

ARISTOPHANES' ECCLESIAZUSAE

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT OR CARRY ON UP THE PNYX

SCENE ONE

Scene: A street in Athens just before dawn. When it gets lighter we'll see the front doors of two houses, and window belonging to one of them. But nothing's yet visible in the gloom.

PRAXAGORA enters stealthily from her front-door, as a cock crows. It is still dark. Her face is illuminated by a the light on her smart phone, which she is holding in one hand, and caressing, as if perhaps some religious icon. She's clutching a bundle of clothing and other items (maybe in some sort of holdall). Suddenly the house-lights go on, and she addresses the audience, somewhat sheepishly:

We're not in ancient Athens, as you see

So if I have to change a thing or too, my plea

Is let me be a bit anachronistic

If what results can seem more realistic.

This is nae antique lamp I've got

You all can plainly see it's not!

It's obviously my mobile phone.

With 'Scots wha' hae' as its ringtone.

As Health 'n 'Safety banned a naked flame.

I need you now to play my little game:

Imagine it's an ancient lamp of clay

With smoky flame that turns night into day.

The house lights dim, as Praxora illuminates her face with the light of her phone once more.

Dear lamp! Thanks, lovely Mr Potter, who

Once spun you on his wheel, as without you,
The audience couldn't see me in the dark
And wouldn't know I got up with the lark.
Today you shall do something quite dynamic:
Don't think you're just a boring old ceramic.
A bit more wick – you'll give a brighter shine [*She adjusts the light on her phone*]
And as you burn you'll give my friends the sign!
We trust you, you're the only one who knows
What women do alone, with curtains closed;
We let you see us while we have our fun
And you tell no one what it is we've done!
You're never shocked to see our bodies bare
Your flame's such help removing surplus hair!
You're there beside us every time we slink
Down to the cellar for a secret drink.
Broadcast our secrets? You do not!
That's why today I'll let you share our plot.
Last Mothers' Day, we made this plan. It's queer
That not a single one of them is here!
It's very nearly time the House was open
It's such a shame, when I was really hopin'
We'd get in first and sit down at the front,
And flout the rule made by that silly – idiot,
Who said that "women have to stay indoors,
And never have a say in making laws".
Where are my friends? They ought to have appeared,
Each with a false moustache, and home-made beard.
Was it so hard to steal their husband's suits
Or slip their tiny feet into his boots,

As we agreed? But help, I see a light! *[The light of another 'lamp' approaches]*

I'm going to hide myself in case it might

Turn out to be a man who's off to work.

I can't see anything through all this murk!

A cock crows again. She tries to hide her lamp, and disappear into the shadows. A woman enters furtively; she's carrying an umbrella, some item of male clothing, a false beard or moustache, and wearing men's shoes.

FIRST WOMAN

Time we were off! Just as I turned the lock,

I'm pretty sure I heard the second cock.

PRAXAGORA

[To herself] Thank god – a woman! here's a welcome sight!

[To her friend, frostily] Good evening! I've been waiting half the night

For you. Let's give my neighbour's door a tap,

Go gently! don't disturb her husband's nap!

SECOND WOMAN *emerging on tiptoe from the house*

I heard you tapping on my door. I was,

I tell you, darlings, wide awake because

My hubby comes from Marathon, and so

All through the flippin' night we're on the go.

I couldn't steal his cloak and stuff before

He'd nodded off.

FIRST WOMAN

But look, I see two more!

Yes! Here comes Sostrate, Cleinarete,

And dear Philaenete! I make that - three!

PRAXAGORA

Come on! Whoever's last will pay a fine:

She'll buy our nibbles **and** three jugs of wine.

FIRST WOMAN

Smikythion's wife Melistiche! That's neat,

I see she's got his slippers on her feet.

PRAXAGORA

Her old man's senile, that's the reason she's

The only one who slips away with ease!

FIRST WOMAN

And there's the landlord's wife, Geusistrate:

There, where the torch is shining, can't you see?

SECOND WOMAN

Gritias's, Testicles's -

Wives of Athens' Biggest Cheeses.

THIRD WOMAN

So hard to get away! I have

My husband puking in the lav;

He stuffed himself last night with so much pie...

PRAXAGORA

Enough. Sit down. There is a question I

Would like to ask you. Did you do the three things

We all back then agreed on at our meetings?

FIRST WOMAN

I did! I've grown a forest under there!

I've now got hairier armpits than a bear.

And every time my man went into town,

I went outside and sunbathed to get brown,

SECOND WOMAN

I did! I chucked my razor in the bin

And let the hairs grow freely on my chin

I don't feel like a woman any more!

PRAXAGORA

But have you brought the beards I asked you for?

As at the meeting we said was our duty?

FIRST WOMAN

Just look at mine! Admit it's quite a beauty!

SECOND WOMAN

In mine I look like Socrates! How weird!

PRAXAGORA

The rest of you?

FIRST WOMAN

Each lady's got her beard.

PRAXAGORA

I see, as well, you all have brought your boots

As we agreed. Perfect! And business suits!

And with those nicely rolled umbrellas

No one will guess that you're not fellas.

FIRST WOMAN

While he was sleeping off his luncheon

I took my hubby's big thick truncheon! *[which she flaunts in an obscene manner]*

SECOND WOMAN

Did he let off one of his famous farts?

PRAXAGORA

We know he's skilled in all the gas-trick arts.

But we've a problem facing us quite soon.

Which we shall have to tackle, ere the moon

Has set. We must to parliament! The gate

Opens at dawn. We simply can't be late!

FIRST WOMAN

So all of you just get a move on, it's
Essential we're near where the speaker sits.

SECOND WOMAN

I've got some knitting and a ball of wool.
I won't be bored while waiting till it's full!

PRAXAGORA

While it fills up? You booby!

SECOND WOMAN

What's the harm?

I'm knitting things to keep my babies warm!
I'll listen too! I'm good at multi-tasking.

PRAXAGORA

Knitting! You goose, you don't get what I'm asking!

We mustn't show a scrap of female flesh
In parliament, you twit, while they're in sess-
ion. What a fine thing it would be, if when
The House was full up, tightly packed, and then
One of us women, to get to where she sits,
Whilst clambering over, showed her lady bits.
But if we get there first, and wrapped up too
There's not a single man would have a clue.
Our beards will cover up our boobs. How then
Will anybody know that we're not men?

FIRST WOMAN

Agyrrhios managed! Though he couldn't grow
His own, he cadged one from a mate and so
No one knows except his mum
His chin is smoother than his bum.

PRAXAGORA

Then he's our idol. Let us emulate

His daring, now. No need to wait.

This very day, if we can take command,

And make the women leaders of our land,

The ship of state will sail on safe and sound –

If not, I fear, it'll drift and run aground.

SECOND WOMAN

But that breaks with all traditions

Having female politicians!

PRAXAGORA

But everybody knows. With guys, it's

Who get laid most win the prizes,

And get promotion, and in time become

Our biggest beasts. You cannot be that dumb!

It's natural women would do even better!

FIRST WOMAN

That's true I hope, but only if we get a

Bit of practice.

PRAXAGORA

Yes, that's why we're here.

So we can practise and not need to fear.

Rehearse our speeches. Cover up your chin,

If you intend sincerely to join in.

SECOND WOMAN

Sweetheart, women can't stop talking!

All day long we're always squawking.

Now you'll be teaching us? Is this a joke?

PRAXAGORA

Just get your beard on and become a bloke.

Put on now all your clobber, as will I

In case I need to catch the Speaker's eye.

FIRST WOMAN

Praxagora, my sweet, how daft we look!

It's crazy, mad, this thing we undertook.

PRAXAGORA

How Daft? What do you mean?

FIRST WOMAN

My hairy face!

I look like something come from outer space!

PRAXAGORA *as the Speaker, formally opening the parliamentary session. In default of the usual animal for the opening sacrifice, someone grabs a passing cat.*

We haven't got a proper pig to sacrifice:

This pussycat then must, perforce, suffice. *[Cat protests. Sympathetic muttering]*

No talking! Bear it reverently around

To sanctify for us this hallowed ground. *[The cat is removed. Pause. Miaowing. Silence.]*

Who wants to speak?

FIRST WOMAN

I do!

PRAXAGORA Stand by the bar.

FIRST WOMAN

OK.

PRAXAGORA

Get on with it!

FIRST WOMAN

But where's my jar?

PRAXAGORA

Drink!! Are you mad?

FIRST WOMAN

I'm standing at the bar!?

PRAXAGORA

Get out of it! You would have shown us up!

FIRST WOMAN

Why? Don't the men all meet to down a cup (or two?)

PRAXAGORA

Drink here? You fool! That's really what you think?

FIRST WOMAN

By Artemis, of course they take a drink!

And always doubles, you be sure. My dear,

They're never ever sober, let's be clear!

Such massive reams of clueless legislation

Could not be passed without extreme intoxication!

There's always booze to oil the wheels

What else explains their stupid deals?

