The Ecclesiazusae
by Aristophanes [Written 390 B.C.E]

Dramatis Personae
PRAXAGORA
BLEPYRUS, husband of Praxagora
WOMEN
A MAN CHREMES
A CITIZEN HERALD A GIRL
A YOUNG MAN THREE OLD WOMEN A SERVANT MAID to PRAXAGORA
CHORUS OF WOMEN

Scene The Orchestra represents a public square in Athens; in the background are two houses with an alley between them.

PRAXAGORA swinging the lantern, which is to be a signal for the other women; in high tragic style
Oh! Thou shining light of my earthenware lamp, from this high spot shalt thou look abroad. Oh! lamp, I will tell thee thine origin and thy future; 'tis the rapid whirl of the potter's wheel that has lent thee thy shape, and thy wick counterfeits the glory of the sun; mayst thou send the agreed signal flashing afar! In thee alone do we confide, and thou art worthy, for thou art near us when we practise the various postures in which Aphrodite delights upon our couches, and none dreams even in the midst of her sports of seeking to avoid thine eye that watches us.

Thou alone shinest into the secret recesses of our thighs and dost singe the hair that groweth there, and with thy flame dost light the actions of our loves. If we open some cellar stored with fruits and wine, thou art our companion, and never dost thou betray or reveal to a neighbour the secrets thou hast learned about us. Therefore thou shalt know likewise the whole of the plot that I have planned with my friends, the women, at the festival of the Scirophoria.

She pauses and looks about her.

I see none of those I was expecting, though dawn approaches; the Assembly is about to gather and we must take our seats in spite of Phyromachus, who forsooth would say, "It is meet the women sit apart and hidden from the eyes of the men." Why, have they not been able then to procure the false beards that they must wear, or to steal their husbands' cloaks? Ah! I see a light approaching; let us draw somewhat aside, for fear it should be a man.

She hides in the alley. From the right a woman enters, followed almost immediately by others. All are carrying staffs, men's sandals, and cloaks over their arms.

FIRST WOMAN
Let us start, it is high time; as we left our dwellings, the cock was crowing for the second time.

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PRAXAGORA to herself
And I have spent the whole night waiting for you.

She emerges from the alley.

But come, let us call our neighbour by scratching at her door; and gently too, so that her husband may hear nothing.

SECOND WOMAN coming out of her house; she is dressed like a man, with a staff in her hand

I was putting on my shoes, when I heard you scratching, for I was not asleep, so there! Oh! my dear, my husband (he is a Salaminian) never left me an instant's peace, but was at me, for ever at me, all night long, so that it was only just now that I was able to filch his cloak.

PRAXAGORA
I see Clinarete coming too, along with Sostrate and their next-door neighbor Philaenete.

To the women that are just arriving; in a loud voice

Hurry yourselves then, for Glyce has sworn that the last comer shall forfeit three measures of wine and a choenix of peas.

SECOND WOMAN
Don't you see Melistice, the wife of Smicythion, hurrying hither in her big shoes? I think she is the only one of us all who has had no trouble in getting rid of her husband.

FIRST WOMAN
And can't you see Geusistrate, the tavern-keeper's wife, with a lamp in her hand?

PRAXAGORA
And the wives of Philodoretus and Chaeretades, and a great many others; all the useful people in the city, in fact.

THIRD WOMAN
Oh! my dear, I have had such trouble in getting away! My husband ate such a surfeit of sprats last evening that he was coughing and choking the whole night long.

PRAXAGORA
Take your seats, and, since you are all gathered here at last, let us see if what we decided on at the feast of the Scirophoria has been duly done.

FIRST WOMAN
Yes. Firstly, as agreed, I have let the hair under my armpits grow thicker than a bush; furthermore, whilst my husband was at the Assembly, I rubbed myself from head to foot with oil and then stood the whole day long in the sun.

SECOND WOMAN
So did I. I began by throwing away my razor, so that I might get quite hairy, and no longer resemble a woman.

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PRAXAGORA
Have you the beards that we had all to get ourselves for the Assembly?
FIRST WOMAN
Yea, by Hecate! Is this not a fine one?
SECOND WOMAN
Aye, much finer even than the one Epicrates has.
PRAXAGORA to the other women
And you?
FIRST WOMAN
Yes, yes; look, they all nod assent.
PRAXAGORA
I see that you have got all the rest too, Spartan shoes, staffs and men's cloaks, as it was arranged.
FIRST WOMAN
I have brought Lamias' club, which I stole from him while he slept.
PRAXAGORA
What, the club that makes him fart with its weight?
SECOND WOMAN
By Zeus the Deliverer, if he had the skin of Argus, he would know better than any other how to shepherd the popular herd.
PRAXAGORA
But come, let us finish what has yet to be done, while the stars are still shining; the Assembly, at which we mean to be present, will open at dawn.
FIRST WOMAN
Good; you must take up your place at the foot of the platform and facing the Prytanes.
SECOND WOMAN
I have brought this with me to card during the Assembly. 
*She shows some wool.*
PRAXAGORA
During the Assembly, wretched woman?
SECOND WOMAN
Surely, by Artemis! shall I hear any less well if I am doing a bit of carding? My little ones are all but naked.
PRAXAGORA
Think of her wanting to card! whereas we must not let anyone see the smallest part of our bodies. 'Twould be a fine thing if one of us, in the midst of the discussion, rushed on to the speaker's platform and, flinging her cloak aside, showed her Phormisius.

