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ADVICE TO THE PLAYERS

Should you wish to produce my *Lysistrata*, I am content to let you take liberties that I don't allow with any of the other plays I have written.

This script was compiled specifically for a March 3, 2003, event at Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Theater. Ours was one reading of the thousands done that day all over the world as part of the *Lysistrata* Project, which was a global protest against the burgeoning war in Iraq. It was meant to be a frankly comic and, well, joyful, response to a dire moment in history, drawing people who were frightened and angry into a community of protest, letting us laugh at the absurdity of war and also giving us hope that human beings are better than that.

In any case, the laughter is vital, and nothing ages more quickly than comedy, so feel free to update the jokes. Also, comedy is local, so our references in the New York City of 2003 might not be your references now wherever you happen to be staging it. So throw in some of your own topical references if you like. The bottom line is: the humor is the most important thing—you need to do whatever is funny to you and your audience. If you do change the script for these purposes, just indicate that in the program. Something like, "Text by Ellen McLaughlin with additional material by the company" would probably do the trick.

I also think that using a balloon-manipulating clown onstage in order to create those indispensable erect phalluses is well-nigh essential. I just don't think anything else is nearly as funny. We were fortunate in having a female clown at BAM, who came out at the beginning of the show and began making absurdly large (two-to-three foot) colorful phallus balloons. (They would be tied to a circular hoop of another long balloon, thus making a sort of hip belt—with a spectacular accessory—that a man could step into and pull up when the time came for his entrance.) In this way one establishes the balloon convention from the very beginning so that they don't come as an abrupt surprise device when they appear, three-quarters of the way into the play.

Also music is essential. I do recommend having an onstage band to play throughout, but at the very least you should have music before the play and afterward. (Letting the audience dance afterward is a good idea.) We also had a few clowns, acrobats, and comedians to warm up the audience. The point is to create an evening that's truly a festival, funny and celebratory. That way the anti-war theme that is the basis of the endeavor is just a part of the exuberant whole.

I include a breakdown of the cast from our production to give a sense of how the parts might be divided among a limited number of actors.

ATHENIAN CHORUS LEADER 1	Delphi Harrington
ATHENIAN CHORUS LEADER 2	Kathleen Chalfant
LYSISTRATA	Mercedes Ruehl
CALONICE	Johanna Day
LAMPITO	Vernice Miller
MYRRHINE	Kyra Sedgwick
DIPSAS	Kathryn Grody
ISMENIA	Lori Singer
GEEZER 1	Bill Irwin
GEEZER 2	Johnny Lee Davenport
GEEZER 3	David Strathairn
OLD WOMAN 1	Delphi Harrington
OLD WOMAN 2	Kathleen Chalfant
OLD WOMAN 3	Kathryn Grody
MAGISTRATE	F. Murray Abraham
BELPHRAGIA	Lori Singer
FISHERWOMAN	Kathryn Grody
CINESIAS	Kevin Bacon
SPARTAN ENVOY	Johnny Lee Davenport
SPARTAN DELEGATE	David Strathairn

However you choose to make use of this version of an ancient anti-war play, enjoy.

CHARACTERS

ATHENIAN CHORUS LEADER 1 (ACL 1)

ATHENIAN CHORUS LEADER 2 (ACL 2)

LYSISTRATA

CALONICE

LAMPITO

MYRRHINEK

DIPSASY

ISMENIA

GEEZER 1

GEEZER 2

GEEZER 3

OLD WOMAN 1

OLD WOMAN 2

OLD WOMAN 3

MAGISTRATE

BELPHRAGIA

FISHERWOMAN

CINESIAS

SPARTAN ENVOY

SPARTAN DELEGATE

PLACE

A public place.

LYSISTRATA

An affluent neighborhood in Athens. Lysistrata is pacing back and forth, muttering irritably to herself. The Athenian chorus leaders (ACL 1 and ACL 2) run on and address the audience.

ACL 1. OK. So, we're, like, the chorus, and we've gotta figure out how to tell you this whole story in, what?

ACL 2. Forty-five minutes.

ACL 1. Forty-five minutes? I thought we had the place for an hour and a half.

ACL 2. I don't know, there's this dance party or something they have to fit in. It's a whole, you know, *event*...

ACL 1. Alrighty then, just the high points. So. It's 411. A very bad year to be an Athenian.