They slag each other off, they swing their fists!

The cops get called! They're always bloody pissed!

PRAXAGORA

Get off! Sit down, you fool. You're worse than useless!

FIRST WOMAN

Yes I'm a silly cow, completely boozeless!

I wish I'd never donned this stupid beard!

PRAXAGORA

You've failed the practice, as I feared.

Is there another girl who'd like a shot?

SECOND WOMAN

Yes, me.

PRAXAGORA

Then step up, quick, and don't talk rot.

Make sure you speak as loudly as you can.

Be patronising, condescending, like a man.

SECOND WOMAN

Quite unaccustomed as I am to speak

In public - I'd have much preferred to seek

A back seat while the experts had their say;

I tell you now, though, if I had my way,

I'd ban all pubs from serving water.

It is my view, they didn't oughta.

That's my two penn'orth, by the Holy Twain.

PRAXAGORA

You idiot, you're mad! The Holy Twain!!

SECOND WOMAN

What's up? I never asked you for a glass.

PRAXAGORA

You swore a woman's oath, you stupid ass!

The rest of what you said was very good.

SECOND WOMAN

So, "by Apollo". There. I've understood!

PRAXAGORA

But have you really? No, let's stop right here.

To parliament? No way! We can't go near

Until we've got the language sorted out.

SECOND WOMAN

Oh please, just let me have another shout!

I've got a new idea which makes good sense. *[clearing her throat]*

"Listen, you ladies in the audience ..."

PRAXAGORA

Ladies??! There's no one in the hall but gents!

SECOND WOMAN

I saw old ----- with his hair all blonde,
Assumed he was a girl, but I was conned.

PRAXAGORA

Shut up. Sit down. I can't take any more.
I see that I myself must take the floor.
I pray to the gods our plans will turn out right.
Honourable members, I'm with you in the fight
To save our country. I deplore the state
Our city's in. Something I won't tolerate!
It seems she is electing leaders who
Are awful. And if once one chooses to
Do something nice, there's always ten who would
Do something bad, and cancel out the good.
You change the leaders? Nothing's better.
You're hard to please, so you don't get a
Man who'll tell you what you need. You're sick
Of those who want to do you good, yet lick
The bums of those who want to harm your case.

Applause

For years we lost our interest in this place.
Agyrrhios we figured was a rotten crook –
But since he got us pay to come here, look!
The House is heaving, always, that's a fact
The allowance means that every day it's packed.
Before, you called a man who came a creep,
Now if you lose a day's pay, how you weep!.

FIRST WOMAN

By Aphrodite, what a speech what verve!

PRAXAGORA

You swore by Aphrodite! That would serve
To wreck our chances if you said it there.

FIRST WOMAN

I wouldn't, sorry.

PRAXAGORA

You must take more care!

Not long ago unless you voted leave
The country would be ruined, I believe
You said. But now we've left you're mad as hell
You've sacked the man who worked so hard to sell
The idea to you. Yet you still refuse
To choose the only man who'd be of use!

FIRST WOMAN *aside in a deep throaty voice*

This guy's a star!

PRAXAGORA *aside to First Woman*

That's more like it, ta!

[Back to the speech] Athenians, the blame is wholly yours!

You all competed madly for the cause,
The cause of self-enrichment. Each of you
Thought only of himself, what cash could do.
The city lurched from side to side, just like
A hopeless drunkard trying to ride a bike.
We 'd do much better if we sent'em
Packing, and we'd gain 'Momentum'!
Trust me, gents, now cometh the hour
To give our womenfolk the power!
Let's hand the nation to our spouses!
After all they run our houses!

FIRST WOMAN

Yay, yay, and yay again, by - Jove!

SECOND WOMAN

More, mister, more!

PRAXAGORA

They're better than us in every way; I'll draw

A picture for you. Washing out their woollies

They use warm water, and ignore the bullies,

Who say "that's out of date". They will not change!

If only Athens' leaders could arrange

To be consistent like their gorgeous wives

Then how much we'd improve our lives,

If no one chased the latest fads,

If women ruled and not the lads!

They still sit down to roast the joint

Just the way they've always done.

They fetch the water, that's my point

Just the way they've always done. *[The other women gradually join in the "chorus" of "always done", as in a Trump rally]*

They won't say what they do on Women's Day

Just the way they've always done.

They still make scrumptious cakes , OK?

Just the way they've always done.

And still they piss their husbands off

Just the way they've always done.

They hide their boyfriends in the loft

Just the way they've always done.

They love to give themselves a treat

Just the way they've always done.

Prefer it when their booze is neat
Just the way they've always done.
And most of all they love some sex
Just the way they've always done.
Then don't you see it'll save our necks,
To have a female government?
There can't be any argument!
Don't worry what their policies might be
Just let them do it! Soon you'll see
That mothers won't want soldiers dying -
Instead they'll focus on supplying
Grub! They're keen to watch the spending,
You'd never catch a woman lending
Money to some dodgy geezer!
Surely now you all will seize a
Chance for everyone to gain:
And make our Athens Great Again!

FIRST WOMAN

That was absolutely brill!
Dearest, how'd you get that skill?

PRAXAGORA

We lived once when our house got burned
Near Speaker's Corner, where I learned.

FIRST WOMAN

No wonder you're so clever! We've
Elected you Commander-in Chief!
(When once our motion's safely through the House.)
But what's your answer when, you know, that louse
Who's always talking through his arse, asks you ...?

PRAXAGORA

I'll say he's nuts.

FIRST WOMAN

But we already knew!

PRAXAGORA

I'll says he's psycho.

FIRST WOMAN

Knew that too!

PRAXAGORA

He manufactures sanitary ware:

I'll simply say to him "Piss off!" So there!

FIRST WOMAN

And what if Squinty calls you dumb?

PRAXAGORA

I'll tell him "Squint up a doggy's bum!"

FIRST WOMAN

And if someone tries to put his hand up ...

PRAXAGORA

I'm handy too. I'll make him stand up ...

FIRST WOMAN

What if they rumble your disguise

And then a burly policeman tries

To haul you off?

PRAXAGORA

I'll stick my elbows out akimbo;

I'm not some feeble helpless bimbo!

No uniformed officious nerd'll

Get his arms around my girdle!

SECOND WOMAN

And we'll all tell him to release you.

FIRST WOMAN

But tell us, we just want to please you:

I guess I must seem rather dim

But how do we lift the upper limb?

To raise our legs has been the norm.

But put our hands up? What's the form?

PRAXAGORA

It will be hard, but when we vote

This is the thing that you should note:

Straighten the elbow, arm in the air!

Pull up your trousers, tie back your hair

Lace up your boots – just like the men do.

You've got to be smart – it isn't a hen do.

Once everything else is hunky-dory

Time for the beards – the crowning glory.

And last of all – put on his cloak,

And then you'll feel just like a bloke.

Swing your umbrellas and think what's before us –

And make sure everyone joins in the chorus.

SECOND WOMAN

Well said. Let's go at once and get good seating.

Women from out of town will be competing.

PRAXAGORA

Yes, get there early and show that we're keen.

If you're late there's no pay – you'll not get a bean.

CHORUS LEADER

Gentlemen, the time has come for us to start upon our way.

We're gents not ladies don't forget – so don't let's give ourselves away.

Our enterprise is perilous and fraught

So please watch out, don't anyone get caught.

CHORUS of bearded ladies march off singing to the tune of Men of Harlech:

Men of Athens, let's get cracking, or we'll find that we'll be lacking

All the pay we should be stacking in our bank accounts.

If you cannot get there early, you will only find the surly

Git's poor mind's in such a whirl he gives us wrong amounts.

There's no time for coffee; maybe grab a toffee.

It's clear you must be black with dust, and bleary-eyed and coughy.

Long before it's light and sunny, if you want to get your money -

Don't think I am being funny - you must join the queue.

You've no time to wash your faces, fix your hair or tie your laces

To your pay, that's where the race is, have to get there first.

If you want to get your earnings, even though your stomach's churning

And to pee you're really yearning, try hard not to burst.

When we 've waited longer. and we've got our wonga,

We'll just sit and do our bit, and try hard not to fade away with hunger.

Friends of ours we shall support'em, long as they do what we taught'em

If the coppers haven't caught'em: make us Great Again!

Let's get rid of all the dossers, all the scum and all the tossers

They would not be any loss as all they want is loot

Once there were within this city, decent men who weren't so shitty,

Now there aren't and more's the pity, let's give them the boot.

Everyone's a spiv now. That's the way we live now.

Back then we gave things for free, that nobody is ever going to give now.

Now they're all like merchant bankers, just a load of worthless wankers

That's why everyone will thank us: power to the girls!

As the chorus march off into the distance, an elderly man, Blepyrus, Praxagora's husband emerges from one of the doorways. He's wearing a woman's yellow nightie and fluffy slippers.

BLEPYRUS

What's happening? And where the hell is **she**?

My missus, gone, as far as I can see!

