO

Well said indeed! everything is going for the best.

LYSISTRATA

Come, quick, Lampito, and let us bind ourselves by an inviolable oath.

LAMPITO

Recite the terms; we will swear to them.

LYSISTRATA

With pleasure. Where is our Scythian policewoman? Now, what are you staring at, pray? Lay this shield on the earth before us, its hollow upwards, and someone bring me the victim's inwards.

CLEONICE

Lysistrata, say, what oath are we to swear?

LYSISTRATA

What oath? Why, in Aeschylus, they sacrifice a sheep, and swear over a buckler; we will do the same.

CLEONICE

No, Lysistrata, one cannot swear peace over a buckler, surely.

LYSISTRATA

What other oath do you prefer?

CLEONICE

Let's take a white horse, and sacrifice it, and swear on its entrails.

LYSISTRATA

But where shall we get a white horse?

CLEONICE

Well, what oath shall we take then?

LYSISTRATA

Listen to me. Let's set a great black bowl on the ground; let's sacrifice a skin of Thasian wine into it, and take oath not to add one single drop of water.

LAMPITO

Ah! that's an oath pleases me more than I can say.

LYSISTRATA

Let them bring me a bowl and a skin of wine.

CLEONICE

Ah! my dears, what a noble big bowl! what fun it will be to empty it

LYSISTRATA

Set the bowl down on the ground, and lay your hands on the victim.Almighty goddess, Persuasion, and thou, bowl, boon comrade of joy and merriment, receive this our sacrifice, and be propitious to us poor women!

CLEONICE (*as LYSISTRATA pours the wine into the bowl*)

Oh! the fine red blood! how well it flows!

LAMPITO

And what a delicious bouquet, by Castor!

CLEONICE

Now, my dears, let me swear first, if you please.

LYSISTRATA

No, by Aphrodite, unless it's decided by lot. But come, then, Lampito, and all of you, put your hands to the bowl; and do you, Cleonice, repeat for all the rest the solemn terms I am going to recite. Then you must all swear, and pledge yourselves by the same promises,-I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband...

CLEONICE (*faintly*)

I will have naught to do whether with lover or husband...

LYSISTRATA

Albeit he come to me with an erection...

CLEONICE (*her voice quavering*)

Albeit he come to me with an erection... (*in despair*) Oh! Lysistrata, I cannot bear it!

LYSISTRATA (*ignoring this outburst*)

I will live at home unbullied...

CLEONICE

I will live at home unbullied...

LYSISTRATA

Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown

CLEONICE

Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-coloured gown...

LYSISTRATA

To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.

CLEONICE

To the end I may inspire my husband with the most ardent longings.

LYSISTRATA

Never will I give myself voluntarily...

CLEONICE

Never will I give myself voluntarily...

LYSISTRATA

And if he has me by force...

CLEONICE

And if he has me by force...

LYSISTRATA

I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb...

CLEONICE

I will be cold as ice, and never stir a limb...

LYSISTRATA

I will neither extend my Persian slippers toward the ceiling...

CLEONICE

I will neither extend my Persian slippers toward the ceiling...

LYSISTRATA

Nor will I crouch like the carven lions on a knife-handle.

CLEONICE

Nor will I crouch like the carven lions on a knife-handle.

LYSISTRATA

And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.

CLEONICE (*more courageously*)

And if I keep my oath, may I be suffered to drink of this wine.

LYSISTRATA

But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.

CLEONICE

But if I break it, let my bowl be filled with water.

LYSISTRATA

Will you all take this oath?

ALL

We do.

LYSISTRATA

Then I'll now consume this remnant. *(She drinks.)*

CLEONICE (*reaching for the cup*)

Enough, enough, my dear; now let us all drink in turn to cement our friendship. *(They pass the cup around and all drink. A great commotion is heard off stage.)*

LAMPITO

Listen! what do those cries mean?

LYSISTRATA

It's what I was telling you; the women have just occupied the Acropolis. So now, Lampito, you return to Sparta to organize the plot, while your comrades here remain as hostages. For ourselves, let us go and join the rest in the citadel, and let us push the bolts well home.

CLEONICE

But don't you think the men will march up against us?

LYSISTRATA

I laugh at them. Neither threats nor flames shall force our doors; they shall open only on the conditions I have named.

CLEONICE

Yes, yes, by Aphrodite; otherwise we should be called cowardly and wretched women.

(She follows LYSISTRATA out.) (The scene shifts to the entrance of the Acropolis. The CHORUS OF OLD MEN slowly enters, carrying faggots and pots of fire.)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Go easy, Draces, go easy; why, your shoulder is all chafed by these damned heavy olive stocks. But forward still, forward, man, as needs must.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN *(singing)*

What unlooked-for things do happen, to be sure, in a long life! Ah! Strymodorus, who would ever have thought it? Here we have the women, who used, for our misfortune, to eat our bread and live in our houses, daring nowadays to lay hands on the holy image of the goddess, to seize the Acropolis and draw bars and bolts to keep any from entering!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Come, Philurgus, man, let's hurry there; let's lay our faggots all about the citadel, and on the blazing pile burn with our hands these vile conspiratresses, one and all-and Lycon's wife first and foremost!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN *(singing)*

Nay, by Demeter, never will I let them laugh at me, whiles I have a breath left in my body. Cleomenes himself, the first who ever seized our citadel, had to quit it to his sore dishonour; spite his Lacedaemonian pride, he had to deliver me up his arms and slink off with a single garment to his back. My word! but he was filthy and ragged! and what an unkempt beard, to be sure! He had not had a bath for six long years!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! but that was a mighty siege! Our men were ranged seventeen deep before the gate, and never left their posts, even to sleep. These women, these enemies of Euripides and all the gods, shall I do nothing to hinder their inordinate insolence? else let them tear down my trophies of Marathon.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

But look, to finish this toilsome climb only this last steep bit is left to mount. Truly, it's no easy job without beasts of burden, and how these logs do bruise my shoulder! Still let us carry on, and blow up our fire and see it does not go out just as we reach our destination. Phew! phew! (*Blowing the fire*) Oh! dear! what a dreadful smoke!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

It bites my eyes like a mad dog. It is Lemnian fire for sure, or it would never devour my eyelids like this. Come on, Laches, let's hurry, let's bring succour to the goddess; it's now or never! Phew! phew! (*Blowing the fire*) Oh dear! what a confounded smoke!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

There now, there's our fire all bright and burning, thank the gods! Now, why not first put down our loads here, then take a vine-branch, light it at the brazier and hurl it at the gate by way of battering-ram? If they don't answer our summons by pulling back the bolts, then we set fire to the woodwork, and the smoke will choke them. Ye gods! what a smoke! Pfaugh! Is there never a Samian general will help me unload my burden?-Ah! it shall not gall my shoulder any more. (*Setting down the wood*) Come, brazier, do your duty, make the embers flare, that I may kindle a brand; I want to be the first to hurl one. Aid me, heavenly Victory; let us punish for their insolent audacity the women who have seized our citadel, and may we raise a trophy of triumph for success!

