

ARISTOPHANES, *LYSISTRATA*

Aristophanes (c. 450-385 BC) was one of the leading comic playwrights of classical Athens. His *Lysistrata* was performed there in 411 BC, during the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), fought between the Peloponnesian League, an alliance of Greek city states dominated by Sparta, and Athens, which headed what was in theory a voluntary alliance called the "Delian League," but which in fact was so dominated by the Athenians that its members were generally involuntary allies. The year of *Lysistrata's* first production also saw Athens's democracy overthrown and replaced by an oligarchy. (The democracy would be restored in 410.) In this play, the Spartan characters all speak in an unsophisticated dialect; no attempt to reproduce this is made here.

Scene: In a square at Athens

LYSISTRATA: Ah! if only they had been invited to a Dionysian reveling, or a feast of Pan or Aphrodite or Genetyllis,<sup>1</sup> why! the streets would have been impassable for the thronging tambourines! Now there's never a woman here—ah! except my neighbor Calonice, whom I see approaching yonder.... Good day, Calonice.

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

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

CALONICE: And they are quite right, upon my word.

LYSISTRATA: Yet, look: when the women are sum-

moned to meet for a matter of the last importance, they lie in bed instead of coming.

CALONICE: 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 up the slave; 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.

CALONICE: And why do you summon us, dear Lysistrata? What is this all about?

LYSISTRATA: About a big affair.

CALONICE: And is it thick too?

LYSISTRATA: Yes indeed; both big and great.

CALONICE: And we are not all on the spot!

LYSISTRATA: Oh! if it were what you suppose, there would never be an absentee. No, no, it concerns a

thing I have turned about and about this way that for many sleepless nights.

CALONICE: 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!

CALONICE: By women! Why, its salvation hangs by a poor thread then!

LYSISTRATA: Our country's fortunes depend on it; it is for us to undo utterly the Peloponnesia.

CALONICE: That would be truly a noble deed.

LYSISTRATA: To exterminate the Boeotians and their man!

CALONICE: But surely you would spare the Boeotians.

LYSISTRATA: For Athens's sake I will never threaten so fatal a doom; trust me for that. However, Boeotian and Peloponnesian women join together; Greece is saved.

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

LYSISTRATA: Indeed, but those are the very anchors of our salvation—those yellow gowns, those scents and slippers, those cosmetic transparent robes.

CALONICE: How so, pray?

LYSISTRATA: There is not a man will wield a spear against another—

CALONICE: Quick, I will get me a yellow tun and the dyer's.

LYSISTRATA:—or want a shield—

CALONICE: I'll run and put on a flowing gown.

LYSISTRATA:—or draw a sword.

1 These religious celebrations all involved a great relaxation of controls on women. The festival of Dionysius was also imagined as involving women wandering the countryside in a mad frenzy, although the strength of the evidence that this was the case is uncertain. "Genetyllis" was another name for Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

2 I.e., the Spartans and their allies.

3 Other opponents of Athens in the war.

4 Boeotia was known for its eels (which were eaten).

5 The hoplite, or heavy-armed infantryman, held a shield and a spear.

6 The island, now subject to Athens, where the Athenians had a colony.

7 A town in Attica, and so Athenian territory. Citizee is a goddess.

8 A goddess.

9 A small and unimportant section of Athens.

thing I have turned about and about this way and that for many sleepless nights.

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

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LYSISTRATA: Our country's fortunes depend on us—it is for us to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.<sup>2</sup>

CALONICE: That would be truly a noble deed!

LYSISTRATA: To exterminate the Boeotians<sup>3</sup> to a man!

CALONICE: But surely you would spare the eels.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

CALONICE: How so, pray?

LYSISTRATA: There is not a man will wield a lance<sup>5</sup> against another—

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

LYSISTRATA:—or want a shield—

CALONICE: I'll run and put on a flowing gown.

LYSISTRATA:—or draw a sword.

CALONICE: I'll rush and buy a pair of slippers this instant.

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

CALONICE: 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 shoreward parts, not one from Salamis.<sup>6</sup>

CALONICE: But I know for certain they embarked at daybreak.

LYSISTRATA: And the dames from Acharnae!<sup>7</sup> why, I thought they would have been the very first to arrive.

CALONICE: Theagenes's wife at any rate is sure to come; she has actually been to consult Hecate<sup>8</sup>.... But look! here are some arrivals—and there are more behind. Ah! ha! now what countrywomen may they be?

LYSISTRATA: They are from Anagyrae.<sup>9</sup>

CALONICE: Yes! upon my word, it's a levy *en masse* of the whole female population of Anagyra!

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 belt in the dark. However, if the matter is so pressing, here we are; so speak.

LYSISTRATA: No, but let us wait a moment more, until the women of Boeotia arrive and those from the Peloponnese.

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

LYSISTRATA: Good day, Lampito, dear friend from

2 I.e., the Spartans and their allies.

3 Other opponents of Athens in the war.

4 Boeotia was known for its eels (which were eaten).

5 The hoplite, or heavy-armed infantryman, held a thrusting spear or lance.

6 The island, now subject to Athens, where the Athenians defeated the Persian forces during the Persian Wars of the fifth century BC.

7 A town in Attica, and so Athenian territory. Citizens of this region were especially in favor of the war.

8 A goddess.

- Lacedaemon.<sup>10</sup> 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 practice the kick dance.
- LYSISTRATA: And what superb bosoms!
- LAMPITO: La! You are feeling me as if I were a beast for sacrifice.
- LYSISTRATA: And this young woman, what country-woman is she?
- LAMPITO: She is a noble lady from Boeotia.
- LYSISTRATA: Ah! my pretty Boeotian friend, you are as blooming as a garden.
- CALONICE: Yes, on my word! and the garden is so prettily weeded too!
- LYSISTRATA: And who is this?
- LAMPITO: It's an honest woman, by my faith; she comes from Corinth.
- LYSISTRATA: Oh! honest, no doubt then—as honesty goes at Corinth.<sup>11</sup>
- LAMPITO: But who has called together this council of women, pray?
- LYSISTRATA: I have.
- LAMPITO: Well then, tell us what you want of us.
- LYSISTRATA: With pleasure, my dear.
- MYRRHINE: What is the most important business you wish to inform us about?
- LYSISTRATA: I will tell you: But first answer me one question.
- MYRRHINE: What is that?
- 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 undertake to say that there is not one of you whose husband is not abroad at this moment.
- CALONICE: Mine has been the last five months in Thrace—looking after Eucrates.<sup>12</sup>
- LYSISTRATA: It's seven long months since mine left me for Pylos.<sup>13</sup>
- LAMPITO: As for mine, if he ever does return from service, he's no sooner back 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-long dildo even, to be a leather<sup>14</sup> consolation to us poor widows.... Now tell me, if I have discovered a means of ending the war, will you all second me?
- MYRRHINE: Yes truly, by all the goddesses, I swear I will, even if I have to put my gown in pawn, and drink the money the same day.
- CALONICE: 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.<sup>15</sup>
- LYSISTRATA: Then I will come out with it at last, my mighty secret! Oh! sister women, if we would compel our husbands to make peace, we must refrain—
- MYRRHINE: 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 sex altogether. No, 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?
- MYRRHINE: No, I will not do it; let the War go on.
- LYSISTRATA: And you, my pretty flat fish, who declared just now they might split you in two?
- CALONICE: 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? My dear, dear Lysistrata!
- LYSISTRATA: And you?

10 I.e., Sparta.

11 Corinth had a reputation for prostitution.

12 An Athenian general suspected of treachery.

13 A town on the coast in Spartan territory which had been seized from the sea by the Athenians.

14 Dildos were made of leather.

15 In Spartan territory; Spartan women celebrated rites of Dionysius there.

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 about 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 conjure you.

LAMPITO: It's a hard thing, by the two goddesses<sup>16</sup> it is! for a woman to sleep alone without ever a standing weapon in her bed. But there, Peace must come first.

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

CALONICE: But if—which the gods forbid—we do refrain altogether from what you say, would we get peace any sooner?