ACL 2. Totally sucks.

ACL 1. We've been at war with Sparta for how many years?

ACL 2. It's this crazy-ass Peloponnesian War you may have heard about.

ACL 1. We started it, basically because we *could*, you know, 'cause we were the big cheese after the Persian wars.

ACL 2. Of course regular people never wanted to go to war in the first place.

ACL 1. Why would they?

ACL 2. But the politicians just told them to shut up—said no one was interested in hearing all that nonsense about, you know, *peace*.

ACL 1. Yeah, *peace*. What a silly idea.

ACL 2. How *naive*...

ACL 1. Right. Plus, the big boys kept saying it would all be over in a few months.

ACL 2. Ha! Twenty years go by. Our treasury is bankrupt—

ACL 1. —'cause all our ships keep getting sunk—

ACL 2. —right, and now Athens is surrounded by the Spartan army.

ACL 1. Assassination plots here, right-wing conspiracies there—

ACL 2. —It's a disaster—

ACL 1. —Our little democracy's just been hanging on by her fingernails.

ACL 2. Meanwhile, the war grinds on.

ACL 1. Plus every two minutes one of our generals decides to charge off and invade someplace *else*.

ACL 2. Sicily was the last one.

ACL 1. What a great idea *that* was.

ACL 2. How many thousands of Athenians died?

ACL 1. They kicked our butts.

Pause. They indulge in a moment of depression.

ACL 2. Well, look on the bright side.

ACL 1. Huh?

ACL 2. You know how Greeks can never agree about anything? Well, there's *complete* consensus on one thing now.

ACL 1. (*Seeing where she's going with this.*) Yup, you got a point.

ACL 2. Everyone—and I mean EVERYONE— / hates our guts!

ACL 1. They hate our guts! It's true! Spartans and Thracians are talking to each other for the first time in *centuries*. Of course they're basically talking about what assholes *we* are but still...

ACL 2. It's an accomplishment. (*Looks at her watch.*) Oo! We've got to get this show on the road!

ACL 1. Anyway, that's Lysistrata.

ACL 2. The one the play's named after.

ACL 1. You'll see why later. She's upset. Not only because it's 411 and it's sucky to be an Athenian, but also because she called a conference for all the important women of Greece.

ACL 2. —It was scheduled for dawn—

ACL 1. —Today.

ACL 2. —Right here. And nobody's shown up.

ACL 1. Yet.

ACL 2. Not even us.

They realize they shouldn't be onstage and run off.

LYSISTRATA. (*Pacing back and forth, furious.*) I hate women! Everything men say about us is true! Women are late to everything! Sometimes they don't even show up! Totally unreliable! Impossible! WHERE IS EVERYONE? This is just so embarrassing. Here I call a meeting of all women from every city in Greece—"Pan-Hellenic Women's Conference to Discuss the Most Important Issues of the Day"—and who shows up? Nobody. That's political consciousness for you. I hate women!

Calonice, her neighbor, appears.

CALONICE. What are you bitching about?

LYSISTRATA. I call this huge historic meeting and nobody shows up.

CALONICE. Well, it's *dawn*, for goodness' sake. Who throws a party at dawn?

LYSISTRATA. It's not a party, it's a, it's a...IT'S THE BIRTH OF A NEW ERA! CIVILIZATION WILL BE REDEFINED THIS MORNING! I invited every important woman in Greece!

CALONICE. Gee, and me in my bathrobe. How embarrassing. So where's the food? These thousands of women are going to come from the four corners of the earth, and after all that trouble they get, what? Not even a handful of raisins? What kind of hostess are you?

LYSISTRATA. I'm not a *hostess*! I'm a *political leader*! This isn't about *chips and dip*! This is about the *future of the world*! Oo, oo, oo! Look! Women! I knew it! I knew it! They're coming! It's Myrrhine from Anagyra, Ismenia from Boeotia...Dipsas from Corinth. Oh, and Lampito with some Spartan women! I'M A GENIUS!

CALONICE. A *Spartan*? You invited a Spartan here? Have you lost your mind?

A large, bedraggled group of women enter, looking hungry and pissy.

LYSISTRATA. It's all part of my cunning plan. You'll see.

Myrrhine. Nice to see you. Lampito. You're looking annoyingly beautiful.