(*They begin to build a fire. The CHORUS OF WOMEN now enters, carrying pots of water.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! my dears, methinks I see fire and smoke; can it be a conflagration? Let us hurry all we can.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Fly, fly, Nicodice, ere Calyce and Critylle perish in the fire, or are stifled in the smoke raised by these accursed old men and their pitiless laws. But, great gods, can it be I come too late? Rising at dawn, I had the utmost trouble to fill this vessel at the fountain. Oh! what a crowd there was, and what a din! What a rattling of water-pots! Servants and slave-girls pushed and thronged me! However, here I have it full at last; and I am running to carry the water to my fellow-townswomen, whom our foes are plotting to burn alive.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

News has been brought us that a company of old, doddering grey-beards, loaded with enormous faggots, as if they wanted to heat a furnace, have taken the field, vomiting dreadful threats, crying that they must reduce to ashes these horrible women. Suffer them not, oh! goddess, but, of thy grace, may I see Athens and Greece cured of their warlike folly. 'Tis to this end, oh! thou guardian deity of our city, goddess of the golden crest, that they have seized thy sanctuary. Be their friend and ally, Athene, and if any man hurl against them lighted firebrands, aid us to carry water to extinguish them.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What is this I see, ye wretched old men? Honest and pious folk ye cannot be who act so vilely.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah, ha! here's something new! a swarm of women stand posted outside to defend the gates!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Fart at us, would you? we seem a mighty host, yet you do not see the ten-thousandth part of our sex.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ho, Phaedrias! shall we stop their cackle? Suppose one of us were to break a stick across their backs, eh?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Let us set down our water-pots on the ground, to be out of the way, if they should dare to offer us violence.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Let someone knock out two or three teeth for them, as they did to Bupalus; they won't talk so loud then.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Come on then; I wait you with unflinching foot, and no other bitch will ever grab your balls.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Silence! or my stick will cut short your days.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Now, just you dare to touch Stratyllis with the tip of your finger!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

And if I batter you to pieces with my fists, what will you do?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I will tear out your lungs and entrails with my teeth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! what a clever poet is Euripides! how well he says that woman is the most shameless of animals.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Let's pick up our water-jars again, Rhodippe.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You damned women, what do you mean to do here with your water?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And you, old death-in-life, with your fire? Is it to cremate yourself?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

I am going to build you a pyre to roast your female friends upon.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And I,-I am going to put out your fire.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You put out my fire-you?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Yes, you shall soon see.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

I don't know what prevents me from roasting you with this torch.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I am getting you a bath ready to clean off the filth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A bath for me, you dirty slut?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Yes, indeed, a nuptial bath-tee heel

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*turning to his followers*)

Do you hear that? What insolence!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I am a free woman, I tell you.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

I will make you hold your tongue, never fear!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Ah ha! you shall never sit any more amongst the Heliasts.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN *(to his torch)*

Burn off her hair for her!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN *(to her pot)*

Achelous, do your duty!

(The women pitch the water in their water-pots over the old men.)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Was it hot?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Hot, great gods! Enough, enough!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I'm watering you, to make you bloom afresh.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas! I am too dry! Ah, me how! how I am trembling with cold!

(A MAGISTRATE enters, with a few Scythian policemen.)

MAGISTRATE

These women, have they made din enough, I wonder, with their tambourines? bewept Adonis enough upon their terraces? I was listening to the speeches last assembly day, and Demostratus, whom heaven confound! was saying we must all go over to Sicily-and lo! his wife was dancing round repeating: "Alas! alas! Adonis, woe is me for Adonis!" Demostratus was saying we must levy hoplites at Zacynthus-and there was his wife, more than half drunk, screaming on the house-roof: "Weep, weep for Adonis!"-while that infamous Mad Ox was bellowing away on his side.-Do you not blush, you women, for your wild and uproarious doings?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

But you don't know all their effrontery yet! They abused and insulted us; then soused us with the water in their water-pots, and have set us wringing out our clothes, for all the world as if we had beppised ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

And well done too, by Posidon! We men must share the blame of their ill conduct; it is we who teach them to love riot and dissoluteness and sow the seeds of wickedness in their hearts. You see a husband go into a shop: "Look you, jeweller," says he, "you remember the necklace you made for my wife. Well, the other evening, when she was dancing, the catch came open. Now, I am bound to start for Salamis; will you make it convenient to go up to-night to make her fastening secure?" Another will go to the cobbler, a great, strong fellow, with a great, long tool, and tell him: "The strap of one of my wife's sandals presses her little toe, which is extremely sensitive; come in about midday to supple the thing and stretch it." Now see the results. Take my own case-as a Magistrate I have enlisted rowers; I want money to pay them, and the women slam the door in my face. But why do we stand here with arms crossed? Bring me a crowbar; I'll chastise their insolence!-Ho! there, my fine fellow! (to one of the Scythians) what are, you gaping at the crows for? looking for a tavern, I suppose, eh? Come on, bring crowbars here, and force open the gates. I will put a hand to the work myself.

LYSISTRATA (*opening the gate and walking out*)

No need to force the gates; I am coming out-here I am. And why bolts and bars? What we want here is not bolts and bars and locks, but common sense.

MAGISTRATE (*jumping nervously, then striving manfully to regain his dignity*)

Really, my fine lady! Where is my officer? I want him to tie that woman's hands behind her back.

LYSISTRATA

By Artemis, the virgin goddess! if he touches me with the tip of his finger, officer of the public peace though he be, let him look out for himself! (*The first Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE (*to another officer*)

How now, are you afraid? Seize her, I tell you, round the body. Two of you at her, and have done with it!

CLEONICE

By Pandrosos! if you lay a hand on her, Ill trample you underfoot till the crap comes out of you!
(*The second Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

Look at the mess you've made! Where is there another officer? (*To the third Scythian*)
Bind that minx first, the one who speaks so prettily!

MYRRHINE

By Phoebe, if you touch her with one finger, you'd better call quick for a surgeon!
(*The third Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

What's that? Where's the officer? (*To the fourth Scythian*) Lay hold of her. Oh! but I'm going to stop your foolishness for you all

CLEONICE

By the Tauric Artemis, if you go near her, I'll pull out your hair, scream as you like.
(*The fourth Scythian defecates in terror.*)

MAGISTRATE

Ah! miserable man that I am! My own officers desert me. What ho! are we to let ourselves be bested by a mob of women? Ho! Scythians mine, close up your ranks, and forward!

LYSISTRATA

By the holy goddesses! you'll have to make acquaintance with four companies of women, ready for the fray and well armed to boot.

MAGISTRATE

Forward, Scythians, and bind them!
(*The Scythians advance reluctantly.*)

LYSISTRATA

Forward, my gallant companions; march forth, ye vendors of grain and eggs, garlic and vegetables, keepers of taverns and bakeries, wrench and strike and tear; come, a torrent of invective and insult! (*They beat the Scythians who retire in haste.*) Enough, enough now retire, never rob the vanquished! (*The women withdraw.*)

MAGISTRATE

How unfortunate for my officers!

LYSISTRATA

Ah, ha! so you thought you had only to do with a set of slave-women! you did not know the ardour that fills the bosom of free-born dames.

MAGISTRATE

Ardour! yes, by Apollo, ardour enough-especially for the wine-cup!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Sir, sir what good are words? they are of no avail with wild beasts of this sort. Don't you know how they have just washed us down-and with no very fragrant soap!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What would you have? You should never have laid rash hands on us. If you start afresh, I'll knock your eyes out. My delight is to stay at home as coy as a young maid, without hurting anybody or moving any more than a milestone; but 'ware the wasps, if you go stirring up the wasps' nest!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Ah! great gods! how get the better of these ferocious creatures? 'tis past all bearing! But come, let us try to find out the reason of the dreadful scourge. With what end in view have they seized the citadel of Cranaus, the sacred shrine that is raised upon the inaccessible rock of the Acropolis?

