

Niccolò Machiavelli

Mandragola

translated by

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Based on the 1519 manuscript published in *La «Mandragola»: storia e filologia. Con l'edizione critica del testo secondo il Laurenziano Redi 129*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), with reference also to Niccolò Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Milan: Mondadori, 2006)

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NOTES ON THIS TRANSLATION

I have enjoyed reading this text with students for many years, but have usually found that they need assistance in reading it in Italian. I hope that this translation will be used principally as an adjunct to a close reading of the Italian text, and perhaps as a point of reference for the preparation of a performance text.

I have based my translation on the edition prepared by Pasquale Stoppelli from the 1519 manuscript: *La «Mandragola»: storia e filologia. Con l'edizione critica del testo secondo il Laurenziano Redi 129*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005). I have also made use of the notes in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, ed. Pasquale Stoppelli (Milan: Mondadori, 2006).

Some of my thoughts on the play are published in “Machiavelli, Pirandello, and Their *donne di virtù*,” *Pirandello Studies*, 28 (2008): 48–67.

CAST

CALLIMACO
SIRO
MESSER NICIA
LIGURIO
SOSTRATA
FRIAR TIMOTEO
A WOMAN
LUCREZIA

Prologue

God save you all, benevolent spectators!
And since it seems your kindness
depends upon this play being pleasing to you,
if you continue to keep quiet and still
we'll tell you all about
a recent case that happened in this city.
You see this set, erected
upon the stage before you:
it represents your Florence;
some other time it will be Rome or Pisa,
and hugely entertaining, not a teaser.

Behind the door on my right hand there lives
a judge so bovine that
he must have learned law from Boëfius.
That alley round the corner there is called
the Via dello Amore:
and he who falls there rises not again.
You'll recognize with ease
from his conventional habit
what kind of prior or abbot
lives in the church located opposite,
provided that you stay until the end.

A young man called Callimaco Guadagno,
who's just come back from Paris,
lives at this other door upon my left.
A boon companion, he above all others
displays the badge and colours
of honourable nobility and worth.
A young woman of wit
was much beloved by him
and for this was deceived,
as you will hear, and I would wish that you,
just as she was, might be deceived too.

The play is called *Mandragola*. You'll see
the reason for its title
as we perform it, if my guess is right.
Its author's not a man of any fame,
but if you do not laugh
he'll gladly buy you all a jug of wine.
A wretched man in love,

a judge devoid of craft,
a friar of sinful life,
a parasite beloved of nought but guile
will be your entertainment now awhile.

And if this subject's judged to be unworthy,
because it's frivolous,
of one who'd wish to seem both grave and wise,
forgive him for this reason: he's just trying
with these vain thoughts
to make his wretched days a little sweeter,
because there's nowhere else
that he can turn his face
since he has been prevented
from finding other ways to show his talents
and all his labours go without reward.

All he expects from you now in return
is that you'll stand and smirk,
and criticise all that you see and hear.
This is, without a doubt, the reason why
the present world retreats
from all the ancient virtues;
because people can see
that everybody blames
but no one makes an effort or tries hard
to summon up his strength to make a work
the wind will blow away or fog envelop.

Yet, if you think by criticising him
you'll seize him by the scruff
and scare him first then drag him to the side,
then let me warn you all and tell you this:
that he can do it too,
the rhetoric of blame was his first art,
and nowhere does he stand
in awe of any man
who speaks his mother tongue,
although he might be forced to bend the knee
to one who wears a better cloak than he.

But if you want to criticise, feel free.
We'll get back to our play
so that time doesn't get away from us.
There is no point in paying heed to words
nor to some monster, when

we don't know if he's living now or dead.
But here's Callimaco
coming out with Siro
his servant, and he'll tell us
how everything will go, so pay attention
and don't expect for now more explanation.

Act One

Scene 1

CALLIMACO and SIRO

[1] CALLIMACO Siro, don't go away. I need you a moment.

[2] SIRO I'm right here.

[3] CALLIMACO I think you were wondering about my sudden departure from Paris, and now you're wondering why I've been here for a month without achieving anything.

[4] SIRO Indeed, I am.

[5] CALLIMACO If I haven't told you before what I'm going to tell you now, it wasn't because I didn't trust you. Rather it's because I judged that if there are things that you don't want to be known, then it's better not to talk about them unless you have to. And now, seeing that I need your assistance, I want to tell you everything.

[6] SIRO I'm at your service, and servants must never question their masters in anything, or enquire about anything they do. Rather, when they themselves ask, they must serve them faithfully: and that's what I've always done and always will.

[7] CALLIMACO I know you will. I think you've heard me relate a thousand times, but it doesn't matter if you hear it a thousand and one times, how I was ten years old when my guardians – because my father and mother were dead – sent me to Paris, where I lived for twenty years. And because ten years later, with the descent of Charles [VIII of France], the Italian wars began,¹ bringing the destruction of this land, I decided to settle in Paris and never return to my native land, in the belief that I could make a more secure living there than here.

[8] SIRO And that's the case.

[9] CALLIMACO I arranged that all my property here should be sold except our house, and I decided to stay there, where I lived most happily for another ten years.

[10] SIRO As well I know.