LAMPITO. I try.

LYSISTRATA. No, really. I don't know how you get through the day. Men must regularly throw themselves down at your feet and just sort of howl.

LAMPITO. The dears. One just steps over them.

LYSISTRATA. I'd hate you on principle if it wasn't that your very beauty will be the lynchpin of what I like to call L.B.P., which is short for Lysistrata's Brilliant Plan, a little something that I flatter myself may just change the course of human history, I mean if we play our cards right, L.B.P. might—

MYRRHINE. —Is there anything to eat?

LAMPITO. Really. I'm starving.

LYSISTRATA. Don't you want to know what it is?

MYRRHINE. (*Searching her clothing.*) I thought I had a couple of figs on me somewhere.

LAMPITO. I had a piece of toast, but that was like three hours ago.

LYSISTRATA. Lysistrata's Brilliant Plan?

MYRRHINE. See, I'm on this new diet, all fruit. Tons of figs.

CALONICE. Does it work?

MYRRHINE. Well, I've lost a few pounds, but I feel so bloated all the time—

LYSISTRATA. —Isn't anyone curious?

LAMPITO. Well, you look great.

MYRRHINE. (*Flattered.*) You think so?

LYSISTRATA. Will everyone please just shut up for a minute about FOOD? God! Men are right! It's all women ever talk about!

Bad little pause.

LAMPITO. (*Calmly.*) I see. So what you're saying is that, having answered your unintelligible call to women everywhere, we now

find ourselves here at dawn, miles from home, worn out, and yes, hungry, and it is at this moment that we learn we have traveled all this way only to be, what? *Yelled at?* BY SOME LUNATIC ATHE-NIAN WOMAN WHO ONLY HAD TO ROLL OUT OF BED TO GET HERE? How uncouth of us to mention food. I, in fact, am now so humiliated that I feel I must remove myself, perhaps all the way to the market where I can only hope to console myself for my lack of tact with some thinly sliced lamb and a carafe of red wine.

DIPSAS. Gosh, I'm feeling pretty humiliated too. Maybe some coffee?

ISMENIA. Me too. Just so ashamed. Or a little hot bread?

MYRRHINE. You know how ashamed I am? I'm ashamed enough to go off my diet and just begin stuffing / fistfuls of—

LYSISTRATA. All right, all right, all right. I get your point. I'm sorry I snapped. I'd like to apologize.

LAMPITO. Go right ahead.

LYSISTRATA. Go right ahead and what?

MYRRHINE. Apologize.

LYSISTRATA. Didn't I just do that?

ISMENIA. No, you said you'd *like* to.

LYSISTRATA. But, I—Didn't I—? I thought I said...

They all shake their heads.

LAMPITO. Pathetic.

MYRRHINE. (*To Lampito.*) Sad really. Just like a man.

LYSISTRATA. Look. (*Quickly.*) I'm sorry I made you mad because I need you all in order to make my plan work. (It really is brilliant.) I hope you'll help me 'cause I can't do it alone.

LAMPITO. Ladies? Shall we stay?

Pause. They decide to stay.

MYRRHINE. All right. Tell us.

LYSISTRATA. First, let me just ask a question. How many of you ladies have husbands at home right now? Raise your hands.

No one raises a hand.

All of your husbands are away, right? How many of you have husbands fighting in some god-forsaken place, away for weeks, months, years at a time?

They all raise their hands.

Your husbands are probably all off right this minute fighting with each other, isn't that right?

They nod.

You probably all spend your days the way I do, bored and scared at the same time, just numb, staring at the walls, too unhappy to even leave the house sometimes, praying that the war will end. And you spend your nights tossing and turning, worried sick that your husband is lying in a battlefield somewhere, wounded, dying, calling your name...

The women start to cry.

How many of you are SICK OF WAR?

They all put up their hands.

How many of you would give up anything for peace?

They all put up their hands.

Repeat after me: I WOULD GIVE UP ANYTHING FOR PEACE!

WOMEN. I WOULD GIVE UP ANYTHING FOR PEACE!

LYSISTRATA. I WOULD GIVE UP MY YOUTH!

WOMEN. I WOULD GIVE UP MY YOUTH!

LYSISTRATA. I WOULD GIVE UP MY SIGHT!

WOMEN. I WOULD GIVE UP MY SIGHT!