It's early morning, I was lying there

Needing a crap, no way that I could bear

To ignore it. But I couldn't find my boots,

So desperate, I didn't give two hoots,

I grabbed her slippers, pulled her nightie on,

Dashed out, the urge to shit still hadn't gone!

I realise I look a total mess -

Embarrassing to wear a woman's dress.

I need that dump. Now where's a quiet spot?

Thank god it's dark. No one will see me squat.

He squats

Why did I marry late in life? It's mad.

I'm more than old enough to be her dad.

But what's she up to? I 've not got a clue -

But let me focus on my number two.

A MAN, poking his head out from the window of the house next door

Who's that? Is it Blepyrus from next door?

BLEPYRUS

Of course it's me! Who else?

MAN

Then tell me more!

Inform me, kindly, why you look so queer,

And yellow, like a pile of diarrhoea?

BLEPYRUS

Because I had no time to wonder where

My own had gone, I grabbed **her** underwear.

MAN

Where was your coat?

BLEPYRUS

Dunno. I had a look

It wasn't hanging on its normal hook.

MAN

Then ask your missus, that's what I would do.

BLEPYRUS

She isn't there, she's gone, I'm telling you!

That's why I'm dressed up like a dickhead –

For sure she's up to something wicked.

MAN

Well bugger me! That's freaky, I

Have had the same thing happen! **My**

Dear wife has wandered off – she took **my** coat!

And what gives me extra pain is

She went off with my best trainers.

BLEPYRUS

Well that is just the strangest news

I seem as well to have no shoes!

I was so scared I'd shit the bed

I put her slippers on instead.

MAN

Where've they gone to, what's your hunch?

BLEPYRUS

I guess they've just popped out for brunch.

MAN

Nothing serious, not to worry.

Now, though I have got to hurry –

It seems you're trying to shit a tow-rope -

Better go, or there'll be no hope

I'll be in time to claim my pay.

Shoes or no shoes, on my way!

BLEPYRUS

I'll follow soon. I need to come –

But there's a carrot up my bum.

MAN

That carrot which our so-called leaders proferred

To fix the shabby deal that they'd been offered?

He pops back inside.

BLEPYRUS

It feels as if I've got a cork in

And my bowels no longer workin'.

This blockage is a real curse

But when I eat it makes it worse

I really don't know what I'll do

If I can't have a decent poo.

Perhaps to cure my constipation

I'll have to have an operation.

My GP? No, he's too superior

To have a look at my posterior.

Someone out there watching? Mum?

I need a doctor for my bum!

Why o why can't I just fart?

It's tough to have the comic part -

Blepyrus strains and finds relief at last. Another man comes along the street. He's not in a happy mood. He's just come from the meeting.

CHREMES

What ho! What's up with you? Having a shit?

BLEPYRUS

Not any more! I just got rid of it!

CHREMES

You're dressed in women's clothes. How so?

BLEPYRUS

I grabbed them in the dark. I had to go!

But where've you come from, may I ask?

CHREMES

The meeting.

BLEPYRUS

That was over fast!

CHREMES

The queues were epic. Not that I'm a quitter!

BLEPYRUS

You got no pay, I guess, then. Are you bitter?

CHREMES

It's all my fault, I shouldn't curse

Though all I've got's this empty purse.

BLEPYRUS

So what had happened then?

CHREMES

A mighty crowd

The biggest I remember, was allowed
Into the meeting, it was packed with chaps.
But funny-looking, I dunno, perhaps...
Their faces all looked ghostly in the light
As if they only went outside at night.
These pasty faces dominate the mob –
That's why I miss out getting my few bob.

BLEPYRUS

So if I go at once...

CHREMES

You wouldn't have a sniff,

You'd not have got a farthing even if
You'd gone at two o'clock.

BLEPYRUS

'Oh, woe is me!

Alas, alack, my pay', the poet said,
'Is gone, deceased, it is no more, it's dead.'
But what, that hour, attracted such a multitude?

CHREMES

They were deciding on our attitude:
What best to do to make our city great –
Then first up leaps our squinty mate
The people boo and tell him scram;
"You can't save us in this jam.
How can you see our coming doom,
You can hardly see across the room?"
"What then do you suggest?" he said.

BLEPYRUS

“To stop your eyes from getting red:

Mix garlic, mustard and some ginger –

Then rub well in, don’t be a winger.”

They should give ‘im my recippy ...

CHREMES

... Next one up was him, ‘the Hippy’ –

It looked to us like he was starkers,

Hardly a stitch to cloak his carcase.

Actually he’d had a suit,

He said, had shrunk, become minute;

If we’d just give him lots of money

He wouldn’t have to look so funny.

The state should hand out overcoats:

That’d make damn sure they got the votes.

“To keep the city free from harm

Make sure the citizens are nice and warm.

Anyone here who is poor and old

Should be given a fur to keep out the cold.”

BLEPYRUS

Great Jeremy Corbyn, what an idea!

And all the pubs should give free beer!

The cafes should hand out salty snacks!

We’d vote for that instead of tax.

CHREMES

But then stood up one of those fresh-faced chappies –

Hard to believe he was out of nappies -

But although he looked so pale and weak,

He confidently rose to speak.

And this was the gist of his oration:

Make women rulers of our nation!

The pale-faced dudes all cheered like mad –

The rest of them, though, took it bad.

They started murmuring and grumbling –

A noise like a hundred bellies rumbling.

BLEPYRUS

And quite right too to make a fuss.

CHREMES

But no good, they outnumbered us.

The guy who spoke for the womenfolk

Now turned on you – that’s not a joke!

He called you –

BLEPYRUS

-what?

CHREMES

“A thief, a prat!”

BLEPYRUS

You too?

CHREMES

No! you. And “Ignoramus, twat!”

‘BLEPYRUS

Just me?

CHREMES

And “Blighter, stinker, jerk and cur!”

BLEPYRUS

Just me? Alone? I can’t take that. No sir!

CHREMES

You’re right. Those people also, over there. *[indicating the audience]*

BLEPYRUS

No one will argue much with that! Quite fair!

CHREMES

Women, he said, are creatures packed with brains

Who know well how to make financial gains.

And when they have a private session

They keep it quiet and use discretion.

Not like us men, the useless blabbers!

BLEPYRUS

He's absolutely right, Bejabbers. *[Irish accent]*

CHREMES

And when they lend each other stuff

Like clothes and jewellery, it's enough

To give their word one to another

No witness needed, never bother!

Whatever they borrow they return,

Unlike us men; we've lots to learn.

BLEPYRUS

No shit! With men you have to sue

To get back things that are your due.

CHREMES

They won't report you or take you to law

And that is not everything, trust me there's more

They don't believe that revolution

Can ever be the right solution.

BLEPYRUS

Can you explain what the decision they made is?

CHREMES

Hand the whole bloody outfit straight to the ladies.

It's something quite new, so they may's well try it.

PLEPYRUS

I can't quite believe the assembly would buy it!

CHREMES

They did!

BLEPYRUS

So, every job men did before

Will now be women's work – and that's the law?

CHREMES

You won't support your family but your wife'll

BLEPYRUS

You're really telling me in fact our life'll

Be reversed? I'll be the one who'll stay in bed?

CHREMES

Fart and relax – you'll run the home instead.

The women now will have the upper hand.

BLEPYRUS

Hang on, I'm not quite sure I understand -

Old blokes like me, if women exercise the right...

CHREMES

To what?

BLEPYRUS

To do the nasty every night?

CHREMES

Unless we show we're keen and able ...

BLEPYRUS

There'll be no breakfast on the table.

CHREMES

Make your own porridge while she gloats.

And have your oats, then, while you have your oats!

BLEPYRUS

You mean, surrender to her passions?

CHREMES

Yes, just lie back, and think of Athens.

BLEPYRUS *[sighs and shakes his head]*

Before, we often spoke a load of tosh:

It always came out right, though, in the wash.

CHREMES

Let's hope. Good day!

BLEPYRUS

Good day to you, old mate.

They part, Chremes into town, and Blepyrus back into his house.

CHORUS LEADER

As the chorus return –at a much faster pace than when they left.

Quick march, I fear the men my chase us.

We mustn't let the chaps outpace us.

Look behind, and watch your backs,

We don't want men in dirty macs

Getting close or coming near.

I'd hate one staring at my rear.

CHORUS *[tune of eg Battle Hymn of the Republic. Maybe they wear MAGA caps?*

Stamp your feet and keep in time, we're on the final lap

Stay together, keep in line and don't leave any gap

If the menfolk rumble us, we'll be right in the crap

But the women will make Athens great. *Someone shouts:* Again!

We'll make Athens great.

Keep wrapped up and hide your bits, look out for the guys

It would be disaster if they see through our disguise

Look left! Look right! Look up! Look down! We don't want no surprise.

Let's make Athens great. *Shouts of* Again!

Let's make Athens great.

We're safe back where our leader instigated her ideas

So let's take off our beards and stuff, there's no more need for fear.

We've made it back we're safely home, relax and have a beer!

