

Aristophanes Lysistrata

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LYSISTRATA

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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Note that in the text below the numbers in square brackets refer to the lines in the Greek text; the numbers without brackets refer to the lines in the translated text. In numbering the lines of the English text, the translator has normally counted a short indented line with the short line above it, so that two short lines count as one line.

The translator would like to acknowledge the valuable help provided by Alan H. Sommerstein's edition of *Lysistrata* (Aris & Phillips: 1990), particularly the commentary.

It is clear that in this play the male characters all wear the comic phallus which is an integral part of the action throughout. Note, too, that in several places in *Lysistrata* there is some confusion and debate over which speeches are assigned to which people. These moments occur, for the most part, in short conversational exchanges. Hence, there may be some differences between the speakers in this text and those in other translations.

Aristophanes (c. 446 BC to c. 386 BC) was the foremost writer of Old Comedy in classical Athens. His play *Lysistrata* was first performed in Athens in 411 BC, two years after the disastrous Sicilian Expedition, when Athens suffered an enormous defeat in the continuing war with Sparta and its allies (a conflict which lasted from 431 BC to 404 BC).

LYSISTRATA

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

LYSISTRATA: a young Athenian wife
 CALONICE: a mature married woman
 MYRRHINE: a very attractive teenage wife.
 LAMPITO: a strong young country wife from Sparta.
 ISMENIA: a women from Thebes
 SCYTHIAN GIRL: one of Lysistrata's slaves
 MAGISTRATE: an elderly Athenian with white hair
 CINESIAS: husband of Myrrhine
 CHILD: infant son of Myrrhine and Cinesias
 MANES: servant nurse of the Child
 HERALD: A Spartan envoy
 CHORUS OF OLD MEN
 CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN
 ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR
 SPARTAN AMBASSADOR
 WOMAN A: one of the wives following Lysistrata
 WOMAN B: one of the wives following Lysistrata
 WOMAN C: one of the wives following Lysistrata
 ARMED GUARDS: four police officials attending on the Magistrate
 WOMEN: followers of Lysistrata
 RECONCILIATION: a goddess of harmony
 ATHENIAN DELEGATES
 SPARTAN DELEGATES
 SLAVES AND ATTENDANTS

[The action of the play takes place in a street in Athens, with the citadel on the Acropolis in the back, its doors facing the audience]

LYSISTRATA

If they'd called a Bacchic celebration
 or some festival for Pan or Colias
 or for Genetyllis, you'd not be able
 to move around through all the kettle drums.
 But as it is, there are no women here.

[Calonice enters, coming to meet Lysistrata]

LYSISTRATA

Ah, here's my neighbour—at least she's come.¹
 Hello, Calonice.

CALONICE

Hello, Lysistrata.

What's bothering you, child? Don't look so annoyed.
 It doesn't suit you. Your eyes get wrinkled.

LYSISTRATA

My heart's on fire, Calonice—I'm so angry
 at married women, at us, because,
 although men say we're devious characters . . .

10

[10]

CALONICE *[interrupting]*

Because by god we are!

LYSISTRATA *[continuing]*

. . . when I call them all
 to meet here to discuss some serious business,
 they just stay in bed and don't show up.

CALONICE

Ah, my dear, they'll come. It's not so easy
 for wives to get away. We've got to fuss
 about our husbands, wake up the servants,
 calm and wash the babies, then give them food.

LYSISTRATA

But there are other things they need to do—
 more important issues.

20

[20]

CALONICE

My dear Lysistrata,
 why have you asked the women to meet here?
 What's going on? Is it something big?

LYSISTRATA

It's huge.

¹Lysistrata is complaining that if the city had called a major festival all the women would be in the streets enjoying themselves. But none of them, it seems, has answered her invitation to a meeting (as we find out a few lines further on).

CALONICE

And hard as well?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, by god, really hard.

CALONICE

Then why aren't we all here?

LYSISTRATA

I don't mean *that!*

If that were it, they'd all be charging here so fast.

No. It's something I've been playing with—
wrestling with for many sleepless nights.

CALONICE

If you've been working it like that, by now
it must have shrivelled up.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, so shrivelled up
that the salvation of the whole of Greece
is now in women's hands.

30

[30]

CALONICE

In women's hands?

Then it won't be long before we done for.

LYSISTRATA

It's up to us to run the state's affairs—
the Spartans would no longer be around.

CALONICE

If they weren't there, by god, not any more,
that would be good news.

LYSISTRATA

And then if all Boeotians
were totally destroyed!

CALONICE

Not all of them—
you'd have to save the eels.¹

LYSISTRATA

As for Athens,

I won't say anything as bad as that.

You can imagine what I'd say. But now,
if only all the women would come here
from Sparta and Boeotia, join up with us,
if we worked together, we'd save Greece.

40

[40]

CALONICE

But what sensible or splendid act
could women do? We sit around playing
with our cosmetics, wearing golden clothes,
posing in Cimmerian silks and slippers.

LYSISTRATA

Those are the very things which I assume
will save us—short dresses, perfumes, slippers,
make up, and clothing men can see through.

50

CALONICE

How's that going to work?

LYSISTRATA

No man living
will lift his spear against another man . . .

[50]

CALONICE [*interrupting*]

By the two goddesses, I must take my dress
and dye it yellow.²

LYSISTRATA [*continuing*]

. . . or pick up a shield . . .

¹At the time *Lysistrata* was first produced, the Athenians and Spartans had been fighting for many years. The Boeotians were allies of the Spartans. Boeotia was famous for its eels, considered a luxury item in Athens.

²The two goddesses are Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The Athenian women frequently invoke them.

LYSISTRATA

CALONICE [*interrupting again*]

I'll have to wear my very best silk dress.

LYSISTRATA [*continuing*]

. . . or pull out his sword.

CALONICE

I need to get some shoes.

LYSISTRATA

O these women, they should be here by now!

CALONICE

Yes, by god! They should have sprouted wings
and come here hours ago.

LYSISTRATA

They're true Athenians,
you'll see—everything they should be doing
they postpone till later. But no one's come
from Salamis or those towns on the coast.

60

CALONICE [*with an obscene gesture*]

I know those women—they were up early
on their boats riding the mizzen mast.

[60]

LYSISTRATA

I'd have bet
those women from Acharnia would come
and get here first. But they've not shown up.

CALONICE

Well, Theogenes' wife will be here.
I saw her hoisting sail to come.¹ Hey, look!
Here's a group of women coming for you.
And there's another one, as well. Hello!
Hello there! Where they from?

70

[*Various women start arriving from all directions*]

LYSISTRATA

Those? From Anagyrus.

¹Theogenes was a well-known merchant and ship owner.

LYSISTRATA

CALONICE

My god, it seems we're kicking up a stink.¹

[*Enter Myrrhine*]

MYRRHINE

Hey, Lysistrata, did we get here late?
What's the matter? Why are you so quiet?

LYSISTRATA

I'm not pleased with you, Myrrhine. You're late.
And this is serious business.

[70]

MYRRHINE

It was dark.
I had trouble tracking down my waist band.
If it's such a big deal, tell these women.

LYSISTRATA

No, let's wait a while until the women
from Boeotia and from Sparta get here.

80

MYRRHINE

All right. That sounds like the best idea.
Hey, here comes Lampito.

[*Lampito enters with some other Spartan women and with Ismenia, a woman from Thebes*]

LYSISTRATA

Hello Lampito,
my dear friend from Sparta. How beautiful
you look, so sweet, such a fine complexion.
And your body looks so fit, strong enough
to choke a bull.

[80]

LAMPITO²

Yes, by the two gods,

¹Calonice is making an obscure joke on the name Anagyrus, a political district named after bad-smelling plant.

²In Aristophanes' text, Lampito and other Spartans use a parody of a Spartan dialect, a styl of speaking significantly different from (although related to) Athenian Greek. Translator have dealt with this in different ways, usually by giving the Spartans a recognizable English!

[Footnote continues

LYSISTRATA

I could pull that off.¹ I do exercise
and work out to keep my bum well toned.

CALONICE [*fondling Lampito's bosom*]

What an amazing pair of breasts you've got!

90

LAMPITO

O, you stroke me like I'm a sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA [*looking at Ismenia*]

And this young woman—where's she from?

[90]

LAMPITO

By the twin gods, she's an ambassador—
she's from Boeotia.

MYRRHINE [*looking down Ismenia's elegant clothes*]

Of course, from Boeotia.

She's got a beautiful lowland region.

CALONICE [*peering down Ismenia's robe to see her pubic hair*]

Yes. By god, she keeps that territory
elegantly groomed.

LYSISTRATA

Who's the other girl?

LAMPITO

A noble girl, by the two gods, from Corinth.

dialect, for example, from the Southern States or Scotland, or English with a foreign accent. The difference between the Spartans' speech and the language of the others reflects the political antagonism between the Athenians and Spartans. Here I have not tried to follow this trend. My main reasons for doing so are (in brief) that, first, some dialects are in places incomprehensible to some readers or have been made irrelevant (e.g., Jack Lindsay's Scottish language in the Bantam edition of Aristophanes or the erratic Russian English of the Perseus translation) and, second, I wish to leave the choice of dialect or accent up to the imagination of the readers or the directors of stage productions (who might like to experiment with dialects which will connect with their particular audiences more immediately than any one I might select).

¹Spartans commonly invoke the divine twins Castor and Pollux, brothers of Helen and Clytaemnestra.

LYSISTRATA

CALONICE [*inspecting the girl's bosom and buttocks*]

A really noble girl, by Zeus—it's clear
she's got good lines right here, back here as well.

100

LAMPITO

All right, who's the one who called the meeting
and brought this bunch of women here?

LYSISTRATA

I did.

LAMPITO

Then lay out what it is you want from us.

MYRRHINE

Come on, dear lady, tell us what's going on,
what's so important to you.

LYSISTRATA

In a minute.

Before I say it, I'm going to ask you
one small question.

CALONICE

Ask whatever you want.

LYSISTRATA

Don't you miss the fathers of your children
when they go off to war? I understand
you all have husbands far away from home.

[100]

110

CALONICE

My dear, it's five full months my man's been gone—
off in Thrace taking care of Eucrates.

MYRRHINE

And mine's been off in Pylos seven whole months.¹

¹Thrace was a region to the north of Greece, a long way from Athens. Eucrates was an Athenian commander in the region. Pylos was a small area in the south Peloponnese which the Athenians had captured and occupied for a number of years.

LAMPITO

And mine—as soon as he gets home from war
he grabs his shield and buggers off again.

LYSISTRATA

As for old flames and lovers—they're none left.
And since Milesians went against us,
I've not seen a decent eight-inch dildo.
Yes, it's just leather, but it helps us out.¹
So would you be willing, if I found a way,
to work with me to make this fighting end?

[110]
120

MYRRHINE

By the twin goddesses, yes. Even if
in just one day I had to pawn this dress
and drain my purse.

CALONICE

Me too—they could slice me up
like a flat fish, then use one half of me
to get a peace.