LYSISTRATA. I WOULD GIVE UP MY HEARING!

WOMEN. I WOULD GIVE UP MY HEARING!

LYSISTRATA. I WOULD GIVE UP MY BEAUTY!

WOMEN. I WOULD GIVE UP MY BEAUTY!

LYSISTRATA. I WOULD GIVE UP ANYTHING AT ALL!

WOMEN. I WOULD GIVE UP ANYTHING AT ALL!

LYSISTRATA. I WOULD EVEN GIVE UP SEX!

The chorus, which has reached an ecstatic fervor, completely disintegrates.

Come on, Ladies! I WOULD EVEN GIVE UP SEX!

ISMENIA. What are you, nuts?

DIPSAS. We may be unhappy but we're not idiots.

LAMPITO. Why do you think we miss our husbands so much?

CALONICE. Absolutely. Sex is what makes life worth living.

MYRRHINE. It's the *only* thing that makes life bearable sometimes.

DIPSAS. Nothing could make me give it up.

The chorus shouts agreement.

LYSISTRATA. But that's the reason my plan is so brilliant!

LAMPITO. What, because it's insane?

LYSISTRATA. No, no, don't you realize that as much as you miss your husbands, they miss you just as much?

DIPSAS. So what? We're all miserable. What's your point?

LYSISTRATA. If we say that we won't have sex with them until they all declare peace, they'll *have* to settle their differences. Don't you see?

ISMENIA. You mean the next time they come home for a few days for a little nookie, we just *say no*?

LYSISTRATA. Absolutely. It's very simple.

LAMPITO. It's impossible is what it is.

LYSISTRATA. Oh, come on, it's for such a good cause.

MYRRHINE. Maybe you can do it, but I'm not giving up the only pleasure I've got left.

LYSISTRATA. But it won't work if we don't all do it. That's the point.

DIPSAS. It's too much to ask. Particularly now that I've finally taught him all the best tricks I know to make me happy.

CALONICE. I know! It took ages!

MYRRHINE. Also, I like the way his hair curls on the back of his neck.

ISMENIA. Mine's got the most wonderful mole, right under his rib cage.

DIPSAS. Mine's got this way of hooking his leg over my hip / and—

LYSISTRATA. —Enough! Let's not descend into dewy-eyed idiocy. Focus, ladies! Think of it! We could end war forever.

CALONICE. Think of it. Lovemaking every single night.

MYRRHINE. No more lonely days.

ISMENIA. No more dying of fright every time I see a messenger coming to the door.

LYSISTRATA. Think of it.

LAMPITO. Think of it. (*Pause.*) All right, I'll do it.

LYSISTRATA. Oh, you Spartan queen! If we have you with us, then we've got nothing to worry about!

They embrace.

DIPSAS. Well, I'm not going to be outdone by a Spartan. I'll do it.

LYSISTRATA. Oh, wonderful!

CALONICE. We Athenians can do just as well as any other Greeks. All right, Lysistrata, I'll give up sex too. Even if it kills me.

LYSISTRATA. I take back everything terrible I ever said about you.

They embrace.

And that's a lot.

LAMPITO. One little thing: I'll spread the word through the women of Sparta, and I think we can rely on all of the rest of the ladies present to get their country's girls together on this. But I'm having trouble believing you'll ever get your gung-ho boys to put down their swords. Athenians are just freaking loco when it comes to starting fights. It must be all that gold in your Acropolis. Until that's in the hands of women, Athenians are never going to stop killing anyone who comes within sniffing distance of it.

LYSISTRATA. My dear Lampito, you are as brainy as you are beautiful. And I agree with every word you said.

Men are fools for battle everywhere, but in Athens the boys start stabbing each other in the playpens before they can even pee standing up. That's why, while we've been talking here, a group of elder women, all in black—every one a war widow—have headed up to take the Acropolis from the geezers who were left to guard it. Right now, I bet they're just about ready to beat the old farts with

their own canes, then close up the doors behind themselves and wait for the rest of us to join them up there. So, while you ladies are back home organizing, we Athenian gals will hole up in the Acropolis together, and we'll just bide our time until our men get wind of what's happened and come back home. I can see it now. They'll be pawing the ground, begging us to open our gates and then...to open our gates.

CALONICE. But we won't, right?

