LYSISTRATA SCENE 2 – Swearing of the Oath

(4 WOMEN)

LYSISTRATA (Liss-iss-traw-tuh)

CALONICE (callow-nigh-see)

LAMPITO – (lamb-pee-toe)

MYRRHINE – (meer-ih-knee)

LYSISTRATA & CALONICE ALREADY ONSTAGE

MYRRHINE

Are we late, Lysistrata? ... What is that?

Nothing to say?

LYSISTRATA

I've not much to say for you,

Myrrhine, dawdling on so vast an affair.

MYRRHINE

I couldn't find my girdle in the dark.

But if the affair's so wonderful, tell us, what is it?

LYSISTRATA

No, let us stay a little longer till

The Peloponnesian girls and the girls of Bocotia

Are here to listen.

MYRRHINE

That's the best advice.

Ah, there comes Lampito.

Enter LAMPITO.

LYSISTRATA

Welcome Lampito!

Dear Spartan girl with a delightful face,

Washed with the rosy spring, how fresh you look

In the easy stride of your sleek slenderness,

Why you could strangle a bull!

LAMPITO

I think I could.

It's frae exercise and kicking high behint.

[Footnote: The translator has put the speech of the Spartan characters in Scotch dialect)

LYSISTRATA

What lovely figure to own!

LAMPITO

Oo ... your fingers

Assess them, ye tickler, wi' such tender chucks

I feel as if I were an altar-victim.

LYSISTRATA

Who is this youngster?

LAMPITO

A Boeotian lady.

LYSISTRATA

There never was much undergrowth in Boeotia,

Such a smooth place, and this girl takes after it.

CALONICE

Yes, I never saw a skin so primly kept.

LYSISTRATA

This girl?

LAMPITO

A sonsie open-looking jinker!

She's a Corinthian.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, isn't she

Very open, in some ways particularly.

LAMPITO

But who's garred this Council o' Women to meet here?

LYSISTRATA

I have.

LAMPITO

Propound then what you want o' us.

MYRRHINE

What is the amazing news you have to tell?

LYSISTRATA

I'll tell you, but first answer one small question.

MYRRHINE

As you like.

LYSISTRATA

Are you not sad your children's fathers

Go endlessly off soldiering afar

In this plodding war? I am willing to wager

There's not one here whose husband is at home.

CALONICE

Mine's been in Thrace, keeping an eye on Eucrates

For five months past.

MYRRHINE

And mine left me for Pylos

Seven months ago at least.

LAMPITO

And as for mine

No sooner has he slipped out frae the line

He straps his shield and he's snickt off again.

LYSISTRATA

And not the slightest glitter of a lover!

And since the Milesians betrayed us, I've not seen

The image of a single upright man

To be a marble consolation to us.

Now will you help me, if I find a means

To stamp the war out.

MYRRHINE

By the two Goddesses, Yes!

I will though I've to pawn this very dress

And drink the barter-money the same day.

CALONICE

And I too though I'm split up like a turbot

And half is hackt off as the price of peace.

LAMPITO

And I too! Why, to get a peep at the shy thing

I'd clamber up to the tip-top o' Taygetus.

LYSISTRATA

Then I'll expose my mighty mystery.

O women, if we would compel the men

To bow to Peace, we must refrain--

MYRRHINE

From what?

O tell us!

LYSISTRATA

Will you truly do it then?

MYRRHINE

We will, we will, if we must die for it.

LYSISTRATA

We must refrain from every depth of love....

Why do you turn your backs? Where are you going?

Why do you bite your lips and shake your heads?

Why are your faces blanched? Why do you weep?

Will you or won't you, or what do you mean?

MYRRHINE

No, I won't do it. Let the war proceed.

CALONICE

No, I won't do it. Let the war proceed.

LYSISTRATA

You too, dear turbot, you that said just now

You didn't mind being split right up in the least?

CALONICE

Anything else? O bid me walk in fire

But do not rob us of that darling joy.

What else is like it, dearest Lysistrata?

LYSISTRATA

And you?

MYRRHINE

O please give me the fire instead.

LYSISTRATA

Lewd to the least drop in the tiniest vein,

Our sex is fitly food for Tragic Poets,

Our whole life's but a pile of kisses and babies.

But, hardy Spartan, if you join with me

All may be righted yet. O help me, help me.

LAMPITO

It's a sair, sair thing to ask of us, by the Twa,

A lass to sleep her lane and never fill

Love's lack except wi' makeshifts.... But let it be.

Peace maun be thought of first.

LYSISTRATA

My friend, my friend!

The only one amid this herd of weaklings.

CALONICE

But if--which heaven forbid--we should refrain

As you would have us, how is Peace induced?

LYSISTRATA

By the two Goddesses, now can't you see

All we have to do is idly sit indoors

With smooth roses powdered on our cheeks,

Our bodies burning naked through the folds

Of shining Amorgos' silk, and meet the men

With our dear Venus-plats plucked trim and neat.