[11] CALLIMACO Dividing my time between study, pleasure and business, I laboured enough in each of these so that no one of them impeded the progress of the other. And in this way, as you know, I lived most peacefully, assisting everyone and endeavouring to offend no one; so that I felt I was friend to burghers and nobles, expatriates and Parisians, rich and poor.

[12] SIRO Indeed, it's the truth.

[13] CALLIMACO But Fortune, in the belief that I was having too good a time, brought a certain Camillo Calfucci to visit Paris.

[14] SIRO I'm beginning to guess what your problem is.

[15] CALLIMACO He, like other Florentines, was often invited to dinner at my house, and as we talked together it happened one day that we started arguing about which country had more beautiful women, Italy or France. And because I couldn't talk about Italian women, seeing that I was so young when I left, some other Florentine who was present took the side of the French, and Camillo the Italian side, and after many arguments

¹ The winter of 1494–5. The play is thus set in Carnival ten years later, 1504 by the Florentine calendar (the new year did not begin until 25 March), and 1505 by the modern calendar.

were put forward on each side Camillo said, almost angrily, that even if all Italian women were monsters, one of his relatives would redeem their honour.

[16] SIRO Now I know what you are trying to say.

[17] CALLIMACO And he named Madonna Lucrezia, wife of Messer Nicia Calfucci, and he heaped such praise on her beauty and her manners that he amazed every last one of us, and in me he aroused such desire to see her that I abandoned all previous intentions, thought no more about the wars or the peace of Italy, and set out for here. And when I arrived I found that Madonna Lucrezia's reputation fell far short of the truth, which is a very rare occurrence, and I am so aroused by desire to be by her side that I find no peace.

[18] SIRO If you had told me about this in Paris, I'd know how to advise you; but now I don't know what to say.

[19] CALLIMACO I haven't told you this to get your advice, but partly to vent my frustration and also so that you get yourself ready to help me as the need arises.

[20] SIRO For that I'm always ready. But what hope have you got?

[21] CALLIMACO Alas! None.

[22] SIRO Why is that?

[23] CALLIMACO I'll tell you. First of all, what's most against me is her character: she is completely virtuous and quite against anything to do with love. And the fact that she has a very rich husband and that he allows himself to be controlled by her, and even if he isn't young, he's not at all as old as he seems. And that she has no relatives or neighbours who might require her presence at some party or reception, or at some other entertainment that young women usually enjoy. She never has tradesmen in the house; she hasn't a maid-servant or a manservant that doesn't tremble in her presence, with the result that there is no opportunity for any corruption.

[24] SIRO So what do you think you can do?

[25] CALLIMACO Nothing is ever so desperate that there's no room for hope; and even if it is a vain and slender hope, a man's longing and desire to move things forward make it seem not so.

[26] SIRO Well, what gives you hope?

[27] CALLIMACO Two things. The first is Messer Nicia's simple-mindedness: even though he is a judge, he is the most simple-minded, the most foolish man in Florence. The other is the desire that they both nurture to have children, and being married for six years, and not having had any yet, seeing that they are seriously rich, they're dying to have them. And there's one more: her mother was a good-time girl in her youth; but she is rich, so that I don't know how to take advantage of her.

[28] SIRO Have you tried anything else at all, apart from this?

[29] CALLIMACO Yes, I have, but not much.

[30] SIRO Like what?

[31] CALLIMACO You know Liguro? The fellow who's forever coming to dinner with me. He started out as a marriage broker. Then he took up scrounging for lunch and dinner. And because he's an pleasant enough chap, Messer Nicia has struck up a close friendship with him and Ligurio is taking him for a ride; and even though he doesn't invite him to lunch, he does lend him money sometimes. I've made friends with him, and I've told him about my love. He's promised to help me, boots and all.

[32] SIRO Be careful he doesn't cheat you: these scroungers tend not to be trustworthy.

[33] CALLIMACO That's true. Even so, when something is in your interests, you have to believe, once you've entrusted it to someone else, that he's going to serve you loyally. I've promised him that if it turns out well, I'll give him a goodly sum of money. And if it doesn't turn out, then he'll earn himself a lunch and a dinner, so that whatever happens I won't be eating alone.

[34] SIRO What has he promised to do so far?

[35] CALLIMACO He's promised to persuade Messer Nicia to go to the spa with his wife next May.

[36] SIRO What's in this for you?

[37] CALLIMACO What's in it for me? The spa might transform her into a different woman, because all they do in such places is party. I'd take myself there and I'd sample all the pleasures I could, and I'd put on the very best display possible: I'd make friends with her, with her husband. How do I know? One thing leads to another, and time takes care of the rest.

[38] SIRO I like it.

[39] CALLIMACO Ligurio left me this morning saying that he would see Messer Nicia about this and he would get back to me.

[40] SIRO Here they come together.

[41] CALLIMACO I'm going to move aside so that I can have word with Ligurio as soon as he gets away from the judge. In the meantime, you go home and get things done and if I need you to do anything, I'll let you know.

[42] SIRO I'm off.

Scene 2

MESSER NICIA and LIGURIO

[43] NICIA I believe this is good advice you've given me, and I discussed it last night with the wife and she said that she'd give me an answer today. But to tell you the truth, I'm not keen on going.