LYSISTRATA. Not until we see a delegation of men from all over Greece standing before us, hands over their swollen peckers, humbly pledging themselves to peace.

MYRRHINE. This *is* a brilliant plan!

LYSISTRATA. I thought you'd like it.

LAMPITO. Let's swear to it, girls!

The women, in a circle, place their right hands together

KEEP IT ZIPPED 'TIL THEY FLIP!

WOMEN. KEEP IT ZIPPED 'TIL THEY FLIP!

DIPSAS. CROSS YOUR LEGS OR HOPE TO DIE!

WOMEN. CROSS YOUR LEGS OR HOPE TO DIE!

MYRRHINE. DON'T GIVE THEM A PIECE OF ASS UNTIL THEY GIVE US A PEACE THAT LASTS!

WOMEN. DON'T GIVE THEM A PIECE OF ASS UNTIL THEY GIVE US A PEACE THAT LASTS!

CALONICE. MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR!

WOMEN. MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR!

DIPSAS. That sounds so familiar.

ISMENIA. Doesn't it?

CALONICE. I just made it up!

ISMENIA. It's nice. Catchy.

CALONICE. Thanks. Ooo, hang on, I feel another one coming on... WAR IS NOT HEALTHY FOR CHILDREN OR OTHER LIVING THINGS!

DIPSAS. Nah, too long.

CALONICE. Wait, wait, um... STOP IN THE NAME OF NOOKIE...

LAMPITO. Quit while you're ahead, doll.

The women, ignoring Calonice entirely, are discussing strategies, shaking hands, and leaving.

CALONICE. REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEBODY'S HAND, I mean, *DON'T*...REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEBODY'S HAND...um, hang on... IF YOU LIKE IT, YOU GOTTA PUT A SOCK ON IT...

She realizes she is alone onstage.

...Hey, wait up, you guys!

She exits.

The Athenian chorus leaders rush back on.

ACL 2. *Meanwhile*...over at the Acropolis. Word gets out that the women have taken over the treasury and the local police force mobilizes itself.

ACL 1. Only problem is that the flower of Athens is off fighting everybody in the world—

ACL 2. —Yeah, so the average age of the geezers available to take on the women is, like, eighty-six and change.

ACL 1. Talk about your thin blue lines.

ACL 2. And they have the bright idea that they're going to burn down the Acropolis to save it.

ACL 1. Or something like that.

ACL 2. Yeah, looky, here they come, they can tell you themselves. Watch out!

Geezers teeter in slowly, wheezing and flicking butane lighters. An unprepossessing lot.

GEEZER 1. Hup! Hup! Hup! Come on, fellas! We'll show them what it takes!

GEEZER 2. (*Wheezing.*) Slow down, for Pete's sake, I've got a pebble in my sandal that's killing me.

GEEZER 3. A pebble? Cry me a river, bub, my toga's been twisted

funny around my armpits since we began this forced march. I'm chafing myself raw over here.

GEEZER 1. Bunch of pantywaists! You don't deserve to call yourselves Athenians. The fate of the city's at stake and all you can think about is your withered carcasses!

GEEZER 2. (*Hopping in a circle as he tries to free the pebble from his sandal.*) It's like a splinter of really pointy, like, / what is that, *glass*?

GEEZER 1. When I think of our former glory—

GEEZER 3. (*Struggling with his toga.*) Since my wife left me I just haven't been able to get the hang of this thing—

GEEZER 1. —The way we stood shoulder to shoulder against the barbarian horde at Marathon—

GEEZER 3. —It's a mystery, this thing, there's some sort of extra tuck or roll / I haven't mastered—

GEEZER 1. —All for one and one for all—

GEEZER 2. (*Hopping around.*) —I think that's actually blood! Look! *Blood!*—

GEEZER 1. —Those were the days! That's when Athens had greatness!

GEEZER 2. —Now on top of impetigo, cataracts, and this new allergy to root vegetables, I'll be crippled / for life.

GEEZER 1. —That it has come to this! Unmanned by *women*! The indignity of it! (*Notices that no one is paying attention to him.*) Will you quit bellyaching and LISTEN UP?

They do.

This is the situation, men. Our gold is being held hostage by a bunch of old biddies—it's downright humiliating. We're locked out here shaking our fists at the air while they're lolling around in there on the money bags, filing their nails and doing crosswords.