We've made Athens great (Again!)

We've made Athens great.

Quick, get them off and out of sight, don't let there be a hitch.

What joy to be a girl again, by gods those beards did itch!

We've won the vote (hurrah!) and passed the legislation which

Made Athens great again!

Cheers and chants (" Make Athens great, Make Athens great") as Praxagora arrives to join them.

PRAXAGORA

Well done there, ladies, it's all gone to plan.

Now get those beards off, quickly as you can.

Strip off all your husbands' ge-ar –

We can't afford the risk he'll see yer.

Remove your boots and coats, as well as

Chucking out those damned umbrellas!

The things I stole whilst hubby slept

I'll put them all back where they're kept.

I think that would be quite judicious

Before his highness gets suspicious.

The chorus finish removing their disguises – and all is hidden away.

CHORUS LEADER *[tune of Clementine if you like]*

What a story, morning glory, you have got the whole thing sussed.

Give a holler, we will foller, you've completely won our trust

Alexander? As commander, he was not as Great as you.

Cheers and chanting

PRAXAGORA

Will you aid me, now you've made me leader of our city state

Please support me, since you've taught me, who's a friend and who is fake.

In the fight you did what's right, so let us all go home for cake.

Wild cheers. Just as Praxagora is about to go into her house, the door is flung open, and Blepyrus is standing there (brandishing a rolling-pin?). Silence.

BLEPYRUS

Where the hell have **you** been?

PRAXAGORA

Mind your own

Damned business.

BLEPYRUS

"Mind your own ..." Wow, that's polite!

PRAXAGORA

So, was I at my boyfriend's? Did I spend the night?

BLEPYRUS

With more than one, I'd reckon.

PRAXAGORA

You'd know if ...

BLEPYRUS

How?

PRAXAGORA

Smell my clothing. Give my hair a sniff!

BLEPYRUS

So what? You can't get fucked without some scent?

PRAXAGORA

I can't, for sure!

BLEPYRUS

Then tell me where you went,

Last night when you crept out and took my stuff?

PRAXAGORA

A dear dear friend of mine was up the duff

Her pains had started.

BLEPYRUS

So? You could have spoken.

PRAXAGORA

What, stop and natter, with her waters broken?

Men!

BLEPYRUS

If you'd told me I'd've understood!

It's my belief you were up to no good.

PRAXAGORA

Her maid who fetched me said "Come, *vite*!

No messing! Pronto! *Tout de suite*!"

BLEPYRUS

But why on earth then take the coat that's mine?

You stole it off the bed and left behind

Your flimsy nightie, left me lying there

Exactly like a corpse, completely bare.

How come you missed out on the holy unction?

PRAXAGORA

I'm weak and fragile, I need warmth to function!

I was freezing, took your jacket

So bloody cold, I couldn't hack it.

You lay there snoring nice and snug

Warm and cozy beneath your rug.

BLEPYRUS

Then what about my boots and brolly?

PRAXAGORA

I might get mugged and lose my lolly.

Dressed like you in all your clobber

I'd not get picked on by a robber.

BLEPYRUS

Undressed, no clothes, I could not go to town.

I missed my money. We're three obols down!

PRAXAGORA

No matter. It's a boy. The baby's fine.

BLEPYRUS

Whose, the Assembly's?

PRAXAGORA

No, you bonehead, mine!!

Did the assembly meet? I wouldn't know. *[innocently]*

BLEPYRUS

Of course it did, I'm sure I told you so!

PRAXAGORA

Now I remember.

BLEPYRUS

Guess what law went through?

PRAXAGORA

I haven't got the least idea.

BLEPYRUS

They've handed it to you!

You're looking faint, you'd best sit down a while.

PRAXAGORA

They've handed us the house-work?

BLEPYRUS

No! Wait, I'll

Be very clear, you now must manage ...

PRAXAGORA

What?

BLEPYRUS

The state, the country, everything, the lot!

PRAXAGORA

By Aphrodite, that's a splendid notion

In future ...

BLEPYRUS

What?

PRAXAGORA

We'll pass a motion:

No more fake news, no inquisitions

No taking up extreme positions.

No dodgy deals and no more rip-offs

BLEPYRUS

But I make my living from those tip-offs!

CHREMES

Oh, do shut up and let the lady speak!

PRAXAGORA

No more delinquents up before the beak,

No envying the guys with yachts

No sleeping rough for the have-nots

No lies, no bullying, no abuse,

CHREMES

If that's all true it's welcome news.

PRAXAGORA

I'll make my policies so very clear,

Even my husband will be forced to cheer!

CHORUS [Shenandoah]

Praxagora, we long to hear you

Hooray, our glorious leader!

Praxagora no one will jeer you

Please now give us your proposal

Your feminist agenda.

Praxagora, please help our nation

Hooray, our glorious leader!

You're the mistress of persuasion

It can solve all Athens problems

Your feminist agenda

Tell us now and don't be boring

Hooray our glorious leader!

Or you'll find we'll all be snoring

Make it new, make it exciting

Your feminist agenda

CHORUS LEADER

I heard a person in the audience cough.

That means they're starting to nod off.

Get on with it and state your case,

What matters in a play is – pace!

In the anapaestic discussion which follows, the rhymes and rhythm should be exaggerated in a slightly absurd manner.

PRAXAGORA *[addressing the audience]*

I'll make it perfectly clear: what you're going to hear will be good. But I fear your reaction.

Are the audience thick? Are you likely to stick with your old preference for inaction?

With your antique ideas and your ludicrous fears and your bigoted extreme positions?

Are you ready to move, if I give you a shove, to a politics nobler and higher?

BELPYRUS

I've long had ambitions to try new positions, that's always been my one desire.

PRAXAGORA

I won't stand for booing or cat-calls or mooing, nor tolerate any protest. No!

Not till I've sold'em the ideas I told'em and they've swallowed my manifesto.

There'll be no concessions to private possessions, all ownership will be abolished!

Whatever your name, you will all have the same! Does my policy make you astonished?

No one rich, no one poor, no one coveting more, no country estates for the fat cats.

No more cash for The Few while The Many (Boo hoo!) still live in - hovels with fat rats.

They don't want a lot, they just yearn for a plot, where their corpse they can decently bury.

There's nobody oughta have just bread and water while the loaded - have 'people for sherry'.

The obvious sequel: make everyone equal!

BLEPYRUS

Equality Shmality,

How's that a polity?

PRAXAGORA

You've taken a premature shit!

BLEPYRUS

We're sharing our shit now, that it??

PRAXAGORA

I was meaning to state that you just couldn't wait!

I meant "don't interrupt!"

You were far too abrupt.

I was right on the brink, about to say what I think! And explain that all land will be common.

From the city's resources we'll rally our forces, and we'll feed all the people, we women!

When you hand in your stuff, we shall soon have enough, if nothing's kept stored away, hidden.

We shall ration it tightly, and share it out rightly; private property is now forbidden.

BLEPYRUS

I've thought of hitch: But what of the rich whose fortune's not in bricks and mortar,

But who lock up their cash in some personal stash in a secretive overseas quarter?

PRAXAGORA

They won't keep a penny, it won't do them any - good, they can't protect it by lying -

BLEPYRUS

They got it through lies, and their Old School ties – can't believe that you'll have 'em all crying!

PRAXAGORA

There **will** be boo hoos, when their cash is no use ...

BLEPYRUS

And now you sound like you're demented!

PRAXAGORA

No need for greed. They will have all they need: everyone will be fully contented.

Winter coats, pots of jam, jugs of wine, lots of ham, diet Coke, paper hats, packs of peanuts!

What could be cooler than "Bye!" to your moolah? Keep your money? No! You'd have to **be** nuts!

BLEPYRUS

Some people are needy and steal 'cos they're greedy, even though they are very well-nourished...

PRAXAGORA

But that was because of the old-fashioned laws that we've cancelled today and abolished!

And now everything's free and without any fee, and, whatever you want, you receive it!

If you've got what you're after, you'd have to be daft as brush to still hanker to thief it!

BLEPYRUS

If your head's in a whirl and you've just seen a girl, who you fancy, and can't wait to fuck her?

Missing out would be folly, you slip her some lolly; and you get both your shag and your tucker!

PRAXAGORA

If you want to screw 'er her, you won't have to woo'er! You can have her for nothing, free, gratis!

Girls won't be saleable, they'll be available! If you're eager to take her to parties,

You will find a girl willing - won't cost you a shilling – for a blow-job, or making a baby!

BLEPYRUS

But we'd go for the beauties, the sexiest cuties! Wouldn't that the most obvious play be?

PRAXAGORA

The girls who are uglier stand with their cuddlier friends – if you want rumpy-pumpy,

You can't hope to score with a girl who's ador-able till you have rogered a dumpy!

BLEPYRUS

But I see a flaw in your brilliant law. How am I going to get me some fanny?

Us elderly guys won't be able to rise if we've first got it up for a granny!