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*to the MAGISTRATE*)

Question them; be cautious and not too credulous. It would be culpable negligence not to pierce the mystery, if we may.

MAGISTRATE (*addressing the women*)

I would ask you first why you have barred our gates.

LYSISTRATA

To seize the treasury; no more money, no more war.

MAGISTRATE

Then money is the cause of the war?

LYSISTRATA

And of all our troubles. It was to find occasion to steal that Pisander and all the other agitators were forever raising revolutions. Well and good! but they'll never get another drachma here.

MAGISTRATE

What do you propose to do then, pray?

LYSISTRATA

You ask me that! Why, we propose to administer the treasury ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

You do?

LYSISTRATA

What is there in that to surprise you? Do we not administer the budget of household expenses?

MAGISTRATE

But that is not the same thing.

LYSISTRATA

How so-not the same thing?

MAGISTRATE

It is the treasury supplies the expenses of the war.

LYSISTRATA

That's our first principle-no war!

MAGISTRATE

What! and the safety of the city?

LYSISTRATA

We will provide for that.

MAGISTRATE

You?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, we!

MAGISTRATE

What a sorry business!

LYSISTRATA

Yes, we're going to save you, whether you like it or not.

MAGISTRATE

Oh! the impudence of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA

You seem annoyed! but it has to be done, nevertheless.

MAGISTRATE

But it's the very height of iniquity!

LYSISTRATA (*testily*)

We're going to save you, my good man.

MAGISTRATE

But if I don't want to be saved?

LYSISTRATA

Why, all the more reason!

MAGISTRATE

But what a notion, to concern yourselves with questions of peace and war!

LYSISTRATA

We will explain our idea.

MAGISTRATE

Out with it then; quick, or... (*threatening her*).

LYSISTRATA (*sternly*)

Listen, and never a movement, please!

MAGISTRATE (*in impotent rage*)

Oh! it is too much for me! I cannot keep my temper!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Then look out for yourself; you have more to fear than we have.

MAGISTRATE

Stop your croaking, you old crow! (*To LYSISTRATA*)

Now you, say what you have to say.

LYSISTRATA

Willingly. All the long time the war has lasted, we have endured in modest silence all you men did; you never allowed us to open our lips. We were far from satisfied, for we knew how things were going; often in our homes we would hear you discussing, upside down and inside out, some important turn of affairs. Then with sad hearts, but smiling lips, we would ask you: Well, in today's Assembly did they vote peace?-But, "Mind your own business!" the husband would growl, "Hold your tongue, please!" And we would say no more.

CLEONICE

I would not have held my tongue though, not I!

MAGISTRATE

You would have been reduced to silence by blows then.

LYSISTRATA

Well, for my part, I would say no more. But presently I would come to know you had arrived at some fresh decision more fatally foolish than ever. "Ah! my dear man," I would say, "what madness next!" But he would only look at me askance and say: "Just weave your web, please; else your cheeks will smart for hours. War is men's business!"

MAGISTRATE

Bravo! well said indeed!

LYSISTRATA

How now, wretched man? not to let us contend against your follies was bad enough! But presently we heard you asking out loud in the open street: "Is there never a man left in Athens?" and, "No, not one, not one," you were assured in reply. Then, then we made up our minds without more delay to make common cause to save Greece. Open your ears to our wise counsels and hold your tongues, and we may yet put things on a better footing.

MAGISTRATE

You put things indeed! Oh! this is too much! The insolence of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA

Be still!

MAGISTRATE

May I die a thousand deaths ere I obey one who wears a veil!

LYSISTRATA

If that's all that troubles you, here, take my veil, wrap it round your head, and hold your tongue.

CLEONICE

Then take this basket; put on a girdle, card wool, munch beans. The war shall be women's business.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Lay aside your water-pots, we will guard them, we will help our friends and companions.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

For myself, I will never weary of the dance; my knees will never grow stiff with fatigue. I will brave everything with my dear allies, on whom Nature has lavished virtue, grace, boldness, cleverness, and whose wisely directed energy is going to save the State.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! my good, gallant LYSISTRATA, and all my friends, be ever like a bundle of nettles; never let your anger slacken; the winds of fortune blow our way.

LYSISTRATA

May gentle Love and the sweet Cyprian Queen shower seductive charms on our breasts and our thighs. If only we may stir so amorous a feeling among the men that they stand as firm as sticks, we shall indeed deserve the name of peace-makers among the Greeks.

MAGISTRATE

How will that be, pray?

LYSISTRATA

To begin with, we shall not see you any more running like mad fellows to the Market holding lance in fist.

CLEONICE

That will be something gained, anyway, by the Paphian goddess, it will!

LYSISTRATA

Now we see them, mixed up with saucepans and kitchen stuff, armed to the teeth, looking like wild Corybantes!

MAGISTRATE

Why, of course; that's what brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA

Oh! but what a funny sight, to behold a man wearing a Gorgon's-bead buckler coming along to buy fish!

CLEONICE

The other day in the Market I saw a phylarch with flowing ringlets; he was on horseback, and was pouring into his helmet the broth he had just bought at an old dame's still. There was a Thracian warrior too, who was brandishing his lance like Tereus in the play; he had scared a good woman selling figs into a perfect panic, and was gobbling up all her ripest fruit-

MAGISTRATE

And how, pray, would you propose to restore peace and order in all the countries of Greece?

LYSISTRATA

It's the easiest thing in the world!

MAGISTRATE

Come, tell us how; I am curious to know.

LYSISTRATA

When we are winding thread, and it is tangled, we pass the spool across and through the skein, now this way, now that way; even so, to finish of the war, we shall send embassies hither and thither and everywhere, to disentangle matters.

MAGISTRATE

And is it with your yarn, and your skeins, and your spools, you think to appease so many bitter enmities, you silly women?

LYSISTRATA

If only you had common sense, you would always do in politics the same as we do with our yarn.

MAGISTRATE

Come, how is that, eh?

LYSISTRATA

First we wash the yarn to separate the grease and filth; do the same with all bad citizens, sort them out and drive them forth with rods—they're the refuse of the city. Then for all such as come crowding up in search of employments and offices, we must card them thoroughly; then, to bring them all to the same standard, pitch them pell-mell into the same basket, resident aliens or no, allies, debtors to the State, all mixed up together. Then as for our Colonies, you must think of them as so many isolated hanks; find the ends of the separate threads, draw them to a centre here, wind them into one, make one great hank of the lot, out of which the public can weave itself a good, stout tunic.

MAGISTRATE

Is it not a sin and a shame to see them carding and winding the State, these women who have neither art nor part in the burdens of the war?

LYSISTRATA

What! wretched man! why, it's a far heavier burden to us than to you. In the first place, we bear sons who go off to fight far away from Athens.

MAGISTRATE

Enough said! do not recall sad and sorry memories!

LYSISTRATA

Then secondly, instead of enjoying the pleasures of love and making the best of our youth and beauty, we are left to languish far from our husbands, who are all with the army. But say no more of ourselves; what afflicts me is to see our girls growing old in lonely grief.