[44] LIGURIO Why not?

[45] NICIA Because I don't like poking my head out the door. And then having to decant the wife, the maid, the household, it's just not worth it. Besides, I talked to a number of doctors yesterday. One of them said I should go to San Filippo, another said to Porretta and the other said to Villa.² In my opinion they're all quacks. And to tell you the truth, these medical doctors wouldn't know a spa from a spade.

[46] LIGURIO What you said before, about moving, that must really bother you, because you're not used to letting the Cupola out of your sight.

[47] NICIA That's not true. When I was younger, I was a great gadabout. They never held the fair at Prato without me going there; and there isn't a town around about where I haven't been. And I'll tell you something else: I've been to Pisa and Livorno. So there!

[48] LIGURIO You must have seen the Wart in Pisa.

[49] NICIA You mean the Verrucola Fortress.

² Bagno alla Villa, now Bagni di Lucca (Stoppelli 2006: 26).

[50] LIGURIO Of course, the Verrucola.³ When you were in Livorno, did you see the sea?

[51] NICIA You know I saw the sea.

[52] LIGURIO How much bigger is it than the Arno?

[53] NICIA Than the Arno? It's four times... more than six times... more than seven times bigger, you'll make me say. You can't see anything except water, water, everywhere.

[54] LIGURIO You've pissed in so many places that I'm amazed you make such a fuss about taking the waters at the spa.

[55] NICIA You're wet behind the ears. You think it's a breeze to uproot the whole household? Even so, I so want to have children that I'm prepared to do anything. So have a talk to these baboons and find out where they advise me to go. In the meantime I'll be with my wife and we'll meet again later.

[56] LIGURIO Well said.

Scene 3

LIGURIO and CALLIMACO

[57] LIGURIO I don't think there's a sillier man in the world than him. And look how Fortune has favoured him! He's got money, he's got a beautiful woman who's smart and clever and fit to rule a kingdom. I think it's rare to see proof of the proverb that says: Marriages are made in heaven. Because you often see a man with all the right attributes draw a monster for a wife, and conversely a good woman get a lunatic. But from his lunacy brings one good thing: that Callimaco has something to hope for. But here he comes now. What are you up to, Callimaco?

[58] CALLIMACO I saw you with the judge and I was waiting for you to get away from him so I could find out what you'd done.

[59] LIGURIO You know what he's like: not very smart and even less brave. He's unwilling to leave Florence. Even so, he's warming to the idea and in the end he said that he'll do anything; and if he likes this plan I think we'll get him to go along with it. But I'm not sure that we'll achieve what we need to.

[60] CALLIMACO Why's that?

[61] LIGURIO How can I be sure? You know that these baths attract every kind of person, and it could be that there are men there who find Madonna Lucrezia just as pleasing as you do: and someone richer than you, more charming than you; so that we run the risk of going to all this trouble for somebody else; and it may happen that the rush of rivals just makes her more firm in her resolve, or that she makes the acquaintance of someone else and turns to him rather than to you.

[62] CALLIMACO I grant that you're right: but how am I to go about it? What am I to do? Where am I to turn? I have to try something: even if it is grandiose, or dangerous, or harmful, or infamous. It's better to die than to live like this. If I could sleep at night, if I

³ Sergio Bertelli, "When Did Machiavelli Write Mandragola?," *Renaissance Quarterly* 24 (1971): 317-326 (326-327); and Carlo Pedretti, "La Verruca," *Renaissance Quarterly* 25 (1972): 417-425. The fortress at La Verruca was captured from the Pisans in June 1503, but soon fell into ruin. More usefully, on the word play, see Stoppelli 2005: 123-126.

could eat, if I could hold a conversation, if I could take pleasure in anything, I'd be more patient in biding my time. But there is nothing for it here. And if my hopes aren't buoyed by some plan, I'll die anyway. And seeing that I'm going to die, I'm not going to be afraid of anything, but rather I'm going to do something beastly, cruel and wicked.

[63] LIGURIO Don't talk that way. Pull yourself together.

[64] CALLIMACO You can see that the only way I can hold myself together is by nurturing such thoughts as these. And that's why either we have to keep on trying to send him to the baths, or we have to choose some other way of giving me hope, a vain one at least, if not a real one, so that I can cherish a thought that will bring some comfort to my troubled breast.

[65] LIGURIO You're right, and I'm ready to do it.

[66] CALLIMACO I believe you, even though I know that men of your kind make a living out of deceiving people. Nonetheless, I don't think I'm being deceived because if you did and I noticed, I'd try pay you back; and you would at once lose the use of my house and any hope you had of what I promised you for the future.

[67] LIGURIO Do not doubt my loyalty. Even if I didn't stand to gain what I hear and what I hope, the fact is that we share a blood bond, and I want you to fulfil your desire almost as much as you do. But be that as it may. The judge has asked me to find a doctor and discover which baths are best to go to. I want you to do what I tell you, and that is, that you should say that you've studied medicine and you've practised a bit in Paris. He'll believe you easily, because he's so simple, and because you've been to school and you can say something to him in Latin.