LAMPITO

I'd climb up to the top
of Taygetus to get a glimpse of peace.²

LYSISTRATA

All right I'll tell you. No need to keep quiet
about my plan. Now, ladies, if we want
to force the men to have a peace, well then,
we must give up . . .

[120]
130

MYRRHINE [*interrupting*]

Give up what? Tell us!

LYSISTRATA

Then, will you do it?

¹Miletus had rebelled against Athens in the previous year. That city was associated with sexuality and (in this case) the manufacture of sexual toys.

²Taygetus was a high mountain in the Peloponnese.

MYRRHINE

Of course, we'll do it,
even if we have to die.

LYSISTRATA

All right then—
we have to give up all male penises.

[*The women react with general consternation*]

Why do you turn away? Where are you going?
How come you bite your lips and shake your heads?
And why so pale? How come you're crying like that?
Will you do it or not? What will it be?

MYRRHINE

I won't do it. So let the war drag on.

CALONICE

I won't either. The war can keep on going.

140 [130]

LYSISTRATA

How can you say that, you flatfish? Just now
you said they could slice you into halves.

CALONICE

Ask what you like, but not that! If I had to,
I'd be willing to walk through fire—sooner than
than give up screwing. There's nothing like it,
dear Lysistrata.

LYSISTRATA

And what about you?

MYRRHINE

I'd choose the fire, too.

LYSISTRATA

What a debased race
we women are! It's no wonder men write
tragedies about us. We're good for nothing
but screwing Poseidon in the bath tub.
But my Spartan friend, if you were willing,
just you and me, we still could pull it off.
So help me out.

150 [140]

LAMPITO

By the twin gods, it's hard
for women to sleep all by themselves
without a throbbing cock. But we must try.
We've got to have a peace.

LYSISTRATA

O you're a true friend!
The only real woman in this bunch.

CALONICE

If we really do give up what you say—
I hope it never happens!—would doing that
make peace more likely?

LYSISTRATA

By the two goddesses, yes, 160
much more likely. If we sit around at home
with all our makeup on and in those gowns
made of Amorgos silk, naked underneath, [150]
with our crotches neatly plucked, our husbands
will get hard and want to screw. But then,
if we stay away and won't come near them,
they'll make peace soon enough. I'm sure of it.

LAMPITO

Yes, just like they say—when Menelaus
saw Helen's naked tits, he dropped his sword.¹

CALONICE

But my friend, what if our men ignore us? 170

LYSISTRATA

Well then, in the words of Pherecrates,
you'll find another way to skin the dog.²

¹In a famous story, Menelaus went storming through Troy looking for his wife, Helen, in order to kill her. But when he found her, he was so overcome by her beauty that he relented and took her back home to Sparta.

²Pherecrates was an Athenian comic dramatist. The line may be a quotation from one of his plays.

CALONICE

But fake penises aren't any use at all.
What if they grab us and haul us by force
into the bedroom. [160]

LYSISTRATA

Just grab the door post.

CALONICE

And if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA

Then you must submit—
but do it grudgingly, don't cooperate.
There's no enjoyment for them when they just
force it in. Besides, there are other ways
to make them suffer. They'll soon surrender. 180
No husband ever had a happy life
if he did not get on well with his wife.

CALONICE

Well, if you two think it's good, we do, too.

LAMPITO

I'm sure we can persuade our men to work
for a just peace in everything, no tricks.
But how will you convince the Athenian mob? [170]
They're mad for war.

LYSISTRATA

That's not your worry.
We'll win them over.

LAMPITO

I don't think so—
not while they have triremes under sail
and that huge treasure stashed away 190
where your goddess makes her home.¹

LYSISTRATA

But that's all been well taken care of.

¹The financial reserves of the Athenian state were stored in the Acropolis.

Today we'll capture the Acropolis.
The old women have been assigned the task.
While we sit here planning all the details,
they'll pretend they're going there to sacrifice
and seize the place.

LAMPITO

You've got it all worked out. [180]
What you say sounds good.

LYSISTRATA

All right Lampito,
let's swear an oath as quickly as we can.
That way we'll be united.

LAMPITO

Recite the oath. 200
Then we'll all swear to it.

LYSISTRATA

That's good advice.
Where's that girl from Scythia?

[The Scythian slave steps forward. She is holding a small shield]

Why stare like that?
Put down your shield, the hollow part on top.
Now, someone get me a victim's innards.

CALONICE

Lysistrata, what sort of oath is this
we're going to swear?

LYSISTRATA

What sort of oath?
One on a shield, just like they did back then
in Aeschylus' play—with slaughtered sheep.

CALONICE

You can't, Lysistrata, not on a shield,
you can't swear an oath for peace on that 210 [190]

LYSISTRATA

What should the oath be, then?

CALONICE

Let's get a stallion,
a white one, and then offer up its guts!

LYSISTRATA

Why a white horse?

CALONICE

Then how will we make our oath?

LYSISTRATA

I'll tell you, by god, if you want to hear.
Put a large dark bowl down on the ground,
then sacrifice a jug of Thasian wine,
and swear we'll never pour in water.

LAMPITO

Now, if you ask me, that's a super oath!

LYSISTRATA

Someone get the bowl and a jug of wine.

[The Scythian girl goes back in the house and returns with a bowl and a jug of wine. Calonice takes the bowl]

CALONICE

Look, dear ladies, at this splendid bowl. 220 [200]
Just touching this gives instant pleasure.

LYSISTRATA

Put it down. Now join me and place your hands
on our sacrificial victim.

[The women gather around the bowl and lay their hands on the wine jug. Lysistrata starts the ritual prayer]

O you,
Goddess of Persuasion and the bowl
which we so love, accept this sacrifice,
a women's offering, and be kind to us.

[Lysistrata opens the wine jug and lets the wine pour out into the bowl]

CALONICE

Such healthy blood spurts out so beautifully!

LAMPITO

By Castor, that's a mighty pleasant smell.

MYRRHINE

Ladies, let me be the first to swear the oath.

CALONICE

No, by Aphrodite, no—not unless
your lot is drawn.

230

LYSISTRATA [*holds up a bowl full of wine*]

Grab the brim, Lampito,
you and all the others. Someone repeat
for all the rest of you the words I say—
that way you'll pledge your firm allegiance:
No man, no husband and no lover . . .

[210]

CALONICE [*taking the oath*]

No man, no husband and no lover . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . will get near me with a stiff prick. . . Come on,
say it!

CALONICE

. . . will get near me with a stiff prick.
O Lysistrata, my knees are getting weak!

LYSISTRATA

At home I'll live completely without sex . . .

240

CALONICE

At home I'll live completely without sex . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up . . .

CALONICE

. . . wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up . . .

[220]

LYSISTRATA

. . . to make my man as horny as I can.

CALONICE

. . . to make my man as horny as I can.

LYSISTRATA

If against my will he takes me by force . . .

CALONICE

If against my will he takes me by force . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . I'll be a lousy lay, not move a limb.

CALONICE

. . . I'll be a lousy lay, not move a limb.

LYSISTRATA

I'll not raise my slippers up towards the roof . . .

250

CALONICE

I'll not raise my slippers up towards the roof . . .

[230]

LYSISTRATA

. . . nor crouch down like a lioness on all fours.

CALONICE

. . . nor crouch down like a lioness on all fours.

LYSISTRATA

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

CALONICE

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

LYSISTRATA

If I fail, may this glass fill with water.

CALONICE

If I fail, may this glass fill with water.

LYSISTRATA

Do all you women swear this oath?

ALL

We do.

LYSISTRATA

All right. I'll make the offering.

[*Lysistrata drinks some of the wine in the bowl*]

CALONICE

Just your share,
my dear, so we all stay firm friends.

[A sound of shouting is heard from offstage]

LAMPITO

What's that noise?

260 [240]

LYSISTRATA

It's what I said just now—the women
have already captured the Acropolis.
So, Lampito, you return to Sparta—
do good work among your people there.
Leave these women here as hostages.
We'll go in the citadel with the others
and help them barricade the doors.

CALONICE

Don't you think the men will band together
and march against us—and quickly, too.

LYSISTRATA

I'm not so worried about them. They'll come
carrying their torches and making threats,
but they'll not pry these gates of ours apart,
not unless they agree to our demands.

270
[250]

CALONICE

Yes, by Aphrodite, that's right. If not,
we'll be labelled weak and gutless women.

[The women enter the citadel. The Chorus of Old Men enters slowly, for they are quite decrepit. They are carrying wood for a fire, glowing coals to start the blaze, and torches to light.]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Keep moving, Draces, pick up the pace,
even if your shoulder's tired lugging
all this heavy fresh-cut olive wood.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas, so many unexpected things
take place in a long life. O Strymodorus,
who'd ever think they'd hear such news

280

about our women—the ones we fed
in our own homes are truly bad.
The sacred statue is in their hands,
they've seized my own Acropolis
and blocked the doors with bolts and bars.

[260]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Come on Philurgus, let's hurry there
as fast as we can go up to the city.
We'll set these logs down in a circle,
stack them so we keep them bottled up,
those women who've combined to do this.
Then with our own hands we'll set alight
a single fire and, as we all agreed
in the vote we took, we'll burn them all,
beginning first with Lycon's wife.¹

290

[270]

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

They'll won't be making fun of me,
by Demeter, not while I'm still alive.
That man Cleomenes, who was the first
to take our citadel, went back unharmed.
Snorting Spartan pride he went away,
once he'd handed me his weapons,
wearing a really tiny little cloak,
hungry, filthy, with his hairy face.
He'd gone six years without a bath.²

300

[280]

That's how I fiercely hemmed him in,
our men in ranks of seventeen
we even slept before the gates.
So with these foes of all the gods
and of Euripides, as well,
will I not check their insolence?

310

¹Lycon's wife was a woman in Athens famous for her promiscuity.

²Cleomenes, a king of Sparta, once came with a small army to Athens (in 508) to help the oligarch party. He had a very hostile reception and took refuge in the Acropolis, where he stayed under siege for two days. A truce was arranged and the Spartans left peacefully.

If I do not, then let my trophies
all disappear from Marathon.¹

The rest of the journey I have to make
is uphill to the Acropolis.
We must move fast, but how do we haul
this wood up there without a donkey?
This pair of logs makes my shoulders sore.
But still we've got to soldier on
giving our fire air to breathe.
It may go out when I'm not looking
just as I reach my journey's end. 320

[They blow on the coals to keep them alight. The smoke comes blowing up in their faces. The Old Men fall back, coughing and rubbing their eyes]

O the smoke!
Lord Hercules, how savagely
it jumped out from the pot right in my face
and bit my eyes like a raving bitch.
It works just like a Lemnian fire
or else it wouldn't use its teeth
to feed on fluids in my eye. 300
We need to hurry to the citadel
and save the goddess. If not now,
O Laches, when should we help her out?² 330

[The men blow on the coals and are again overpowered by the smoke]

Damn and blast this smoke!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Thanks to the gods, the fire's up again—
a lively flame. So what if, first of all,

¹Euripides was a younger contemporary of Aristophanes. Marathon was the site of the great Greek victory over the Persian expeditionary forces in 490 BC, a high point of Athenian military achievement.