MAGISTRATE

Don't the men grow old too?

LYSISTRATA

That is not the same thing. When the soldier returns from the wars, even though he has white hair, he very soon finds a young wife. But a woman has only one summer; if she does not make hay while the sun shines, no one will afterwards have anything to say to her, and she spends her days consulting oracles that never send her a husband.

MAGISTRATE

But the old man who can still get an erection...

LYSISTRATA

But you, why don't you get done with it and die? You are rich; go buy yourself a bier, and I will knead you a honey-cake for Cerberus. Here, take this garland.
(Drenching him with water.)

CLEONICE

And this one too. *(Drenching him with water.)*

MYRRHINE

And these fillets. *(Drenching him with water.)*

LYSISTRATA

What else do you need? Step aboard the boat; Charon is waiting for you, you're keeping him from pushing off.

MAGISTRATE

To treat me so scurvily! What an insult! I will go show myself to my fellow-MAGISTRATES just as I am.

LYSISTRATA

What! are you blaming us for not having exposed you according to custom? Nay, console yourself; we will not fail to offer up the third-day sacrifice for you, first thing in the morning.
(She goes into the Acropolis, with CLEONICE and MYRRHINE)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Awake, friends of freedom; let us hold ourselves aye ready to act.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

I suspect a mighty peril; I foresee another tyranny like Hippias'. I am sore afraid the Laconians assembled here with Clisthenes have, by a stratagem of war, stirred up these women, enemies of the gods, to seize upon our treasury and the funds whereby I lived.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Is it not a sin and a shame for them to interfere in advising the citizens, to prate of shields and lances, and to ally themselves with Laconians, fellows I trust no more than I would so many famished wolves? The whole thing, my friends, is nothing else but an attempt to re-establish tyranny. But I will never submit; I will be on my guard for the future; I will always carry a blade hidden under myrtle boughs; I will post myself in the public square under arms, shoulder to shoulder with Aristogiton; and now, to make a start, I must just break a few of that cursed old jade's teeth yonder.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Nay, never play the brave man, else when you go back home, your own mother won't know you. But, dear friends and allies, first let us lay our burdens down.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Then, citizens all, hear what I have to say. I have useful counsel to give our city, which deserves it well at my hands for the brilliant distinctions it has lavished on my girlhood. At seven years of age, I carried the sacred vessels; at ten, I pounded barley for the altar of Athene; next, clad in a robe of yellow silk, I played the bear to Artemis at the Brauronia; presently, when I was grown up, a tall, handsome maiden, they put a necklace of dried figs about my neck, and I was one of the Canephoroi.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

So surely I am bound to give my best advice to Athens. What matters that I was born a woman, if I can cure your misfortunes? I pay my share of tolls and taxes, by giving men to the State. But you, you miserable greybeards, you contribute nothing to the public charges; on the contrary, you have wasted the treasure of our forefathers, as it was called, the treasure amassed in the days of the Persian Wars. You pay nothing at all in return; and into the bargain you endanger our lives and liberties by your mistakes. Have you one word to say for yourselves?... Ah! don't irritate me, you there, or I'll lay my slipper across your jaws; and it's pretty heavy.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (*singing*)

Outrage upon outrage! things are going from bad to worse. Let us punish the minxes, every one of us that has balls to boast of. Come, off with our tunics, for a man must savour of manhood; come, my friends, let us strip naked from head to foot. Courage, I say, we who in our day garrisoned Lipsydriion; let us be young again, and shake off old.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

If we give them the least hold over us, that's the end! their audacity will know no bounds! We shall see them building ships, and fighting sea-fights, like Artemisia; and, if they want to mount and ride as cavalry, we had best cashier the knights, for indeed women excel in riding, and have a fine, firm seat for the gallop. Just think of all those squadrons of Amazons Micon has painted for us engaged in hand-to-hand combat with men. Come then, we must now fit collars to all these willing necks.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

By the blessed goddesses, if you anger me, I will let loose the beast of my evil passions, and a very hailstorm of blows will set you yelling for help. Come, dames, off with your tunics, and quick's the word; women must smell the smell of women in the throes of passion.... Now just you dare to measure strength with me, old greybeard, and I warrant you you'll never eat garlic or black beans any more. No, not a word! my anger is at boiling point, and I'll do with you what the beetle did with the eagle's eggs.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I laugh at your threats, so long as I have on my side LAMPITO here, and the noble Theban, my dear Ismenia.... Pass decree on decree, you can do us no hurt, you wretch abhorred of all your fellows. Why, only yesterday, on occasion of the feast of Hecate, I asked my neighbours of Boeotia for one of their daughters for whom my girls have a lively liking - a fine, fat eel to wit; and if they did not refuse, all along of your silly decrees! We shall never cease to suffer the like, till some one gives you a neat trip-up and breaks your neck for you! (*To LYSISTRATA as she comes out from the Acropolis*) You, LYSISTRATA, you who are leader of our glorious enterprise, why do I see you coming towards me with so gloomy an air?

LYSISTRATA

It's the behaviour of these naughty women, it's the female heart and female weakness that so discourage me.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Tell us, tell us, what is it?

LYSISTRATA

I only tell the simple truth.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

What has happened so disconcerting? Come, tell your friends.

LYSISTRATA

Oh! the thing is so hard to tell-yet so impossible to conceal.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Never seek to hide any ill that has befallen our cause.

LYSISTRATA

To blurt it out in a word-we want laying!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Oh! Zeus, oh! Zeus!

LYSISTRATA

What use calling upon Zeus? The thing is even as I say. I cannot stop them any longer from lusting after the men. They are all for deserting. The first I caught was slipping out by the postern gate near the cave of Pan; another was letting herself down by a rope and pulley; a third was busy preparing her escape; while a fourth, perched on a bird's back, was just taking wing for Orsilochus' house, when I seized her by the hair. One and all, they are inventing excuses to be off home. (Pointing to the gate) Look! there goes one, trying to get out! Halloo there! whither away so fast?

FIRST WOMAN

I want to go home; I have some Milesian wool in the house, which is getting all eaten up by the worms.

LYSISTRATA

Bah! you and your worms! go back, I say!

FIRST WOMAN

I will return immediately, I swear I will by the two goddesses! I only have just to spread it out on the bed.

LYSISTRATA

You shall not do anything of the kind! I say, you shall not go.

FIRST WOMAN

Must I leave my wool to spoil then?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, if need be.

SECOND WOMAN

Unhappy woman that I am! Alas for my flax! I've left it at home unstript!

LYSISTRATA

So, here's another trying to escape to go home and strip her flax!

SECOND WOMAN

Oh! I swear by the goddess of light, the instant I have put it in condition I will come straight back.

LYSISTRATA

You shall do nothing of the kind! If once you began, others would want to follow suit.

THIRD WOMAN

Oh! goddess divine, Ilithyia, patroness of women in labour, stay, stay the birth, till I have reached a spot less hallowed than Athene's mount!

LYSISTRATA

What mean you by these silly tales?

THIRD WOMAN

I am going to have a child-now, this minute!

LYSISTRATA

But you were not pregnant yesterday!

THIRD WOMAN

Well, I am to-day. Oh! let me go in search of the midwife, LYSISTRATA, quick, quick!