[68] CALLIMACO What use will that be?

[69] LIGURIO We'll use it to send him to whichever baths we want or to make him accept another plan that I've thought up, which will be quicker, surer and more feasible than the baths.

[70] CALLIMACO What are you saying?

[71] LIGURIO I'm saying that, if you have the courage and if you trust in me, I'll hand you this on a plate before this time tomorrow. And even if he were the kind of man, which he isn't, who would try to check up whether you are a doctor or not, the short space of time and the matter itself will ensure either that he doesn't talk about it or that he isn't in time to spoil the plan even if he did talk about.

[72] CALLIMACO You restore me to life: you're promising too much, and you're giving me too much hope. What will you do?

[73] LIGURIO You'll find out when the time comes, because for now I don't need to tell you. We'll be short of time for action, not for talking. You go home and wait for me there, and I'll go and find the judge; and if I bring him to you, just follow my lead and adapt yourself to that.

[74] CALLIMACO Indeed I will, even though you fill me with a hope that I fear will go up in smoke.

Act Two

Scene 1

LIGURIO, MESSEY NICIA and SIRO

[1] LIGURIO As I told you, I believe that God sent us this man so that your wish will be granted. He has had extensive experience in Paris, and don't be surprised if he hasn't practised his profession in Florence, because the reason is first that he's rich and second because he's returning to Paris at any moment.

[2] NICIA Well, my friend, that's very important, because I wouldn't want you to lead me up the garden path and then leave me high and dry.

[3] LIGURIO Have no fear of that. The only thing to be frightened of is that he won't want to go to this trouble; but if he does, he won't give up until he's seen it through.

[4] NICIA As far as that's concerned I'm going to put my trust in you; but as for his professional skill, I'll have the last word myself as to whether he's a man of learning, because he won't sell me some quack remedy.

[5] LIGURIO And because I know you, I'll send you to him so that you can talk to him. And when you've talked to him, if you don't think his presence, his learning, his eloquence make him so trustworthy that you'd kneel before him, then you can say that he's not the one.

[6] NICIA Well now, in the name of the Archangel, let's go. But where does he live?

[7] LIGURIO He lives right on this piazza, at that house that you see opposite ours.

[8] NICIA Very well. Knock!

[9] LIGURIO There we are.

[10] SIRO Who's there?

[11] LIGURIO Is Callimaco in?

[12] SIRO Yes, he is.

[13] NICIA Why don't you say "Master Callimaco"?

[14] LIGURIO He doesn't care for grandiose titles.

[15] NICIA Don't say that, give him due respect: and if he doesn't like it he can lump it.

Scene 2

CALLIMACO, MESSEY NICIA and LIGURIO

[16] CALLIMACO Who is it that wants me?

[17] NICIA *Bona dies, domine magister.*⁴

[18] CALLIMACO *Et vobis bona, domine doctor.*⁵

[19] LIGURIO (How does he seem to you?)

[20] NICIA (God's word, he's good!)

⁴ Good day, doctor.

⁵ And good day to you, your honour.

[21] LIGURIO If you want me to stay here with you, you'll have to speak so that I can understand you, otherwise we'll be heading in opposite directions.

[22] CALLIMACO What brings you here?

[23] NICIA How would I know. I'm in pursuit of two things that anybody else would probably flee, namely to bring trouble on myself and on others. I don't have children and I want some, and trouble myself with them I've come to bother you.

[24] CALLIMACO It will be no trouble to me to please you and all excellent and worthy men like you; and I only toiled in Paris for so many years just so as to be able to serve men like yourself.

[25] NICIA Thank you indeed! And if you ever needed my skills, I would willingly serve you. But let us return *ad rem nostra*.⁶ Have you given thought to which spa would be good to prepare my wife to get pregnant? I know that Ligurio here has told you what's been said.

[26] CALLIMACO He certainly has. But in order to fulfil your desires it is necessary to know the cause of your wife's sterility, because there can be several reasons. *Nam cause sterilitatis sunt aut in semine, aut in matrice, aut in instrumentis seminariis, aut in virga, aut in causa extrinseca.*⁷

[27] NICIA (This is the cleverest man alive.)

[28] CALLIMACO Besides this, this sterility could be caused by you, by impotence, and if this were the case, there would be no remedy at all.

[29] NICIA Me? Impotent? Oh, you make me laugh! I don't think there's a stronger, more vigorous man in Florence than me.

[30] CALLIMACO If it's not that, then be of good cheer, and we'll find you a remedy.

[31] NICIA Would there be some other remedy than the baths? Because I would rather not have this bother, and my wife would be reluctant to leave Florence.

[32] LIGURIO Yes there would be. I want to answer this question. Callimaco is so cautious that he takes it to excess. Didn't you tell me that you know how to prepare certain potions that will bring on pregnancy without fail?

[33] CALLIMACO. Indeed I did. But I keep quiet about it with people that I don't know, because I wouldn't wish to be taken for a quack.

[34] NICIA Don't worry about me, because you've amazed me to such an extent that there is nothing that I would not do or believe at your hands.

[35] LIGURIO I think that you need to see a specimen.

[36] CALLIMACO Absolutely: we can't proceed without it.