LYSISTRATA: By the two goddesses, of course we would! We need only sit indoors with painted cheeks, and meet our mates lightly clad in transparent gowns of Amorgos silk, and with our mounds nicely plucked smooth; then their tools will stand like mad and they will 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,<sup>17</sup> threw away his sword, they say.

CALONICE: But, poor devils, suppose our husbands go away and leave us.

LYSISTRATA: Then, as Pherecrates says, we must "flay a skinned dog,"<sup>18</sup> that's all.

CALONICE: Bah! these proverbs are all idle talk.... But if our husbands drag us by main force into the bed-chamber?

LYSISTRATA: Hold on to the door posts.

CALONICE: But if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA: Then yield to their wishes, but with a bad grace; there is no pleasure 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.

CALONICE: Very well, if you *will* 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 hear reason.

LAMPITO: No, impossible, so long as they have their trusty ships and the vast treasures stored in the temple of Athena.<sup>19</sup>

LYSISTRATA: Ah! but we have seen to that; this very day the Acropolis<sup>20</sup> will be in our hands. That is the task assigned to the older women; while we are here in council, they are going, under pretense of offering sacrifice, to seize the citadel.

LAMPITO: Well said indeed! so 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 woman?<sup>21</sup> Now, what on the earth are you staring at, pray? Lay this shield before us, its hollow upwards, and someone bring me the victim's entrails.

CALONICE: Lysistrata, say, what oath are we to swear?

LYSISTRATA: What oath? Why, in Aeschylus,<sup>22</sup> they sacrifice a sheep, and swear over a shield; we will do the same.

<sup>16</sup> Demeter and Proserpina.

<sup>17</sup> From Greek mythology. Menelaus, husband of Helen, was ready to slay her after the Trojan war in revenge for abandoning him for Paris.

<sup>18</sup> Pherecrates was a comic playwright of Aristophanes's time. The proverb means it is useless to do what it is already too late to do—such as flogging a dead horse. Flaying a dog can also be a way of procuring leather to make a dildo.

<sup>19</sup> The treasury of the Delian League, now functioning as an Athenian empire, was kept in the temple of Athena in Athens, and so under Athenian control. It was used to support Athens's navy.

<sup>20</sup> The highest section of the city, a fortified area, where Athena's temple stood.

<sup>21</sup> At Athens the police and ushers in court and at the assembly of citizens were (male) Scythian slaves.

<sup>22</sup> A reference to Aeschylus's play *The Seven Against Thebes* (fifth century BC).

CALONICE: No, Lysistrata, one cannot swear peace over a shield, surely.

LYSISTRATA: What other oath do you prefer?

CALONICE: Let's take a white horse, and sacrifice its entrails.

LYSISTRATA: But where to get a white horse from?

CALONICE: 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 wine-skin of Thasian wine into it, and take an oath not to add one single drop of water.

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

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

CALONICE: Ah! my dears, what a noble, big bowl! what a delight 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 you, bowl, boon comrade of joy and merriment, receive this our sacrifice, and be propitious to us poor women!

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

LAMPITO: And what a delicious savor, by the two goddesses!

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

CALONICE: No, by the goddess of love, let us decide that by lot.

LYSISTRATA: Come then, Lampito, and all of you, put your hands to the bowl; and you, Calonice, repeat in the name of all the solemn terms I am going to recite. Then you must all swear, and pledge yourselves by the same promises: "I will have nothing to do whether with lover or husband ..."

CALONICE: I will have nothing to do whether with lover or husband ...

LYSISTRATA: Albeit he comes to me with a stiff and standing tool ...

CALONICE: Albeit he comes to me with a stiff and standing tool ... Oh! Lysistrata, I cannot bear it!

LYSISTRATA: I will live at home in perfect chastity ...

CALONICE: I will live at home in perfect chastity ...

LYSISTRATA: Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-colored gown ...

CALONICE: Beautifully dressed and wearing a saffron-colored gown ...

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

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

LYSISTRATA: Never will I give myself voluntarily ...

CALONICE: Never will I give myself voluntarily ...

LYSISTRATA: And if he has me by force ...

CALONICE: And if he has me by force ...

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

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

LYSISTRATA: I will not lift my legs in the air ...

CALONICE: I will not lift my legs in the air ...

LYSISTRATA: Nor will I crouch with bottom upraised, like carved lions on a knife handle.

CALONICE: Nor will I crouch with bottom upraised, like carved lions on a knife handle.

LYSISTRATA: And if I keep my oath, may I be allowed to drink of this wine.

CALONICE: And if I keep my oath, may I be allowed to drink of this wine.

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

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

LYSISTRATA: Will you all take this oath?

MYRRHINE: Yes, yes!

LYSISTRATA: Then lo! I immolate the victim.<sup>23</sup> [She drinks.]

CALONICE: Enough, enough, my dear; now let us all drink in turn to cement our friendship.

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, return to Sparta to organize the plot, while your comrades here remain as hostages.<sup>24</sup> For our-

...selves, let us go join the rest in the city and push the bolts well home.

CALONICE: But don't you think the men will get up against us?

LYSISTRATA: I laugh at them. Neither flames shall force open our doors; they will only do so on the conditions I have named.

CALONICE: Yes, yes, by the goddess of chastity, I will keep up our old-time reputation for obstinacy.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Go easy, Dracmides, why, your shoulder is all chafed by the heavy olive sticks. But forward still, for as must be. What unlooked-for things will come to be sure, in a long life! Ah! Strymon would ever have thought it? Here were the women, who used, for our misfortune, to knead bread and live in our houses, daring not to lay hands on the holy image of the goddess; they will seize the Acropolis and draw bars and bolts to prevent any from entering! Come, Philurgus, hurry there; let's lay our faggots all against the citadel, and on the blazing pile burn the hands these vile conspiratrices, one and all! Lycon's wife, Lysistrata, first and foremost, Demeter, I will never let 'em laugh at me again; I will have a breath left in my body. Cleomene, the first who ever seized our citadel,<sup>25</sup> had it not been for his pride, he had to deliver me up his arms and go off with a single garment to his back. My beard, he was filthy and ragged! and what an old beard, to be sure! He had not had a bath for twenty years! Oh! but that was a mighty siege! The women were ranged seventeen deep before the gates, and they never left their posts, even to sleep. These were these enemies of Euripides<sup>26</sup> and all the rest; shall I do nothing to hinder their inordin-

23 Sacrificed animals were burned or cooked after being slaughtered. The gods fed off the smell.

24 In 425 the Athenians had captured 120 Spartan soldiers, and held them as hostages in order to prevent Sparta from invading Athenian territory.

25 Much earlier in the fifth century.

26 A contemporary of Aristophanes and one of the great Athenian victors over the Persians during the Peloponnesian War.

27 The great Athenian victory over the Persians during the Peloponnesian War.

28 Lemnos was associated with frequent disaster.

29 Samos had just established a democracy and sided with the Athenians.

30 Traditionally, the victor of a battle set up a "triumphal arch" to commemorate the victory.

selves, let us go join the rest in the citadel, and let us push the bolts well home.