If, on the other hand, we are the first to take our seats closely muffled in our cloaks, none will know us. Let us fix these beards on our chins, so that they spread all over our bosoms. How can we fail then to be mistaken for men?

Agýrrhius has deceived everyone, thanks to the beard of Pronomus; yet he was no better than a woman, and you see how he now holds the first position in the city.

Thus, I adjure you by this day that is about to dawn, let us dare to copy him and let us be clever enough to possess ourselves of the management of affairs.

Let us save the ship of state, which just at present none seems able either to sail or row.

FIRST WOMAN in a tragic style
But where shall we find orators in an Assembly of women?

PRAXAGORA
Nothing simpler. Is it not said that the cleverest speakers are those who get made love to most often? Well, thanks to the gods, we are that by nature.

FIRST WOMAN
There's no doubt of that; but the worst of it is our inexperience.

PRAXAGORA
That's the very reason we are gathered here, in order to prepare the speech we must make in the Assembly. Hasten, therefore, all you who know aught of speaking, to fix on your beards.

SECOND WOMAN
Oh you stupid thing! is there ever a one among us cannot use her tongue?

PRAXAGORA
Come, look sharp, on with your beard and become a man. As for me, I will do the same in case I should have a fancy for getting on to the platform. Here are the chaplets.

They all put on their beards.

SECOND WOMAN
Oh! great gods! my dear Praxagora, do look here! Is it not laughable?

PRAXAGORA
How laughable?

SECOND WOMAN
Our beards look like broiled cuttle-fishes.

PRAXAGORA pretending to be the herald
Priest, bring in the cat. Step forward, please Silence, Ariphrades! Come and take your seat. Now, who wishes to speak?

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SECOND WOMAN
I do.

PRAXAGORA
Then put on this chaplet and success be with you.

SECOND WOMAN
There!

PRAXAGORA
Well then I begin.

SECOND WOMAN
Before drinking?

PRAXAGORA
Hah! she wants to drink!

SECOND WOMAN
Why, what else is the meaning of this chaplet?

PRAXAGORA
Get you hence! you would probably have played us this trick also before the people.

SECOND WOMAN
Well! don't the men drink then in the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA
Now she's telling us the men drink!

SECOND WOMAN
Yes, by Artemis, and neat wine too. That's why their decrees breathe of drunkenness and madness. And why libations, why so many ceremonies, if wine plays no part in them? Besides, they abuse each other like drunken men, and you can see the archers dragging more than one uproarious drunkard out of the market-place.

PRAXAGORA
Go back to your seat, you are wandering.

SECOND WOMAN returning to her seat
Ah! I should have done better not to have muffled myself in this beard; my throat's afire and I feel I shall die of thirst.

PRAXAGORA
Who else wishes to speak?

FIRST WOMAN rising
I do.
PRAXAGORA
Quick then, take the chaplet; the time's running short. Try to speak worthily, let your language be truly manly, and lean on your staff with dignity.

FIRST WOMAN
I had rather have seen one of your regular orators giving you wise advice; but, as that is not to be, it behoves me to break silence; I cannot, for my part indeed, allow the tavern-keepers to fill up their wine-pits with water. No, by the two goddesses...

PRAXAGORA
What? by the two goddesses! Wretched woman, where are your senses?

FIRST WOMAN
Eh! what?... I have not asked you for a drink.

PRAXAGORA
No, but you want to pass for a man, and you swear by the two goddesses. Otherwise you did very well.

FIRST WOMAN
Well then. By Apollo...

PRAXAGORA
Stop! All these details of language must be adjusted; else it is quite useless to go to the Assembly.

FIRST WOMAN
Give me back the chaplet; I wish to speak again, for I think I have got hold of something good. You women who are listening to me...

PRAXAGORA
Women again; why, you wretched creature, it's men that you are addressing.

FIRST WOMAN
That's the fault of Epigonus; I caught sight of him way over there, and I thought I was speaking to women.

PRAXAGORA
Come, withdraw and remain seated in the future. I am going to take this chaplet myself and speak in your name. May the gods grant success to my plans! My country is as dear to me as it is to you, and I groan, I am grieved at all that is happening in it.

Scarcely one in ten of those who rule it is honest, and all the others are bad. If you appoint fresh chiefs, they will do still worse.

It is hard to correct your peevish humour; you fear those who love you and throw yourselves at the feet of those who betray you.

There was a time when we had no assemblies, and then we all thought Agyrrihus a dishonest man;

now they are established, he who gets money thinks everything is as it should be,

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and he who does not, declares all who sell their votes to be worthy of death.

SECOND WOMAN
By Aphrodite, that is well spoken.

PRAXAGORA
Why, wretched woman, you have actually called upon Aphrodite. Oh! what a fine thing it would have been if you had said that in the Assembly!

SECOND WOMAN
But I would not have done it then.

PRAXAGORA
Well, mind you don't fall into the habit.

Resuming the oratorical manner

When we were discussing the alliance, it seemed as though it were all over with Athens if it fell through. No sooner was it made than we were vexed and angry, and the orator who had caused its adoption was compelled to seek safety in flight. Is there talk of equipping a fleet? The poor man says, yes, but the rich citizen and the countryman say, no.