[37] LIGURIO Call Siro and tell him to go home with the judge to get one and come back here. We'll wait inside.

[38] CALLIMACO Siro, go with him. And, your Honour, come straight back, if you like, and we'll think of something good.

[39] NICIA What do you mean, If I like? I'll be back in a flash, because I have more faith in you than the Hungarians have in Pippo Spano.⁸

⁶ To our business.

⁷ For the causes of sterility lie either in the seed, or in the womb, or in the seminary organs, or in the member, or in some extrinsic cause.

⁸ See Stoppelli 2005: 134-137.

Scene 3

MESSER NICIA *and* SIRO

[40] NICIA This master of yours is a very fine fellow!

[41] SIRO Finer than you think.

[42] NICIA The King of France must hold him in high esteem.

[43] SIRO Very high.

[44] NICIA And that's why he must like living in France.

[45] SIRO So I believe.

[46] NICIA He's quite right. In this city they're all as mean as cat's piss and they don't appreciate talent at all. If this fellow lived here, there wouldn't be a soul who would look him in the face. I can talk, because I've worked my guts out to learn the mumbo jumbo, and if I had to live off it, I'd be up the creek, I can tell you.

[47] SIRO You'd earn a hundred ducats a year, wouldn't you?

[48] NICIA Not even a hundred groats, hey! The fact is, if you're one of us and you're not in power, they you won't even find a dog to bark at you. And all we're good for is going to funerals and wedding receptions, or sitting out the front of the Palazzo del Proconsolo, being one of the lads. But as far as I'm concerned, they can go to the devil. I don't need anybody. If those worse off than me could be so lucky. But I wouldn't want to be quoted on this, because I'd be sure to get some tax or some other broomstick up my bum to make me miserable.

[49] SIRO Have no fear.

[50] NICIA Here we are at home. Wait for me here. I'll be back in a minute.

[51] SIRO Go.

Scene 4

SIRO *solo*

[52] SIRO If all judges were like him, we'd be running riot all over town. This villain Ligurio and my madman of a master are leading him into some shameful trap, to be sure. And to tell the truth, that's what I'd want if I thought that nobody would find out; but if they do find out, my life's in danger, and my master's life and property too. He's already become a doctor. I don't know what his plan is and where this subterfuge is heading. But here's the judge and he has a chamber pot in his hand. He's such a buzzard, who wouldn't laugh.

Scene 5

NICIA *and* SIRO

[53] NICIA I've done everything your way, now I want you to do it my way. If I thought I wasn't going to have children, I would rather have married a peasant girl than you.

Here, Siro, take this. Follow me. What a fuss I had to put up with to make that silly wife of mine give me this specimen. I'm not saying that she doesn't want to have children. She's more worried about it than I am. But whenever I want to do anything about it, it's a big drama.

[54] SIRO Just be patient. Women can usually be sweet-talked into anything.

[55] NICIA What do you mean by sweet-talked. I'm sick of her. Hurry up, tell the good doctor and Ligurio that I'm here.

[56] SIRO Here they are coming now.

Scene 6

LIGURIO, CALLIMACO and NICIA the Judge

[57] LIGURIO The judge will be easy to persuade The hard part will be his wife, and we won't be short of ways for that.

[58] CALLIMACO Do you have the specimen?

[59] NICIA Siro has it, under there.

[60] CALLIMACO Hand it over here. Oh! This specimen shows a weakness of the kidneys.

[61] NICIA It does look cloudy, but she's only just done it now.

[62] CALLIMACO Don't let it surprise you. *Nam mulieris urine sunt semper maioris grossitiae et albedinis et minoris pulcritudinis quam virorum. Huius autem inter cetera causa est amplitudo canalium, mixtio eorum que ex matrice exeunt cum urina.*⁹

[63] NICIA (Oh! By St Puck's pocket! He's getting better and better with every stroke. See how well he speaks on this subject!)

[64] CALLIMACO I'm afraid she's not well covered at night, and that's why her urine's a bit pale.

[65] NICIA She keeps a good quilt over her, but she spends four hours on her knees with her Our Fathers before she'll go off to bed; and she's a tough one with the cold.

[66] CALLIMACO When all's said and done, your Honour, either you trust me or you don't. Either I'll direct you to a sure remedy or not. And if a year from today your wife isn't holding a son in her arms, I will willingly owe you two thousand ducats.

[67] NICIA Say what you have to say, because I'm going to respect you in everything and trust you more than my confessor.

[68] CALLIMACO You must understand this: that there's no way more certain to get a woman pregnant than making her drink a potion made from *mandragola*. I've had first-hand experience of this on two occasions and I've always found it to be the case. And but for this, the Queen of France would be sterile and any number of princesses in that kingdom.

[69] NICIA Is this possible?

[70] CALLIMACO Just as I say. And in the meantime, Fortune has so smiled upon you that I have brought here with me all the things that go into that potion, and you can have it as you require.

⁹ For a woman's urine is always coarser and paler and less beautiful than men's. The cause of this, among other things, is the width of the canals, and the mixing of the fluids from the uterus with urine.

[71] NICIA When should she take it?