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

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

CALONICE: Yes, yes, by the goddess of love! let us keep up our old-time reputation for obstinacy and spite.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Go easy, Draces, go easy; why, your shoulder is all chafed by these plaguey heavy olive sticks. But forward still, forward, man, as must be. 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! Come, Philurgus man, let's hurry there; let's lay our faggots all around the citadel, and on the blazing pile burn with our hands these vile conspiratresses, one and all—and Lycon's wife, Lysistrata, first and foremost! No, by Demeter, I will never let 'em laugh at me, whiles I have a breath left in my body. Cleomenes himself, the first who ever seized our citadel,<sup>25</sup> had to leave it to his sore dishonor; 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! 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<sup>26</sup> and all the gods—shall I do nothing to hinder their inordinate inso-

lence? else let them tear down my trophies of Marathon.<sup>27</sup> But look, to finish our toilsome climb, we have only this last steep bit left to mount. Truly it's no easy job without beasts of burden, and how these logs bruise my shoulder! Still let us go on, and blow on our fire and see it does not go out just as we reach our destination. Phew! phew! [blows on the fire]. Oh! dear! what a dreadful smoke! It bites my eyes like a mad dog. It is Lemnos<sup>28</sup> fire for sure, or it would never devour my eyelids like this. Come on, Laches, let's hurry, let's bring help to the goddess; it's now or never! Phew! phew! [blows on the fire]. Oh! dear! what confounded smoke! 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 like a battering-ram? If they don't answer our summons by pulling back the bolts, then we set fire to the wood-work, and the smoke will choke 'em. Ye gods! what smoke! Pfaugh! Is there never a Samos general<sup>29</sup> who will help me unload my burden? Ah! it shall not gall my shoulder any more. [Tosses down his wood.] Come, brazier, do your duty, make the embers flare so I may kindle a brand; I want to be the first to hurl one. Help me, heavenly Victory; let us punish for their insolent audacity the women who have seized our citadel, and may we raise a trophy<sup>30</sup> of triumph for success!

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Oh! my dears, I think I see fire and smoke; can it be a conflagration? Let us hurry all we can. Fly, fly, Nicodice, before 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.<sup>31</sup> Oh! what a crowd there was, and what a din! What a rattling of water pots!

25 Much earlier in the fifth century.

26 A contemporary of Aristophanes and one of the leading playwrights of Athens, Euripides had a reputation for misogyny.

27 The great Athenian victory over the Persians during the Persian wars.

28 Lemnos was associated with frequent disaster.

29 Samos had just established a democracy and sided with Athens before *Lysistrata* was produced.

30 Traditionally, the victor of a battle set up a "trophy," made up of the arms of the defeated dead, on the field of battle.

31 This would be a public water source.

- 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. News has been brought us that a company of old, doddering graybeards, loaded with enormous faggots, as if they wanted to heat a furnace, have taken the field, vomiting dreadful threats, crying that they must reduce these horrible women to ashes. Do not allow them, oh! goddess, but of your grace may I see Athens and Greece cured of their warlike folly. It's to this end, oh! guardian deity of our city, goddess of the golden helmet,<sup>32</sup> they have seized your sanctuary. Be their friend and ally, Athena, and if any man hurls against them lighted firebrands, help us carry water to extinguish them.
- STRATYLLIS: Let me be, I say. Oh! oh! [She calls for help.]
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: What is this I see, you wretched old men? Honest and pious folk you cannot be who act so vilely.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Ah, ha! here's something new! a swarm of women stand posted outside to defend the gates!
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Ah! ah! we frighten you, do we? we seem a mighty host, yet you do not see the ten-thousandth part of our sex.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Ho, Phaedrias! shall we stop their cackle? Suppose one of us were to break a stick across their backs, eh?
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Let us set down our water pots on the ground, to be out of the way, in case they dare offer us violence.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Let someone knock out two or three teeth for them, as they did to Bupalus;<sup>33</sup> they won't talk so loud then.
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Come on then; I wait for you with an unflinching foot, and I will snap off your testicles like a bitch.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Silence! before my stick cuts short your days.
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Now, just you dare to touch Stratyllis with the tip of your finger!
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: And if I batter you to pieces with my fists, what will you do?
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: I will tear out your lungs and entrails with my teeth.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Oh! what a clever poet is Euripides! how well he says that woman is the most shameless of animals.
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Let's pick up our water jars again, Rhodippe.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Ah! accursed whore, what do you mean to do here with your water?
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: And you, old death-in-life, with your fire? Is it to cremate yourself?
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: I am going to build you a pyre to roast your female friends upon.
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: And I—I am going to put out your fire.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: You put out my fire—you!
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Yes, you shall soon see.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: I don't know what prevents me from roasting you with this torch.
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: I am getting you a bath ready to clean off the filth.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: A bath for me, you dirty slut, you!
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Yes, indeed, a nuptial bath—he, he!
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Do you hear that? What insolence!
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: I am a free woman, I tell you.
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: I will make you hold your tongue, never fear!
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Ah, ha! you shall never sit more amongst the heliasts.<sup>34</sup>
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Burn off her hair for her!
- CHORUS OF WOMEN: Water; do your office! [The Women pitch the water in their water pots over the old men.]
- CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!

32 Athena, who wore a helmet and armor.

33 A sculptor who was so harshly attacked in verse by a poet whose image he had sculpted in an ugly fashion that he killed himself.

34 The panels of judges/jurors who heard legal cases at Athens.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Was it hot?

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Hot, great gods! Enough, enough!

CHORUS OF WOMEN: I'm watering you, to make you bloom afresh.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Alas! I am too dry! Ah, me! how I am trembling with cold!

MAGISTRATE: These women, have they made din enough, I wonder, with their tambourines? Bewept Adonis enough upon their terraces?<sup>35</sup> I was listening to the speeches last assembly day, and Demostratus,<sup>36</sup> 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<sup>37</sup> at Zacynthus<sup>38</sup>—and lo! his wife, more than half drunk, was screaming on the house-roof: "Weep, weep for Adonis!" while that infamous Mad Ox<sup>39</sup> was bellowing away on his side. Do you not blush, you women, for your wild and uproarious doings?

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: But you don't know all their effrontery yet! They abused and insulted us, and 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 bepossed ourselves.

MAGISTRATE: And it's well done too, by Poseidon!<sup>40</sup> We men must share the blame for 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, jeweler," he says, "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 over tonight to make her fastening secure?" Another will go to a 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 soften the thing and stretch it." Now see the results. Take my own case—as a Magistrate I have enlisted rowers;<sup>41</sup> I want money to pay 'em, and lo! 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! [addressing one of his attendant officers] what are you gaping at the crows for? looking for a tavern, I suppose, eh? Come, crowbars here, and force open the gates. I will put a hand to the work myself.

LYSISTRATA: 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: 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 might be, let him look out for himself!

MAGISTRATE [to the officer]: How now, are you afraid? Seize her, I tell you, around the middle. Two of you at her, and have done with it!

FIRST WOMAN: By Pandrosos!<sup>42</sup> if you lay a hand on her, I'll stomp you underfoot till you shit your guts!

35 A reference to the festival which commemorated the death of the mythical figure Adonis, a very handsome male, beloved of Aphrodite. The festival was celebrated by women with great weeping on the terraces and rooftops of Athens, and with tambourines.

36 Demostratus was in fact a politician who proposed an Athenian military expedition to Sicily (415-413) on the first day of the festival of Adonis. The expedition not only helped bring on a resumption of hostilities in the Peloponnesian War, but also was in itself a military disaster.

37 A kind of heavily armed infantryman.

38 An ally of Athens.

39 A nickname of Demostratus.

40 God of the sea.

41 For warships.

42 Goddess of the dew.

MAGISTRATE: Oh, there! my guts! Where is my other officer? Bind that minx first, who speaks so prettily!

SECOND WOMAN: By Phoebe,<sup>43</sup> if you touch her with one finger, you'd better call quick for a surgeon!

MAGISTRATE: What do you mean? Officer, where have you got to? Lay hold of her. Oh! but I'm going to stop your foolishness for you all!

THIRD WOMAN: By the Tauric Artemis, if you go near her, I'll pull out your hair, scream as you like.

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! my Scythians,<sup>44</sup> 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!

LYSISTRATA: Forward, my gallant companions; march forth, you 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 officers.] Enough, enough! now retire, never rob the vanquished!

MAGISTRATE: Here's a fine exploit 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 ardor that fills the bosom of free-born women.

MAGISTRATE: Ardor! yes, by Apollo,<sup>45</sup> ardor enough—especially for the wine cup!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Sir, sir! Why waste 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!

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 mile-stone; but beware the wasps, if you go stirring up the wasps' nest!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Ah! great gods! how to get the better of these ferocious creatures? It's past all bearing! But come, let us try to find out the reason for the dreadful scourge. With what end in view have they seized the citadel of Cranaus,<sup>46</sup> the sacred shrine that is raised upon the inaccessible rock of the Acropolis? Question them; be cautious and not too credulous. It'd 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 Peisander<sup>47</sup> and all the other agitators were forever raising revolutions. Well and good! but they'll never get another drachma<sup>48</sup> 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 that 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, just we.