You were angered against the Corinthians and they with you; now they are well disposed towards you, be so towards them. As a rule the Argives are dull, but the Argive Hieronymus is a distinguished chief. Herein lies a spark of hope; but Thrasybulus is far from Athens and you do not recall him.

SECOND WOMAN
Oh! what a brilliant man!

PRAXAGORA to her
That's better! that's fitting applause.

Continuing her speech

Citizens, you are the ones who are the cause of all this trouble. You vote yourselves salaries out of the public funds and care only for your own personal interests; hence the state limps along like Aesimus.

But if you hearken to me, you will be saved. I assert that the direction of affairs must be handed over to the women,

for they are the ones who have charge and look after our households.

ALL THE WOMEN
Very good, very good, that's perfect! Go on, go on.

PRAXAGORA ignoring this interruption

They are worth more than you are, as I shall prove. First of all they wash all their wool in warm water, according to the ancient practice; you will never see them changing their method.

Ah! if Athens only acted thus, if it did not take delight in ceaseless innovations, would not its happiness be assured?

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Then the women sit down to cook, just as they always did; they carry things on their head just as they always did; they keep the Thesmophoria, just as they always did; they knead their cakes just as they always did; they make their husbands angry just as they always did; they receive their lovers in their houses just as they always did; they buy dainties just as they always did; they love unmixed wine just as they always did; they delight in being loved just as they always did. Let us therefore hand Athens over to them without endless discussions, without bothering ourselves about what they will do; let us simply hand them over the power, remembering that they are mothers and will therefore spare the blood of our soldiers; besides, who will know better than a mother how to forward provisions to the front? Woman is adept at getting money for herself and will not easily let herself be deceived; she understands deceit too well herself. I omit a thousand other advantages. Take my advice and you will live in perfect happiness.

FIRST WOMAN
How beautiful this is, my dearest Praxagora, how clever! But where, pray, did you learn all these pretty things?

PRAXAGORA
When the countryfolk were seeking refuge in the city, I lived on the Pnyx with my husband, and there I learnt to speak through listening to the orators.

FIRST WOMAN
Then, dear, it's not astonishing that you are so eloquent and clever, henceforward you shall be our leader, so put your great ideas into execution. But if Cephalus belches forth insults against you, what answer will you give him in the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA
I shall say that he is drivelling.

FIRST WOMAN
But all the world knows that.

PRAXAGORA
I shall furthermore say that he is a raving madman.

FIRST WOMAN
There's nobody who does not know that.

PRAXAGORA
That he, as excellent a statesman as he is, is a clumsy potter.

FIRST WOMAN
And if the blear-eyed Neoclides comes to insult you?

PRAXAGORA
To him I shall say, "Go and look at a dog's arse."
FIRST WOMAN
And if they fly at you?

PRAXAGORA
Oh! I shall shake them off as best I can; never fear, I know how to use this too!

FIRST WOMAN
But there is one thing we don't think of. If the Scythians drag you away, what will you do?

PRAXAGORA
With my arms akimbo like this, I will never, never let myself be taken round the middle.

FIRST WOMAN
If they seize you, we will bid them let you go.

SECOND WOMAN
That's the best way. But how are we going to remember to lift our arms in the Assembly when it's our legs we are used to lifting?

PRAXAGORA
It's difficult; yet it must be done, and the arm shown naked to the shoulder in order to vote. Quick now, put on these tunics and these Laconian shoes, as you see the men do each time they go to the Assembly or for a walk. When this is done, fix on your beards, and when they are arranged in the best way possible, dress yourselves in the cloaks you have stolen from your husbands; finally start off, leaning on your staffs and singing some old man's song as the villagers do.

FIRST WOMAN
Well spoken; and let us hurry to get to the Pnyx before the women from the country, for they will no doubt not fail to come there.

PRAXAGORA
Quick, quick, for it's the custom that those who are not at the Pnyx early in the morning return home empty-handed.

PRAXAGORA and the FIRST and SECOND WOMEN depart; those who are left behind form the CHORUS.

* * *

CHORUS returning from the Assembly, still dressed like men; singing
March along, go forward. Is there some man following us? Turn round, examine everywhere and keep a good look-out; be on your guard against every trick, for they might spy on us from behind. Let us make as much noise as possible as we tramp.
It would be a disgrace for all of us if we allowed ourselves to be caught in this deed by the men.

Come, wrap yourselves up well, and search both right and left, so that no mischance may happen to us. Let us hasten our steps; here we are close to the meeting-place whence we started for the Assembly, and here is the house of our leader, the author of this bold scheme, which is now decreed by all the citizens.

Let us not lose a moment in taking off our false beards, for we might be recognized and denounced. Let us stand under the shadow of this wall; let us glance round sharply with our eye to beware of surprises, while we quickly resume our ordinary dress. Ah! here is our leader, returning from the Assembly. Hasten to relieve your chins of these flowing manes. Look at your comrades yonder; they have already made themselves women again some while ago.

They remove the beards as PRAXAGORA and the other women enter from the right through the Orchestra.