[72] CALLIMACO This evening after supper, because the moon is well disposed and the time couldn't be more propitious.

[73] NICIA That won't be any great problem. All right, get it ready: I'll make her take it.

[74] CALLIMACO Now we have to turn our minds to this: the first man to lie with her after she's taken the potion will die within a week, and nothing in the world would save him.

[75] NICIA Bloody shit! I'm not going to swallow that. You're not sticking me with that! Now I'm stuffed, thanks to you.

[76] CALLIMACO Calm down! There's a remedy.

[77] NICIA Namely?

[78] CALLIMACO We get somebody else to sleep with her immediately, so that by spending one night with her he draws all the poison of the *mandragola* into himself. Then you can lie with her, with no danger to yourself.

[79] NICIA I don't want to do it.

[80] CALLIMACO Why not?

[81] NICIA Because I don't want to make my wife a whore and myself a cuckold.

[82] CALLIMACO Your Honour, what are you saying? Oh, I thought you were wiser than this. So you hesitate to do what's been done by the King of France and all the lords in his realm?

[83] NICIA Who do you expect me to find to do such a crazy thing? If I tell him what it is, he'll refuse; if I don't tell him, then I'm betraying him, and I'll be called before the magistrates. I don't want to end up neck-deep in trouble.

[84] CALLIMACO If that's all that's bothering you, leave everything to me.

[85] NICIA What's to be done?

[86] CALLIMACO I'll tell you. I'll give you the potion. This evening after supper you'll give it to her to drink, and straight away you'll put her to bed, and that'll be around nine o'clock tonight. Then we'll disguise ourselves: you, Ligurio, Siro and me. And we'll go looking around the Mercato Vecchio, the Mercato Nuovo, around here; and the first young scoundrel that we find hanging about, we'll blindfold him and rough him up, and bring him to your house and your bedchamber in the dark. We'll put him into your bed, we'll tell him what he has to do, and there won't be any problem at all. Then in the morning, we'll send him on his way before dawn. You'll give your wife a good wash, and you can lie with her at your pleasure and without danger.

[87] NICIA If you say that kings and princes and lords have taken this path, I'm happy. But one thing above all: don't let anybody know about it, or the Watch will be onto us.

[88] CALLIMACO Who do you think would say a word?

[89] NICIA There's still one important problem.

[90] CALLIMACO What's that?

[91] NICIA Making my wife agree. I don't think she'll ever come around.

[92] CALLIMACO You're right. But I would rather not be married if I couldn't persuade my wife to do what I wanted.

[93] LIGURIO I've thought of a remedy.

[94] NICIA What?

[95] LIGURIO Use her confessor.

[96] CALLIMACO (Who will persuade the confessor?)

[97] LIGURIO (You, me, money, and their wicked nature.)

[98] NICIA I suspect, apart from anything else, that she'll refuse to go and speak to her confessor on my say so.

[99] LIGURIO There's a remedy for that too.

[100] CALLIMACO Tell me.

[101] LIGURIO Get her mother to take her along.

[102] NICIA She does trust her.

[103] LIGURIO And I know that her mother thinks the way we do. Well now, time's passing and it's getting late. (Callimaco, take yourself off for a walk, and make sure that late this afternoon we can find you at your house with the potion all prepared.) We'll go to her mother's house, the Judge and I, to get her on side, because she's a friend of mine. Then we'll go off to visit the friar, and we'll report back to you on what we've done.

[104] CALLIMACO (Oh! don't leave me alone.)

[105] LIGURIO (You really are a case.)

[106] CALLIMACO (Where do you expect me to go now?)

[107] LIGURIO (Here and there, up this street and down the next. Florence is a big place!)

[108] CALLIMACO (I'm a dead man!)

Act Three

Scene 1

SOSTRATA, NICIA *and* LIGURIO

[1] SOSTRATA I've always heard it said that it's the duty of a prudent man to choose the best from a set of bad alternatives. If this is the only remedy that will give you children, then you should take it, provided that it doesn't weigh on your conscience.

[2] NICIA And so it is.

[3] LIGURIO You go and visit your daughter, and his Honour and I will go and visit Friar Timoteo, her confessor, and we'll explain the whole thing to him, so that you don't have to do it yourself. Wait and see what he tells you.

[4] SOSTRATA That's what we'll do. You are going in that direction and I'm going to see Lucrezia and I'll bring her to talk to the friar, whatever it takes.

Scene 2

NICIA *and* LIGURIO

[5] NICIA You're amazed, perhaps, Ligurio, that it takes so much argument to persuade my wife. But if you knew everything, you wouldn't be wondering at all.

[6] LIGURIO I believe it's because all women are suspicious.

[7] NICIA It's not that. She's the sweetest person in the world and the most obliging. But because one of the neighbourhood women once told her that if she made a vow to go forty mornings in a row to hear the first mass at Santa Maria dei Servi, she'd get pregnant, so she made a vow, and she went perhaps twenty mornings. And you know, one of those lecherous friars began to hang around so that she refused to go back. It's not right, though, that the ones who ought to be giving a good example behave like that. Am I right?

[8] LIGURIO By Lucifer, it's absolutely true.