PRAXAGORA

No, that's not an issue, she won't want to kiss you. They won't be competing...

BLEPYRUS

For what?

PRAXAGORA

To

Offer coition. That's not their ambition They'll all be competing hard not to.

BLEPYRUS

I know, now you've said it, where this policy's headed: it's sex on demand for the ladies.

The girls have a right to sex morn, noon or night. It's not clear when **our** chance to get laid is!

While we're screwing the crone, the cool birds have flown, and no elderly geezer can catch 'em -

PRAXAGORA

But the less handsome guys will not take their eyes off the fit dudes, they'll make sure they watch'em

When they're out for the night they'll keep them in sight and won't let them get near a birdie -

Any good-looking chick. They can't show her their prick, until **she** has had someone nerdy.

BLEPYRUS

Then, you know him that wicked, disgusting old dickhead, he'll get some at last, the old bastard!

PRAXAGORA

Yes, it's social democracy! Death to phallocracy! I can't wait to see some chav who's plastered

Tell a posh boy "You, scram, I don't give a damn, how plebby or vulgar you find me.

Sunshine, fuck **you**, I'm first in the queue – you Tarquins can line up behind me!"

CHREMES

But how will I divine which children are mine, and which are the sprogs of another?

How'll I know if it's Boris, or Nigel or Horace is **my** boy?

PRAXAGORA

It's simple! No bother:

With the greatest of ease, as **all** the old geez-ers are fathers to **all** of the laddies!

BLEPYRUS

Then us poor old buffers will get treated rough, as that's always what happens to daddies,

When they **know** we're their papas, they still thump and bop us! It'll be open season for paters

We'll be battered and sat on and, eternally shat on, no respite, when **all** our kids hate us!

PRAXAGORA

Au contraire, my dear. There's no need to fear, his companion provides you protection.

In those days of yore, you could beat your own Paw, without some officious reaction:

Now if some old bugger is facing a mugger, a lad won't let anyone at 'im

He protects **all** the old chaps, lest one of them, perhaps, is the father who actually begat' im.

BLEPYRUS

Your point is quite sound, but, darling, I'm bound to ask you what if, just supposing,

I'm out in the town, merely strolling around, or on a bench quietly reposing;

Some ghastly young freak, or a spotty-faced geek calls me "Daddy", I couldn't help heaving!

Or some snivelling creep, I'd just have to weep, I 'd rather be seen doing weaving.

CHREMES

I know something worse that would lead me to curse: a thing even more of a sickie:

If that limp-wristed queer asked me “Daddio, dear, do you mind if I give you a hickey?”

BLEPYRUS

He’d get slapped on the wrist, and he wouldn’t get kissed ...

CHREMES

... But his perfume is strangely effective ...

But that guy I thought of won’t need to be fought off, because the law’s not retrospective.

No chance of a snog from that slimy Tree-Frog. [Rees-Mogg?]

BLEPYRUS

Maybe not, but if I find him lurking ... *[shrugs]*

But this **is** alarming: who’ll do all the farming?

PRAXAGORA

The slaves! We shall still have them working.

Your task will be this: take a bath, have a piss, get a shave and dress up like a winner.

When you see the sun sink, it’s time for a drink and to escort your lady to dinner.

BLEPYRUS

But what of my clothing? I really have no thing, that’s suitable wear for a soirée ...

PRAXAGORA

You’ve got your old dickey, no need to get picky; later on, we’ll replace it. Don’t worry.

BLEPYRUS

OK. You’ve committed a crime, you don’t want to do time, so a pretty stiff fine is your sentence.

The cash comes from where? It would not be fair, if you used public funds. That makes no sense!

It would be rather funny, if the state gives you money which then you give back to the city!

PRAXAGORA

I’ve given it some more thought. There won’t **be** a lawcourt!

CHREMES

Oh? Who are you, Walter Mitty?

BLEPYRUS

That was puzzling me.

PRAXAGORA

What on earth would they **be** for, explain to me, please, what their use is?

CHREMES

I don't need to explain! Surely it's plain? It's so obvious! Someone refuses

To pay what you lent, and the money's been spent...

PRAXAGORA

That's the point! That's precisely my beef!

If you've cash of your own, which you're able to loan – then it's clear that you must be a thief!

BLEPYRUS

Oh, I am such a muppet! Of course, you've checked up it! So, thank you! My next observation:

Some malevolent punk who is totally drunk beats you up and you want compensation.

To make up for your bashin', you surely should cash in. So how do we punish the sinner?

PRAXAGORA

He'll be barred from the pub and won't get his grub, and isn't allowed any dinner!

Imagine him grumble when his tum starts to rumble. He won't know where he's getting a meal from.

CHREMES

So, I'm asked to believe there's no robbers and thieves?

PRAXAGORA

Of course, because who's there to steal from?

There would be no cause, if everything's yours.

BLEPYRUS

Going out when it's dark, it's the muggers -

They brandish a knife, and threaten your life ...

PRAXAGORA

Then stay home and get under the rug, as

It's not like it was, I tell you because getting robbed today's not such a setback.

If he wants it so bad, no need to get mad; just give it 'im , then you can get back

The very same model! It's really a doddle. Just pick one up free when you shop!

CHREME

Aren't you forgetting, there still will be betting?

PRAXAGORA

Work it out! Duh! It is certain to stop. *[Pause as Chremes works it out]*

BLEPYRUS

Is life going to be changing?

PRAXAGORA

It'll need re-arranging, when we're all of us property owners

You'll all be delighted with Athens United. All in it together, a bonus!

This is my mission – knock down every partition – so there's one massive communal dwelling

And let everyone wander, hither and yonder: togetherness, that's what I'm selling.

BLEPYRUS

Jolly good, that's so cool, it's really the jewel in your crown! But what place will we eat in?

PRAXAGORA

Yes, the courts will be fine, when they're made into diners, they're totally perfect to meet in.

BLEPYRUS

And the bars and the docks and the magistrate's box? Or will they be unused and idle?

PRAXAGORA

No, the bars are for drinking, the box - I am thinking - becomes a place that will provide all

The children with places to go through their paces, singing poems to honour the glorious

Great heroes they rate; while for cowards they hate, they'll sing 'em to make **them** notorious.

BLEPYRUS

The computers they use to help them to choose men for juries: do they have a function?

PRAXAGORA

I shall take them all down to the centre of town, and we'll use'em to organise luncheon.

You'll be given a letter, which says where you'll get a pre-arranged place at a table:

When you're ready for dinner, you're already a winner – just go and look for the label!

All will go gladly, no need to rush madly. The table is laid and your meal's cooked.

Those with a *Beta* will all go and eat a lunch in the Bank, where it's been booked.

If you've been *Delta Theta*, you head for the theatre; if you're lucky enough to have *Pi*

BLEPYRUS

Then *Eta*?

PRAXAGORA

No, guys, there'll be plenty of pies - on your table so no need to *Psi*!

CHREMES

if you don't get a letter, I assume that you won't get a dinner tonight, you're excluded,

If you think I'd be grateful if I missed my plateful, my dear then you're greatly deluded!

PRAXAGORA [Sings – tune of “You make me feel so young”]

Not gonna be like that,

There'll be enough for all to eat.

Everyone will stagger home,

A pissed and happy individual.

The girls will lie in wait,

On every corner there's a date

And she will say, “Come on inside,

I'm gonna be your bride.”

Just next door

There's another one twice as nice

Calling from her room upstairs

“Let me release you from all your cares!

It's gonna be such fun.

No need to stick with simply the one

Come with me, hon

There's such wonderful things to be done!”

But an ugly bloke is on your heels

Saying, "Now you know just how it feels:

Because now you gotta wait in line.

You can't have the girl that's fit,

Till we deplorables have done our bit,

Your dad was rich and owned a bank?

Run away and have a wank.

That's the way it's gonna be.

Equal shares for one and all

Food or sex it's all the same

We shall have democracy.

Food or sex it's all the same

We shall have gynocracy!

So, tell me, does that ring your bell?

BLEPYRUS

You bet!

PRAXAGORA

I'm off now to the square, it's time to get

The hand-in organised. There's mounds of stuff!

And I must find a girl with lots of puff,

And voice that's loud, to broadcast our decree.

I'm Head of State, so it's all down to me.

As Minister of Food as well, it's quite

A task, to organise our feast tonight!

BLEPYRUS

So soon? A party?

PRAXAGORA

Well, why not, I say?

I'm closing all the brothels in the town

Today the knocking-shops will be shut down,

Each single one.

BLEPYRUS

But why?

PRAXAGORA

It wasn't fair

Our local girls could never get their share.

Our girls should have first choice of **our** young laddies

They shouldn't wait until some stud has had 'is

Fun with those voluptuous slave-girl hussies.

The slaves can screw'em, let'em shave their pussies.

BLEPYRUS

I'll follow close, can't wait to see them drool,

And shout "The Leader's husband, he's so cool!"

CHREMES

Don't worry, ma'am, as I for one won't fail yer

I'm off to hand in all my paraphernalia.