PRAXAGORA
Friends, success has crowned our plans. But off with these cloaks and these boots quick, before any man sees you; unbuckle the Laconian straps and get rid of your staffs;

to the LEADER
and you help them with their toilet. As for myself, I am going to slip quietly into the house and replace my husband's cloak and other gear where I took them from, before he can suspect anything.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
There! it's done according to your bidding. Now tell us how we can be of service to you, so that we may show you our obedience, for we have never seen a cleverer woman than you.

PRAXAGORA
Wait! I only wish to use the power given me in accordance with your wishes; for, in the market-place, in the midst of the shouts and danger, I appreciated your indomitable courage.

Just as she is about to enter the house BLEPYRUS appears in the doorway.

BLEPYRUS
Eh, Praxagora! where are you coming from?

PRAXAGORA
How does that concern you, dear?

BLEPYRUS
Why, greatly! what a silly question!

PRAXAGORA
You don't think I have come from a lover's?
BLEPYRUS
No, perhaps not from only one.

PRAXAGORA
You can make yourself sure of that.

BLEPYRUS
And how?

PRAXAGORA
You can see whether my hair smells of perfume.

BLEPYRUS
What? cannot a woman possibly be laid without perfume, eh!

PRAXAGORA
The gods forfend, as far as I am concerned.

BLEPYRUS
Why did you go off at early dawn with my cloak?

PRAXAGORA
A companion, a friend who was in labour, had sent to fetch me.

BLEPYRUS
Could you not have told me?

PRAXAGORA
Oh, my dear, would you have me caring nothing for a poor woman in that plight?

BLEPYRUS
A word would have been enough. There's something behind all this.

PRAXAGORA
No, I call the goddesses to witness! I went running off; the poor woman who summoned me begged me to come, whatever might betide.

BLEPYRUS
And why did you not take your mantle? Instead of that, you carry of mine, you throw your dress upon the bed and you leave me as the dead are left, bar the chaplets and perfumes.

PRAXAGORA
It was cold, and I am frail and delicate; I took your cloak for greater warmth, leaving you thoroughly warm yourself beneath your coverlets.

BLEPYRUS
And my shoes and staff, those too went off with you?
PRAXAGORA
I was afraid they might rob me of the cloak, and so, to look like a man, I put on your shoes and walked with a heavy tread and struck the stones with your staff.

BLEPYRUS
D'you know you have made us lose a sextary of wheat, which I should have bought with the triobolus of the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA
Be comforted, for she had a boy.

BLEPYRUS
Who? the Assembly?

PRAXAGORA
No, no, the woman I helped. But has the Assembly taken place then?

BLEPYRUS
Did I not tell you of it yesterday?

PRAXAGORA
True; I remember now.

BLEPYRUS
And don't you know the decrees that have been voted?

PRAXAGORA
No indeed.

BLEPYRUS
Go to! you can live on lobster from now on, for they say the government is handed over to you.

PRAXAGORA
To do what-to spin?

BLEPYRUS
No, that you may rule...

PRAXAGORA
What?

BLEPYRUS
...over all public business.

PRAXAGORA as she exclaims this CHREMES reappears
Oh! by Aphrodite how happy Athens will be!

BLEPYRUS
Why so?
PRAXAGORA
For a thousand reasons. None will dare now to do shameless deeds, give false testimony or lay informations.

BLEPYRUS
Stop! in the name of the gods! Do you want me to die of hunger?

CHREMES
Good sir, let your wife speak.

PRAXAGORA
There will be no more thieves, nor envious people, no more rags nor misery, no more abuse and no more prosecutions and law-suits.

CHREMES
By Posidon! that's grand, if it's true!

PRAXAGORA
I shall prove it and you shall be my witness and even he pointing to Blepyrus will have no objections to raise.

CHORUS singing
You have served your friends, but now it behoves you to apply your ability and your care to the welfare of the people. Devote the fecundity of your mind to the public weal; adorn the citizens' lives with a thousand enjoyments and teach them to seize every favourable opportunity.

Devise some ingenious method to secure the much-needed salvation of Athens; but let neither your acts nor your words recall anything of the past, for 'tis only innovations that please.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
But do not fail to put your plans into execution immediately; it's quick action that pleases the audience.

PRAXAGORA
I believe my ideas are good, but what I fear is that the public will cling to the old customs and refuse to accept my reforms.

CHREMES
Have no fear about that. Love of novelty and disdain for traditions, these are the dominating principles among us.

PRAXAGORA to the audience
Let none contradict nor interrupt me until I have explained my plan. I want all to have a share of everything and all property to be in common;
there will no longer be either rich or poor; no longer shall we see one man harvesting vast tracts of land, while another has not ground enough to be buried in, nor one man surround
himself with a whole army of slaves, while another has not a single attendant; I intend that there shall only be one and the same condition of life for all.

**BLEPYRUS**

But how do you mean for all?

**PRAXAGORA** _impatiently_

You'll eat dung before I do!

**BLEPYRUS**

Won't the dung be common too?

**PRAXAGORA**

No, no, but you interrupted me too soon. This is what I was going to say; I shall begin by making land, money, everything that is private property, **common to all**.

Then we shall live on this common wealth, which we shall take care to administer with wise thrift.

**BLEPYRUS**

And how about the man who has no land, but only gold and silver coins, that cannot be seen?

**PRAXAGORA**

He must bring them to the common stock, and if he fails he will be a perjured man.

**BLEPYRUS**

That won't worry him much, for has he not gained them by perjury?