[9] NICIA Since then, she's been like a hare with her ears pricked; and if you suggest anything she finds a thousand arguments against it.

[10] LIGURIO I'm not amazed any more. But how was that vow fulfilled?

[11] NICIA By dispensation.

[12] LIGURIO That's good. But now, if you have them, give me twenty-five ducats, because in cases like this you have to spend and make the friar your friend quickly, and give him hope of better things to come.

[13] NICIA Here, take them, this doesn't bother me. I'll economise elsewhere.

[14] LIGURIO These friars are cunning, astute. That figures, because they know our sins and their own. And someone who isn't familiar with them could be deceived and not know how to string them along to do what they want. For this reason, I wouldn't want you to spoil everything by speaking, because a man like you, who spends all day

studying, understands those books of his, but doesn't know how to discuss the ways of the world. (This fellow is such a fool I'm afraid he'll ruin everything.)

[15] NICIA Tell me what you want me to do.

[16] LIGURIO I want you to leave the talking to me, and don't say anything unless I give you a signal.

[17] NICIA That's fine by me. What signal will you give?

[18] LIGURIO I'll close an eye, I'll bite my lip.... Hey, no: let's do it this way. How long is it since you spoke to the friar?

[19] NICIA It's more than ten years.

[20] LIGURIO That's good. I'll tell him that you have gone deaf, and you won't answer and you won't say anything at all unless we speak loudly.

[21] NICIA That's what I'll do.

[22] LIGURIO Besides that, don't be upset if I say something that seems to have nothing to do with what we want, because everything will turn out to be relevant.

[23] NICIA Very well!

[24] LIGURIO But I can see the friar's talking to a woman. Let's wait for him to get away from her.

Scene 3

FRIAR TIMOTEO and A WOMAN

[25] FRIAR If you wanted to confess, I'll do what you want.

[26] WOMAN Not today. I've got somebody waiting for me. It's enough to have got it off my chest just standing here. Did you say that Mass of the Virgin Mary?

[27] FRIAR My lady, yes.

[28] WOMAN Take this florin now and say the Mass of the Dead every Monday for two months for the soul of my husband. And even though he was a brute of a man, my flesh still longs for him. I can't help tingling when I remember him. But do you think he's in purgatory?

[29] FRIAR Without a doubt.

[30] WOMAN I'm not so sure about that. You know what he used to do to me sometimes. Oh, how I complained to you about it. I moved as far away as I could but he was so insistent. Oooh, good Lord!.

[31] FRIAR Fear not: God's mercy is great. Provided man does not lack the will, he will not lack the time to repent.

[32] WOMAN Do you think the Turk will invade Italy?

[33] FRIAR If you don't say your prayers, yes.

[34] WOMAN Dear me, God help us with their diabolical ways. I'm terrified of that impaling business. But I've just spotted a woman in church who has some flax of mine. I'm going to have a word with her. Good day to you.

[35] FRIAR Farewell.

Scene 4

FRIAR TIMOTEO, LIGURIO and MESSEER NICIA

[36] FRIAR Women are the most charitable people in the world, and the most annoying. If you brush them off, you banish both annoyance and advantage. If you entertain them, you end up with annoyance and advantage together. And the truth is that where there's honey there's flies. What brings you here, gentlemen? Isn't that Messer Nicia I see?

[37] LIGURIO Speak loudly. He's gone so deaf that he hardly hears anything.

[38] FRIAR Good day to you, your Honour.

[39] LIGURIO Louder.

[40] FRIAR Good day!

[41] NICIA Good day to you, Father.

[42] FRIAR What brings you here?

[43] NICIA Very well.

[44] LIGURIO You'll have to talk to me, Father, because if you wanted him to hear you, you'd have to create uproar in the piazza.

[45] FRIAR What do you want from me?

[46] LIGURIO Messer Nicia here and another gentleman, whose name I'll tell you later, have several hundred ducats to be distributed as alms.

[47] NICIA Shit a brick!

[48] LIGURIO (Be quiet, damn you. It's not much.) Don't be surprised, Father, at anything he says, because he can't hear and sometimes he thinks he hears and his answers are way off the mark.

[49] FRIAR You continue, then, and he can say what he likes.

[50] LIGURIO I have part of the sum with me. And they have determined that you should be the person to distribute it.

[51] FRIAR Most willingly.

[52] LIGURIO But before these alms can be distributed, it is necessary that you help us in a strange matter that has befallen his Honour, where only you can help, and on which the honour of his family depends completely.

[53] FRIAR What is that?

[54] LIGURIO I'm not sure if you know Camillo Calfucci, the nephew of his Honour here.

[55] FRIAR Yes, I know him.

[56] LIGURIO He went off a year a go, on some business he had, to France; and not having a wife, because she had died, he left his unmarried daughter in the care of a convent, that it is not necessary to name for the moment.

[57] FRIAR What happened?

[58] LIGURIO It happened, either through the carelessness of the nuns or through the headstrong nature of the girl, that she finds herself four months pregnant: with the result that, unless prudent remedy is taken, his Honour, the nuns, the girl, Camillo, and the Calfucci family are disgraced. And his Honour fears this shame so greatly that he has vowed that provided it is not made public he'll give three hundred ducats in God's name.