GEEZER 3. For shame!

GEEZER 2. The brazen wenches!

GEEZER 1. I am vexed indeed.

GEEZER 3. (*Agreeing.*) Irked and vexed. Mightily.

GEEZER 1. Shall we do it, gentlemen?

GEEZER 2 and GEEZER 3. (*Making threatening gestures.*) You betcha! Yessirree Bob! By cracky, we will! (*And so forth. Pause.*) Do what?

GEEZER 1. Smoke the hellcats out!

GEEZER 2 and GEEZER 3. SMOKE THE HELLCATS OUT!

The Geezers start wandering around flicking and brandishing their lighters menacingly.

GEEZER 2. Let me at 'em! / Where do we light up?

GEEZER 3. There'll be no holding this bad boy back!

GEEZER 2. Try and stop me! Try and stop me!

GEEZER 1. That's the spirit, fellas. Now we're talking!

The Old Women come in unnoticed by the men. They hold squirt bottles.

OLD WOMAN 1. Well, well, well, what have we here?

OLD WOMAN 2. Looks like a bunch of John Phillip Sousa groupies.

GEEZER 1. There's one of the shameless hussies now.

GEEZER 2. Running loose like some wildcat on a prowl.

GEEZER 3. Singe her heathen eyebrows off.

He flicks his lighter menacingly.

OLD WOMAN 1. Just try it, old man, and you won't be able to pee straight for the rest of your life.

OLD WOMAN 2. Which amounts to...gee, anyone have a stop-watch?

OLD WOMAN 3. I don't give any of them more than twenty minutes, tops.

OLD WOMAN 2. (*Reacting to the smell of the men.*) When did you last take a bath, Leaky-pants?

OLD WOMAN 3. Let's at least get upwind of them.

GEEZER 1. Mess with us, sister, and you're playing with fire.

GEEZER 2. We're trouble with a capital T.

OLD WOMAN 1. And that rhymes with B.

OLD WOMAN 2. And that stands for

ALL THE OLD WOMEN. BULLSHIT!

GEEZER 1. *(With regret and determination.)* All right, that tears it. Fall in, men. Hup, hup. Let's teach these she-devils a lesson.

The men line up, prepared to implement their lighters.

To arms! Ready! Light!

They brandish the lighters.

OLD WOMAN 1. Ladies?

With a minimum of fuss, the women squirt the men with water.

GEEZER 2. Well, that was just so...

GEEZER 3. Totally...

GEEZER 1. *Uncalled for!*

GEEZER 2. Underhanded!

GEEZER 1. Are we going to let them get away with that?

GEEZER 2. Not on your tintype.

GEEZER 3. Not on my nickel, bub.

GEEZER 1. Stand aside, fellas, it's not going to be pretty.

OLD WOMAN 1. Aw, can the balloon juice, Grandpa. If you so much as wheeze in my direction you'll be singing soprano.

GEEZER 1. Oh yeah?

OLD WOMAN 1. Yeah.

GEEZER 1. Says who?

OLD WOMAN 1. Says me.

GEEZER 1. Says you?

OLD WOMAN 1. That's right.

GEEZER 1. And who's going to stop me?

OLD WOMAN 1. Me.

GEEZER 1. Oh yeah?

OLD WOMAN 1. Yeah.

GEEZER 1. Give me one good reason I shouldn't knock you into next week, ya toothless old freakjob.

OLD WOMAN 1. *(Making a fist.)* I'll give you five good reasons.

GEEZER 1. Prune breath!

OLD WOMAN 1. Leaky-pants!

They square off. Pause.

GEEZER 1. Are you as turned on as I am?

OLD WOMAN 1. At least.

GEEZER 1. I guess we've still got some snap in our garters after all.

OLD WOMAN 1. Apparently. And there's a lot to be said for toothlessness when it comes to you know what.

GEEZER 1. (*Confused.*) Do I? (*Thinking it through, then, delighted.*) Oh, you filthy minx.

But the men and women are still squared off when the Magistrate enters.

MAGISTRATE. What the heck is going on here?

GEEZER 2. Just a little dustup, Your Specialness, sir.

GEEZER 3. Everything's under control.