**PRAXAGORA**

But his riches will no longer be of any use to him.

**BLEPYRUS**

Why?

**PRAXAGORA**

The poor will no longer be obliged to work; each will have all that he needs, bread, salt fish, cakes, tunics, **wine**, chaplets and chick-pease; of what advantage will it be to him not to contribute his share to the common wealth? What do you think of it?

**BLEPYRUS**

But is it not the biggest robbers that have all these things?

**CHREMES**

Yes, formerly, under the old order of things; but now that all goods are in common, what will he gain by not bringing his wealth into the general stock?

**BLEPYRUS**

If someone saw a pretty wench and wished to lay her, he would take some of his reserve store to make her a present and stay the night with her; this would not prevent him **claiming his share of the common property**.

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PRAXAGORA
But he can sleep with her for nothing; I intend that women shall belong to all men in common, and each shall beget children by any man that wishes to have her.

BLEPYRUS
But all will go to the prettiest woman and try to lay her.

PRAXAGORA
The ugliest and the most flat-nosed will be side by side with the most charming, and to win the latter's favours, a man will first have to get into the former.

BLEPYRUS
But what about us oldsters? If we have to lay the old women first, how can we keep our tools from failing before we get into the Promised Land?

PRAXAGORA
They will make no resistance. Never fear; they will make no resistance.

BLEPYRUS
Resistance to what?

PRAXAGORA
To the pleasure of the thing. This is the way that matters will be ordered for you.

BLEPYRUS
It's very well conceived for you women, for every wench's hole will be filled; but what about the men? The women will run away from the ugly ones and chase the good-looking.

PRAXAGORA
The ugly will follow the handsomest into the public places after supper and see to it that the law, which forbids the women to sleep with the big, handsome men before having satisfied the ugly shrimps, is complied with.

BLEPYRUS
Thus ugly Lysicrates' nose will be as proud as the handsomest face?

PRAXAGORA
Yes, by Apollo! this is a truly popular decree, and what a set-back it will be for one of those elegants with their fingers loaded with rings, when a man with heavy shoes says to him, "Give way to me and wait till I have done; you will pass in after me."

BLEPYRUS
But if we live in this fashion, how will each one know his children?

PRAXAGORA
The youngest will look upon the oldest as their fathers.
BLEPYRUS
Ah! how heartily they will strangle all the old men, since even now, when each one knows his father, they make no bones about strangling him! then, my word! won't they just scorn and crap upon the old folks!

PRAXAGORA
But those around will prevent it. Hitherto, when anyone saw an old man beaten, he would not meddle, because it did not concern him; buff now each will fear the sufferer may be his own father and such violence will be stopped.

BLEPYRUS
What you say is not so silly after all; but it would be highly unpleasant were Epicurus and Leucolophas to come up and call me father.

CHREMES
But it would be far worse, were...

BLEPYRUS
Were what?

CHREMES
...Aristyllus to embrace you and style you his father.

BLEPYRUS
He'll regret it if he does!

CHREMES
For you would smell vilely of mint if he kissed you. But he was born before the decree was carried, so that you have not to fear his kiss.

BLEPYRUS
It would be awful. But who will till the soil?

PRAXAGORA
The slaves. Your only cares will be to scent yourself, and to go and dine, when the shadow of the gnomon is ten feet long on the dial.

BLEPYRUS
But how shall we obtain clothing? Tell me that!

PRAXAGORA
You will first wear out those you have, and then we women will weave you others.

BLEPYRUS
Now another point: if the magistrates condemn a citizen to the payment of a fine, how is he going to do it? Out of the public funds? That would not be right surely.

PRAXAGORA
But there will be no more lawsuits.
BLEPYRUS
This rule will ruin you.

CHREMES
I think so too.

PRAXAGORA
Besides, my dear, why should there be lawsuits?

BLEPYRUS
Oh! for a thousand reasons, on my faith! Firstly, because a debtor denies his obligation.

PRAXAGORA
But where will the lender get the money to lend, if all is in common? unless he steals it out of the treasury? and he could not hide that!

CHREMES
Well thought out, by Demeter!

BLEPYRUS
But tell me this: here are some men who are returning from a feast and are drunk and they strike some passer-by; how are they going to pay the fine? Ah! you are puzzled now!

PRAXAGORA
They will have to take it out of their pittance; and being thus punished through their belly, they will not care to begin again.

BLEPYRUS
There will be no more thieves then, eh?

PRAXAGORA
Why steal, if you have a share of everything?

BLEPYRUS
People will not be robbed any more at night?

CHREMES
Not if you sleep at home.

PRAXAGORA
Even if you sleep outdoors there will be no more danger, for all will have the means of living. Besides, if anyone wanted to steal your cloak, you would give it to him yourself. Why not? You will only have to go to the common store and be given a better one.

BLEPYRUS
There will be no more playing at dice?

PRAXAGORA
What object will there be in playing?
BLEPYRUS
But what kind of life is it you propose to set up?

PRAXAGORA
The life in common. Athens will become nothing more than a single house, in which everything will belong to everyone; so that everybody will be able to go from one house to the other at pleasure.

BLEPYRUS
And where will the meals be served?

PRAXAGORA
The law-courts and the porticoes will be turned into dining-halls.

BLEPYRUS
And what will the speaker's platform be used for?