²The reference to Lemnian fire is not clear. The island of Lemnos perhaps had some volcanic activity, or else the reference is to the women of Lemnos who killed all their husbands. There is a pun on the Greek word for Lemnos and the word in the same speech referring to material in the eye.

we placed our firewood right down here, then put
a vine branch in the pot, set it alight,
and charged the door like a battering ram?
We'll order women to remove the bars,
and, if they refuse, we'll burn down the doors. 310
We'll overpower them with the smoke.
All right, put down your loads.

[The men set down their logs. Once again the smoke is too much for them]

This bloody smoke! 340
Is there any general here from Samos
who'll help us with this wood?¹

[He sets down his load of wood]

Ah, that's better.
They're not shrinking my spine any more.
All right, pot, it's now your job to arouse
a fire from those coals, so first of all,
I'll have a lighted torch and lead the charge.
O lady Victory, stand with us here,
so we can set our trophy up in there,
defeat those women in our citadel
put down this present insolence of theirs. 350

[The Old Men stack their logs in a pile and start lighting their torches on the coals. The Chorus of Old Women enters, carrying pitchers of water]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Ladies, I think I see some flames and smoke,
as if a fire was burning. We'd better hurry. 320

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN

We have to fly, Nicodice, fly
before Critylla is burned up
and Calyce, too, by nasty winds
and old men keen to wipe them out.
But I'm afraid I'll be too late

¹Samos was an important island near Athens. A number of the generals of Athenian force came from there.

to help them out. I've only just
filled up my pitcher in the dark.
It was not easy—at the well 360
the place was jammed and noisy too
with clattering pots, pushy servants,
and tattooed slaves. But I was keen
to carry water to these fires
to help my country's women.

I've heard some dim and dull old men
are creeping here and carrying logs—
a great big load—to our fortress,
as if to warm our public baths.
They're muttering the most awful things 370
how with their fire they need to turn [340]
these hateful women into ash.
But, goddess, may I never see
them burned like that—but witness how
they rescue cities, all of Greece,
from war and this insanity.
That's why, golden-crested goddess
who guards our city, these women
now have occupied your shrine.
O Tritogeneia, I summon you 380
to be my ally—if any man [360]
sets them on fire, help us out
as we carry this water up.¹

*[The Old Men have lit their torches and are about to move against the
Acropolis. The Old Women are blocking their way]*

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS
Hold on, ladies. What this I see? Men— 350
dirty old men—hard at work. Honest types,
useful, god-fearing men, could never do
the things you do.

¹Sommerstein observes (p. 171) that the epithet *Tritogeneia* ("Trito born") refers to Athena's birth beside the River Triton or Lake Tritonis in North Africa.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS
What's happening here
is something we did not expect to see—
a swarm of women standing here like this
to guard the doors.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS
So you're afraid of us? 390
Does it look like there's a huge crowd of us?
You're seeing just a fraction of our size—
there are thousands more.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS
Hey there, Phaedrias!
Shall we stop her nattering on like this?
Someone hit her, smack her with a log.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS
Let's put our water jugs down on the ground,
in case they want to lay their hands on us.
Down there they won't get in our way.

[The Old Women set down their water jugs]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS
By god, someone should hit them on the jaw, 360
two or three times, and then, like Boupalus, 400
they'll won't have anything much more to say.¹

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS
Come on then—strike me. I'm here, waiting.
No other bitch will ever grab your balls.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS
Shut up, or I hit you—snuff out your old age.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS
Try coming up and touching Stratyllis
with your finger tips!

¹Boupalus was a sculptor from Chios.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

What if I thrashed you
with my fists? Would you do something nasty?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

With my teeth I'll rip out your lungs and guts!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Euripides is such a clever poet—
the man who says there's no wild animal
more shameless than a woman.

410

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on then,
Rhodippe, let's pick up our water jugs.

[370]

[The Old Women pick up their water jugs again]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Why have you damned women even come here
carrying this water?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

And why are you
bringing fire, you old corpse? Do you intend
to set yourself on fire?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Me? To start a blaze
and roast your friends.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm here to douse your fire.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You'll put out my fire?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes I will. You'll see.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS *[waving his torch]*

I don't know why I'm not just doing it,
frying you in this flame.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Get yourself some soap.
I'm giving you a bath.

420

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You'll wash me,
you old wrinkled prune?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes, it will be
just like your wedding night.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Listen to her!
She's a nervy bitch!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm a free woman.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'll make you shut up!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You don't judge these things.

[380]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Set her hair on fire!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Get to work, Achelous.¹

[She throws her jar of water over the Leader of the Men's Chorus, and, following the leader's example, the women throw water all over the old men]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

O, that's bad!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Was that hot enough?

[The women continue to throw water on the old men]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Hot enough?
Won't you stop doing that? What are you doing?

¹The Achelous was a large well-known river and river god in northern Greece.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm watering you to make you bloom.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'm too old and withered. I'm shaking. 430

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Well, you've got your fire. Warm yourselves up.

[A Magistrate enters with an armed escort of four public guards and slaves with crowbars and some attendant soldiers]

MAGISTRATE

Has not our women's lewdness shown itself
in how they beat their drums for Sabazius,
that god of excess, or on their rooftops
shed tears for Adonis? That's what I heard 390
one time in our assembly. Demonstrates—
what a stupid man he is—was arguing
that we should sail to Sicily. Meanwhile,
his wife was dancing round and screaming out
"Alas, Adonis!" While Demonstrates talked, 440
saying we should levy soldiers from Zacynthus,
the woman was on the roof top, getting drunk
and yelling out "Weep for Adonis! Weep."
But he kept on forcing his opinion through,
that mad brutal ox, whom the gods despise.
That's just the kind of loose degenerate stuff
that comes from women.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Wait until I tell you
the insolent things these women did to us—
all their abuse—they dumped their water jugs 400
on us. So now we have to dry our clothes. 450
We look as if we've pissed ourselves.

¹Sabazius was a popular foreign god associated with drinking (like Dionysus). Adonis was a youth loved by Aphrodite. A festival was celebrated each year in his memory. Demonstrates was a politician promoting the disastrous Athenian military expedition to Sicily. Zacynthus, an island off the Peloponnese, was an ally of Athens.

MAGISTRATE

By Poseidon,

god of the salt seas, it serves you right.
We men ourselves share in the blame for this.
We teach our wives their free and easy life,
and so intrigues come flowering out from them.
Here's what we tell some working artisan,
"O goldsmith, about that necklace I bought here—
last night my wife was dancing and the bolt 410
slipped from its hole. I have to take a boat
to Salamis. If you've got time tonight, 460
you could visit her with that tool of yours
and fix the way the bolt sits in her hole."
Another man goes to the shoemaker,
a strapping lad with an enormous prick,
and says, "O shoemaker, a sandal strap
is pinching my wife's tender little toe.
Could you come at noon and rub her strap,
stretch it really wide?" That's the sort of thing 420
that leads to all this trouble. Look at me,
a magistrate in charge of finding oars 470
and thus in need of money now—these women
have shut the treasury doors to keep me out.
But standing here's no use.

[He calls out to his two slaves]

Bring the crow bars.

I'll stop these women's insolence myself.

[He turns to the armed guards he has brought with him]

What are you gaping at, you idiot!
And you—what are you looking at?
Why are you doing nothing—just staring round
looking for a tavern? Take these crowbars
to the doors there, and then pry them open.
Come, I'll work to force them with you. 480

LYSISTRATA *[opening the doors and walking out]*

No need to use those crowbars. I'm coming out—
and of my own free will. Why these crowbars? 430
This calls for brains and common sense, not force.

MAGISTRATE

Is that so, you slut? Where's that officer?
Seize that woman! Tie her hands!

LYSISTRATA

By Artemis,
he may be a public servant, but if
he lays a finger on me, he'll be sorry.

MAGISTRATE *[to the first armed guard]*

Are you scared of her? Grab her round the waist!
You there, help him out! And tie her up!

OLD WOMAN A¹

By Pandrosus, if you lift a hand to her,
I'll beat you until you shit yourself!

490

[440]

[The armed guard is so terrified he shits]

MAGISTRATE

Look at the mess you made! Where is he,
that other officer?

[The Magistrate turns to a third armed officer]

Tie up this one first,
the one who's got such a dirty mouth.

OLD WOMAN B

By the god of light, if you just touch her,
you'll quickly need a cup to fix your eyes.²

[This officer shits his pants and runs off. The Magistrate turns to a fourth officer]

MAGISTRATE

Who's this here? Arrest her! I'll put a stop
to all women in this demonstration!

¹In modern productions the old women who speak in this scene either come out of the gates to the Acropolis or are members of the Chorus. Alternatively the speeches could be assigned to the characters we have met earlier (Myrrhine and Calonice), who have emerged from the Acropolis behind Lysistrata.

²Black eyes were treated with a small cup placed over the eye to reduce the swelling.

OLD WOMEN C

By bull-bashing Artemis, if you move
to touch her, I'll rip out all your hair
until you yelp in pain.

500

[The fourth officer shits himself and runs off in terror]

MAGISTRATE

This is getting bad.
There're no officers left. We can't let ourselves
be beaten back by women. Come on then,
you Scythians, form up your ranks.¹ Then charge.
Go at them!

[450]

LYSISTRATA

By the two goddesses, you'll see—
we've got four companies of women inside,
all fighting fit and fully armed.

MAGISTRATE

Come on,
Scythians, twist their arms behind them!

LYSISTRATA *[shouting behind her]*

Come out here from where you are in there,
all you female allies, on the double—
you market women who sell grain and eggs,
garlic and vegetables, and those who run
our bakeries and taverns, to the attack!

510

[Many women emerge from the Acropolis, armed in various ways]

Hit them, stomp on them, scratch their eyeballs,
smother them with your abuse! Don't hold back!

[460]

[A general tumult occurs in which the women beat back the Scythian guards]

LYSISTRATA

That's enough! Back off! Don't strip the armour
from those you have defeated.

¹The armed guards accompanying the Magistrate are traditionally Scythian archers.

[The armed women return into the Acropolis]

MAGISTRATE

Disaster!

My guards have acted quite disgracefully.

LYSISTRATA

What did you expect? Did you really think
you were facing a bunch of female slaves?
Or is it your belief that mere women
have no spirit in them?

520

MAGISTRATE

Spirit? By Apollo, yes!

If they're near any man who's got some wine.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

In this land you're a magistrate, but here
your words are useless. Why even try
to have a conversation with these bitches?
Don't you know they've just given us a bath
in our own cloaks? And they did not use soap!