MAGISTRATE: What a sorry business!

LYSISTRATA: Yes, we're going to save you, you wish it or no.

MAGISTRATE: Oh! the impudence of the creature!

LYSISTRATA: You seem annoyed! but there's got to come to it.

MAGISTRATE: But it's the very height of impudence!

LYSISTRATA: We're going to save you, my dear man!

MAGISTRATE: But if I don't want to be saved!

LYSISTRATA: Why, all the more reason!

MAGISTRATE: But what a notion, to conceal ourselves with questions of Peace and War!

LYSISTRATA: We will explain our idea.

MAGISTRATE: Out with it then; quick, or I'll be coming in here!

LYSISTRATA: Listen, and never a movement!

MAGISTRATE: Oh! it is too much for me! I'll keep my temper!

A WOMAN: Then look out for yourself; you'll have more to fear than we have.

MAGISTRATE: Stop your croaking, old crow, [addressing Lysistrata] Now you, say your say.

LYSISTRATA: Willingly. All the long time that we have lasted, we have endured in modest silence; we never allowed ourselves to open our lips. We were far from satisfied, for we knew things were going; often in our homes we hear you discussing; upside down and inside some important turn of affairs. Then we hear hearts, but smiling lips, we would ask you in today's Assembly did they vote Peace?" My husband would growl, "Mind your own business! Hold your tongue!" And I would say no more.

A WOMAN: I would not have held my tongue, 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 better than arrived at some fresh decision more fatally than ever. "Ah! my dear man," I would say,

43 Another name for Artemis, goddess of the moon and of the hunt.

44 See above, n 21.

45 The god of prophecy, music, and other arts.

46 In myth, the second king of Athens.

47 A politician who carried out the oligarchic coup at Athens in 411.

48 Unit of currency.

49 I.e., comb wool in order to straighten its fibers, price.

50 That is Eros (Cupid), the son of Aphrodite.

LYSISTRATA: Yes, just we.

MAGISTRATE: What a sorry business!

LYSISTRATA: Yes, we're going to save you, whether you wish it or no.

MAGISTRATE: Oh! the impudence of the creatures!

LYSISTRATA: You seem annoyed! but there, you've got to come to it.

MAGISTRATE: But it's the very height of iniquity!

LYSISTRATA: We're going to save you, my 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: Listen, and never a movement, please!

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

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

MAGISTRATE: Stop your croaking, old crow, you! [To Lysistrata] Now you, say your say.

LYSISTRATA: Willingly. All the long time the War has lasted, we have endured in modest silence all you men did; we never allowed ourselves 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 the husband would growl, "Mind your own business! Hold your tongue!" And I would say no more.

A WOMAN: 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, or 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! it's too much! The insolence of the creatures! Silence, I say.

LYSISTRATA: Silence yourself!

MAGISTRATE: May I die a thousand deaths before I obey one who wears a veil!

LYSISTRATA: If that's all that troubles you, here, take my veil, wrap it around your head, and hold your tongue. Then take this basket; put on a girdle, card wool,<sup>49</sup> munch beans. The War shall be women's business.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Lay aside your water pots, we will guard them, we will help our friends and companions. 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. 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<sup>50</sup> and the sweet Cyprian Queen<sup>51</sup> shower seductive charms on our bosoms and all our person. If only we can stir so amorous a lust among the men that their tools stand stiff as sticks, we shall indeed deserve the name of peacemakers among the Greeks.

49 I.e., comb wool in order to straighten its fibers, prior to spinning.

50 That is Eros (Cupid), the son of Aphrodite.

51 I.e., Aphrodite.

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.

A WOMAN: That will be something gained, anyway, by the Paphian goddess,<sup>52</sup> it will!

LYSISTRATA: Now we see 'em, mixed up with saucepans and kitchen stuff, armed to the teeth, looking like wild Corybantes!<sup>53</sup>

MAGISTRATE: Why, of course; that's how brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA: Oh! but what a funny sight, to behold a man wearing a Gorgon's-head shield coming along to buy fish!

A WOMAN: The other day in the Market I saw a phylarch<sup>54</sup> with flowing ringlets; he was on horseback, and was pouring into his helmet the broth he had just bought at an old dame's stall. There was a Thracian warrior too, who was brandishing his lance like Tereus in the play;<sup>55</sup> 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 states 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 off the War, we shall send embassies hither and thither and everywhere, to disentangle matters.

MAGISTRATE: And it's 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—it's 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 wool coils; find the ends of the separate threads, draw them to a center here, wind them into one, make one great coil 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 skill 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 erect his organ ...

LYSISTRATA: But you, why don't you get done with it

and die? You are rich; go buy you will knead you a honey cake for (take this garland.<sup>57</sup> [Drenching him  
FIRST WOMAN: And this one too.  
with water.]

SECOND WOMAN: And these heading him with water.]

LYSISTRATA: What more do you lack the boat; Charon<sup>58</sup> is waiting for youing him from pushing off.

MAGISTRATE: To treat me so scurrilous! I will go show myself to mortals just as I am.

LYSISTRATA: What! are you blaming me, being exposed you according to custom sole yourself; we will not fail to offer day sacrifice for you, first thing in the

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Awake, friends let us hold ourselves ready to accept mighty peril; I foresee another tyrant Pias's.<sup>60</sup> I am sore afraid the Lacedaemonians assembled here with Cleisthenes<sup>61</sup> the gem of war, stir up these women, and gods, and seize our treasury and the by I lived.<sup>62</sup> Is it not a sin and a shame to interfere in advising the citizens, to part and lances, and to ally themselves with  
ans,<sup>63</sup> fellows I trust no more than

56 The dead were interred with a honey cake entrance to the land of the dead.

57 Of wool, presumably.

58 Charon ferried the dead over the river Styx

59 The dead were laid out by women for view

60 Hippias the tyrant was the son of Pisistratus

to the tyranny. These events followed the assassination, who were remembered by the Athenians

61 Not to be confused with the more famous Cleisthenes

62 Athenian citizens were paid for attending the navy.

63 I.e., the Spartans.

64 A reference to a popular drinking song about the war

65 See above n 60.

66 Four girls carried objects sacred to Athena in the festival

67 Another ritual; the flour was used to make cakes

68 An annual Athenian festival for Artemis at which certain aspects of the festival may have significance

52 I.e., Aphrodite.

53 Priests of the goddess Cybele who engaged in wild dances while beating cymbals in worship of the goddess.

54 A captain of the cavalry.

55 A lost play of Euripides is about Tereus, son of the war god Ares, and king of the Thracians

and die? You are rich; go buy yourself a bier, and I will knead you a honey cake for Cerberus.<sup>56</sup> Here, take this garland.<sup>57</sup> [Drenching him with water.]

FIRST WOMAN: And this one too. [Drenching him with water.]

SECOND WOMAN: And these headbands. [Drenching him with water.]

LYSISTRATA: What more do you lack? Step aboard the boat; Charon<sup>58</sup> 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?<sup>59</sup> No, console yourself; we will not fail to offer up the third-day sacrifice for you, first thing in the morning.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Awake, friends of freedom; let us hold ourselves ready to act. I suspect a mighty peril; I foresee another tyranny like Hippias's.<sup>60</sup> I am sore afraid the Laconians may have assembled here with Cleisthenes<sup>61</sup> to, by a stratagem of war, stir up these women, enemies of the gods, and seize our treasury and the funds whereby I lived.<sup>62</sup> 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,<sup>63</sup> 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,<sup>64</sup> I will post myself in the Public Square under arms, shoulder to shoulder with Aristogeiton.<sup>65</sup> And now, to make a start, I must just break a few of that cursed old jade's teeth yonder.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: No, 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; 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 was bearer of the sacred vessels,<sup>66</sup> at ten, I pounded barley for the altar of Athena,<sup>67</sup> next, clad in a robe of yellow silk, I was a little bear to Artemis at the Brauronia,<sup>68</sup> presently, grown a tall, handsome maiden, they put a necklace of dried figs about my neck, and I was Basket-Bearer.<sup>69</sup> 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 graybeards, you contribute nothing to the public charges; on the

56 The dead were interred with a honey cake with which to occupy the fierce three-headed dog, Cerberus, who guarded the entrance to the land of the dead.