PRAXAGORA
I shall place the bowls and the ewers there; and young children will sing the glory of the brave from there, also the infamy of cowards, who out of very shame will no longer dare to come to the public meals.

BLEPYRUS
Well thought out, by Apollo! And what will you do with the urns?

PRAXAGORA
I shall have them taken to the market-place, and standing close to the statue of Harmodius, I shall draw a lot for each citizen, which by its letter will show the place where he must go to dine.
Thus, those for whom I have drawn an R will go to the royal portico; if it's a T, they will go to the portico of Theseus; if it's an F, to that of the flour-market.

BLEPYRUS
To cram himself there like a capon?

PRAXAGORA
No, to dine there.

BLEPYRUS
And the citizen whom the lot has not given a letter showing where he is to dine will be driven off by everyone?

PRAXAGORA with great solemnity
But that will not occur. Each man will have plenty; he will not leave the feast until he is well drunk, and then with a chaplet on his head and a torch in his hand; and then the women running to meet you in the crossroads will say,
"This way, come to our house, you will find a beautiful young girl there."-"And I," another will call from her balcony, "have one so pretty and as white as milk;
but before touching her, you must sleep with me."
And the ugly men, watching closely after the handsome fellows, will say, "Hi! friend, where are you running to? Go in, but you must do nothing; it's the ugly and the flat-nosed to whom the law gives the right to make love first; amuse yourself on the porch while you wait, in handling your fig-leaves and playing with yourself." Well, tell me, does that picture suit you?

**BLEPYRUS AND CHREMES**
Marvellously well.

**PRAXAGORA**
I must now go to the market-place to receive the property that is going to be placed in common and to choose a woman with a loud voice as my herald. I have all the cares of state on my shoulders, since the power has been entrusted to me. I must likewise go to busy myself about establishing the common meals, and you will attend your first banquet to-day.

**BLEPYRUS**
Are we going to banquet?

**PRAXAGORA**
Why, undoubtedly! Furthermore, I propose abolishing the whores.

**BLEPYRUS**
And what for?

**PRAXAGORA**
It's clear enough why; so that, instead of them, we may have the first-fruits of the young men.

It is not meet that tricked-out slaves should rob free-born women of their pleasures. Let the courtesans be free to sleep with the slaves.

**BLEPYRUS**
I will march at your side, so that I may be seen and that everyone may say, "Look at the Dictator's husband!"

_He follows PRAXAGORA into their house._

* * *

**Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.**
*The scene shifts to a different section of Athens and the two houses are now to be thought of as those of two prostitutes.*

**FIRST OLD WOMAN** leaning out of the window of one house

How is this? no men are coming? And yet it must be fully time! Then it is for naught that I have painted myself with white lead, dressed myself in my beautiful yellow robe, and that I am here, frolicking and humming between my teeth to attract some passer-by!

http://www.piney.com/ClassAristEccles.html
Oh, Muses, alight upon my lips, inspire me with some soft Ionian love-song!

**YOUNG GIRL in the window of the other house**

You putrid old thing, you have placed yourself at the window before me. You were expecting to strip my vines during my absence and to trap some man in your snares with your songs.

If you sing, I shall follow suit; all this singing will weary the spectators, but is nevertheless very pleasant and very diverting.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN thumping her nose at the YOUNG GIRL**

Ha! here is an old man; take him and lead him away.

**To the flute-player**

As for you, you young flute-player, let us hear some airs that are worthy of you and me.

**She sings**

Let him who wishes to taste pleasure come to my side. These young things know nothing about it;

it's only the women of ripe age who understand the art of love, and no one could know how to fondle the lover who possessed me so well as myself; the young girls are all flightiness.

**YOUNG GIRL singing in her turn**

Don't be jealous of the young girls; voluptuousness resides in the pure outline of their beautiful limbs and blossoms on their rounded breasts;

but you, old woman, you who are tricked out and perfumed as if for your own funeral, are an object of love only for grim Death himself.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN singing again**

May your tongue be stopped; may you be unable to find your couch when you want to be loved. And on your couch, when your lips seek a lover, may you embrace only a viper!

**YOUNG GIRL singing again**

Alas! alas! what is to become of me? There is no lover! I am left here alone; my mother has gone out.

**Interrupting her song**

There's no need to mention the rest.

**Then singing again**

Oh! my dear nurse, I adjure you to call Orthagoras, and may heaven bless you. Ah! poor child, desire is consuming you like an Ionian woman;

interrupting again

and yet you are no stranger to the wanton arts of the Lesbian women.

**Resuming her song**

http://www.piney.com/ClassAristEccles.html
But you shall not rob me of my pleasures; you will not be able to reduce or filch the time that first belongs to me.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

*Sing as much as you please*, peep out like a cat lying in wait, but none shall pass through your door without first **having been to see me**.

**YOUNG GIRL**

If anyone enter your house, it will be to carry out your corpse. And that will be something new for you, you rotten old thing!

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

Can anything be new to an old woman? My old age will not harm you.

**YOUNG GIRL**

Ah! shame on your painted cheeks!

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

Why do you speak to me at all?

**YOUNG GIRL**

And why do you place yourself at the window?

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

I am singing to myself about my lover, Epigenes.

**YOUNG GIRL**

Can you have any other lover than that old fop Geres?

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

Epigenes will show you that himself, for he is coming to me. See, here he is.