[470]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Listen, friend. You should never raise your hand
against your neighbour. If you do, then I
will have to punch you in the eye. I'd prefer
to sit quietly at home, like a young girl,
and not come here to injure anyone
or agitate the nest, unless someone
disturbs the hive and makes me angry.

530

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

O Zeus, however will we find a way
to deal with these wild beasts? What's going on
is no longer something we can bear.
But we must question them and find out why
they are so angry with us, why they wish
to seize the citadel of Cranaus,

540 [480]

the holy ground where people do not go,
on the great rock of the Acropolis.¹

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS *[to Magistrate]*

So ask her. Don't let them win you over.
Challenge everything they say. If we left
this matter without seeking out the cause,
that would be disgraceful.

MAGISTRATE *[turning to Lysistrata]*

Well then, by god,

first of all I'd like to know the reason
why you planned to use these barriers here
to barricade our citadel.

LYSISTRATA

To get your money
so you couldn't keep on paying for war.

550

MAGISTRATE

Is it money that's the cause of war?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, and all the rest of the corruption.
Peisander and our leading politicians
need a chance to steal. That's the reason
they're always stirring up disturbances.²
Well, let the ones who wish to do this
do what they want, but from this moment on
they'll get no more money.

[490]

MAGISTRATE

What will you do?

LYSISTRATA

You ask me that? We'll control it.

¹Cranaus was a legendary king of Athens. His citadel is the Acropolis.

²Peisander was a leading Athenian politician, suspected of favouring the war for selfish reasons.

MAGISTRATE

You mean
you're going to manage all the money?

560

LYSISTRATA

You consider that so strange? Isn't it true
we take care of all the household money?

MAGISTRATE

That's not the same.

LYSISTRATA

Why not?

MAGISTRATE

We need the cash
to carry on the war.

LYSISTRATA

Well, first of all,
there should be no fighting.

MAGISTRATE

But without war
how will we save ourselves?

LYSISTRATA

We'll do that.

MAGISTRATE

You?

LYSISTRATA

That's right—us.

MAGISTRATE

This is outrageous!

LYSISTRATA

We'll save you,
even if that goes against your wishes.

MAGISTRATE

What you're saying is madness!

LYSISTRATA

You're angry,
but nonetheless we have to do it.

570

MAGISTRATE

By Demeter, this is against the law!

[500]

LYSISTRATA

My dear fellow, we have to rescue you.

MAGISTRATE

And if I don't agree?

LYSISTRATA

Then our reasons
are that much more persuasive.

MAGISTRATE

Is it true
you're really going to deal with peace and war?

LYSISTRATA

We're going to speak to that.

MAGISTRATE [*with a threatening gesture*]

Then speak fast,
or else you may well start to cry.

LYSISTRATA

Then listen—
and try to keep your fists controlled.

MAGISTRATE

I can't.
It's hard for me to hold back my temper.

580

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

It's more likely you're the one who'll weep.

MAGISTRATE

Shut up your croaking, you old bag.

[*To Lysistrata*]

You—talk to me.

LYSISTRATA

I'll do that. Up to now through this long war

we kept silent about all those things
 you men were doing. We were being modest.
 And you did not allow us to speak up,
 although we were not happy. But still,
 we listened faithfully to you, and often
 inside the house we heard your wretched plans
 for some great deed. And if we ached inside,
 we'd force a smile and simply ask, "Today
 in the assembly did the men propose
 a treaty carved in stone decreeing peace?"
 But our husbands said, "Is that your business?
 Why don't you shut up?" And I'd stay silent.

OLD WOMAN

I'd not have kept my mouth shut.

MAGISTRATE [*to Lysistrata*]

You'd have been smacked
 if you had not been quiet and held your tongue.

LYSISTRATA

So there I am at home, saying nothing.
 Then you'd tell us of another project,
 even stupider than before. We'd say,
 "How can you carry out a scheme like that?
 It's foolish." Immediately he'd frown
 and say to me, "If you don't spin your thread,
 you'll get a major beating on your head.
 War is men's concern."

MAGISTRATE

Yes, by god!

That man spoke the truth.

LYSISTRATA

You idiot!

Is that sensible—not to take advice
 when what you're proposing is so silly?
 Then we heard you speaking in the streets,
 asking openly, "Are there any men
 still left here in our land?" and someone said,
 "By god, there's no one." Well then, after that
 it seemed to us we had to rescue Greece

by bringing wives into a single group
 with one shared aim. Why should we delay?
 If you'd like to hear us give some good advice,
 then start to listen, keep your mouths quite shut,
 the way we did. We'll save you from yourselves.

MAGISTRATE

You'll save us? What you're saying is madness.
 I'm not going to put up with it!

LYSISTRATA

Shut up!

MAGISTRATE

Should I shut up for you, you witch, someone
 with a scarf around her head? I'd sooner die!

LYSISTRATA

If this scarf of mine really bothers you,
 take it and wrap it round your head. Here—

[*Lysistrata takes off her scarf and wraps it over the Magistrate's head.*]

Now keep quiet!

OLD WOMAN A

And take this basket, too!

LYSISTRATA

Now put on a waist band, comb out wool,
 and chew some beans. This business of the war
 we women will take care of.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on, women,

get up and leave those jars. It's our turn now
 to join together with our friends.

WOMEN'S CHORUS

With dancing I'll never tire—
 weariness won't grip my knees
 or wear me out. In everything
 I'll strive to match the excellence
 of these women here—in nature,
 wisdom, boldness, charm,

and prudent virtue in the way
they love their country.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You grandchildren of the bravest women,
sprung from fruitful stinging nettles,
let your passion drive you forward
and don't hold back, for now you've got
the winds of fortune at your back.

640

[550]

LYSISTRATA

O Aphrodite born on Cyprus
and, you, sweet passionate Eros, breathe
sexual longing on our breasts and thighs
and fill our men with tortuous desire
and make their pricks erect. If so, I think
we'll win ourselves a name among the Greeks
as those who brought an end to warfare.

650

MAGISTRATE

What will you do?

LYSISTRATA

For a start, we'll stop
you men hanging around the market place
armed with spears and acting up like fools.

OLD WOMAN A

Yes, that's right, by Paphian Aphrodite!

LYSISTRATA

Right now in the market they stroll around
among the pots and vegetables, fully armed,
like Corybantes.¹

MAGISTRATE

Yes, that's right—
it's what brave men should do.

¹Corybantes were divine attendants on the foreign goddess Cybele. They were associated with ecstatic music and dancing.

LYSISTRATA

It looks so silly—
going off to purchase tiny little birds
while carrying a Gorgon shield.¹

[560]

OLD WOMAN A

By god,
I myself saw a cavalry commander—
he had long hair and was on horseback—
pouring out some pudding he'd just bought
from an old woman into his helmet.
Another Thracian was waving his spear
and his shield, as well, just like Tereus,
and terrifying the woman selling figs
while gobbling down the ripest ones she had.²

660

MAGISTRATE

And how will you find the power to stop
so many violent disturbances
throughout our states and then resolve them?

670

LYSISTRATA

Very easily.

MAGISTRATE

But how? Explain that.

LYSISTRATA

It's like a bunch of yarn. When it's tangled,
we take it and pass it through the spindle
back and forth—that's how we'll end the war,
if people let us try, by sending out
ambassadors here and there, back and forth.

[570]

MAGISTRATE

You're an idiot! Do you really think
you can end such fearful acts with spindles,
spools, and wool?

¹Shields with monstrous Gorgon's heads depicted on them were common in Athens.

²Tereus was a mythical king of Thrace and a popular figure with Athenian dramatists.

LYSISTRATA

If you had any common sense,
you'd deal with everything the way we do
when we handle yarn.

680

MAGISTRATE

What does that mean?

Tell me.

LYSISTRATA

First of all, just as we wash the wool
in a rinsing tub to remove the dirt,
you have to lay the city on a bed,
beat out the rascals, and then drive away
the thorns and break apart the groups of men
who join up together in their factions
seeking public office—pluck out their heads.
Then into a common basket of good will
comb out the wool, the entire compound mix,
including foreigners, guests, and allies,
anyone useful to the public good.
Bundle them together. As for those cities
which are colonies of this land, by god,
you must see that, as far as we're concerned,
each is a separate skein. From all of them,
take a piece of wool and bring it here.
Roll them together into a single thing.
Then you'll have made one mighty ball of wool,
from which the public then must weave its clothes.

690

[580]

700

MAGISTRATE

So women beat wool and roll it in balls!
Isn't that wonderful? That doesn't mean
they bear any part of what goes on in war.

LYSISTRATA

You damned fool, of course it does—we endure
more than twice as much as you. First of all,
we bear children and then send them off
to serve as soldiers.

MAGISTRATE

All right, be quiet.

[590]

Don't remind me of all that.

LYSISTRATA

And then,

when we should be having a good time,
enjoying our youth, we have to sleep alone
because our men are in the army.
Setting us aside, it distresses me
that young unmarried girls are growing old
alone in their own homes.

710

MAGISTRATE

Don't men get old?

LYSISTRATA

By god, that's not the same at all. For men,
even old ones with white hair, can come back
and quickly marry some young girl. For women
time soon runs out. If they don't seize their chance,
no one wants to marry them—they sit there
waiting for an oracle.

720

MAGISTRATE

But an old man
who can still get his prick erect . . .

LYSISTRATA *[interrupting]*

O you—
why not learn your lesson and just die? It's time.
Buy a funeral urn. I'll prepare the dough
for honey cakes.¹ Take this wreath.

[600]

[Lysistrata throws some water over the Magistrate]

OLD WOMAN A

This one, too—
it's from me!

¹A honey cake was traditionally part of the funeral service. It was given to make sure the dead shade reached Hades.

[Old Woman A throws more water on the Magistrate]

OLD WOMAN B

Here, take this garland!

[Old Woman B throws more water on the Magistrate]

LYSISTRATA

Well now,

what do you need? What are you waiting for?

Step aboard the boat. Charon's calling you.

You're preventing him from casting off.¹

MAGISTRATE

I don't have to put up with these insults!

I'll go to the other magistrates, by god,

and show myself exactly as I am!

730

[620]

[The Magistrate exits with his attending slaves]

LYSISTRATA *[calling out to him as he leaves]*

Are you blaming us for not laying you out

for burial? Well then, on the third day,

we'll come and offer up a sacrifice

on your behalf first thing in the morning.

[Lysistrata and the old women with her return inside the Acropolis]

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS

You men, no more sleeping on the job

for anyone born free! Let's strip ourselves

for action on this issue. It seems to me

this business stinks—it's large and getting larger.

740

[The Old Men strip down, taking almost all their clothes off]

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

And I especially smelled some gas—
the tyrant rule of Hippias.

I've a great fear that Spartan men

collected here with Cleisthenes,

have with their trickery stirred up

¹Charon was the ferryman who transports the shades of the dead across the river into Hades.

these women, whom the gods all hate,
to seize the treasury and our pay,
the funds I need to live my way.¹

It's terrible these women here

are thinking about politics

and prattling on about bronze spears—

they're women!—and making peace

on our behalf with Spartan types,

whom I don't trust, not any more

than gaping wolves. In this affair,

those men are weaving plots for us,

so they can bring back tyranny.