57 Of wool, presumably.

58 Charon ferried the dead over the river Styx to Hades, the land of the dead.

59 The dead were laid out by women for viewing.

60 Hippias the tyrant was the son of Pisistratus, tyrant of Athens. Hippias was driven out of Athens in 510 BC, bringing an end to the tyranny. These events followed the assassination of Hippias's brother, Hipparchus, by the lovers Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who were remembered by the Athenians as heroic opponents of tyranny.

61 Not to be confused with the more famous Cleisthenes of the later sixth century BC.

62 Athenian citizens were paid for attending the Assembly and serving as judges/jurors. They were also paid for serving in the navy.

63 I.e., the Spartans.

64 A reference to a popular drinking song about the assassination of Hipparchus (for which see above n 60).

65 See above n 60.

66 Four girls carried objects sacred to Athena in a semiannual festival.

67 Another ritual; the flour was used to make cakes offered to Athena.

68 An annual Athenian festival for Artemis at which girls dressed as bears and performed a "bear dance." Their participation in certain aspects of the festival may have signalled their eligibility for marriage.

69 A woman who carried cake and led processions at important Athenian festivals.

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: Outrage upon outrage! things are going from bad to worse. Let us punish the minxes, every one of us that has a man's appendages to boast of. Come, off with our tunics, for a man must savor of manhood; come, my friends, let us strip naked from head to foot.<sup>70</sup> Courage, I say, we who in our day garrisoned Lipsydriion,<sup>71</sup> let us be young again, and shake off old age. If we give them the least hold over us, it's all up! Their audacity will know no bounds! We shall see them building ships, and fighting sea-fights, like Artemisia,<sup>72</sup> nay, if they want to mount and ride as cavalry, we had best cashier the cavalry, for indeed women excel in riding, and have a fine, firm seat for the gallop.<sup>73</sup> Just think of all those squadrons of Amazons Micon<sup>74</sup> has painted for us engaged in hand-to-hand combat with men. Come then, we must even fit collars to all these necks to put them in the stocks.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: 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 send you yelling for help. Come, dames, off with the tunics, and quick's the word; women must scent the savor of women in the throes of passion.... Now just you dare to measure strength with me, old graybeard, and I warrant you you'll never more eat garlic or black beans. 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.<sup>75</sup> 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 neighbors 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 someone gives you a neat trip-up and breaks your neck for you!

CHORUS OF WOMEN: [addressing Lysistrata] 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 behavior of these naughty women, it's the female heart and female weakness that so discourages me.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Tell us, tell us, what is it?

LYSISTRATA: I only tell the simple truth.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: What has happened that is so disconcerting; come, tell your friends.

LYSISTRATA: Oh! the thing is so hard to tell—yet so impossible to conceal.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: No, never seek to hide any ill that has befallen our cause.

LYSISTRATA: To blurt it out in a word—we are in heat!

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's house, when I seized her by the hair. One and all,

they are inventing excuses to be off! H there goes one, trying to get out! H where are you going so fast?

FIRST WOMAN: I want to go home; I house some Miletus wool which is getting up by the worms.

LYSISTRATA: Bah! you and your worms say!

FIRST WOMAN: I will return immediately will by the two goddesses! I only have spread it out on the bed,

LYSISTRATA: You shall not do anything or say, you shall not go.

FIRST WOMAN: Must I leave my wool to LYSISTRATA: Yes, if need be.

SECOND WOMAN: Unhappy woman that for my flax! I've left it at home unstripped

LYSISTRATA: So, here's another trying to come home and strip her flax forsooth!

SECOND WOMAN: Oh! I swear by the light, the instant I have put it in condition come straight back.

LYSISTRATA: You shall do nothing of the kind you began, others would want to follow

THIRD WOMAN: Oh! goddess divine patroness of women in labor, stay, stay that I have reached a spot less hallowed than Mount!

LYSISTRATA: What mean you by these silly

THIRD WOMAN: I am going to have a child this minute.

LYSISTRATA: But you were not pregnant!

THIRD WOMAN: Well, I am today. Oh! let me search of the midwife, Lysistrata, quick.

LYSISTRATA: What is this fable you are telling? Ah! what have you got there so hard?

THIRD WOMAN: A male child.

LYSISTRATA: No, no, by Aphrodite! nothing sort! Why, it feels like something hollow—a kettle. Oh! you baggage, if you have not

70 Greek athletes competed in the nude. Heroic male figures were also portrayed nude.

71 A town in Athenian territory which was taken from Athens but returned to it with the fall of the tyranny there.

72 Queen of Halicarnassus and an ally of the king of Persia in the Persian war. She sailed with her battleships in the naval battle of Salamis.

73 "The horse" was a sexual position in which the woman mounts the man.

74 Micon, a famous painter, had painted frescoes at Athens depicting battles between the Athenians and the Amazons, a mythical clan of woman warriors.

75 In a fable of Aeson, the beetle throws the eagle's eggs out of the nest, breaking them.

76 I.e., Athena, who wore armor.

77 A mythical snake.

78 The owl was the symbol of Athena (and so of A

they are inventing excuses to be off home. Look! there goes one, trying to get out! Halloo there! where are you going so fast?

FIRST WOMAN: I want to go home; I have in the house some Miletus wool 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 unstripped!

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

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 labor, stay, stay the birth, till I have reached a spot less hallowed than Athena'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 today. Oh! let me go in search of the midwife, Lysistrata, quick, quick!

LYSISTRATA: What is this fable you are telling me? 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. Oh! you baggage, if you have not got the

sacred helmet of Pallas<sup>76</sup>—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 pretenses every word! The thing's as clear as daylight. Anyway, you must stay here now until 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.<sup>77</sup>

FOURTH WOMAN: Ah! and those confounded owls<sup>78</sup> 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?

FIRST WOMAN: Yes, tell us what the oracle declares.

LYSISTRATA: Silence then! Now, "When the swallows, fleeing before the hoopoes,<sup>79</sup> 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; yes, and Zeus, which thunders in the skies, shall set above what was before below—"

CHORUS OF WOMEN: What! shall the men be underneath?

LYSISTRATA: "But if dissension arises 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."

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Ye gods! the prophecy is clear. No, never let us be cast down by calamity! Let us

76 I.e., Athena, who wore armor.

77 A mythical snake.

78 The owl was the symbol of Athena (and so of Athens).

79 A kind of crested bird.

be brave, and go back to our posts. It would be shameful indeed not to trust the promises of the Oracle.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: 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 lived in the mountains, wove himself nets, kept a dog 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: You dear old woman, I would kiss you.

A WOMAN: I will set you crying without onions.

OLD MAN: And give you a sound kicking.

OLD WOMAN: Ah, ha! what a dense forest you have there! [Pointing.]

OLD MAN: So was Myronides one of the best-bearded of men of this side; his backside was all black, and he terrified his enemies as much as Phormio.<sup>80</sup>

CHORUS OF WOMEN: I want to tell you a fable too, to match yours about Melanion. Once there was a certain man called Timon,<sup>81</sup> 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 'em. He had a holy horror of ill-conditioned fellows, but he was mighty tender towards women.

A WOMAN: Suppose I up and broke your jaw for you!

AN OLD MAN: I am not a bit afraid of you.

A WOMAN: Suppose I let fly a good kick at you?

OLD MAN: I should see your backside then.

WOMAN: You would see that, for all my age, it is very well attended to, and all fresh singed smooth.

LYSISTRATA: Ho there! come quick, come quick!

FIRST WOMAN: 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.

FIRST WOMAN: Where is he, this unknown foe?

LYSISTRATA: Yonder—beside the Temple of Demeter.<sup>82</sup>

FIRST WOMAN: Yes, indeed, I see him; but who is it?