CHORUS

A song to end the scene. {Clementine}

Feminism! Feminism! Feminism is the tops

Up the women, no more slimmin', all that stupid nonsense stops.

Never phoned us, thought you owned us

Thought we should be wielding mops.

Feminism! Feminism! Feminism is so great

You despised us patronised us, kept us home to vegetate

While we govern, clean the oven,

Feed the baby, that's your fate!

SCENE TWO

Chremes is seen bustling in and out of his house amassing a collection of objects to be handed in. Business as he lines them up, plays with them ad lib. He's packing them into boxes as a MAN enters, muttering to himself.

MAN

My property. My precious stuff. Give up it?

I'd be a fool, a lunatic, a muppet.

Never, not a chance, no way, not me!

At very least, I plan to wait and see.

I've scrimped and saved, I've sweated buckets

To get this stuff. It's mine ,so fuck it!

Just because some bint says "Jump!"

That is no reason I should dump

My precious life-time acquisitions.

No' I'll keep my inhibitions,

Till I hear someone explain

Extremely clearly what's to gain.

He becomes aware of Chremes

Sorry, if you think I'm nosing,

But are you proposing

Now you've packed up all that junk

To leave your house and do a bunk?

Are you off to pawn it?

CHREMES

No way!

MAN

So are you putting it on Ebay?

CHREMES

None of it's going to be sold

I'm handing it in like I was told.

MAN

Handing it in?

CHREMES

Yes.

MAN

What a sucker!

You're a **proper** fool ...

CHREMES

Eh?

MAN

Pukka!

CHREMES

The laws, d' you mean that I should not obey?

MAN

What laws?

CHREMES

The ones they passed today!

MAN

Today? You must have lost your mind, you fool!

Completely.

CHREMES

Fool? 'Cos I obey the rule?

MAN

A man of sense kow-tows, does what he's told?

And swallows all the bullshit he's been sold?

CHREMES

He does.

MAN

A man who kow-tows has my pity.

CHREMES

So you won't put your knick-knacks in the kitty?

MAN

I'll keep an open mind till I surmise

What everyone is up to, other guys.

CHREMES

They're all preparing to get rid of stuff,

And hand it over.

MAN

Utter guff!

CHREMES

It's what the talk is ...

MAN

Can't ban talkers.

CHREMES

They're undertaking...

MAN

Can ban undertakers.

CHREMES

You keep doubting ...

MAN

Can't ban doubters.

CHREMES

Oh, bugger off!

MAN

Can't ban buggers.

But do you know a soul of either gender

Who's seriously intending to surrender

Their wordly goods? It's idiotic

And downright unpatriotic!

To Athens Money is a god

So I'll cling tightly to my wad.

All our gods are on the take

Or else, chum, what is it you make

Of why they stand with open palms *[gestures like a statue with outstretched arms]*

Desperate for us to give them alms?

CHREMES

Let me get on with handing in my things.

If that's all right? Now where 'd I put the string?

MAN

You'll do it, seriously?

CHREMES

Of course. Get in! *[addressed to a some bulky objects he's trying to fit the box]*

MAN

But why not see what others do, cretin!

CHREMES

And then?

MAN

Delay, and wait, and play it cool.

CHREMES

What for?

MAN

An earthquake, or a flood? You too,
What if a fire breaks out or a black cat
Crosses their path? What would they make of that?
The handing-in would surely be aborted!

CHREMES

I want to get my contribution sorted;
My stuff, I worry, might arrive too late.

MAN

I don't think that will be a problem, mate!
Too late? You've got at least a month, or more
To hand your little boxes in before
The rest get around to any kind of action.

CHREMES

How come?

MAN

Our fellow men prefer inaction.
They argue over what's the best solution
But never seem to come to a conclusion!

CHREMES

They'll had their stuff in!

MAN

What if they do not?

CHREMES

They'll hand it over!

MAN

What if they will not?

CHREMES

Well, then we'll make them.

MAN

What if you cannot?

CHREMES

Then they can get knotted.

MAN

And if they're not knotted?

CHREMES

Get stuffed!

MAN

If I get stuffed, and then explode?

CHREMES

You'll make a lovely mess there in the road.

MAN

Well, as far as me, I still intend to wing it!

You, though, your stuff, you're really going to sling it?

CHREMES

I really am – you should admit defeat;

Because so are all the others in my street.

[A good argument for ending the scene from here to the arrival of the Announcer– the rest is quite tedious!]

MAN

I wonder what old ---- is going to do?

He'd rather spend a fortnight on the loo!

CHREMES

Boo hoo! And ----, will he say "Me too"?

He's wealthier than ---, twixt me and you.

Can't see him being a hero ,

Or handing in a single Euro.

MAN

I told you it would all go down the drain.

We're making all the same mistakes again.

Do you recall the law on salt? A proper

Mess we made!

CHREMES

I do.

MAN

The law on copper?

CHREMES

I do. That currency business made me mad.

I'd sold a cartload of my grapes, and had

The coppers that I'd taken stashed –

My normal way of carrying my cash –

Inside my gob. Then, buying flour for bread,

Well, comrade, you c'd 've knocked me dead!

I'd spat my change out, keen to spend'er

To hear that copper's no more legal tender!

MAN

And what about Euripides's super tax

Supposed, by him, to bring in tax in stacks

Though no one else was very keen –

In fact it hardly raised a bean.

Euripides was deemed a nutter,

And now you'll find him in the gutter.

CHREMES

But this is now and that was then:

Now women rule and not us men.

MAN

Yes, no more Mister, now it's Miss:

I fear they're going to take the piss.

CHREMES

I've put up with your bullshit for nearly an hour.

Face it, you loser, the girls have the power.

He signals to his slaves to pick up his boxes of stuff and take them into the city. There is a sudden announcement, and the two men freeze. Maybe it comes over a tannoy, maybe an attractive girl with a megaphone/microphone appears.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Attention all Athenians! Here is the news.

Madame President says it's time to take your pews.

You all have been assigned a place to dine,

So make your way to where you see your sign.

The tables are waiting and laden with nosh;

There's cushions and napkins, it's all very posh!

They'll spray you with scent as you walk through the door,

The wine's at room temperature ready to pour.

There's meat on the barbecue getting well sizzled,

There's sauce in the pan that's about to be drizzled.

The fish has been filleted, hares have been jugged,

There's soup in the tureens, it's there to be glugged.

Made by young schoolgirls, today's soup is pea:

Do hope you'll like it: at least it is free.

Old --- is the chief washer-upper.

The women are making him work for his supper.

And senile old -- so long in the tooth,

Is dressed like a raver and's got back his youth.

The waiters are waiting to give you a treat,

So come on, you people, it's now time to eat!

MAN

Well you stay here bleating as long as you like

The government's spoken, and I'm on my bike.

CHREMES

You're zooming off now like a bat out of hell

To hand in your stuff? Is that it, please tell!

MAN

No, to dinner!

CHREMES

Oh really? But you won't get fed.

The girls will all know you've not done what they said.

MAN

I'm going to hand it in.

CHREMES

But when, today?

MAN

Mine's not important on its own.

CHREMES

You say?

MAN

There'll be hundreds who haven't, it's not just me!

CHREMES

But you still expect dinner?

MAN

I definitely do!

I respect the government the same as you,

I'm smart.

CHREMES

But If you find they've locked the door?

MAN

I'll climb in!

CHREMES

If they sock you on the jaw?

MAN

I'll sue them!

CHREMES

And if all they do is mock?

MAN

I'll stand outside the kitchen door... and knock!

CHREMES

Yes, why?

MAN

I'll dash inside and grab a piece of pie!

CHREMES *[to his slaves]*

Take this stuff in now. I'll make sure I get there before you.

MAN *[to the slaves]*

It's heavy, it's bulky, I'll help you to carry it. Poor you! *[Chremes fights him off]*

CHREMES

I see your game, you're doing this because

You'll trick our leader and pretend it's yours.

Chremes hurries off, with the slaves carrying his belongings.

MAN

By Zeus, I think I have a cunning plan!

To keep my things – I'm pretty sure I can –

And still get entry to the feast

And stuff myself there like a beast!

A cunning plan – it is a winner.

Nothing will keep me from my dinner!

As he makes his move, two fearsome policewomen grab him, gag him, and carry him off. A song by the Chorus follows.

CHORUS of Policewomen *[apologies to Offenbach's Genevieve de Brabant]*

We're a force of female Bobbies,
And we truly love the beat.
We all know what our job is:
It's to make men feel the heat.
If we catch one pruning roses,
Or an old guy swigging tea,
We run'em in, we run 'em in
We show that we're the Belles Gendarmes. *(twice)*

We're policewomen, bold, and scary
And the city streets we pound!
Of criminals and thugs we're wary,
If there's a robbery we're not found.
But when we find a man out shopping,
Or one snoozing in the park,
We run' em in etc.

SCENE THREE

Three houses in the red-light district. An old woman appears from one of them.