But me, I won't give any ground,

not to a tyrant. I'll stand guard,

from now on carrying a sword

inside my myrtle bough. I'll march

with weapons in the market place

with Aristogeiton at my side.²

I'll stand with him. And now it's time

I struck those hostile to gods' law

and hit that old hag on the jaw.

750

[630]

760

[The Old Men move to threaten the Old Women with their fists]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

When you get back home, your own mother

won't know who you are. Come on, old ladies,

you friends of mine, let's first set our burdens

on the ground.

WOMEN'S CHORUS

All you fellow citizens,

we'll start to give the city good advice

and rightly, since it raised us splendidly

770

[640]

¹Hippias was a tyrant in Athens from 528 to 510. Cleisthenes, an Athenian, was a favourite target of Aristophanes, ridiculed as a passive homosexual. Here there's an accusation that he is sympathetic to the Spartans. The pay the old men refer to is a daily payment of three obol from the state to jury men.

²Aristogeiton and his friend Harmodius assassinated the tyrant Hipparchus, the brother of Hippias. The two were celebrated as heroes of democratic Athens.

so we lived very well. At seven years old,
 I carried sacred vessels, and at ten
 I pounded barley for Athena's shrine.
 Later as bear, I shed my yellow dress
 for the rites of Brauronian Artemis.
 And once I was a lovely full-grown girl,
 I wore strings of figs around my neck
 and was one of those who carried baskets.¹ 780
 So I am indebted to the city.
 Why not pay it back with good advice?
 I was born a woman, but don't hold that
 against me if I introduce a plan
 to make our present situation better. [650]
 For I make contributions to the state—
 I give birth to men. You miserable old farts,
 you contribute nothing! That pile of cash
 which we collected from the Persian Wars
 you squandered. You don't pay any taxes. 790
 What's more, the way you act so stupidly
 endangers all of us. What do you say?
 Don't get me riled up. I'll take this filthy shoe
 and smack you one right on the jaw.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Is this not getting way too insolent?
 I think it's better if we paid them back. [660]
 We have to fight this out. So any one
 who's got balls enough to be a man
 take off your clothes so we men can smell
 the way we should—like men. We should strip. 800
 It's not right to keep ourselves wrapped up.
 We're the ones who've got white feet.
 We marched to Leipsydriion years ago.²

¹The Old Women are referring to many city activities and rituals in which girls of noble families played important roles. The phrase "pounding barley" refers to making cakes for sacrifices.

²Leipsydriion was the site of a battle years before when the tyrant Hippias besieged and defeated his opponents. The old men are treating the event as if they had been

[Footnote continues]

And now let's stand erect again, aroused
 in our whole bodies—shake off our old age. [670]

[The Old Men take off their remaining clothes, hold up their shrivelled phalluses, and threaten the women]

If one of us gives them the slightest chance
 there's nothing these women won't continue
 trying to work on—building fighting ships,
 attacking us at sea like Artemesia.¹
 If they switch to horses, I draw the line. 810
 For women are the best at riding bareback—
 their shapely arses do a lovely job.
 They don't slip off when grinding at a gallop.
 Just look how Micon painted Amazons
 fighting men on horseback hand to hand.²
 So we must take a piece of wood with holes, [680]
 and fit a yoke on them, around their necks.

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN

By the two goddesses, if you get me roused,
 I'll let my wild sow's passion loose and make
 you yell to all the people here today
 how I'm removing all your hair. 820

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You ladies,
 let's not delay—let's take off all our clothes,
 so we can smell a woman's passion
 when we're in a ferocious mood.

[The Old Women take off their clothes]

WOMEN'S CHORUS

Now let any man step out against me—

victorious. The detail about their white feet, Sommerstein suggests, refers to those who were hostile to Hippias and the tyrants (hence, lovers of freedom).

¹Artemesia was queen of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. She led ships from her city as part of the Persian expedition against Athens in 480 and fought at the Battle of Salamis.

²Micon was a well-known Athenian painter.

LYSISTRATA

he won't be eating garlic any more, [690]
and no black beans. Just say something nasty,
I'm so boiling mad, I'll treat you the same way
the beetle did the eagle—smash your eggs.¹

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Not that I give a damn for you, not while 830
I have Lampito here—Ismenia, too,
my young Theban friend. You have no power,
not even with seven times as many votes.
You're such a miserable old man, even those
who are your neighbours find you hateful.
Just yesterday for the feast of Hecate, [700]
I planned a party, so I asked my neighbours
in Boeotia for one of their companions,
a lovely girl—she was for my children—
a splendid pot of eels.² But they replied 840
they couldn't send it because you'd passed
another one of your decrees. It doesn't seem
you'll stop voting in these laws, not before
someone takes your leg, carries you off
and throws you out.

*[Lysistrata comes out from the Acropolis, looking very worried and angry.
The leader of the Women's Chorus addresses her]*

Here's our glorious leader,
who does the planning for this enterprise.
Why have you come here, outside the building,
and with such a sad expression on your face?

LYSISTRATA

It's the way these women act so badly, 850
together with their female hearts, that makes
me lose my courage and walk in circles.

¹This is a reference to an old story in which the dung beetle got its revenge against an eagle by smashing its eggs. The old woman obviously threatens the man's testicles as she says this.

²Hecate was a goddess whose worship was associated with birth and children.

LYSISTRATA

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What are you saying? What do you mean? [710]

LYSISTRATA

It's true, so true.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What's wrong? You can tell us—
we're friends of yours.

LYSISTRATA

I'm ashamed to say,
but it's hard to keep it quiet.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Don't hide from me
bad news affecting all of us.

LYSISTRATA

All right,
I'll keep it short—we all want to get laid.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

O Zeus!

LYSISTRATA

What's the point of calling Zeus?
There's nothing he can do about this mess.
I can't keep these women from their men, 860
not any longer—they're all running off.
First I caught one slipping through a hole [720]
beside the Cave of Pan, then another
trying it with a rope and pulley, a third
deserting on her own, and yesterday
there was a woman on a giant bird
intending to fly down to that place
run by Orsilochus.¹ I grabbed her hair.
They're all inventing reasons to go home.

[A woman come out of the citadel, trying to sneak off]

¹Orsilochus was either a well known seducer or someone who kept a brothel.

LYSISTRATA

Here's one of them on her way right now. 870
Where do you think you're going?

WOMAN A

Who me?

I want to get back home. Inside the house
I've got bolts of Milesian cloth, and worms
are eating them.

LYSISTRATA

What worms? Get back in there! [730]

WOMAN A

I'll come back right away, by god—I just
need to spread them on the bed.

LYSISTRATA

Spread them?

You won't be doing that. You're not leaving!

WOMAN A

My wool just goes to waste?

LYSISTRATA

If that's what it takes.

[Woman A trudges back into the Acropolis. Woman B emerges]

WOMAN B

I'm such a fool, I've left my wretched flax
back in my house unstripped.

LYSISTRATA

Another one 880
leaving here to go and strip her flax!
Get back inside!

WOMAN B

By the goddess of light,

I'll be right back, once I've rubbed its skin.

LYSISTRATA

You'll not rub anything. If you start that, [740]
some other woman will want to do the same.

[Woman B returns dejected into the citadel. Woman C emerges from the
citadel, looking very pregnant]

LYSISTRATA

WOMAN C

O sacred Eileithia, goddess of birth,
hold back my labour pains till I can find
a place where I'm permitted to give birth.¹

LYSISTRATA

What are you moaning about?

WOMAN C

It's my time—

I'm going to have a child!

LYSISTRATA

But yesterday 890
you weren't even pregnant.

WOMAN C

Well, today I am.

Send me home, Lysistrata, and quickly.
I need a midwife.

LYSISTRATA [inspecting Woman C's clothing]

What are you saying?

What's this you've got here? It feels quite rigid.

WOMAN C

A little boy.

LYSISTRATA

No, by Aphrodite,
I don't think so. It looks like you've got
some hollow metal here. I'll have a look. [750]

[Lysistrata looks under the woman's dress and pulls out a helmet]

You silly creature, you've got a helmet there,
Athena's sacred helmet. Didn't you say
you were pregnant.

WOMAN C

Yes, and by god, I am. 900

¹To have a child in a holy place, like the Acropolis, was considered a sacrilege.

LYSISTRATA

Then why've you got this helmet?

WOMAN C

Well, in case

I went into labour in the citadel.
I could give birth right in the helmet,
lay it in there like a nesting pigeon.

LYSISTRATA

What are you talking about? You're just
making an excuse—that's so obvious.
You'll stay here for at least five days
until your new child's birth is purified.

WOMAN C

I can't get any sleep in the Acropolis,
not since I saw the snake that guards the place.

910

[More women start sneaking out of the citadel]

WOMAN D

Nor can I. I'm dying from lack of sleep
those wretched owls keep hooting all the time.

[760]

LYSISTRATA

Come on ladies, stop all these excuses!
All right, you miss your men. But don't you see
they miss you, too? I'm sure the nights they spend
don't bring them any pleasure. But please, dear friends,
hold on—persevere a little longer.
An oracle has said we will prevail,
if we stand together. That's what it said.

WOMAN A

Tell us what it prophesied.

LYSISTRATA

Then, keep quiet.

920

"When the sparrows, as they fly away,
escaping from the hoopoe birds, shall stay
together in one place and shall say nay
to sexual encounters, then a bad day
will be rare. High thundering Zeus will say
'What once was underneath on top I'll lay.'"

[770]

WOMAN B *[interrupting]*

Women are going to lie on top of men?

LYSISTRATA *[continuing the oracle]*

"... but if the sparrows fight and fly away
out of the holy shrine, people will say
no bird is more promiscuous than they."

930

WOMAN A

That oracle is clear enough, by god.

LYSISTRATA

All you heavenly gods, can we stop talking
of being in such distress. Let us go back in.
For, my dearest friends, it will be a shame
if we don't live up to this prophecy.

[780]

[Lysistrata and the women go back into the citadel, leaving the two choruses]

MEN'S CHORUS

I'd like to tell you all a tale,
which I heard once when I was young
about Melanion, a young lad
who fled from marriage and then came
into the wilds and so he lived
up in the hills. He wove some nets
and hunted hares. He had a dog.
Not once did he return back home
He hated women—they made him sick.
And we are no less wise than he.

940

[790]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Let's kiss, old bag, give it a try.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You won't need onions to make you cry.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'll lift my leg—give you a kick.

LEADER OF WOMAN'S CHORUS

Down there your pubic hair's too thick.