LYSISTRATA: Look, look! does any of you recognize him?

FIRST WOMAN: I do, I do! it's my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA: To work then! Let your task be to inflame and torture and torment him. Seductions, caresses, provocations, refusals, try every means! Grant every favor—always excepting what is forbidden by our oath on the wine bowl.

MYRRHINE: Have no fear, I undertake the work.

LYSISTRATA: Well, I will stay here to help you cajole the man and set his passions aflame. The rest of you, withdraw.

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: Yes, no doubt about it, a man!

LYSISTRATA: Begone!

CINESIAS: But who are you that thus repulses me?

LYSISTRATA: The sentinel of the day.

CINESIAS: By all the gods, call Myrrhine hither.

LYSISTRATA: Call Myrrhine here. And pray, who are you?

CINESIAS: I am her husband, Cinesias, son of Peon.

LYSISTRATA: Ah! good day, my dear friend. Your name is not unknown amongst us. Your wife has it for ever 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, your wife quickly declares:

"Oh! all the rest, they're good for nothing compared with Cinesias."

CINESIAS: Oh! I beseech you, go and call her to me.

LYSISTRATA: And what will you give me for my trouble?

CINESIAS: All this, if you like. I will give you all I have here!

LYSISTRATA: Well, well, I will tell her to come.

CINESIAS: Quick, oh! be quick! Life has been full of charms for me since she left my house, but now I am sad, when I go indoors; it all seems so dreary, my victuals have lost their savor. Desire is my heart!

MYRRHINE: I love him, oh! I love him; but let himself be loved. No! I shall not come.

CINESIAS: Myrrhine, my little darling, what are you saying? Come down to me.

MYRRHINE: No indeed, not I.

CINESIAS: I call you, Myrrhine, Myrrhine, why will you not come?

MYRRHINE: Why should you call me? You are the one who want me.

CINESIAS: Not want you! Why, my weariness is stiff with desire!

MYRRHINE: Good-bye.

CINESIAS: Oh! Myrrhine, Myrrhine, in your name, hear me; at any rate hear the child! Call your mother.

CHILD: Mommy, mommy, mommy!

CINESIAS: There, listen! Don't you pity the child? It's six days now you've not washed the child.

MYRRHINE: Poor darling, your father takes 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 woman! Well, well, we must come down, I suppose.

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

MYRRHINE: You are as sweet as your father, and as good-looking! Let me kiss you, my treasure, my darling!

80 Both men mentioned were well-known Athenian military commanders.

81 An actual contemporary of Aristophanes.

82 The goddess of the harvest.

83 I.e., the cloth Myrrhine has been weaving.

84 A god with a reputation for lechery.

- LYSISTRATA: And what will you give me for my trouble?
- CINESIAS: All this, if you like. I will give you what I have here!
- LYSISTRATA: Well, well, I will tell her to come.
- 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 savor. Desire is eating out my heart!
- MYRRHINE: 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; will you not come?
- MYRRHINE: Why should you call me? You do not want me.
- CINESIAS: Not want you! Why, my weapon stands stiff with desire!
- MYRRHINE: Good-bye.
- CINESIAS: Oh! Myrrhine, Myrrhine, in our child's name, hear me; at any rate hear the child! Little lad, call your mother.
- CHILD: Mommy, mommy, mommy!
- CINESIAS: There, listen! Don't you pity the poor child? It's six days now you've not washed and not 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: 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: 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: Hands off, sir!
- CINESIAS: Everything is going to rack and ruin in the house.
- MYRRHINE: I don't care.
- CINESIAS: But your web<sup>83</sup> 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 come back home?
- MYRRHINE: No, at least, not until 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. Until then, I am bound by an oath.
- CINESIAS: At any rate, let's have a short time together.
- MYRRHINE: No, no, no! ... all the same I cannot say I don't love you.
- CINESIAS: You love me? Then why refuse what I ask, my little girl, my sweet Myrrhine.
- MYRRHINE: You must be joking! What, before the child!
- CINESIAS: Manes, carry the lad home. There, you see, the child is gone; there's nothing to hinder us; let us get to work!
- MYRRHINE: But, miserable man, where, where are we to do it?
- CINESIAS: In the cave of Pan,<sup>84</sup> nothing could be better.
- MYRRHINE: But how to purify myself, before going back into the citadel?
- CINESIAS: Nothing easier! you can wash at the Clepsydra.<sup>85</sup>
- MYRRHINE: But my oath? Do you want me to perjure myself?

83 I.e., the cloth Myrrhine has been weaving.

84 A god with a reputation for lechery.

85 A spring on the acropolis.

CINESIAS: I take all responsibility; never make yourself anxious.

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

CINESIAS: Oh! it's not worthwhile; we can lie on the ground surely.

MYRRHINE: No, no! bad man as you are, I don't like your lying on the bare earth.

CINESIAS: Ah! how the dear girl loves me!

MYRRHINE: [coming back with a bed] Come, get to bed quick; I am going to undress. But, plague take it, we must get a mattress.

CINESIAS: A mattress! Oh! no, never mind!

MYRRHINE: No, by Artemis!<sup>86</sup> lie on the bare sack- ing, never! That would be too squalid.

CINESIAS: A kiss!

MYRRHINE: Wait a minute!

CINESIAS: Oh! by the great gods, be back quick!

MYRRHINE: [coming back with a mattress] Here is a mattress. Lie down, I am just going to undress. But, but you've got no pillow.

CINESIAS: I don't want one, no, no.

MYRRHINE: But I do.

CINESIAS: Oh! dear, oh, dear! they treat my poor penis for all the world like Heracles.<sup>87</sup>

MYRRHINE: [coming back with a pillow] There, lift your head, dear!

CINESIAS: That's really everything.

MYRRHINE: Is it everything, I wonder.

CINESIAS: Come, my treasure.

MYRRHINE: I am just unfastening my belt. 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: Great Zeus! Does that matter? It's you I want to fuck.

MYRRHINE: 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 up for one moment.

CINESIAS: But I tell you, our friend here is up—all stiff and ready!

MYRRHINE: Would you like me to perfume you?

CINESIAS: No, by Apollo, no, please!

MYRRHINE: Yes, by Aphrodite, but I will, whether you wish it or not.

CINESIAS: Ah! great Zeus, may she soon be done!

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'll improve when it's well rubbed in. Somehow it does not smack of the marriage bed!

MYRRHINE: There, what a scatterbrain I am: if I have not brought Rhodian perfumes!

CINESIAS: Never mind, dearest, let it be now.

MYRRHINE: You are joking!

CINESIAS: Deuce take the man who first invented perfumes, say I!

MYRRHINE: [coming back with another flask] Here, take this bottle.

CINESIAS: I have a better all ready for your service, 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! I must have someone to fuck, I must! Ah me! the loveliest of women has swindled and cheated me. Poor little lad [addressing his penis], how am I to give you what you want so badly? Where is Dog-fox?<sup>88</sup> quick, man, get him a nurse!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Poor, miserable wretch, balked in your amorousness! what tortures are yours! Ah! you fill me with pity. Could any man's back and loins stand such a strain? His organ

stands stiff and rigid, and there's never help him!

CINESIAS: You gods in heaven, what pair  
CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Well, there it doing, that abandoned hussy!

CINESIAS: Nay, nay! rather say that sweet darling.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: That dearest darling that hussy, I say! Zeus, god of the skies, let loose a hurricane, to sweep them all air, and whirl 'em round, then drop crash! and impale them on the point of h

A HERALD: Say, where shall I find the Eld. Prytaner?<sup>89</sup> I am bearer of dispatches.

MAGISTRATE: But are you a man or a pray?

HERALD: Oh! but he's mighty simple. I am of course, I swear I am, and I come from about making peace.

MAGISTRATE: But look, you are hiding a fair your clothes, surely.

HERALD: No, nothing of the sort.

MAGISTRATE: Then why do you turn away and hold your cloak out from your body you gotten swellings in the groin from your ney?

HERALD: By the twin brethren! the man maniac.