FIRST GRANNY

Where are the men? By now they should be queueing.

I'm here, in rouge and lipstick, ripe for wooing.

In my transparent frock I'm dressed to kill,

But unemployed! To pass the time until

I trap

A passing chap

I may as well rehearse my wooing song,

And practise my seductive moves. How long?

Some sexy music might just help a bit:

Can I remember that old Fifties hit?

She begins trying out some 'suggestive' moves, and makes an abortive attempt to sing. The noise brings a girl to her window.

GIRL

You thought you'd get in first, you crumbling hag?

You thought you'd cut me out and try to bag

The choicest cherries, you disgusting crone,

By warbling some historic antique drone?

But in comedy, it's an old tradition *[sudden lurch out of character]*

To have a musical competition!

It's bound to entertain the audience,

Or maybe it will test their pat-i-ence!

FIRST GRANNY

"Talk to the hand, the face ain't list'nin'." You,

You with the keyboard, do what it is you do.

Lay down some beats for me so I can rap,

And let the audience join in and clap!

The keyboard lays down some banging beats, and – most unexpectedly – First Granny begins to rap:

If you all loookin' for a good time (yeah!)

Come up and see me one time (yeah!)

wanna nice hump yo betta get an old bitch

Them itty-bitty chicks they dunno jack shit.

Old gyal like me do the business and stay true

Young gyal get jiggy jiggy and betray you.

GIRL

Us younger chicks don't need yo' dissin' (yo!)
It's us the gangstas always kissin' (yo!)
They really dig our lady lumps,
Our shaven thighs give 'em goose bumps.
You look like a corpse in all that make-up
You'd make a great screw for the undertaker.

FIRST GRANNY

Baby girl, you better watch your mouth. [yeah!]
Make sure you don't fall off of your couch. [yeah!]
Baby when you're up there bouncin', bouncin',
Be oh so careful who you allows in,
That snake that's sneakin' up inside ya
You may find out it's an actual viper.

GIRL

Whassup? Whass goin' on? Can't bear it.
My baby's stood me up. Can't bear it.
I'm all alone and no one wants me.
Take me home, I need my Mummy.
You won't get a shtup, guys prefer a cuppa with their grans
Yo, Maggie, face it, go crazy, you ain't got no fans
Better have some fun with a nice courgette
That's as near to a man as you gonna get.

GRANNY

That's an itch you got but you can't scratch it.
You've got that thing – weren't you told it was catching?
You know the ABC of sex, I sure can tell,

So you know what perversion starts with an L?

But you won't steal my customers from under my nose,

So get back inside there with all them other hoes.

The rap competition ends. Maybe the audience could be asked to judge it?

GIRL

You yowl just like an alley cat on coke.

GRANNY

Your pussy, though, won't be the first one stroked.

GIRL

Perhaps quite soon you may in fact get laid -

Out in the mortuary, you're so far decayed?

D'you get it, Gran? Did I say something new?

GRANNY

You can't teach Grandma to suck eggs! Fuck you!

I'm not a threat, I'm just a harmless Bid-dy.

GIRL

But made-up like a tart! You look an idi- /ot!

GRANNY

You infant whore, you still got things to say?

GIRL

And you're still here and standing in my way?

GRANNY

I've got a love-song for my darling, Arthur.

GIRL

That's short for Artheritis, or his father!

GRANNY

You'll see! He's on his way. He'll soon be here.

GIRL

Look here he comes!

GRANNY

He's mine! You dare go near!

GIRL

Let's wait and see who **he** prefers. OK?

GRANNY

Touch wood, it's me. Let's hope he isn't gay!

A young man enters, just in time to spot the two women as they go back indoors..

YOUNG MAN

I do beg your pardon

But I've got a hard on;

I can't show my dick

To that gorgeous young chick,

And I simply can't have any fanny.

I can't have the beauty

Till I've done my duty

And thoroughly rogered the granny!

GRANNY *[singing out of the window]*

So that is your plan

You beastly young man?

I'll be out of luck,

And I won't have a fuck,

I won't get my sexual relief?

Don't care if you're sore,

You're breaking the law:

Democracy, that's our belief!

[speaking] I'll pop back inside to see what he does next.

Granny pops back in.

YOUNG MAN

Oh it's such an ordeal to be so over-sexed!

I've had a few pints to make myself braver.

I just want to romp with that sexy young raver!

GIRL *[Sticking her head out of her window]*

That grim old bat has fallen for my plan.

While she's inside I'll try to hook the man!

She sings, [Rolling Stones' Let's Spend the Night Together]

Don't you worry what's on my mind

I'm in a hurry, got no time

I'm going red, my tongue's all tied

I'm off my head my mouth's all dry.

Let's spend the night together

Now I need you more than ever.

Let's spend the night together.

She disappears

YOUNG MAN *[sings]*

This doesn't happen every day

No excuses offered anyway

I'll satisfy your every need

And now I know you'll satisfy me

Let's spend the night together

Now I need you more than ever.

Let's spend the night together.

My precious sweetheart, Aphrodite's brood, *[spoken, or a different tune]*

My honey, paragon of pulchritude!.

Open up, I'm stiff with desire,

Come on, baby, put out my fire!

He knocks frantically at the Girl's door, but Granny appears from hers.

GRANNY

Oh, did you knock? You did want **me**?

YOUNG MAN

No way!

GRANNY

You were hammering and hammering.

YOUNG MAN

Oh, do go away.

GRANNY

What's that thing in your hand, is it a fire hose?

YOUNG MAN

Yes, I'm watering a garden for somebody who grows ...

GRANNY

What?

YOUNG MAN

Herbs to cure incontinence!

GRANNY

That's quite enough impertinence!

YOUNG MAN

Today we can't oblige the over-eighties.

She's under twenty-one, the girl my date is.

Your case is closed the court discharges you.

GRANNY

Under the old regime, but it's the new.

My sweet: us first, the law is black and white.

YOUNG MAN

Like on a chess-board? There you have a right

To refuse to take a piece, it's in the rule-book

GRANNY

The piece you wanted on the Cheese-board, you took!

That piece, I didn't notice you refuse it!

If that's the game we're in, young sir, you lose it.

YOUNG MAN

Nonsense. I'll give her door another knock.

GRANNY

My knockers need attending to, old cock.

YOUNG MAN

No thanks, I've got some antique jugs indoors.

GRANNY

I Know you love me. Tell me I am yours!

Don't be so coy, Come here and gissa kiss..

YOUNG MAN

I'd love to, darling, but my fear is this:

Your boyfriend scares me....

GRANNY

Lover? Who d'that be?

YOUNG MAN

The famous sculptor, what's his name

GRANNY

Who's he?

YOUNG MAN

"The bride of Death" His latest work is called!

Don't let him catch you here, he'd be appalled

His favourite model like a common tart.

GRANNY

I know you want me.

YOUNG MAN

Please don't start!

GRANNY

Bismillah! No, I will not let you go.

YOUNG MAN

You're mad, my answer still is no, no, no!

GRANNY

I'll drag you off to bed, by hook or crook.

YOUNG MAN

I started imagining, when you said "hook".

It would be no trouble,

You're almost bent double,

If, on my wall, I fixed you upside down

You'd be just right to hold my dressing-gown.

GRANNY

Don't mess with my head,

Just come straight to bed.

YOUNG MAN

I'm not obliged, you can't compel me to,

Unless you've paid the service charge that's due.

(It's only two percent!)

GRANNY

By law you have to sleep with me.

But I enjoy it – I would do it free!

I've lovely dreams about young boys like you.

YOUNG MAN

And you're my nightmare, mad old bats like you.

No way I'll share your bed.

GRANNY

You sure?

This in my hand will force you.

YOUNG MAN

What?

GRANNY

The law!

You have to come with me, it's in the book.

YOUNG MAN

I don't believe you; let me have a look.

GRANNY

All right then, I shall read it out, perforce.

"If any male wants sexual intercourse

With any fit young dolly bird or chick

He must ensure he doth not dip his wick,

Until a senior one's been satisfied,

And naught she asked for was denied.

If none the less he still goes for the cutie,

It's every older woman's sacred duty

To pull the young man off her by the balls,

And lay him down inside a grandma's walls."

YOUNG MAN

I tried to pull a bird – that was the start -

But now it seems I might be pulled apart!

GRANNY

"We are the mistresses now." It's a fair cop!

YOUNG MAN

No problem. I've an old school chum who'll dare pop

Along: he's rich and can afford to stand my bail.

GRANNY

Men can't handle sums that large. To jail!

YOUNG MAN

I'll plead extenuating circumstance.

GRANNY

Try it! Do! Can it be you've shit your pants?

YOUNG MAN

I didn't know the rule. I've been abroad.

GRANNY

Another lie, and one you can't afford.

YOUNG MAN

I'm out. What can I do?

GRANNY

Just come with me!

YOUNG MAN

Compulsory?

GRANNY

Compulsory as a pee.

