

PRAXAGORA

At it

all night?

THIRD WOMAN

Yes, the pig. He stuffed himself

on sardines at supper and couldn't sleep for burping.

PRAXAGORA

Very well. Be seated.

Now that I've got you together,

I'd like to run a check on your performance.

Have you complied completely with all the directives we drafted and passed at Athene's feast last summer?

FIRST WOMAN

I certainly have. First, as per understanding,

I let my underarms bush up into jungles.

Next, every time my husband went downtown,

I smeared my body with oil and spent the day standing in the sun and getting an alllover tan.

SECOND WOMAN

Me, too. I started by slinging my razor right out

of the house, and now I'm such a mass of fuzz

I don't even look like a woman any more.

Well, not to a casual glance.

PRAXAGORA

Another point

in the compact. We each agreed to bring a beard to this meeting. Do you have yours?

THIRD WOMAN

Producing her false beard.

Mine's divine!

SECOND WOMAN

Producing a huge beard.

And mine's in line with fashion. Epikrates decrees that this year's beardline's below the knees.

PRAXAGORA

To the crowd of women.

Do you

have yours?

FIRST WOMAN

Boy, do they. Look at those hairy nods.

PRAXAGORA

Well, everything else appears to be in order.

Let's see, now. Slippers, check. And ditto the canes.

And ditto your husbands' cloaks.

Just as agreed.

FIRST WOMAN

Producing a tremendous club.

I stole this cane from my husband while he was sleeping.

As usual.

PRAXAGORA

Just what does your husband do?

FIRST WOMAN

logs. You know him—Lamios.*

Delivers

SECOND WOMAN

Oh, yes—the man

who lets those tremendous farts!

FIRST WOMAN

It's such a waste

of talent: He carries a big stick, farts like an army . . .

If only he could stay awake, he'd make

a fortune in politics.

PRAXAGORA

And now, before the stars

decide to leave the sky, we'd better decide

on our next move. We've made all these preparations to go to Congress, and Congress takes up at dawn.

FIRST WOMAN

God, yes. You'll have to get us over there early;

we want those seats down front by the speaker's stand, facing the Executive Board.

THIRD WOMAN

Holding up a large phallos.*

See what I brought.

PRAXAGORA

What's that?

THIRD WOMAN

A carding comb. I thought I could work the snaggles out of my wool until the men started Congress in earnest.

PRAXAGORA
you nitwit?

What's the point,

THIRD WOMAN

I'm sure there's bound to be some connection . . .
and anyway, I can listen just as well
while I flog away at my fleece.

I have to do it.

My kids are positively nude.

PRAXAGORA

That's all we need.

Card your wool, indeed. *No man must see
the slightest bit of your body.*

We've got to hurry;
the littest slip and we're undone. I can see it all:
The people assemble, Congress commences . . . and then
we arrive in a flap, some woman climbs over a bench,
flips up her cloak, and exposes, to all and sundry,
some misplaced whiskers.

But if we get there first
and take our places, we can adjust our clothing
and no one'll be the wiser. And once we're there,
with proper beards tied on and arranged in place,
what casual observer will say that we're not men?

FIRST WOMAN*

You're right. Agyrthios started out as a woman,
but then he stole a fluteplayer's beard, and pulled
the wool over everyone's eyes, and look at him now:
He runs the city.

PRAXAGORA

And Agyrthios, girls, is our model.
By the gods of daylight robbery, let's try to pull
a *coup* as big as his. Let's devise a device
to take command, take charge, take over. *We'll* run
the city, run it right and proper and well.
No more sitting and drifting in a ship of state
with empty oarlocks and barren masts!

THIRD WOMAN

Now, look:

We're women! What place is there on the floor of Congress
for feminine intercourse? How can we fit in?

PRAXAGORA
You'd be surprised. It's agreed that the most persuasive
speakers are smoothskinned, softvoiced boys who've been screwed
to a pitch of eloquence—and *that* is a qualification
that we possess in plenty.

THIRD WOMAN

That may be okay
for rump sessions, but what's our official position? The thing
we lack is practice.

PRAXAGORA

And that, in case you've forgotten,
is precisely why we're here—to rehearse our speeches.
Now hurry and get that beard tied on.

The same

for those of you who've been practicing how to talk.

SECOND WOMAN

You mean there's someone here who doesn't know how?

PRAXAGORA

You tie your beard on. Quickly. Be a man.
I'll set these wreaths down here and put mine on
with the rest of you. I just might want to speak.

*All the women adjust their beards. The Second
Woman, still beard-proud, points at the women
before her.*

SECOND WOMAN

Praxagora, honey, look over here. The funniest
thing I ever saw.

PRAXAGORA

The funniest? How?

SECOND WOMAN

That fringe
around their chins. They look like roasted squids.

PRAXAGORA

*Attention, please! The ritual purification will now
commence. The Chaplain will pass among you, bearing
the sacrificial polecat.*

FIRST WOMAN

I thought they sacrificed pigs.

PRAXAGORA

We couldn't get a pig.

As a herald.