MAGISTRATE: Ah, ha! my fine lad, why I am standing, oh fie!

HERALD: I tell you no! but enough of this for

MAGISTRATE: Well, what is it you have then?

HERALD: A Lacedaemonian skytale.<sup>91</sup>

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

HERALD: Why, everything is turned upside

86 Goddess of the moon and the hunt.

87 The Greek name of the heroically strong Hercules. In comedies he was often depicted as a glutton who waits indefinitely for appetizing dishes.

88 Nickname of Philostratus, a brothel-keeper at Athens.

89 An executive council.

90 The god of gardens, son of Aphrodite and, accordingly, a man with a large, prominent erect penis.

91 A device for sending secret messages. A strip of leather of a certain length. The leather was then removed, and the message was written on the same thickness.

92 A city which had long been the aim of the Spartans.

stands stiff and rigid, and there's never a wench to help him!

CINESIAS: You gods in heaven, what pains I suffer!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Well, there it is; it's her doing, that abandoned hussy!

CINESIAS: Nay, nay! rather say that sweetest, dearest darling.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: That dearest darling? no, no, that hussy, I say! Zeus, god of the skies, can you not let loose a hurricane, to sweep them all up into the air, and whirl 'em round, then drop 'em down, crash! and impale them on the point of his weapon!

A HERALD: Say, where shall I find the Elders and the Prytanes?<sup>89</sup> I am bearer of dispatches.

MAGISTRATE: But are you a man or a Priapus,<sup>90</sup> pray?

HERALD: Oh! but he's mighty simple. I am a herald, of course, I swear I am, and I come from Sparta about making peace.

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

HERALD: No, nothing of the sort.

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

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

MAGISTRATE: Ah, ha! my fine lad, why I can see it standing, oh fie!

HERALD: I tell you no! but enough of this foolery.

MAGISTRATE: Well, what is it you have there then?

HERALD: A Lacedaemonian skytale.<sup>91</sup>

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 are half dead with lusting. We simply must have Pellene.<sup>92</sup>

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

HERALD: No, but Lampito's and the Spartan women's, acting at her instigation; they have denied the men all access to their cunts.

MAGISTRATE: But whatever do you do?

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 their cunts until we have all agreed to conclude peace.

MAGISTRATE: Ha, ha! So I see now, it's a general conspiracy embracing all Greece. You go back to Sparta and bid them send envoys with plenary powers to treat for peace. I will urge our Elders myself to name ambassadors with full power from us, and to persuade them, why, I will show them *this*.

HERALD: What could be better? I fly at your command.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: No wild beast is there, no flame of fire, more fierce and untamable than woman; the panther is less savage and shameless.

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.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Never, never can my hatred towards women cease.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Well, please yourself. Still I cannot bear to leave you all naked as you are; folks would laugh at me. Come, I am going to put this tunic on you.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: You are right, upon my word it was only in my confounded fit of rage I took it off.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Now at any rate you look like a man, and they won't make fun of you. Ah! if you

<sup>89</sup> An executive council.

<sup>90</sup> The god of gardens, son of Aphrodite and, according to some, Dionysus. A lascivious figure, he was depicted with an enormous erect penis.

<sup>91</sup> A device for sending secret messages. A strip of leather was wrapped around a staff and a message was written along the length. The leather was then removed, and the message could be read only by wrapping the leather around a staff of the same thickness.

<sup>92</sup> A city which had long been the aim of the Spartans to seize. It may be that Pellene was also the name of some well-known woman (a prostitute?) of the time.

had not offended me so badly, I would take out that nasty insect you have in your eye for you.

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 so very long.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Well, I agree, though your manners are not over and above pleasant. Oh! what a huge great gnat! just look! It's from Tricorysus,<sup>93</sup> for sure.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: A thousand thanks! the creature was digging a regular well in my eye; now it's gone, my tears flow freely.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: I will wipe them for you—bad, naughty man though you are. Now, just one kiss.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: No—a kiss, certainly not!

CHORUS OF WOMEN: Just one, whether you like it or not.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Oh! those confounded women! how they cajole us! How true the saying: "It's 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; to clinch the bargain, let us sing a choral song.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: We desire, Athenians, to speak ill of no one, but on the contrary, to say much good of everyone, and to do the like. We have had enough of misfortunes and calamities. Is there any one, 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,<sup>94</sup> 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 today; 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!

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Ah! here come the envoys from Sparta with their long flowing beards; why, you would think they wore a cage between their thighs. [The Lacedaemonian envoys enter.] Hail to you, first of all, Laconians;<sup>95</sup> then tell us how you fare.

A LACONIAN: No need for many words; you see what a state we are in.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Alas! the situation grows more and more strained! the intensity of the thing is just frightful.

LACONIAN: It's beyond belief. But to work! summon your commissioners, and let us patch up the best peace we can.

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.

AN ATHENIAN: Can anybody tell us where Lysistrata is? Surely she will have some compassion on our condition.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Look! It's the very same complaint. [Addressing the Athenian.] Don't you feel a strong nervous tension in the mornings?

ATHENIAN: Yes, and a dreadful, dreadful torture it is! Unless peace is made very soon, we shall find no resource but to fuck Cleisthenes.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Take my advice, and put on your clothes again; one of the fellows who mutilated the Hermae<sup>96</sup> might see you.

ATHENIAN: You are right.

LACONIAN: Quite right. There, I will slip on my tunic.

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

LACONIAN: [addressing one of his countrymen] Ah! my boy, what a thing it would have been if these

fellows had seen us just now when out on full stand!

ATHENIAN: Speak out, Laconians, what brings you here?

LACONIAN: We have come to treat for peace.

ATHENIAN: Well, said; we are of the same temper call Lysistrata then; she is the only one who will bring us to terms.

LACONIAN: Yes, yes—and Lysistratus<sup>97</sup> is a gain, if you will.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Needless to call for heard your voices, and here she comes.

ATHENIAN: Hail, boldest and bravest of mankind! The time has come to show you uncompromising and conciliatory, yielding, haughty and condescending, your skill and artfulness. Lo! the foreign Greece, seduced by your fascinations, entrust the task of ending their quarrel:

LYSISTRATA: It'll be an easy task—if only from mutual indulgence in masculine I do, I shall know the fact at once. Now, gentle goddess, Peace? Lead here the envoys. But, look, no roughness or violence to husbands always behaved so boorishly. I to give you his hand, then catch him by the hand and draw him politely forward. Bring you Laconians, approach; and you, Athenians, to the other side. Now hearken all! I am but a woman, I have good common sense; Nature has made me with discriminating judgment, which has further developed, thanks to the wise counsel of my father and the elders of the city. I bring a reproach against you that applies to both sides. At Olympia, and Thermopylae, Delphi, and a score of other places too numerous to mention, you celebrate before the same

93 A marshy, wooded, and buggy district of Attica.

94 Carystus was a city notorious for loose-living.

95 I.e., Spartans.

96 The Hermae were sacred statues with enormous erect penises. They stood before doorways and other public spaces in Athens. During the Peloponnesian War they were desecrated.

97 The masculine of Lysistrata.

98 I.e., the Persians in this case. The Greek by the way.

99 In 464 BC an earthquake nearly ended Sparta and she was forced to ask Athens for help.

100 Actually, the Spartans, nervous about an Athenian victory.

fellows had seen us just now when our tools were on full stand!

ATHENIAN: Speak out, Laconians, what is it that brings you here?

LACONIAN: We have come to treat for peace.

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

LACONIAN: Yes, yes—and Lysistratus<sup>97</sup> into the bargain, if you will.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN: Needless to call her; she has heard your voices, and here she comes.

ATHENIAN: Hail, boldest and bravest of womankind! The time has 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 Greece, seduced by your fascinations, are agreed to entrust the task of ending their quarrels to you.

LYSISTRATA: It'll 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? Lead here the Laconian envoys. But, look, 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 catch him by the penis and draw him politely forward. Bring up the Athenians too; you may take them just how you will. 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 dowered 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 cere-

monies common to all Greeks; yet you go cutting each other's throats and sacking Greek cities, when all the while the Barbarian<sup>98</sup> is yonder threatening you! That is my first point.