[800]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Myronides had a hairy dick

950

and beat foes with his big black bum.
That Phormio was another one.¹

WOMEN'S CHORUS

To you I'd like to tell a tale
to answer your Melanion.
There was a man called Timon once,
a vagabond, the Furies' child.
Wild thistles covered his whole face. [810]
He wandered off filled up with spite
and always cursing evil types.
But though he always hated men, 960
those of you who are such rogues,
women he always really loved. [820]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You'd like a punch right on the chin?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Not given the state of fear I'm in.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What if I kicked you with my toe?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

We'd see your pussy down below.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

And then you'd see, although I'm old
it's not all matted hair down there,
but singed by lamp and plucked with flair.

*[Lysistrata appears on a balcony of the citadel, looking off in the distance.
Other women come out after her]*

LYSISTRATA

Hey, you women! Over here to me. Come quick! 970

CALONICE

What's going on? Why are you shouting? [830]

¹Myronides and Phormio were two dead generals who fought for Athens.

LYSISTRATA

A man!

I see a man approaching mad with love,
seized with desire for Aphrodite's rites.
O holy queen of Cyprus, Cythera,
and Paphos, keep moving down the road,
the straight path you've been travelling on.

CALONICE

Where is he, whoever he is?

LYSISTRATA

Over there,
right beside the shrine of Chloe.

CALONICE

O yes,
there he is, by god. Who is he?

LYSISTRATA

Have a look.
Do any of you know him?

MYRRHINE

O god, I do. 980
It's my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA

All right,
your job is to torment him, be a tease,
make him hot, offer to have sex with him
and then refuse, try everything you can, [840]
except the things you swore to on the cup.

MYRRHINE

Don't you worry. I'll do that.

LYSISTRATA

All right, then.
I'll stay here to help you play with him.
We'll warm him up together. You others,
go inside.

*[The women go inside, including Myrrhine. Cinesias enters with a very large
erection. An attendant comes with him carrying a young baby]*

CINESIAS

I'm in a dreadful way.
It's all this throbbing. And the strain. I feel
as if I'm stretched out on the rack.

990

LYSISTRATA

Who's there,
standing inside our line of sentinels?

CINESIAS

It's me.

LYSISTRATA

A man?

CINESIAS

Yes, take a look at this!

LYSISTRATA

In that case leave. Go on your way.

CINESIAS

Who are you
to tell me to get out?

LYSISTRATA

The daytime watch.

CINESIAS

Then, by the gods, call Myrrhine for me.

[850]

LYSISTRATA

You tell me to summon Myrrhine for you?
Who are you?

CINESIAS

Cinesias, her husband,
from Paeonidae.¹

¹Sommerstein (p. 200) points out that Paeonidae was a political district in northern Attica. The name suggests the Greek verb *paiein*, meaning to strike or copulate. Sommerstein offers the translation "Bangwell." Jack Lindsay translates the place as "Bangtown."

LYSISTRATA

Welcome, dear friend, your name
is not unknown to us. Your wife always
has you on her lips. Any time she licks
an apple or an egg she says, "Ah me,
if only this could be Cinesias."

1000

[Lysistrata licks her fist obscenely]

CINESIAS

O my god!

LYSISTRATA

Yes, by Aphrodite, yes. And when our talk
happens to deal with men, your wife speaks up
immediately, "O they're all useless sorts
compared to my Cinesias."

[860]

CINESIAS

Please call her out.

LYSISTRATA

Why should I do that? What will you give me?

CINESIAS

Whatever you want, by god. I have this . . .

[Cinesias waves his erection in front of Lysistrata]

I'll give you what I've got.

LYSISTRATA

No thanks.

1010

I think I'll tell her to come out to you.

[Lysistrata leaves to fetch Myrrhine]

CINESIAS

Hurry up. I've had no pleasure in life
since she's been gone from home. I go out,
but I'm in pain. To me now everything
seems empty. There's no joy in eating food.
I'm just so horny.

[Lysistrata appears dragging Myrrhine with her. Myrrhine is pretending to be reluctant]

MYRRHINE [*loudly so that Cinesias can hear*]
 I love him. I do.
 But he's unwilling to make love to me,
 to love me back. Don't make me go to him.

[870]

CINESIAS
 O my dear sweetest little Myrrhine,
 what are you doing? Come down here.

1020

MYRRHINE
 I'm not going there, by god.

CINESIAS
 If I ask you,
 won't you come down, Myrrhine?

MYRRHINE
 You've got no reason to be calling me.
 You don't want me.

CINESIAS
 You don't think I want you?
 I'm absolutely dying for you!

MYRRHINE
 I'm leaving.

CINESIAS
 Hold on! You might want to hear our child.
 Can you call out something to your mama?

CHILD
 Mummy, mummy, mummy!

CINESIAS
 What's wrong with you?
 Don't you feel sorry for the boy. It's now
 six days since he's been washed or had some food.

[880]

1030

MYRRHINE
 Ah yes, I pity him. But it's quite clear
 his father doesn't.

CINESIAS
 My lovely wife,
 come down here to the child.

MYRRHINE
 Being a mother
 is so demanding. I better go down.
 What I put with!

[*Myrrhine starts coming down from the Acropolis accentuating the
 movement of her hips as she goes*]

CINESIAS
 She seems to me
 to be much younger, easier on the eyes.
 She was acting like a shrew and haughty,
 but that just roused my passion even more.

MYRRHINE [*to the child*]
 My dear sweet little boy. But your father—
 such rotten one. Come here. I'll hold you.
 Mummy's little favourite.

1040 [890]

CINESIAS
 You dim-witted girl,
 what are you doing, letting yourself
 be led on by these other women,
 causing me grief and injuring yourself?

MYRRHINE
 Don't lay a hand on me!

CINESIAS
 Inside our home
 things are a mess. You stopped doing anything.

MYRRHINE
 I don't care.

CINESIAS
 You don't care your weaving
 is being picked apart by hens?

MYRRHINE
 So what?

CINESIAS
 You haven't honoured holy Aphrodite
 by having sex, not for a long time now.
 So won't you come back?

1050

MYRRHINE

No, by god, I won't—
unless you give me something in return.
End this war.

[900]

CINESIAS

Well now, that's something I'll do,
when it seems all right.

MYRRHINE

Well then, I'll leave here,
when it seems all right. But now I'm under oath.

CINESIAS

At least lie down with me a little while.

MYRRHINE

I can't. I'm not saying I wouldn't like to.

CINESIAS

You'd like to? Then, my little Myrrhine,
lie down right here.

MYRRHINE

You must be joking—
in front of our dear baby child?

CINESIAS

No, by god.

1060

[Cinesias turns toward the attendant]

Manes, take the boy back home. All right then,
the lad's no longer in the way. Lie down.

MYRRHINE

But, you silly man, where do we do it?

[910]

CINESIAS

Where? The Cave of Pan's an excellent place.

MYRRHINE

How will I purify myself when I return
into the citadel?

CINESIAS

You can wash yourself
in the water clock. That would do the job.

MYRRHINE

What about the oath I swore? Should I become
a wretched perjurer?

CINESIAS

I'll deal with that.
Don't worry about the oath.

MYRRHINE

Well then,
I'll go and get a bed for us.

1070

CINESIAS

No, no.
The ground will do.

MYRRHINE

No, by Apollo, no!
You may be a rascal, but on the ground?
No, I won't make you lie down there.

[Myrrhine goes back into the Acropolis to fetch a bed]

CINESIAS

Ah, my wife—
she really loves me. That's so obvious.

[Myrrhine reappears carrying a small bed]

MYRRHINE

Here we are. Get on there while I undress.
O dear! I forgot to bring the mattress.

[920]

CINESIAS

Why a mattress? I don't need that.

MYRRHINE

You can't lie
on the bed cord. No, no, by Artemis,
that would be a great disgrace.

CINESIAS

Give me a kiss—

1080

right now!

MYRRHINE [*kissing him*]

There you go.

[*Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to fetch the mattress*]

CINESIAS

Oh my god—

get back here quickly!

[*Myrrhine reappears with the mattress*]

MYRRHINE

Here's the mattress.

You lie down on it. I'll get my clothes off.

O dear me! You don't have a pillow.

CINESIAS

But I don't need a pillow!

MYRRHINE

By god, I do.

[*Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis for a pillow*]

CINESIAS

This cock of mine is just like Hercules—
he's being denied his supper.¹

[*Myrrhine returns with a pillow*]

MYRRHINE

Lift up a bit.

Come on, up! There, I think that's everything.

CINESIAS

That's all we need. Come here, my treasure.

[930]

MYRRHINE

I'm taking off the cloth around my breasts.

1090

¹Hercules was famous for always being hungry and having an enormous appetite.

Now, don't forget. Don't you go lying to me
about that vote for peace.

CINESIAS

O my god,

may I die before that happens!

MYRRHINE

There's no blanket.

CINESIAS

I don't need one, by god! I want to get laid!

MYRRHINE

Don't worry. You will be. I'll be right back.

[*Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to fetch a blanket*]

CINESIAS

That woman's killing me with all the bedding!

[*Myrrhine returns with a blanket*]

MYRRHINE

All right, get up.

CINESIAS

But it's already up!

MYRRHINE

You want me to rub some scent on you?

CINESIAS

No, by Apollo. Not for me.

MYRRHINE

I'll do it,

whether you want it rubbed on there or not—
for Aphrodite's sake.

1100

[*Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to get the perfume*]

CINESIAS

O great lord Zeus,
pour the perfume out!

[940]

[*Myrrhine returns with the perfume*]

MYRRHINE

Hold out your hand, now.
Take that and spread it round.

CINESIAS *[rubbing the perfume on himself]*

By Apollo,
this stuff doesn't smell so sweet, not unless
it's rubbed on thoroughly—no sexy smell.

MYRRHINE *[inspecting the jar of perfume]*

I'm such a fool. I brought the Rhodian scent!

CINESIAS

It's fine. Just let it go, my darling.

MYRRHINE *[getting up to leave]*

You're just saying that.

[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to get the right perfume]

CINESIAS

Damn the wretch who first came up with perfume!

[Myrrhine comes back from the Acropolis with another box of perfume]

MYRRHINE

Grab this alabaster thing.

CINESIAS *[waving his cock]*

You grab this alabaster cock.
Come lie down here, you tease. Don't go and fetch
another thing for me. 1110

MYRRHINE

By Artemis, I'll grab it.
I'm taking off my shoes. Now, my darling, [950]
you will be voting to bring on a peace.

CINESIAS

I'm planning to.

[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis. Cinesias turns and sees she's gone]

That woman's killing me!
She teased me, got me all inflamed, then left.

[Cinesias gets up and declaims in a parody of tragic style]

Alas, why suffer from such agony?

Who can I screw? Why'd she betray me,
the most beautiful woman of them all?

Poor little cock, how can I care for you?

Where's that Cynalopex? I'll pay him well
to nurse this little fellow back to health.¹ 1120

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You poor man, in such a fix—your spirit
so tricked and in distress. I pity you. [960]

How can your kidneys stand the strain,
your balls, your loins, your bum, your brain
endure an erection that's hard for you,
without a chance of a morning screw.

CINESIAS

O mighty Zeus, it's started throbbing once again.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

A dirty stinking bitch did this to you.