LYSISTRATA

What is this fable you are telling me? (Feeling her stomach) Ah! what have you got there so hard?

THIRD WOMAN

A male child.

LYSISTRATA

No, no, by Aphrodite! nothing of the sort! Why, it feels like something hollow-a pot or a kettle. (Opening her robe) Oh! you silly creature, if you have not got the sacred helmet of Pallas-and you said you were with child!

THIRD WOMAN

And so I am, by Zeus, I am!

LYSISTRATA

Then why this helmet, pray?

THIRD WOMAN

For fear my pains should seize me in the Acropolis; I mean to lay my eggs in this helmet, as the doves do.

LYSISTRATA

Excuses and pretences every word! the thing's as clear as daylight. Anyway, you must stay here now till the fifth day, your day of purification.

THIRD WOMAN

I cannot sleep any more in the Acropolis, now I have seen the snake that guards the temple.

FOURTH WOMAN

Ah! and those awful owls with their dismal hooting! I cannot get a wink of rest, and I'm just dying of fatigue.

LYSISTRATA

You wicked women, have done with your falsehoods! You want your husbands, that's plain enough. But don't you think they want you just as badly? They are spending dreadful nights, oh! I know that well enough. But hold out, my dears, hold out! A little more patience, and the victory will be ours. An oracle promises us success, if only we remain united. Shall I repeat the words?

THIRD WOMAN

Yes, tell us what the oracle declares.

LYSISTRATA

Silence then! Now-"Whenas the swallows, fleeing before the hoopoes, shall have all flocked together in one place, and shall refrain them from all amorous commerce, then will be the end of all the ills of life; yea, and Zeus, who doth thunder in the skies, shall set above what was erst below...."

THIRD WOMAN

What! shall the men be underneath?

LYSISTRATA

"But if dissension do arise among the swallows, and they take wing from the holy temple, it will be said there is never a more wanton bird in all the world."

THIRD WOMAN

Ye gods! the prophecy is clear.

LYSISTRATA

Nay, never let us be cast down by calamity! let us be brave to bear, and go back to our posts. It would be shameful indeed not to trust the promises of the oracle. (*They all go back into the Acropolis.*)

CHORUS OF OLD MEN (singing)

I want to tell you a fable they used to relate to me when I was a little boy. This is it: Once upon a time there was a young man called Melanion, who hated the thought of marriage so sorely that he fled away to the wilds. So he dwelt in the mountains, wove himself nets, and caught hares. He never, never came back, he had such a horror of women. As chaste as Melanion, we loathe the jades just as much as he did.

AN OLD MAN (*beginning a brief duet with one of the women*)

You dear old woman, I would fain kiss you.

WOMAN

I will set you crying without onions.

OLD MAN

And give you a sound kicking.

WOMAN (*pointing*)

Ah, ha! what a dense forest you have there!

OLD MAN

So was Myronides one of the bushiest of men of this side; his backside was all black, and he terrified his enemies as much as Phormio.

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

I want to tell you a fable too, to match yours about Melanion. Once there was a certain man called Timon, a tough customer, and a whimsical, a true son of the Furies, with a face that seemed to glare out of a thorn-bush. He withdrew from the world because he couldn't abide bad men, after vomiting a thousand curses at them. He had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows, but he was mighty tender towards women.

WOMAN (*beginning another duet*)

Suppose I up and broke your jaw for you!

OLD MAN

I am not a bit afraid of you.

WOMAN

Suppose I let fly a good kick at you?

OLD MAN

I should see your thing then.

WOMAN

You would see that, for all my age, it is very well plucked.

LYSISTRATA (*rushing out of the Acropolis*)

Ho there! come quick, come quick!

ONE OF THE WOMEN

What is it? Why these cries?

LYSISTRATA

A man! a man! I see him approaching all afire with the flames of love. Oh! divine Queen of Cyprus, Paphos and Cythera, I pray you still be propitious to our enterprise.

WOMAN

Where is he, this unknown foe?

LYSISTRATA

Over there-beside the Temple of Demeter.

WOMAN

Yes, indeed, I see him; but who is he?

LYSISTRATA

Look, look! do any of you recognize him?

MYRRHINE (*joyfully*) I do, I do! it's my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA

To work then! Be it your task to inflame and torture and torment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, try every means! Grant every favour,-always excepting what is forbidden by our oath on the wine-bowl.

MYRRHINE

Have no fear, I'll do it.

LYSISTRATA

Well, I shall stay here to help you cajole the man and set his passions aflame. The rest of you withdraw. (*CINESIAS enters, in obvious and extreme sexual excitement. A slave follows him carrying an infant.*)

CINESIAS

Alas! alas! how I am tortured by spasm and rigid convulsion! Oh! I am racked on the wheel!

LYSISTRATA

Who is this that dares to pass our lines?

CINESIAS

It is I.

LYSISTRATA

What, a man?

CINESIAS

Very much so!

LYSISTRATA

Get out.

CINESIAS

But who are you that thus repulses me?

LYSISTRATA

The sentinel of the day.

CINESIAS

For the gods' sake, call MYRRHINE

LYSISTRATA

Call MYRRHINE, you say? And who are you?

CINESIAS

I am her husband, Cinesias, son of Paeon.

LYSISTRATA

Ah! good day, my dear friend. Your name is not unknown amongst us. Your wife has it forever on her lips; and she never touches an egg or an apple without saying: "This is for Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Really and truly?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, indeed, by Aphrodite! And if we fall to talking of men, quick your wife declares: "Oh! all the rest, they're good for nothing compared with Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Oh! please, please go and call her to me!

LYSISTRATA

And what will you give me for my trouble?

CINESIAS

Anything I've got, if you like. (Pointing to the evidence of his condition) I will give you what I have here!

LYSISTRATA

Well, well, I will tell her to come.

(She enters the Acropolis.)

CINESIAS

Quick, oh! be quick! Life has no more charms for me since she left my house. I am sad, sad, when I go indoors; it all seems so empty; my victuals have lost their savour. And all because of this erection that I can't get rid of!

MYRRHINE *(to LYSISTRATA, over her shoulder)*

I love him, oh! I love him; but he won't let himself be loved. No! I shall not come.

CINESIAS

MYRRHINE, my little darling MYRRHINE, what are you saying? Come down to me quick.

MYRRHINE

No indeed, not I.

CINESIAS

I call you, MYRRHINE, MYRRHINE; won't you please come?

MYRRHINE

Why should you call me? You do not want me.

CINESIAS

Not want you! Why, here I stand, stiff with desire!

MYRRHINE

Good-bye.

(She turns, as if to go.)

CINESIAS

Oh! MYRRHINE, MYRRHINE, in our child's name, hear me; at any rate hear the child!
Little lad, call your mother.

CHILD

Mamma, mamma, mamma!

CINESIAS

There, listen! Don't you pity the poor child? It's six days now you've never washed and never fed the child.

MYRRHINE

Poor darling, your father takes mighty little care of you!

CINESIAS

Come down, dearest, come down for the child's sake.

MYRRHINE

Ah! what a thing it is to be a mother! Well, well, we must come down, I suppose.

CINESIAS *(as MYRRHINE approaches)*

Why, how much younger and prettier she looks! And how she looks at me so lovingly! Her cruelty and scorn only redouble my passion.