**YOUNG GIRL**

He's not thinking of you in the least.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

Aye, but he is.

**YOUNG GIRL**

Old starveling! Let's see what he will do. I will leave my window.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

And I likewise. You will see I am much wiser than you.

**A YOUNG MAN sings**

Ah! could I but sleep with the young girl without first making love to the old flat-nose! It is intolerable for a free-born man.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN singing to the same tune**

Willy nilly, you must **first gratify my desire**. There shall be no nonsense about that, for my authority is the law and the law must be obeyed in a democracy.
(Speaking) But come, let me hide, to see what he's going to do.
(She retires.)

**YOUNG MAN**

Ah! ye gods, if I were to find the sweet child alone! the **wine has fired** my lust.

**YOUNG GIRL** (reappearing in her window)

I have tricked that cursed old wretch; she has left her window, thinking I would stay at home. Ah! here is the lover we were talking of.

(She sings)

This way, my love, this way, come here and haste to rest the whole night in my arms. I worship your lovely curly hair; I am consumed with ardent desire. Oh! Eros, in thy mercy, compel him to my bed.

**YOUNG MAN** (standing beneath the **YOUNG GIRL'S** window and singing)

Come down and haste to open the door unless you want to see me fall dead with desire. Dearest treasure, I am burning to yield myself to voluptuous sport, lying on your bosom, to let my hands play with your **bottom**. Aphrodite, why **dost thou fire me with such** delight in her? Oh! Eros, I beseech thee, have mercy and make her share my couch. Words cannot express the tortures I am suffering.

Oh! my adored one, I adjure you, open your door for me and press me to your heart; 'tis for you that I am suffering. Oh! my jewel, my idol, you child of Aphrodite, the confidante of the Muses, the sister of the Graces, you living picture of voluptuousness, oh! open for me, press me to your heart, 'tis for you that I am suffering.

(He knocks.)

**FIRST OLD WOMAN** (reappearing suddenly)

What are you knocking for? Are you looking for me?

**YOUNG MAN**

What an idea!

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

But you were tapping at the door.

**YOUNG MAN**

Death would be sweeter.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

Why do you come with that torch in your hand?

**YOUNG MAN**

I am looking for a man from Anaphystia.

**FIRST OLD WOMAN**

What's his name?

**YOUNG MAN**

http://www.piney.com/ClassAristEccles.html
Oh! it's not Sebinus, whom no doubt you are expecting.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (taking him by the arm)
By Aphrodite, you must, whether you like it or not.

YOUNG MAN (shaking her off)
We are not now concerned with cases dated sixty years back; they are remanded for a later day; we are dealing only with those of less than twenty.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
That was under the old order of things, sweetheart, but now you must first busy yourself with us.

YOUNG MAN
Aye, if I want to, according to the rules of draughts, where we may either take or leave.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
But it's not according to the rules of draughts that you take your seat at the banquet.

YOUNG MAN
I don't know what you mean; it's at this door I want to knock.

FIRST OLD WOMAN (standing in his way)
Not before knocking at mine first.

YOUNG MAN (haughtily)
For the moment I really have no need for old leather.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
I know that you love me; perhaps you are surprised to find me at the door. But come, let me kiss you.

YOUNG MAN (pulling back; sarcastically)
No, no, my dear, I am afraid of your lover.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
Of whom?

YOUNG MAN
The most gifted of painters.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
And who is he?

YOUNG MAN
The artist who paints the little bottles on coffins. But get you indoors, lest he should find you at the door.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
I know what you want.
YOUNG MAN
I can say as much of you.
FIRST OLD WOMAN (hanging on to him)
By Aphrodite, who has granted me this good chance, I won't let you go.
YOUNG MAN
You are drivelling, you little old hag.
FIRST OLD WOMAN
Rubbish! I am going to lead you to my couch.
YOUNG MAN
What need for buying hooks? I will let her down to the bottom of the well and pull up
the buckets with her old carcase, for she's crooked enough for that.
FIRST OLD WOMAN
A truce to your jeering, poor boy, and follow me.
YOUNG MAN
Nothing compels me to do so, unless you have paid the levy of five hundredths for me.
FIRST OLD WOMAN
Look, by Aphrodite, there is nothing that delights me as much as sleeping with a lad of
your years.
YOUNG MAN
And I abhor such as you, and I will never, never consent.
FIRST OLD WOMAN
But, by Zeus, here is something will force you to it.
(She shows him a document.)
YOUNG MAN
What's that?
FIRST OLD WOMAN
A decree, which orders you to enter my house.
YOUNG MAN
Read it out then, and let's hear.
FIRST OLD WOMAN
Listen. "The women have decreed that if a young man desires a young girl, he can only
lay her after having satisfied an old woman; and if he refuses and goes to seek the
maiden, the old women are authorized to seize him and drag him in."
YOUNG MAN
Alas! I shall become a Procrustes.
FIRST OLD WOMAN
Obey the law.

YOUNG MAN
But if a fellow-citizen, a friend, came to pay my ransom?

FIRST OLD WOMAN
No man may dispose of anything above a medimnus.

YOUNG MAN
But may I not enter an excuse?

FIRST OLD WOMAN
There's no evasion.

YOUNG MAN
I shall declare myself a merchant and so escape service.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
Beware what you do!