Their stirring love will rise up furiously,

They'll beg our arms to open. That's our time!

We'll disregard their knocking, beat them off--

And they will soon be rabid for a Peace.

I'm sure of it.

LAMPITO

Just as Menelaus, they say,

Seeing the bosom of his naked Helen

Flang down the sword.

CALONICE

But we'll be tearful fools

If our husbands take us at our word and leave us.

LYSISTRATA

There's only left then, in Pherecrates' phrase,

To flay a skinned dog--flay more our flayed desires.

CALONICE

Bah, proverbs will never warm a celibate.

But what avail will your scheme be if the men

Drag us for all our kicking on to the couch?

LYSISTRATA

Cling to the doorposts.

CALONICE

But if they should force us?

LYSISTRATA

Yield then, but with a sluggish, cold indifference.

There is no joy to them in sullen mating.

Besides we have other ways to madden them;

They cannot stand up long, and they've no delight

Unless we fit their aim with merry succour.

CALONICE

Well if you must have it so, we'll all agree.

LAMPITO

For us I ha' no doubt. We can persuade

Our men to strike a fair an' decent Peace,

But how will ye pitch out the battle-frenzy

O' the Athenian populace?

LYSISTRATA

I promise you

We'll wither up that curse.

LAMPITO

I don't believe it.

Not while they own ane trireme oared an' rigged,

Or a' those stacks an' stacks an' stacks O' siller.

LYSISTRATA

I've thought the whole thing out till there's no flaw.

We shall surprise the Acropolis today:

That is the duty set the older dames.

While we sit here talking, they are to go

And under pretence of sacrificing, seize it.

LAMPITO

Certie, that's fine; all's working for the best.

LYSISTRATA

Now quickly, Lampito, let us tie ourselves

To this high purpose as tightly as the hemp of words

Can knot together.

LAMPITO

Set out the terms in detail

And we'll a' swear to them.

LYSISTRATA

Of course.... Well then

Where is our Scythianess? Why are you staring?

First lay the shield, boss downward, on the floor

And bring the victim's inwards.

CALONICE

But, Lysistrata,

What is this oath that we're to swear?

LYSISTRATA

What oath!

In Aeschylus they take a slaughtered sheep

And swear upon a buckler. Why not we?

CALONICE

O Lysistrata, Peace sworn on a buckler!

LYSISTRATA

What oath would suit us then?

CALONICE

Something burden bearing

Would be our best insignia.... A white horse!

Let's swear upon its entrails.

LYSISTRATA

A horse indeed!

CALONICE

Then what will symbolise us?

LYSISTRATA

This, as I tell you--

First set a great dark bowl upon the ground

And disembowel a skin of Thasian wine,

Then swear that we'll not add a drop of water.

LAMPITO

Ah, what aith could clink pleasanter than that!

LYSISTRATA

Bring me a bowl then and a skin of wine.

CALONICE

My dears, see what a splendid bowl it is;

I'd not say No if asked to sip it off.

LYSISTRATA

Put down the bowl. Lay hands, all, on the victim.

Skiey Queen who givest the last word in arguments, And thee, O Bowl, dear comrade, we beseech: Accept our oblation and be propitious to us.

CALONICE

What healthy blood, la, how it gushes out!

LAMPITO

An' what a leesome fragrance through the air.

LYSISTRATA

Now, dears, if you will let me, I'll speak first.

CALONICE

Only if you draw the lot, by Aphrodite!

LYSISTRATA

SO, grasp the brim, you, Lampito, and all.

You, repeat each word I say. Then you must all take oath and pledge your arms to the same stern conditions--

LYSISTRATA

To husband or lover I'll not open arms

ALL LADIES

To husband or lover I'll not open arms

LYSISTRATA

Though love and denial may enlarge his charms.

ALL LADIES

Though love and denial may enlarge his charms.

CALONICE

O, O, my knees are failing me, Lysistrata!

LYSISTRATA

But still at home, ignoring him, I'll stay,

ALL LADIES

But still at home, ignoring him, I'll stay,

LYSISTRATA

Beautiful, clad in saffron silks all day.

ALL LADIES

Beautiful, clad in saffron silks all day.

LYSISTRATA

If then he seizes me by dint of force,

ALL LADIES

If then he seizes me by dint of force,

LYSISTRATA

I'll give him reason for a long remorse.

ALL LADIES

I'll give him reason for a long remorse.

LYSISTRATA

I'll never raise my slippers towards the ceiling,

ALL LADIES

I'll never raise my slippers towards the ceiling,

LYSISTRATA

If I keep faith, then bounteous cups be mine.

ALL LADIES

If I keep faith, then bounteous cups be mine.

LYSISTRATA

If not, to nauseous water change this wine.

ALL LADIES

If not, to nauseous water change this wine.

LYSISTRATA

Do you all swear to this?

ALL LADIES

We do, we do.

LYSISTRATA

Then I shall immolate the victim thus.

(She drinks, and the rest drink.)