YOUNG MAN

OK then, my love, we need to organise:

The drinks, the flowers, lots of pies!

Musicians, candles – last not least

We can't forget to hire the priest.

GRANNY

I'll need a veil. A wedding dress. I must...

YOUNG MAN

But it's your funeral I'm planning: dust to dust!

The girl comes running out of her house.

GIRL

Where are you're taking that young man?

GRANNY

To bed!

GIRL

No, no, it's wrong. Before you go ahead,
You know you are too old for that young man
You look as though you ought to be his nan.
If men today make out with antique hussies,
Then pretty soon, they'll all be Oedipuses.

GRANNY

I see your game, you spiteful little bitch.
I'll get you!

YOUNG MAN

Thank god you saved me from that evil witch,
My darling, sweetest girl. I have a giftie,
For you tonight. A clue: it's quite a stiffie.

An even older woman suddenly appears

ANOTHER GRANNY

I hope you're not about to break the statute
With that young boy! I've never seen one that cute!
He has to sleep with me. The law is very clear.

YOUNG MAN

From under what damp stone did she appear?
Another grimmie, grimmer still is here.
Oh shit!

SECOND GRANNY

Come here, my lad!

YOUNG MAN

Not on your life!

SECOND GRANNY

The law compels me. I'm to be your wife!

YOUNG MAN

Help! It's the Creature from the Black Lagoon,

The Loch Ness Monster come to suck me doon.

SECOND GRANNY

Come with me, little boy, and shut your gob.

YOUNG MAN

Before we go, can I just do a job?

I must, because I haven't been in weeks:

You gave me such a fright I've shit me breeks.

SECOND GRANNY

Crap in the house! I've got an inside loo.

YOUNG MAN

My life is one unending pile of poo.

How much to set me free? I have a mucker,

Who'll pay her cash so I don't have to - have intercourse with her.

SECOND GRANNY

Don't bother him ...

Yet another woman, older still appears suddenly.

THIRD GRANNY

My highland laddie, where?

Where and o where are you off to with her?

YOUNG MAN

I am not off, I'm being offed. She's pulled:

I'm being pulled. I let myself be fooled!

He suddenly sees the Third Granny.

Ye ghosties and ghoulies and lang-legged beasties!

Whose cat brought this one in? Thank god, at least she's

Most clearly not a human. What? A chimp
Made up for Halloween? Or some dead gimp,
Already rotting, exhumed from her tomb?
Come straight from deepest hell to be my doom?

THIRD GRANNY

Come here, my laddie, that's enough.

SECOND GRANNY

No, here!

THIRD GRANNY *[Queen]*

No we will not let you go!

SECOND GRANNY

Let him go!

YOUNG MAN

I'm just a poor boy and nobody loves me
I'm just a poor boy from a poor family
Spare me my life from this monstrosity.
Easy come easy go will you let me go?

GRANNIES

No we will not let you go, let him go
No we will not let you go, let him go
No we will not let you go, let him go

YOUNG MAN

Oh mamma mia, mamma mia, mamma mia, let me go.

SECOND GRANNY

You have to sleep with me; the law is very clear.

THIRD GRANNY

No if an even uglier biddy doth appear.

YOUNG MAN

But making out with you will kill me dead;

How can I get the fit chick into bed?

THIRD GRANNY

That's not my problem. You just have to do your job.

YOUNG MAN

I must then, who'll be first to feel my knob?

SECOND GRANNY

Me obviously!

YOUNG MAN

But she's not letting go!

THIRD GRANNY

Come here, you're mine, I've got you!

YOUNG MAN

No!!

SECOND GRANNY

Bismillah, I will not let you go!

THIRD GRANNY

And nor will I!

YOUNG MAN

I'd hate to have you cox my boat.

SECOND GRANNY

Oh, why?

YOUNG MAN

With you as cox, the crew would hear you shout

But wouldn't know to put it in or take it out!

SECOND GRANNY

Shut up, come here, to me.

THIRD GRANNY

No, here, to me!

YOUNG MAN

Like Brexit, in and out at the same time.

How can I fuck them both and find a rhyme,

Unless I'm two? I couldn't dip my oar

Both sides at once, my rowlocks would get sore.

SECOND GRANNY

A dozen oysters, they should help you rise.

YOUNG MAN

Oh shit, I'm through the door, I realise ...

THIRD GRANNY [to Second Granny]

Don't think you've won. No ma'am. I'm coming too.

YOUNG MAN

One into two won't go. Oh fuck. It does.

THIRD GRANNY

You may enjoy it. Maybe not. Tough titty.

YOUNG MAN

Woe, woe and woe once more, that's thrice. A pretty -

No, not so pretty – fate is mine tonight,

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow night.

I roger this disintegrating cow;

If I can still perform – don't ask me how -

I'm s'posed to shtup this creature from the crypt -

I'll need a prick that's iron-tipped -

Before her toadship crawls back down the hole

And can resume her place as Satan's Moll.

I need some magic power to save me, men

The only cock with these two sex-starved hens.

If on this journey, I should collapse,

Shagged to death by these two trollops,

Bury my body by the whore-house door.

Instead of a tombstone, I implore;
Send this tart for taxidermy,
Paint her black and plant her firmly
On my grave, to show the nation
The result of too much copulation.

SCENE FOUR

Enter a waitress, slightly tipsy and carrying a large glass of wine.

WAITRESS

You happy people! I am happy too!
She's happy, our First Minister, as you
Are, now the Festival is humming
Thank you all so much for coming.
Friends and neighbours, countrymen, the band,
Welcome! Though I'm, of course, the hired hand,
I've had my hair done, soaked myself in scent,
And so it gives me pleasure to present:
This cheeky little wine - from Aberdeen.
(Though who knows really where it's been)
It has a most voluptuous bouquet –
As I was told to say, by Cookie. *[She sniffs the wine]*
I'm getting blackcurrant, onions, drains
It's not one of the great Champagnes.
The aroma is pungent – but don't get me wrong.
What I wanted to say is – it's frightfully strong.
But where is he, that happy creature?
Our leader's husband.

WOMAN

Said he'd meet ya,

Here, so wait a bit.

WAITRESS

Oh, look he's coming for the feast.

You lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky beast!

BLEPYRUS

Who, me?

WAITRESS

There's no man should be jollier

Because now no one's left to follow ya.

There's thirty-thousand sitting at their place:

They wait. All eyes on you to show your face.

WOMAN

You lovely man! I wish you were my papa.

WAITRESS

You're going? Where? Where are you off to?

BLEPYRUS

Supper!

WAITRESS

Although you're last, before you take your seat

There's someone special I'd like you to meet.

Your wife who knows so well what 'tis amuses

Her husband, thought you 'd like this pair of floozies.

She says your favourite wine has been decanted

And you should have whatever else you wanted.

It's all laid out! So, don't, my love, delay.

If you, the audience, enjoyed the play,

Including all you critics who

Will not submit a bad review

Come on and join us. That means you!!

BLEPYRUS

We generously extend our invitation,

We really have no hesitation,

In summoning you to a fabulous spread

Grown-ups and children, you'll all get fed:

There's plenty of food, you just have to pitch in,

Le diner est servi – in your own kitchen.

Well I'm off now, to go and get my tucker

With these two birds, I'm such a lucky chap to be married to the First Minister.

WOMAN

Come in, and bring your girlfriends, hand in hand.

Meanwhile, I shall instruct our little band

To play a tune to whet the appetite

I think there still might be a feast tonight!

A word to those who've come to judge our drama

It wasn't meant to be like 'Panorama',

Perhaps there is an intellectual

Who found the plotline ineffectual?

Or came to show their irritation

At the inaccurate translation?

If you found it funny, then we're well chuffed.

And if you didn't, then just get stuffed.

Musicians, have you got the beat?

Let's get on down before we eat.

BLEPYRUS *[as he and his girls take the floor]*

I'm on it!

ALL

We've got it! *[Tom Lehrer's elements and G&S Modern Major General]*

Porridge, Kippers, Finnan haddie, mince and tatties, Irn Bru

And Collops, Rollmops, Deep fried Mars bars, cloutie dumpling, Lanark Blue

And Cock-a-leekie, crappit heid and kedgerees and blaeberreries

And Atholl Brose and Cullen skink and Cranachan and tayberries.

These are the Scottish foods you get from Scotmid or from Somerfields

But from Crolla and Valvona you can source much more exotic meals.

Asparagus and aubergines, salade nicoise and bouillabaisse

Avocado muscovado spotted dick or Eton Mess,

And madeleines and frangipanes and creme brulee and cassoulet

Chablis, Chianti, Chardonnay and Sauvignon and Muscadet.

Lamb and ham and jam and spam and Jaffa Cakes and custard

Balsamic and turmeric, – inevitably – and mustard.

You may not feel thinner right after this dinner but you've attended a gastronome's idyll

If your stomach's still rumbling please no more grumbling: it's late night shopping at LIDL.

AMW MARSHFIELD FEBRUARY 7TH 2018