MAGISTRATE. Excuse me, *under control*? The Athenian treasury is in the hands of a rabble of women. I can't get into the vault of *my own city* and my entire police force consists of a trio of nitwits who can be held at bay by a handful of menopausal biddies with spray bottles? UNDER CONTROL?

GEEZER 1. I don't think you fully appreciate just how formidable and, well, *perfidious* these females can be, sir—

GEEZER 2. —They're tricky—

GEEZER 1. —Very crafty (*Pointing.*) (Particularly this one—)

GEEZER 3. —It's the wily, instinctual mind of the she-cat—

GEEZER 2. —The lynx, the lioness. You're not dealing with a rational being here—

GEEZER 1. —It's a sort of animal cunning, really, alien to the sunlit reaches of our masculine / intelligence—

MAGISTRATE. —Oh, SHUT UP! I'm surrounded by imbeciles. Coots and schmendricks to a man. I'm the laughing stock of the Delian League. Is there anyone sensible to speak to on this Acropolis?

LYSISTRATA. (*Entering cheerfully.*) What seems to be the matter?

MAGISTRATE. So you're the ringleader, are you?

LYSISTRATA. I like to think so.

MAGISTRATE. The little lady we have to thank for all this mayhem.

LYSISTRATA. You're welcome. It was really a pleasure. And much easier than I could ever have imagined. If I'd known all it took was a modicum of intelligence and determination, I'd have shut up this slaughterhouse long ago.

MAGISTRATE. Slaughterhouse?

LYSISTRATA. Slaughterhouse, treasury, what's the difference? It's all men can ever think to do with money—fund wars. There's a really criminal lack of imagination.

MAGISTRATE. I suppose you with your housewife's knowledge of money could do better?

LYSISTRATA. Housewives know a thing or two you exalted politicians seem to forget. We spend our money on our children too, but we hand them meals and books while you hand them swords and daggers. Same money. Different principles.

MAGISTRATE. Such a typical emotional gambit. But then that's all you females can manage.

LYSISTRATA. Maybe you're right. Maybe we do feel it more.

After all, we're the ones who live in fear day after day waiting for bad news, or shuttered up in our houses of mourning, listening to the echoes of the loved ones we've lost to your wars.

MAGISTRATE. I don't expect you to understand the higher principles at stake, my dear. Your sphere's too narrow for you to be able to appreciate what we do for you.

LYSISTRATA. Yeah, you really knock yourselves out for us, and you get so little thanks in return. We should really send you bouquets of black flowers every day for all you do. They could lie like ebony snow drifts along your marble halls, so that every day you'd have to trudge through the rotting, stinking vastness of our gratitude for all, all that you have taken from us, our youth, our love, everything we've lost at your hands. Thank you. I speak for mothers and wives everywhere. Thank you.

MAGISTRATE. Well, if you're just going to get morbid, there's no talking to you.

LYSISTRATA. God forbid I should talk about death to a war-monger. How uncouth! Like mentioning sex to a whore.

MAGISTRATE. I was talking about money.

LYSISTRATA. As does any good whore. Indeed, let's talk about money.

MAGISTRATE. Will you be reasonable and give me the keys to the city's vault?

LYSISTRATA. I will be reasonable and keep them. It's very clear you can't be trusted with the keys. You've squandered my city's fortune on the machinery of death and the fuel for your nightmare factories. All your shiny ships have sunk to the bottom of the wine-dark sea with half our dear ones in them. It's time you went on a diet. No more gold. No more blank checks. We have other plans for our riches.

MAGISTRATE. I can't believe I'm even bothering to discuss this with you. You know nothing of politics. You're as sanctimonious as you are ignorant. You dare stand on your hind legs and scold me about how I conduct affairs of state? It's preposterous. This is a national emergency. There is more at stake than your little soap opera. I need the money for battleships. We are in the middle of a war, woman. Step aside and behave yourself.

LYSISTRATA. Yeah, see, that's your favorite tune. I've heard it all my life. "Shut up and don't ask questions. Now is not the time." It's never the time to listen to any voice that's not your own. Until now. Now you *have* to listen to us because it turns out we *do* have something you want. It simply never occurred to us that we had a choice about whether to let you have it.

Here's what it comes down to, honey: We're on strike.

We refuse to bring any more children into the world to be fodder for your wars unless you work for peace.

You want your money? You pay the price.

You want us to lie down with you? You stand up for us.

It's your choice.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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