ATHENIAN: Ah, ah! lust is killing me!

LYSISTRATA: Now it's to you I address myself, Laconians. Have you forgotten how Periclides,<sup>99</sup> your own countryman, sat as a suppliant before our altars? How pale he was in his purple robes! He had come to crave an army of us; 'twas 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.<sup>100</sup> And, after such a service as that, you ravage the soil of your benefactors!

ATHENIAN: They do wrong, very wrong, Lysistrata.

LACONIAN: We do wrong, very wrong. Ah! great gods! what lovely thighs she 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?<sup>101</sup> They, and they only, fought on your side on that eventful day; they delivered you from despotism, and thanks to them our people could change the short tunic of the slave for the long cloak of the free man.

LACONIAN: I have never seen a woman with more gracious dignity.

ATHENIAN: I have never seen a woman with a finer cunt!

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

LYSISTRATA: What rampart, my dear man?

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

<sup>97</sup> The masculine of Lysistrata.

<sup>98</sup> I.e., the Persians in this case. The Greek by this time referred to all non-Greeks as "barbarians."

<sup>99</sup> In 464 BC an earthquake nearly ended Sparta's control over the enslaved Messenians (known as helots). Sparta sent Pericles to ask Athens for help.

<sup>100</sup> Actually, the Spartans, nervous about an Athenian army in Spartan territory, sent the Athenians home.

<sup>101</sup> See above, n 60.

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

LYSISTRATA: Agree, my friends, agree.

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

LYSISTRATA: Ask for another place in exchange.

ATHENIAN: Ah! that's the ticket! Well, to begin with, give us Echinus, the Maliac gulf adjoining, and the two legs of Megara.<sup>102</sup>

LACONIAN: Oh! surely, surely not all that, my dear sir.

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

ATHENIAN: Well, I'm ready now to off my coat and plough my land.

LACONIAN: And I too, to fertilize 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.

ATHENIAN: What allies, I should like to know? Why, we are all on the stand; not one but is mad to be fucking. What we all want is to be in bed with our wives; how could our allies fail to second our project?

LACONIAN: And ours the same, for certain sure!

ATHENIANS: The Carystians first and foremost, by the gods!

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

ATHENIAN: Come along then, and as quick as may be.

LACONIAN: Lead on; I'm your man.

ATHENIAN: Quick, quick's the word, say I.

CHORUS OF WOMEN: 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, against the time they are chosen to be

"basket-bearers" to the goddess. 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 grain 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 12-pound loaf included. So let my poorer neighbors all come with bags and wallets; my man, Manes, shall give them grain; but I warn them not to come near my door, or—beware the dog!

A MARKET-LOUNGER: I say, you, open the door!

A SLAVE: Go your way, I tell you. Why, bless me, they're sitting down now; I shall have to sing 'em with my torch to make 'em stir! What an impudent lot of fellows!

MARKET-LOUNGER: I don't mean to budge.

SLAVE: Well, as you must stop, and I don't want to offend you—but you'll see some queer sights.

MARKET-LOUNGER: Well and good, I've no objection.

SLAVE: 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 hall.

AN 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, all. 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 immediately. 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-turvy. But, look: today it's quite different; we're enchanted whatever happens; instead of Clitagoras,<sup>103</sup> they might sing us Telamon,<sup>104</sup> and we would clap our hands just the same. A perjury or two into the bar-

gain, la! what does that matter to merry ions in their cups?

SLAVE: But here they are back again! Will you you loafing scoundrels.

MARKET-LOUNGER: Ah ha! here's the coming out already.

A LACONIAN: My dear, sweet friend, co your flute in hand; I would dance and sing in honor of the Athenians and our noble s

AN ATHENIAN: Yes, take your flute, in t name. What a delight to see him dance.

CHORUS OF LACONIANS: Oh Mnemo inspire these men, inspire my muse wh our exploits and those of the Athenians. W a godlike ardor did they swoop down at um on the ships of the Medes!<sup>106</sup> What a victory was that! For the soldiers of Lec they were like fierce wild boars whett tushes. The sweat ran down their fa drenched all their limbs, for truly the Persi as many as the sands of the seashore. Oh! huntress queen whose arrows pierce the of the woods, virgin goddess, be favora Peace we conclude; through you may our long united! May this treaty draw close fo bonds of a happy friendship! No more v stratagems! Help us, oh! help us maiden l

LYSISTRATA: All is for the best; and now, L take your wives away home with you, Athenians, yours. May husband live hap wife, and wife with husband. Dance, dan ebrate our bliss, and let us be heedful to a mistakes for the future.

CHORUS OF ATHENIANS: Appear, appear,

105 I.e., Memory, the mother of the muses.

106 The Greeks defeated the Persian navy at Artemi

107 Leonidas was the Spartan commander at the ba sians—a near-legendary event of the Persian W

108 Women who, in their worship of Dionysius, we

109 An invocation of the gods and an expression of

110 An expression denoting Dionysian frenzy (see r

111 A town near Sparta, where a temple of Apollo s

112 Athena had a temple with bronze-covered wall

113 Castor and Pollux, twin heroes who were espec

102 The legs of Megara are the long walls which joined the city of Megara to the sea.

103 A composer of drinking songs.

104 A composer of war songs.

gain, la! what does that matter to merry companions in their cups?

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

MARKET-LOUNGER: Ah ha! here's the company coming out already.

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

AN ATHENIAN: Yes, take your flute, in the god's name. What a delight to see him dance.

CHORUS OF LACONIANS: Oh Mnemosyne!<sup>105</sup> inspire these men, inspire my muse who knows our exploits and those of the Athenians. With what a godlike ardor did they swoop down at Artemisium on the ships of the Medes!<sup>106</sup> What a glorious victory was that! For the soldiers of Leonidas,<sup>107</sup> they were like fierce wild boars whetting their tusks. The sweat ran down their faces, and drenched all their limbs, for truly 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 favorable to the Peace we conclude; through you may our hearts be long united! May this treaty draw close forever the bonds of a happy friendship! No more wiles and stratagems! Help us, oh! help us maiden huntress!

LYSISTRATA: 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: 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 Maenads,<sup>108</sup> and Zeus, who wields the flashing lightning, and his august, thrice-blessed spouse, the Queen of Heaven! Let us invoke these 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!<sup>109</sup> Dance, leap, as in honor of a victory won. Evoe! Evoe!<sup>110</sup> And you, our Laconian guests, sing us a new and inspiring strain!

CHORUS OF LACONIANS: 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,<sup>111</sup> and Athena of the Bronze House,<sup>112</sup> and the gallant twin sons of Tyn-darus,<sup>113</sup> who practice arms on the banks of Euro-tas river.<sup>114</sup> Haste, hasten 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 Maenads wave their wands in the wild revels of the Wine-god. At their head, oh! chaste and beauteous goddess, daughter of Latona, Artemis, lead the song and dance. A hair band binding your waving tresses, appear in your loveliness; leap like a fawn; strike your divine hands together to animate the dance, and help us to honor the valiant goddess of battles, great Athena of the Bronze House!

<sup>105</sup> *Le.*, Memory, the mother of the muses.

<sup>106</sup> The Greeks defeated the Persian navy at Artemisium in the Persian War.

<sup>107</sup> Leonidas was the Spartan commander at the battle of Thermopylae, where a few hundred Greeks held up many more Persians—a near-legendary event of the Persian War.

<sup>108</sup> Women who, in their worship of Dionysius, were held to go about as though mad. See above, n 1.

<sup>109</sup> An invocation of the gods and an expression of joy.

<sup>110</sup> An expression denoting Dionysian frenzy (see n 1).

<sup>111</sup> A town near Sparta, where a temple of Apollo stood.

<sup>112</sup> Athena had a temple with bronze-covered walls at Chalcis.

<sup>113</sup> Castor and Pollux, twin heroes who were especially revered at Sparta.

<sup>114</sup> The river which ran by Sparta.