CINESIAS

No, by god, a loving girl, a sweet one, too. 1130 [970]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Sweet? Not her. She's a tease, a slut.

CINESIAS

All right, she is a tease, but—
O Zeus, Zeus, I wish
you'd sweep her up there
in a great driving storm,
like dust in the air,
whirl her around,
then fall to the ground.
Then as she's carried down,
to earth one more time, 1140
let her fall right away
on this pecker of mine.

¹Cynalopex (= "Fox Dog") was the nickname of Philostratus who apparently was a pimp.

[Enter the Spartan herald. He, too, has a giant erection, which he is trying to hide under his cloak]

SPARTAN HERALD

Where's the Athenian Senate and the Prytanēs?¹ [980]
I come with fresh dispatches.

CINESIAS *[looking at the Herald's erection]*

Are you a man,
or some phallic monster?

SPARTAN HERALD

I'm a herald,
by the twin gods. And my good man,
I come from Sparta with a proposal,
arrangements for a truce.

CINESIAS

If that's the case,
why do you have a spear concealed in there?

SPARTAN HERALD

I'm not concealing anything, by god. 1150

CINESIAS

Then why are you turning to one side?
What that thing there, sticking from your cloak?
Has your journey made your groin inflamed?

SPARTAN HERALD

By old Castor, this man's insane!

CINESIAS

You rogue,
you've got a hard on!

SPARTAN HERALD

No I don't, I tell you. [990]
Let's have no more nonsense.

CINESIAS *[pointing to the herald's erection]*

Then what's that?

¹The Prytanēs was the business committee of the Athenian council.

SPARTAN HERALD

It's a Spartan herald's stick.

CINESIAS

O that's what it is,
a Spartan herald stick. Let's have a chat.
Tell me the truth. How are things going for you
out there in Sparta?

SPARTAN HERALD

Not good. The Spartans 1160
are all standing tall and the allies, too—
everyone is firm and hard. We need a thrust
in someone's rear.¹

CINESIAS

This trouble of yours—
where did it come from? Was it from Pan?²

SPARTAN HERALD

No. I think it started with Lampito.
Then, at her suggestion, other women
in Sparta, as if from one starting gate,
ran off to keep men from their honey pots.³ [1000]

CINESIAS

How are you doing?

SPARTAN HERALD

We're all in pain.
We go around the city doubled up, 1170
like men who light the lamps.⁴ The women

¹The Greek reads "we need Pellene," an area in the Peloponnese allied with Sparta. But, a Sommerstein points out (p. 206), this is undoubtedly a pun invoking a word meaning vagin or anus. In the exchanges which follow, the Spartans are depicted as having a decided preference for anal sex.

²Pan was a god associated with wild unrestrained sex in the wilderness.

³The meaning of the Greek word *hussakos* is very obscure. Sommerstein translates as "por barrels."

⁴The lamplighters had to walk along bent over in order to protect the flame they carried.

won't let us touch their pussies, not until
we've made a peace with all of Greece.

CINESIAS

This matter
is a female plot, a grand conspiracy
affecting all of Greece. Now I understand.
Return to Sparta as fast as you can go.
Tell them they must send out ambassadors
with full authority to deal for peace. [1010]
I'll tell out leaders here to make a choice
of our ambassadors. I'll show them my prick. 1180

SPARTAN HERALD

All you've said is good advice. I must fly.

[Cinesias and the Spartan Herald exit in opposite directions]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

There's no wild animal harder to control
than women, not even blazing fire.
The panther itself displays more shame.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

If you know that, then why wage war with me?
You old scoundrel, we could be lasting friends.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

But my hatred for women will not stop!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Whatever you want. But I don't much like
to look at you like this, without your clothes. [1020]
It makes me realize how silly you are. 1190
Look, I'll come over and put your shirt on.

*[The Leader of the Women's Chorus picks up a tunic, goes over to the
Leader of the Men's Chorus, and helps him put it on.]*

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

By god, what you've just done is not so bad.
I took it off in a fit of stupid rage.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Now at least you look like a man again.

And people won't find you ridiculous.
If you hadn't been so nasty to me,
I'd grab that insect stuck in your eye
and pull it out. It's still in there.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

So that's what's troubling me. Here's a ring.
Scrape it off. Get it out and show it to me. 1200
God, that's been injuring my eye for ages.

*[The Leader of the Women's Chorus takes the ring and inspects the Leader
of the Men's Chorus in the eye]*

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'll do it. You men are born hard to please. [1030]
My god, you picked up a monstrous insect.
Have a look. That's a Tricorynthus bug!¹

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

By Zeus, you've been a mighty help to me.
That thing's been digging wells in me a while.
Now it's been removed, my eyes are streaming.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'll wipe it for you, though you're a scoundrel.
I'll give you a kiss.

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS

I don't want a kiss.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'll will, whether it's what you want or not. 1210

[She kisses him]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

O you've got me. You're born to flatter us.
That saying got it right—it states the case
quite well, "These women—one has no life
with them, and cannot live without them."
But now I'll make a truce with you. I won't [1040]

¹Tricorynthus is a region in Attica, near Marathon. Presumably it was famous for its insects.

insult you any more in days to come,
and you won't make me suffer. So now,
let's make a common group and sing a song.

[The Men's and Women's Choruses combine]

COMBINED CHORUS *[addressing the audience]*

You citizens, we're not inclined
with any of you to be unkind. 1220

Just the reverse—our words to you
will be quite nice. We'll act well, too.
For now we've had enough bad news.

So if a man or woman here
needs ready cash, give out a cheer, 1050
and take some minae, two or three.

Coins fill our purses now, you see.
And if we get a peace treaty,
you take some money from the sack,
and keep it. You don't pay it back. 1230

I'm going to have a great shindig—
I've got some soup, I'll kill a pig—
with Carystian friends, all good men.¹ 1060
You'll eat fine tender meat again.

Come to my house this very day.
But first wash all the dirt away,
you and your kids, then walk on by.

No need to ask a person why.
Just come straight in, as if my home
was like your own—for at my place
we'll shut the door right in your face. 1240 1070

[A group of Spartans enters]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, here come the Spartan ambassadors
trailing their long beards. They've got
something like a pig pen between their thighs.

¹Carystus is a state from Euboea, allied to Athens.

[The Spartan ambassadors enter, moving with difficulty because of their enormous erections.]

Men of Sparta, first of all, our greetings.
Tell us how you are. Why have you come?

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Why waste a lot of words to tell you?
You see the state that brought us here.

[The Spartans all display their erections with military precision]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh my! The crisis has grown more severe.
It seems the strain is worse than ever 1250

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

It's indescribable. What can I say? 1080
But let someone come, give us a peace
in any way he can.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well now, I see
our own ambassadors—they look just like
our wrestling men with their shirts sticking out
around their bellies or like athletic types
who need to exercise to cure their sickness.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Where's Lysistrata? Can someone tell me?
We're men here and, well, look . . .

[The Athenians pull back their cloaks and reveal that, like the Spartans, they all have giant erections]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

They're clearly suffering from the same disease. 1260
Hey, does it throb early in the morning?

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

By god, yes. What this is doing to me— 1090

it's torture. If we don't get a treaty soon
we'll going to have to cornhole Cleisthenes.¹

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you're smart, keep it covered with your cloak.
One of those men who chopped off Hermes' dick
might see you.²

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR [*pulling his cloak over his erection*]

By god, that's good advice.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR [*doing the same*]

Yes, by the twin gods, excellent advice.
I'll pull my mantle over it.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Greetings, Spartans.

We're both suffering disgracefully.

1270

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Yes, dear sir, we'd have been in real pain
if one of those dick-clippers had seen us
with our peckers sticking up like this.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

All right, Spartans, we each need to talk.
Why are you here?

[1100]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Ambassadors for peace.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Well said. We want the same. Why don't we call
Lysistrata. She's the only one who'll bring
a resolution to our differences.

¹Cleisthenes was a well known Athenian, whom Aristophanes frequently ridicules as a passive homosexual.

²In 415 the statues of Hermes in Athens were mutilated by having their penises chopped off, a very sacrilegious act.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

By the two gods, bring in Lysistratus,
if he's the one you want.

1280

[*Lysistrata emerges from the gates of the citadel*]

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

It seems there is no need to summon her.
She's heard us, and here she is in person.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hail to the bravest woman of them all.
You must now show that you're resilient—
stern but yielding, with a good heart but mean,
stately but down-to-earth. The foremost men
in all of Greece in deference to your charms
have come together here before you
so you can arbitrate all their complaints.

[1110]

LYSISTRATA

That task should not be difficult, unless
they're so aroused they screw each other.
I'll quickly notice that. But where is she,
the young girl Reconciliation?

1290

[*The personification of the goddess Reconciliation comes out. She is completely naked. Lysistrata addresses her first*]¹

Come here,
and first, take hold of those from Sparta,

don't grab too hard or be too rough, not like
our men who act so boorishly—instead
do it as women do when they're at home.
If they won't extend their hands to you,
then grab their cocks.

[*Reconciliation takes two Spartans by their penises and leads them over to Lysistrata*]

¹In Aristophanes' time, this female character would be played by a man with a body stocking prominently displaying female characteristics: breasts, pubic hair, buttocks.

LYSISTRATA

Now go and do the same
for the Athenians. You can hold them
by whatever they stick out.

[1120]
1300

[Reconciliation leads the Athenians over to Lysistrata]

Now then,
you men of Sparta, stand here close to me,
and you Athenians over here. All of you,
listen to my words. I am a woman,
but I have a brain, and my common sense
is not so bad—I picked it up quite well
from listening to my father and to speeches
from our senior men. Now I've got you here,
I wish to reprimand you, both of you,
and rightly so. At Olympia, Delphi,
and Thermopylae (I could mention
many other places if I had a mind
to make it a long list) both of you
use the same cup when you sprinkle altars,
as if you share the same ancestral group.¹
We've got barbarian enemies, and yet
with your armed expeditions you destroy
Greek men and cities. At this point, I'll end
the first part of my speech.

1310 [1130]

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

This erection—
it's killing me!

LYSISTRATA

And now you Spartans,
I'll turn to you. Don't you remember how,
some time ago, Periclidias came,
a fellow Spartan, and sat down right here,
a suppliant at these Athenian altars—
he looked so pale there in his purple robes—
begging for an army? Messenians then

1320

[1140]

LYSISTRATA

were pressing you so hard, just at the time
god sent the earthquake. So Cimon set out
with four thousand armed infantry and saved
the whole of Sparta.¹ After going through that,
how can you ravage the Athenians' land,
the ones who helped you out?

1330

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Lysistrata,
you're right, by god. They're in the wrong.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR *[looking at Reconciliation]*

Not true,
but look at that incredibly fine ass!