MYRRHINE *(ignoring him; to the child)*

You are as sweet as your father is provoking! Let me kiss you, my treasure, mother's darling!

CINESIAS

Ah! what a bad thing it is to let yourself be led away by other women! Why give me such pain and suffering, and yourself into the bargain?

MYRRHINE (*as he is about to embrace her*)

Hands off, sir!

CINESIAS

Everything is going to rack and ruin in the house.

MYRRHINE

I don't care.

CINESIAS

But your web that's all being pecked to pieces by the cocks and hens, don't you care for that?

MYRRHINE

Precious little.

CINESIAS

And Aphrodite, whose mysteries you have not celebrated for so long? Oh! won't you please come back home?

MYRRHINE

No, least, not till a sound treaty puts an end to the war.

CINESIAS

Well, if you wish it so much, why, we'll make it, your treaty.

MYRRHINE

Well and good! When that's done, I will come home. Till then, I am bound by an oath.

CINESIAS

At any rate, lie with me for a little while.

MYRRHINE

No, no, no! (*she hesitates*) but just the same I can't say I don't love you.

CINESIAS

You love me? Then why refuse to lie with me, my little girl, my sweet MYRRHINE?

MYRRHINE (*pretending to be shocked*)

You must be joking! What, before the child!

CINESIAS (*to the slave*)

Manes, carry the lad home. There, you see, the child is gone; there's nothing to hinder us; won't you lie down now?

MYRRHINE

But, miserable man, where, where?

CINESIAS

In the cave of Pan; nothing could be better.

MYRRHINE

But how shall I purify myself before going back into the citadel?

CINESIAS

Nothing easier! you can wash at the Clepsydra.

MYRRHINE

But my oath? Do you want me to perjure myself?

CINESIAS

I'll take all responsibility; don't worry.

MYRRHINE

Well, I'll be off, then, and find a bed for us.

CINESIAS

There's no point in that; surely we can lie on the ground.

MYRRHINE

No, no! even though you are bad, I don't like your lying on the bare earth.
(She goes back into the Acropolis.)

CINESIAS (enraptured)

Ah! how the dear girl loves me!

MYRRHINE (coming back with a cot)

Come, get to bed quick; I am going to undress. But, oh dear, we must get a mattress.

CINESIAS

A mattress? Oh! no, never mind about that!

MYRRHINE

No, by Artemis! lie on the bare sacking? never! That would be squalid.

CINESIAS

Kiss me!

MYRRHINE

Wait a minute! *(She leaves him again.)*

CINESIAS

Good god, hurry up

MYRRHINE (coming back with a mattress)

Here is a mattress. Lie down, I am just going to undress. But you've got no pillow.

CINESIAS

I don't want one either!

MYRRHINE

But I do.*(She leaves him again.)*

CINESIAS

Oh god, oh god, she treats my tool just like Heracles!

MYRRHINE (*coming back with a pillow*)

There, lift your head, dear! (*Wondering what else to tantalize him with; to herself*) Is that all, I wonder?

CINESIAS (*misunderstanding*)

Surely. there's nothing else. Come, my treasure.

MYRRHINE

I am just unfastening my girdle. But remember what you promised me about making peace; mind you keep your word.

CINESIAS

Yes, yes, upon my life I will.

MYRRHINE

Why, you have no blanket!

CINESIAS

My god, what difference does that make? What I want is to make love!

MYRRHINE (*going out again*)

Never fear-directly, directly! I'll be back in no time.

CINESIAS

The woman will kill me with her blankets!

MYRRHINE (*coming back with a blanket*)

Now, get yourself up.

CINESIAS (*pointing*)

I've got this up!

MYRRHINE

Wouldn't you like me to scent you?

CINESIAS

No, by Apollo, no, please don't!

MYRRHINE

Yes, by Aphrodite, but I will, whether you like it or not. (*She goes out again.*)

CINESIAS

God, I wish she'd hurry up and get through with all this!

MYRRHINE

(*coming back with a flask of perfume*) Hold out your hand; now rub it in.

CINESIAS

Oh! in Apollo's name, I don't much like the smell of it; but perhaps it will improve when it's well rubbed in. It does not somehow smack of the marriage bed!

MYRRHINE

Oh dear! what a scatterbrain I am; if I haven't gone and brought Rhodian perfumes!

CINESIAS

Never mind, dearest, let it go now.

MYRRHINE

You don't really mean that. (*She goes.*)

CINESIAS

Damn the man who invented perfumes!

MYRRHINE (*coming back with another flask*)

Here, take this bottle.

CINESIAS

I have a better one already for you, darling. Come, you provoking creature, to bed with you, and don't bring another thing.

MYRRHINE

Coming, coming; I'm just slipping off my shoes. Dear boy, will you vote for peace?

CINESIAS

I'll think about it. (*MYRRHINE runs away.*) I'm a dead man, she is killing me! She has gone, and left me in torment! (in tragic style) I must have someone to lay, I must! Ah me! the loveliest of women has choused and cheated me. Poor little lad, how am I to give you what you want so badly? Where is Cynalopex? quick, man, get him a nurse, do!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Poor, miserable wretch, baulked in your amorousness! what tortures are yours! Ah! you fill me with pity. Could any man's back and loins stand such a strain. He stands stiff and rigid, and there's never a wench to help him!

CINESIAS

Ye gods in heaven, what pains I suffer!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Well, there it is; it's her doing, that abandoned hussy!

CINESIAS

No, no! rather say that sweetest, dearest darling (*He departs.*)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

That dearest darling? no, no, that hussy, say I! Zeus, thou god of the skies, canst not let loose a hurricane, to sweep them all up into the air, and whirl them round, then drop them down crash! and impale them on the point of this man's tool!

(*A Spartan HERALD enters; he shows signs of being in the same condition as CINESIAS.*)

HERALD Say, where shall I find the Senate and the Prytanen? I am bearer of despatches.

(An Athenian MAGISTRATE enters.)

MAGISTRATE

Are you a man or a Priapus?

HERALD (*with an effort at officiousness*)

Don't be stupid! I am a herald, of course, I swear I am, and I come from Sparta about making peace.

MAGISTRATE (*pointing*)

But look, you are hiding a lance under your clothes, surely.

HERALD (embarrassed)

No, nothing of the sort.

MAGISTRATE

Then why do you turn away like that, and hold your cloak out from your body? Have you got swellings in the groin from your journey?

HERALD

By the twin brethren! the man's an old maniac.

MAGISTRATE

But you've got an erection! You lewd fellow!

HERALD

I tell you no! but enough of this foolery.

MAGISTRATE (*pointing*)

Well, what is it you have there then?

HERALD

A Lacedaemonian 'skytale.'

MAGISTRATE

Oh, indeed, a 'skytale,' is it? Well, well, speak out frankly; I know all about these matters. How are things going at Sparta now?

HERALD

Why, everything is turned upside down at Sparta; and all the allies have erections. We simply must have Pellene.

MAGISTRATE

What is the reason of it all? Is it the god Pan's doing?

HERALD

No, it's all the work of Lampito and the women who are acting at her instigation; they have kicked the men out from between their thighs.

MAGISTRATE

But what are you doing about it?

HERALD

We are at our wits' end; we walk bent double, just as if we were carrying lanterns in a wind. The jades have sworn we shall not so much as touch them till we have all agreed to conclude peace.

