

of honest performance, he balances this with a weak of corruption. Give the job to another, he plumbs yet deeper depths of depravity. All this indicates your senselessly finical nature, which makes me despair of giving you any advice. Your standard behavior to prospective friends is frightened rejection, the while you go on your knees to woo potential enemies. It shakes my faith in government: A few years back, we never convened the Congress at all, but we knew one thing for certain: we all agreed Agyrthios was a crook.

But then this crook established a salary for legislative attendance. So now we convene the Congress . . .

and those of us who get paid are loud in his praise, while those of us who don't are equally loud in demanding death for those who pass laws for money.

FIRST WOMAN

Goodness gracious, what a lovely speech!

PRAXXAGORA

—Can't you stop that harebrained swearing? *Goodness gracious* . . . that would sound just peachy in Congress.

FIRST WOMAN

I wouldn't say it there.

PRAXXAGORA

Don't get the habit.

*Back to the speech.*

—Or take the current Alliance against the Spartans: \* During debate, it was roundly affirmed that Athens' future depended upon it; alliance or ruin.

But once we voted it in and the League was established, reaction arose with a vengeance, so savage and swift that the man who'd maneuvered acceptance of the longed-for League

had to leg it out of the city or lose his life.

—I turn to your wishy-washy stand on seapower:

Should Athens launch a fighting navy? \* The poor man thinks of pay, and votes YES; the rich man thinks of tax, and votes NO; the farm bloc thinks of reprisals, and joins the rich man.

—And Korinth: Only yesterday you detested Korinth, and Korinth detested you.

Today they're friends and allies; therefore, play along, about face, be friends and allies too. . . .

The polymath hasn't a brain in his head; the mangiest moron in town is sporting the name of Sage. Whoops, there went a glimpse of Salvation . . . but no, the savior's out of bounds, and nobody calls. \*

SECOND WOMAN

This man is profound.

PRAXXAGORA

(Now, there is proper praise.)

—Of all this higgledy-piggledy mixture of moral incertitude you stand guilty, people of Athens.

You draw a public wage for serving in Congress with blinders which narrow each man's vision to private profit, while General Welfare wobbles along like a drunken cripple.

However, All is Not Lost: Give me your support, and you may yet be saved.

I here propose that we relinquish the State to a trained managerial class, trustees and directors of our happy homes—to our wives and daughters—in short, to the *Women*.

WOMEN

Hurray!

—Hurrah!

—Huzzah!

—Hea! Hea!

PRAXXAGORA

The superior nature of the female's behavior pattern to that of the common male like you or me is easily shown. Example: Every girl jill of those women washes her wool in hot water, just like her mother before her; you never catch them casting about for a newfangled method.

But male-run Athens has always been *in* hot water, for just the opposite reason: We men can never resist improving on something that works; we tinker and innovate the City right into the ground. Not so the women. Women are truly conventional, natural-born conservatives:

Women kneel to bake their bread,  
tote their laundry on the head,

—just like Mother.

Trust a tested recipe,

Keep Demeter's yearly spree, \*

—just like Mother.

Nag their husbands till they're dead,  
hide their lovers under the bed,

—just like Mother.

Pad the grocery bill with snacks,  
take a drink or three to relax,  
prefer their pleasure on their backs,  
happy nymphomaniacs,

—just like Mother.

Therefore, gentlemen, why waste time in debate?  
Why deliberate possible courses of action?

Simply hand over the City and let the women  
rule. You need convincing? Reflect: Mothers  
all, their first desire will be to preserve  
their soldier sons.

Provisions? Who quicker than  
the hand that rocks the cradle at filling the mouth?

Finances? Nothing more witty than women at scrounging  
a budget—and rest assured that, once in power,  
they won't allow embezzlement of public funds;  
by dint of training, they themselves are Athens'  
finest embezzlers.

I say no more. Give me  
your support, and vote yourselves a life of bliss.

FIRST WOMAN

Lovely, Praxagora darling. Right on the button.

SECOND WOMAN

But where did you learn to talk so beautifully, baby?

PRAXAGORA

During the Terror, \* my husband and I hid out  
on the Pnyx, where Congress meets. Got lost in the crowd,  
and listened to politicians. Learned them all by heart.

FIRST WOMAN

I'm not surprised. You're simply fiendishly clever.  
If you can manage to bring your project off,  
we'll elect you commander-in-chief on the spot.

THIRD WOMAN

But what

if Kephalos starts—worse luck—to call you names?  
Can you counter attacks from him in open debate?

PRAXAGORA  
I'll say he's deranged.

THIRD WOMAN

So what? Everyone knows that.

PRAXAGORA

A manic-depressive, downhill phase.

THIRD WOMAN

That won't

faze him. Everyone knows that, too.

PRAXAGORA

I'll say

that a man who turns out such tasteless vases would surely  
make Athens go to pot.

SECOND WOMAN

But suppose Neokleides  
squints his bleary eyes and begins to get nasty?

PRAXAGORA

I'll tell him that sight like his is better suited  
for an open-ended probe of a diarrhetic dog.

FIRST WOMAN

The members may rise to a point of order. Won't that  
stop your flow'?

PRAXAGORA

I'm sure I can handle their points.

I have a penchant for twisting things.

FIRST WOMAN

A what?

PRAXAGORA

A knack.

SECOND WOMAN

There's only one danger left. Suppose  
the police start dragging you out in the middle—what  
can you do?

PRAXAGORA

I'll put my hands on my hips. That way,  
my middle is always safe; they'll have to try  
for my end.

THIRD WOMAN

We won't sit idle. If they make any  
attempt to pick you up, we'll shout them down.