LYSISTRATA

Do you Athenians think I'll forget you?
Don't you remember how these Spartans men,
back in the days when you were dressed as slaves
came here with spears and totally destroyed
those hordes from Thessaly and many friends
of Hippias and those allied with him?
It took them just one day to drive them out
and set you free. At that point you exchanged
your slavish clothes for cloaks which free men wear.

[1150]

1340

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

I've never seen a more gracious woman.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR *[looking at Reconciliation]*

I've never seen a finer looking pussy.

LYSISTRATA

If you've done many good things for each other,
why go to war? Why not stop this conflict?
Why not conclude a peace? What's in the way?

[1160]

¹Lysistrata is listing some of the festivals where all the Greek states cooperated in the ritual celebrations.

¹In 464 Sparta suffered a massive earthquake, which killed many citizens. Their slaves, who included the Messenians, rose in revolt. Sparta appealed to Athens for help, and the Athenians, after some debate, sent Cimon with an army to assist the Spartans.

[In the negotiations which follow, the ambassadors use the body of Reconciliation as a map of Greece, pointing to various parts to make their points]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

We're willing, but the part that's sticking out
we want that handed back.

LYSISTRATA

Which one is that? 1350

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR *[pointing to Reconciliation's buttocks]*

This one here—that's Pylos. We must have that—
we've been aching for it a long time now.¹

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

By Poseidon, you won't be having that!

LYSISTRATA

My good man, you'll surrender it to them.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Then how do we make trouble, stir up shit?

LYSISTRATA

Ask for something else of equal value.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR *[pointing to Reconciliation's public hair]*

Then give us this whole area in here—
first, there's Echinous, and the Melian Gulf,
the hollow part behind it, and these legs [1170]
which make up Megara.²

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

By the twin gods, 1360
my good man, you can't have all that!

LYSISTRATA

Let it go.
Don't start fighting over a pair of legs.

¹Pylos was a small but important part of the south Peloponnese which the Athenians had seized in 425 and held onto ever since.

²These are places relatively close to Athens.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

I'd like to strip and start ploughing naked.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

By god, yes! But me first. I'll fork manure.

LYSISTRATA

You can do those things once you've made peace.
If these terms seem good, you'll want your allies
to come here to join negotiations.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADORS

What of our allies? We've all got hard ons.
Our allies will agree this is just fine.
They are all dying to get laid!

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Ours, as well— 1370 [1180]
no doubt of that.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

And the Carystians—
they'll also be on board, by Zeus.

LYSISTRATA

Well said. Now you must purify yourselves.
We women will host a dinner for you
in the Acropolis. We'll use the food
we brought here in our baskets. In there
you will make a oath and pledge your trust
in one another. Then each of you
can take his wife and go back home.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Let's go—
and hurry up.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR *[to Lysistrata]*

Lead on. Wherever you wish. 1380

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

All right by Zeus, as fast as we can go.

[Lysistrata and Reconciliation lead the Spartan and Athenian delegations into the Acropolis]

CHORUS

Embroidered gowns and shawls,
 robes and golden ornaments—
 everything I own—I offer you
 with an open heart. Take these things
 and let your children have them,
 if you've a daughter who will be
 a basket bearer. I tell you all
 take my possessions in my home—
 nothing is so securely closed
 you can't break open all the seals
 and take whatever's there inside.
 But if you look, you won't see much
 unless your eyesight's really keen,
 far sharper than my own.

1390

[1200]

If anyone is out of corn
 to feed his many tiny children
 and household slaves, at home
 I've got a few fine grains of wheat—
 a quart of those will make some bread,
 a fresh good-looking loaf. If there's a man
 who wants some bread and is in need
 let him come with his sacks and bags
 to where I live to get his wheat.
 My servant Manes will pour it out.
 But I should tell you not to come
 too near my door—for there's a dog
 you need to stay well clear of.

1400

[1210]

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A [*from inside the citadel*]

Open the door!

[The Athenian Delegate A comes staggering out of the citadel, evidently drunk. He's carrying a torch. Other delegates in the same condition come out behind him. Athenian Delegate A bumps into someone by the

*door, probably one of a group of Spartan slaves standing around waiting for their masters to come out*¹

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A

Why don't you get out of my way?

Why are you lot sitting there? What if I
 burned you with this torch? That's a stale routine!²
 I won't do that. Well, if I really must,
 to keep you happy, I'll go through with it.

1410

[1220]

[Athenian Delegate A chases an onlooker away with his torch]

ATHENIAN DELEGATE B [*waving a torch*]

We'll be here with you to help you do it.
 Why not just leave? You may soon be screaming
 for that hair of yours.

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A

Go on, piss off!

So the Spartans inside there can come on out
 and go away in peace.

[The two Athenian delegates force the Spartan slaves away from the door]

ATHENIAN DELEGATE B

Well now,

I've never seen a banquet quite like this.
 The Spartans were delightful. As for us,
 we had too much wine, but as companions
 we said lots of really clever things.

1420

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A

That's right. When we're sober, we lose our minds.
 I'll speak up and persuade Athenians

¹The stage business at this point is somewhat confusing. It's not clear whether the Athenian delegates who now appear are leaving the meeting in the citadel or arriving and wanting to get in. Here I follow Sommerstein, who is following Henderson, and have the delegate emerge from the meeting. The people hanging around the door are probably the slaves who came with the Spartans and who are waiting for their masters inside.

²This comment is taking a swipe at other comic dramatists who use a stock set of situation or actions, while at the same time the action uses the stock technique (not an uncommon feature of Aristophanic comedy).

LYSISTRATA

that when our embassies go anywhere [1230]
they stay permanently drunk. As it is,
whenever we go sober off to Sparta,
right away we look to stir up trouble.
So we just don't hear what they have to say
and get suspicious of what they do not state.
Then we bring back quite different reports 1430
about the same events. But now these things
have all been sorted out. So if someone there
sang "Telamon" when he should have sung
"Cleitagora," we'd applaud the man
and even swear quite falsely that . . .¹

[The Spartan slaves they forced away from the door are gradually coming back]

Hey, those slaves
are coming here again. You whipping posts, [1240]
why can't you go away?

ATHENIAN DELEGATE B

By Zeus,
the ones in there are coming out again.

[The Spartan delegates come out of the citadel. The Spartan ambassador is carrying a musical instrument]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Here, my dear sir, take this wind instrument,
so I can dance and sing a lovely song 1440
to honour both Athenians and ourselves.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR *[turning to one of the slaves]*

Yes, by the gods, take the pipes. I love
to see you Spartans dance and sing.

[The music starts. The Spartan Ambassador sings and dances]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

O Memory, to this young man
send down your child the Muse

¹"Telamon" and "Cleitagora" were well known drinking songs.

LYSISTRATA

who knows the Spartans and Athenians.¹ [1250]
Back then at Artemesium
they fought the ships like gods of war
and overpowered the Medes,
while we, I know, led by Leonidas 1450
whetted our teeth like boars
with foaming mouths, which dripped
down on our legs. The Persian force
possessed more fighting men
than grains of sea shore sand. [1260]
O Artemis, queen of the wild,
slayer of beasts, chaste goddess,
come here to bless our treaty,
to make us long united.
May our peace be always blessed 1460
with friendship and prosperity,
and may we put an end
to all manipulating foxes. [1270]
Come here, O come here,
Virgin Goddess of the Hunt.

[Lysistrata emerges from the citadel bringing all the wives with her]

LYSISTRATA²

Come now, since everything has turned out well,
take these women back with you, you Spartans.
And, you Athenians, these ones are yours.
Let each man stand beside his wife, each wife
beside her man, and then to celebrate 1470
good times let's dance in honour of the gods.
And for all future time, let's never make
the same mistake again.

[The Chorus now sings to the assembled group, as the wives and husbands are rejoined]

¹The Spartan Ambassador is singing about two famous battles against the Persians (both in 480), the Athenian naval victory at Artemesium and the Spartan stand of the 300 at Thermopylae. This military campaign was an important highlight of Greek unity.

²There is some dispute about who this speech should be assigned to. Sommerstein (p. 221) has a useful summary of the arguments.

CHORUS

Lead on the dance, bring on the Graces,
 and summon Artemis and her twin, [1280]
 Apollo, the god who heals us all,
 call on Bacchus, Nysa's god,
 whose eyes blaze forth
 amid his Maenads' ecstasy,
 and Zeus alight with flaming fire, 1480
 and Hera, Zeus' blessed wife,
 and other gods whom we will use
 as witnesses who won't forget
 the meaning of the gentle Peace
 made her by goddess Aphrodite. [1290]

Alalai! Raise the cry of joy,
 raise it high, iai!
 the cry of victory, iai!
 Evoi, evoi, evoi, evoi!

LYSISTRATA

Spartan, now offer us another song, 1490
 match our new song with something new.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Leave lovely Taygetus once again
 and, Spartan Muse, in some way
 that is appropriate for us
 pay tribute to Amyclae's god,
 and to bronze-housed Athena,
 to Tyndareus' splendid sons, [1300]
 who play beside the Eurotas.
 Step now, with many a nimble turn,
 so we may sing a hymn to Sparta, 1500
 dancing in honour of the gods,
 with stamping feet in that place
 where by the river Eurotas
 young maidens dance,
 like fillies raising dust, [1310]
 tossing their manes,
 like bacchants who play
 and wave their thyrsus stalks,

brought on by Leda's lovely child,
 their holy leader in the choral dance.¹ 1510

But come let your hands bind up your hair.
 Let your feet leap up like deer, sound out the beat
 to help our dance. Sing out a song of praise
 for our most powerful bronze-house goddess,
 all-conquering Athena!

[They all exit singing and dancing]

¹*Taygetus* is an important mountain in Sparta. *Amyclae's god* is Apollo who had a shrine at Amyclae, near Sparta. *Bronze-housed Athena* is a reference to the shrine of Athena in Sparta. *Tyndareus' splendid sons* are Castor and Pollux, the twin gods (brothers of Helen and Clytaemnestra). *The Eurotas* is a river near Sparta. The *thyrsus stalk* is a plant stem held by the followers of Bacchus in their ecstatic dancing. *Leda's child* is Helen (wife of Menelaus, sister of Castor and Pollux and Clytaemnestra, a child of Zeus).

LYSISTRATA

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is a retired instructor (now a Research Associate) at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada. His translations include the following:

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
Aristophanes, *Birds*
Aristophanes, *Clouds*
Aristophanes, *Frogs*
Aristophanes, *Knights*
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
Aristophanes, *Peace*
Cuvier, *Discourse on Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
Euripides, *Bacchae*
Euripides, *Medea*
Euripides, *Orestes*
Homer, *Iliad* (Complete and Abridged)
Homer, *Odyssey* (Complete and Abridged)
Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*
Kant, *On Perpetual Peace*
Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
Nietzsche, *Uses and Abuses of History*
Sophocles, *Ajax*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
Sophocles, *Philoctetes*

A number of these translations have been published by Richer Resources Publications, and some of these titles are available as recordings from Naxos Audiobooks.

Ian Johnston maintains a website at the following address:

records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/index.htm.

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