MAGISTRATE

Ah! I see now, it's a general conspiracy embracing all Greece. Go back to Sparta and bid them send envoys plenipotentiary to treat for peace. I will urge our Senators myself to name plenipotentiaries from us; and to persuade them, why, I will show them my own tool.

HERALD

What could be better? I fly at your command. *(They go out in opposite directions.)*

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

No wild beast is there, no flame of fire, more fierce and untamable than woman; the leopard is less savage and shameless.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

And yet you dare to make war upon me, wretch, when you might have me for your most faithful friend and ally.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Never, never can my hatred cease towards women.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Well, suit yourself. Still I cannot bear to leave you all naked as you are; folks would laugh at you. Come, I am going to put this tunic on you.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

You are right, upon my word! it was only in my confounded fit of rage that I took it off.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Now at any rate you look like a man, and they won't make fun of you. Ah! if you had not offended me so badly, I would take out that nasty insect you have in your eye for you.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! so that's what was annoying me so Look, here's a ring, just remove the insect, and show it to me. By Zeus! it has been hurting my eye for a long time now.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Well, I agree, though your manners are not over and above pleasant. Oh I what a huge great gnat! just look! It's from Tricorythus, for sure.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A thousand thanks! the creature was digging a regular well in my eye; now that it's gone, my tears can flow freely.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

I will wipe them for you-bad, naughty man though you are. Now, just one kiss.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

A kiss? certainly not

LEADER OF CHORUS OF WOMEN

Just one, whether you like it or not.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Oh! those confounded women! how they do cajole us! How true the saying: " 'Tis impossible to live with the baggages, impossible to live without 'em!" Come, let us agree for the future not to regard each other any more as enemies; and to clinch the bargain, let us sing a choric song.

COMBINED CHORUS OF WOMEN AND OLD MEN (*singing*)

We desire, Athenians, to speak ill of no man; but on the contrary to say much good of everyone, and to do the like. We have had enough of misfortunes and calamities. If there is any man or woman who wants a bit of money-two or three minas or so; well, our purse is full. If only peace is concluded, the borrower will not have to pay back. Also I'm inviting to supper a few Carystian friends, who are excellently well qualified. I have still a drop of good soup left, and a young porker I'm going to kill, and the flesh will be sweet and tender. I shall expect you at my house to-day; but first away to the baths with you, you and your children; then come all of you, ask no one's leave, but walk straight up, as if you were at home; never fear, the door will be... shut in your faces!

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! here come the envoys from Sparta with their long flowing beards; why, you would think they wore pigstyes between their thighs. (*Enter the LACONIAN ENVOYS afflicted like their herald.*) Hail to you, first of all, Laconians; then tell us how you fare.

LACONIAN ENVOY

No need for many words; you can see what a state we are in.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas! the situation grows more and more strained! the intensity of the thing is simply frightful.

LACONIAN ENVOY

It's beyond belief. But to work! summon your Commissioners, and let us patch up the best peace we may.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Ah! our men too, like wrestlers in the arena, cannot endure a rag over their bellies; it's an athlete's malady, which only exercise can remedy.

(The MAGISTRATE returns; he too now has an evident reason to desire peace.)

MAGISTRATE

Can anybody tell us where LYSISTRATA is? Surely she will have some compassion on our condition.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN (pointing)

Look! now he has the very same complaint. *(To the MAGISTRATE)* Don't you feel a strong nervous tension in the morning?

MAGISTRATE

Yes, and a dreadful, dreadful torture it is! Unless peace is made very soon, we shall find no recourse but to make love to Clisthenes.

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Take my advice, and arrange your clothes as best you can; one of the fellows who mutilated the Hermae might see you.

MAGISTRATE

Right, by Zeus. *(He endeavours, not too successfully, to conceal his condition.)*

LACONIAN ENVOY

Quite right, by the Dioscuri. There, I will put on my tunic.

MAGISTRATE

Oh! what a terrible state we are in! Greeting to you, Laconian fellow-sufferers.

LACONIAN ENVOY *(addressing one of his countrymen)*

Ah! my boy, what a terrible thing it would have been if these fellows had seen us just now when we were on full stand!

MAGISTRATE

Speak out, Laconians, what is it brings you here?

LACONIAN ENVOY

We have come to treat for peace.

MAGISTRATE

Well said; we are of the same mind. Better call LYSISTRATA, then; she is the only person will bring us to terms.

LACONIAN ENVOY

Yes, yes-and Lysistratus into the bargain, if you will.

MAGISTRATE

Needless to call her; she has heard your voices, and here she comes.
(She comes out of the Acropolis.)

LEADER OF CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Hail, boldest and bravest of womankind! The time is come to show yourself in turn uncompromising and conciliatory, exacting and yielding, haughty and condescending. Call up all your skill and artfulness. Lo! the foremost men in Hellas, seduced by your fascinations, are agreed to entrust you with the task of ending their quarrels.

LYSISTRATA

It will be an easy task-if only they refrain from mutual indulgence in masculine love; if they do, I shall know the fact at once. Now, where is the gentle goddess Peace? (The goddess, in the form of a beautiful nude girl is brought in by the Machine.) Lead hither the Laconian envoys. But, look you, no roughness or violence; our husbands always behaved so boorishly. Bring them to me with smiles, as women should. If any refuse to give you his hand, then take hold of his tool. Bring up the Athenians too; you may lead them either way. Laconians, approach; and you, Athenians, on my other side. Now hearken all! I am but a woman; but I have good common sense; Nature has endowed me with discriminating judgment, which I have yet further developed, thanks to the wise teachings of my father and the elders of the city. First I must bring a reproach against you that applies equally to both sides. At Olympia, and Thermopylae, and Delphi, and a score of other places too numerous to mention, you celebrate before the same altars ceremonies common to all Hellenes; yet you go cutting each other's throats, and sacking Hellenic cities, when all the while the barbarian yonder is threatening you! That is my first point.

MAGISTRATE (*devouring the goddess with his eyes*)

Good god, this erection is killing me!

LYSISTRATA

Now it is to you I address myself, Laconians. Have you forgotten how Periclidias, your own countryman, sat a suppliant before our altars? How pale he was in his purple robes! He had come to crave an army of us; it was the time when Messenia was pressing you sore, and the Sea-god was shaking the earth. Cimon marched to your aid at the head of four thousand hoplites, and saved Lacedaemon. And, after such a service as that, you ravage the soil of your benefactors!

MAGISTRATE

They do wrong, very wrong, LYSISTRATA

LACONIAN ENVOY

We do wrong, very wrong. (Looking at the goddess) Ah! great gods! what a lovely bottom Peace has!

LYSISTRATA

And now a word to the Athenians. Have you no memory left of how, in the days when you wore the tunic of slaves, the Laconians came, spear in hand, and slew a host of Thessalians and partisans of Hippias the tyrant? They, and they only, fought on your side on that eventful day; they delivered you from despotism, and thanks to them our nation could change the short tunic of the slave for the long cloak of the free man.

LACONIAN ENVOY (*looking at LYSISTRATA*)

I have never see a woman of more gracious dignity.

MAGISTRATE (*looking at PEACE*)

I have never seen a woman with a finer body!

LYSISTRATA

Bound by such ties of mutual kindness, how can you bear to be at war? Stop, stay the hateful strife, be reconciled; what hinders you?