YOUNG MAN
Well! what is to be done?

FIRST OLD WOMAN
Follow me.

YOUNG MAN
Is it absolutely necessary?

FIRST OLD WOMAN
Yes, as surely as if Diomedes had commanded it.

YOUNG MAN
Well then, first spread out a layer of origanum upon four pieces of wood; bind fillets round your head, bring phials of scent and place a bowl filled with lustral water before your door.

FIRST OLD WOMAN
Will you buy a chaplet for me too?

YOUNG MAN
Yes, if you outlast the tapers; for I expect to see you fall down dead as you go in.

YOUNG GIRL (running out of her house)
Where are you dragging this unfortunate man to?

FIRST OLD WOMAN
To my own bed.
YOUNG GIRL
That's not right. A young fellow like him is not of the age to suit you. You ought to be his mother rather than his wife. With these laws in force, the earth will be filled with Oedipuses.
(She takes him away with her.)

FIRST OLD WOMAN
Oh! you cursed pest! it's envy that makes you say this; but I will be revenged.
(She goes back into her house.)

YOUNG MAN
By Zeus the Deliverer, what a service you have done me, by freeing me of this old wretch! with what ardour I will show you my gratitude in a substantial form!
(Just as he begins to go in with the YOUNG GIRL an even older and uglier woman enters.)

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Hi! you there! where are you taking that young man to, in defiance of the law? The decree ordains that he must first sleep with me.

YOUNG MAN
Oh! what a misfortune! Where does this hag come from? She's a more frightful monster than the other even.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Come here.
(She takes him by the arm.)

YOUNG MAN (to the YOUNG GIRL)
Oh! I beg you, don't let me be led off by her!

SECOND OLD WOMAN
It's not I but the law that leads you off.

YOUNG MAN
No, it's not the law, but an Empusa with a body covered with blemishes and blotches.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Follow me, my handsome little friend, come along quickly without any more ado.

YOUNG MAN
Oh! let me go to the can first, so that I may gather my wits somewhat. Else I should be so terrified that you would see me letting out something yellow.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Never mind! you can crap, if you want, in my house.

YOUNG MAN
More than I want to, I'm afraid; but I offer you two good securities.

http://www.piney.com/ClassAristEccles.html
SECOND OLD WOMAN
I don't require them.

(A THIRD OLD WOMAN, the ugliest yet, now appears.)

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Hi! friend, where are you off to with that woman?

YOUNG MAN
I am not going with her, but am being dragged by force. Oh! whoever you are, may heaven bless you for having had pity on me in my dire misfortune. (Turns round and sees the THIRD OLD WOMAN.) Oh Heracles! oh Pan! oh Corybantes! oh Dioscuri! Why, she is still more awful! Oh! what a monster! great gods! Are you an ape plastered with white lead, or the ghost of some old hag returned from the dark borderlands of death?

THIRD OLD WOMAN (taking his other arm)
No jesting! Follow me.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
No, come this way.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
I will never let you go.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN
But you will rend me asunder, you cursed wretches.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
I'm the one he must go with according to the law.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Not if an uglier old woman than yourself appears.

YOUNG MAN
But if you kill me at the outset, how shall I afterwards go to find this beautiful girl of mine?

THIRD OLD WOMAN
That's your problem. But begin by obeying.

YOUNG MAN
Of which one must I rid myself first?

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Don't you know? Come here.

YOUNG MAN
Then let the other one release me.
SECOND OLD WOMAN
Come to my house.

YOUNG MAN
If this dame will let me go.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
No, by all the gods, I'll not let you go.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN
You would make very bad boatwomen.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Why?

YOUNG MAN
Because you would tear your passengers to pieces in dragging them on board.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Then come along, do, and hold your tongue.

SECOND OLD WOMAN
No, by Zeus, come with me.

YOUNG MAN
It's clearly a case for the decree of Cannonus; I must cut myself in two in order to lay you both. But how am I to work two oars at once?

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Easily enough; you have only to eat a full pot of onions.

YOUNG MAN
Oh! great gods! here I am close to the door and being dragged in!

SECOND OLD WOMAN (to THIRD OLD WOMAN)
You will gain nothing by this, for I shall rush into your house with you.

YOUNG MAN
Oh, no! no! to suffer a single misfortune than two.

THIRD OLD WOMAN
Ah! by Hecate, whether you wish it or not.

YOUNG MAN
What a fate is mine, that I must make love to such a stinking harridan the whole night through and all day; then, when I am rid of her, I have still to tackle a brick-coloured hag! Am I not truly unfortunate? Ah! by Zeus the Deliverer; under what fatal star must I have been born, that I must sail in company with such monsters! But if my bark sinks in the
sewer of these strumpets, may I be buried at the very threshold of the door; let this hag be stood upright on my grave, let her be coated alive with pitch and her legs covered with molten lead up to the ankles, and let her be set alight as a funeral lamp.

(The YOUNG MAN is dragged off by the two OLD WOMEN, one on each arm.)

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

* * *

END

(Ekklésiazousai). "The Women in Council." A comedy of Aristophanes (q.v.), in which the Athenian women are represented as getting into the Ecclesia in the guise of men and altering the Constitution. This play contains the longest word in the Greek language, an extraordinary compound of 169 letters and 77 syllables, covering six verses of the play (1169-1174).