LACONIAN ENVOY We are quite ready, if they will give us back our rampart.

LYSISTRATA

What rampart, my dear man?

LACONIAN ENVOY

Pylos, which we have been asking for and craving for ever so long.

MAGISTRATE

In the Sea-god's name, you shall never have it!

LYSISTRATA

Agree, my friends, agree.

MAGISTRATE

But then what city shall we be able to stir up trouble in?

LYSISTRATA

Ask for another place in exchange.

MAGISTRATE

Ah! that's the ticket! Well, to begin with, give us Echinus, the Maliac gulf adjoining, and the two legs of Megara.

LACONIAN ENVOY

No, by the Dioscuri, surely not all that, my dear sir.

LYSISTRATA

Come to terms; never make a difficulty of two legs more or less!

MAGISTRATE (his eye on PEACE)

Well, I'm ready to strip down and get to work right now. *(He takes off his mantle.)*

LACONIAN ENVOY (following out this idea)

And I also, to dung it to start with.

LYSISTRATA

That's just what you shall do, once peace is signed. So, if you really want to make it, go consult your allies about the matter.

MAGISTRATE

What allies, I should like to know? Why, we are all erected; there's no one who is not mad to be mating. What we all want is to be in bed with our wives; how should our allies fail to second our project?

LACONIAN ENVOY

And ours too, for certain sure!

MAGISTRATE

The Carystians first and foremost by the gods!

LYSISTRATA

Well said, indeed! Now go and purify yourselves for entering the Acropolis, where the women invite you to supper; we will empty our provision baskets to do you honour. At table, you will exchange oaths and pledges; then each man will go home with his wife.

MAGISTRATE

Come along then, and as quick as may be.

LACONIAN ENVOY

Lead on; I'm your man.

MAGISTRATE

Quick, quick's the word, say I. (*They follow LYSISTRATA into the Acropolis.*)

CHORUS OF WOMEN (*singing*)

Embroidered stuffs, and dainty tunics, and flowing gowns, and golden ornaments, everything I have, I offer them to you with all my heart; take them all for your children, for your girls, in case they are chosen Canephoroi. I invite you every one to enter, come in and choose whatever you will; there is nothing so well fastened, you cannot break the seals, and carry away the contents. Look about you everywhere. . . you won't find a blessed thing, unless you have sharper eyes than mine. And if any of you lacks corn to feed his slaves and his young

and numerous family, why, I have a few grains of wheat at home; let him take what I have to give, a big twelve-pound loaf included. So let my poorer neighbours all come with bags and wallets; my man, Manes, shall give them corn; but I warn them not to come near my door, but-beware the dog!

(Another MAGISTRATE enters, and begins knocking at the gate.)

SECOND MAGISTRATE

I say, you, open the door! (To the WOMEN) Go your way, I tell you. (As the women sit down in front of the gate) Why, bless me, they're sitting down now; I shall have to singe 'em with my torch to make 'em stir! What impudence! I won't take this. Oh, well, if it's absolutely necessary, just to please you, we'll have to take the trouble.

AN ATHENIAN

And I'll share it with you. *(He brandishes the torch he is carrying and the CHORUS OF WOMEN departs. The CHORUS OF OLD MEN follows shortly after.)*

SECOND MAGISTRATE

No, no, you must be off-or I'll tear your hair out, I will; be off, I say, and don't annoy the Laconian envoys; they're just coming out from the banquet-ball.

ATHENIAN

Such a merry banquet I've never seen before! The Laconians were simply charming. After the drink is in, why, we're all wise men, every one of us.

MAGISTRATE

It's only natural, to be sure, for sober, we're all fools. Take my advice, my fellow-countrymen, our envoys should always be drunk. We go to Sparta; we enter the city sober; why, we must be picking a quarrel directly. We don't understand what they say to us, we imagine a lot they don't say at all, and we report home all wrong, all topsy-urvy. But, look you, to-day it's quite different; we're enchanted whatever happens; instead of Clitagora, they might sing us Telamon, and we should clap our hands just the same. A perjury or two into the bargain, why! What does that matter to merry companions in their cups?

(The two CHORUSES return.)

But here they are back again! Will you begone, you loafing scoundrels.

(The CHORUSES retire again.)

ATHENIAN

Ah ha! here's the company coming out already. (*Two choruses, one Laconian and one Athenian, enter, dancing to the music of flutes; they are followed by the women under the leadership of LYSISTRATA.*)

A LACONIAN

My dear, sweet friend, come, take your flute in hand; I would fain dance and sing my best in honour of the Athenians and our noble selves.

ATHENIAN

Yes, take your flute, in the gods' name. What a delight to see him dance!

LACONIAN (*dancing and singing*)

Oh! Mnemosyne! inspire these men, inspire my muse who knows our exploits and those of the Athenians. With what a god-like ardour did they swoop down at Artemisium on the ships of the Medes! What a glorious victory was that! For the soldiers of Leonidas, they were like fierce boars whetting their tusks. The sweat ran down their faces, and drenched all their limbs, for verily the Persians were as many as the sands of the seashore. Oh! Artemis, huntress queen, whose arrows pierce the denizens of the woods, virgin goddess, be thou favourable to the peace we here conclude; through thee may our hearts be long united! May this treaty draw close for ever the bonds of a happy friendship! No more wiles and stratagems! Aid us, oh! aid us, maiden huntress!

MAGISTRATE

All is for the best; and now, Laconians, take your wives away home with you, and you, Athenians, yours. May husband live happily with wife, and wife with husband. Dance, dance, to celebrate our bliss, and let us be heedful to avoid like mistakes for the future.

CHORUS OF ATHENIANS (*singing*)

Appear, appear, dancers, and the Graces with you! Let us invoke, one and all, Artemis, and her heavenly brother, gracious Apollo, patron of the dance, and Dionysus, whose eye darts flame, as he steps forward surrounded by the Maenad maids, and Zeus, who wields the flashing lightning, and his august, thrice-blessed spouse, the Queen of Heaven! These let us invoke, and all the other gods, calling all the inhabitants of the skies to witness the noble Peace now concluded under the fond auspices of Aphrodite. Io Paeon! Io Paeon! dance, leap, as in honour of a victory won. Euoi! Euoi! Euai! Euai!

MAGISTRATE

And you, our Laconian guests, sing us a new and inspiring strain! LACONIAN (singing)
Leave once more, oh! leave once more the noble height of Taygetus, oh! Muse of
Lacedaemon, and join us in singing the praises of Apollo of Amyclae, and Athene of the
Brazen House, and the gallant twin sons of Tyndareus, who practise arms on the banks of
the Eurotas river. Haste, haste hither with nimble-footed pace, let us sing Sparta, the city that
delights in choruses divinely sweet and graceful dances, when our maidens bound lightly by
the river side, like frolicsome fillies, beating the ground with rapid steps and shaking their
long locks in the wind, as Bacchantes wave their wands in the wild revels of the Wine-god.
At their head, oh! chaste and beauteous goddess, daughter of Leto, Artemis, do thou lead the
song and dance. With a fillet binding thy waving tresses, appear in thy loveliness; leap like a
fawn, strike thy divine hands together to animate the dance, and aid us to renown the valiant
goddess of battles, great Athene of the Brazen House!

(All depart, singing and dancing.)

THE END .