[59] NICIA (Balderdash!)

[60] LIGURIO (Keep quiet!) And he will give them through you. And you alone, and the abbess, can provide a remedy.

[61] FRIAR How?

[62] LIGURIO By persuading the abbess to give the girl a potion to make her abort.

[63] FRIAR I'll have to think this over carefully.

[64] LIGURIO What is there to think over? Just look at how many good things will flow from this action. You'll maintain the honour of the convent, of the girl and her relations; you'll restore a daughter to her father; you'll be doing a favour for his Honour, for all his relations; you'll do as many good works with these three hundred ducats as you can. And on the other hand, you're not harming anything except a bit of unborn flesh, devoid of feeling, that could be lost in a thousand ways. And I do believe that a deed is good when it is good for the majority and the majority are happy with it.

[65] FRIAR So be it, in the name of God! Let what you wish be done. And let everything be done in the name of God and of charity. Tell me the name of the convent, give me the potion, and if appropriate, that money so as to be able to begin to do some good.

[66] LIGURIO Now you're looking like that cleric I thought you were. Take this part of the money. The Convent is... But wait. There's a woman there in church waving at me. I'll be back in a moment. Don't leave Messer Nicia alone. I want to have a couple of words with her.

Scene 5

FRIAR and MESSER NICIA

[67] FRIAR This girl, how old is she?

[68] NICIA I'm gaping in amazement!

[69] FRIAR I said, how old is the girl?

[70] NICIA Curses on him!

[71] FRIAR Why?

[72] NICIA So that he is knows how it feels.

[73] FRIAR (I seem to caught in a trap. I'm dealing with one man who's mad and one who's deaf. One flees and the other doesn't hear. But unless these are counterfeit, I'll come out of it better than them. Here's Ligurio coming back over here.)

Scene 6

LIGURIO, FRIAR, and MESSER NICIA

[74] LIGURIO (Keep quiet, your Honour.) Oh! I have great news, Father.

[75] FRIAR What news?

[76] LIGURIO That woman I've just spoke to has told me that the girl miscarried on her own.

[77] FRIAR Good news! (And good-bye to these alms, that will go down the drain too.)

[78] LIGURIO What did you say?

[79] FRIAR I said that you have all the more obligation to give these alms.

[80] LIGURIO Alms will be given, whenever you wish. But you'll have to do something else to help his Honour.

[81] FRIAR What is that?

[82] LIGURIO Something less onerous, less scandalous, more acceptable to us and more advantageous to you.

[83] FRIAR What is it? I'm on such close terms with you, and I seem to have forged such a relationship that there is nothing that I wouldn't do.

[84] LIGURIO I'll tell you inside the church, just you and me; and his Honour will be happy to wait here and let me have two words. You wait here, and we'll be back shortly.

[85] NICIA As the toad said to the harrow.

[86] FRIAR Let's go.

Scene 7

MESSER NICIA *alone*

[87] NICIA Is it day or night? Am I awake or dreaming? Am I drunk, even though I haven't had a drink yet today, to go along with this nonsense. We agree to tell the friar one thing and he says something else. Then he wanted me to pretend to be deaf. I would have had to fill my ears with pitch like Ogier the Dane to avoid hearing the crazy things he said. And God knows why he said them. I'm left twenty-five ducats the poorer and we haven't talked about my business yet. And now they've left me here like a shag on a rock. But here they are coming back. Curses on them if they haven't discussed my business.

Scene 8

FRIAR, LIGURIO *and* NICIA

[88] FRIAR Get the women to come. I know what I have to say. And if my authority prevails, we'll seal this match this evening.

[89] LIGURIO Messer Nicia, Friar Timoteo is prepared to do everything. You have to see that the ladies come.

[90] NICIA You've given me new life. Will it be a boy?

[91] LIGURIO A boy.

[92] NICIA I'm choked up with emotion.

[93] FRIAR You go into the church. I'll wait for the ladies. Keep to the side, so that they don't see you. And when they've left, I'll tell you what I've done.

Scene 9

FRIAR TIMOTEO, *alone*

[94] FRIAR I don't know who's deceived whom. This rogue Ligurio came to me here with that first tale to test me, so that if I agreed to that he could lead me more easily to this. If I hadn't agreed, he would never have spoken of this one so as not to reveal their plans to no avail. And the first one, which was a fabrication, didn't matter to them. The fact is that I have been deceived, but this deception is to my advantage. Messer Nicia and Callimaco are rich, and each of them, in his different way, is about to gain considerably. It's essential that the matter remain secret, because the consequences of speaking about it are as serious for them as it is for me. Whatever happens, I'm not sorry. It is indeed true that I fear I'll have some difficulty, because Madonna Lucrezia is wise and good. But I'll get at her through her goodness. And in the end, women don't have much of a brain; and if there's one who knows how to put two words together, it's broadcast at once, because in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king. And here she is with her mother, who is indeed a tough customer, and she'll be a great help to me in making her bow to my wishes.

Scene 10

SOSTRATA and LUCREZIA

[95] SOSTRATA I know, dear girl, that you know that I have as much regard for your honour and your happiness as anyone in the world, and that I wouldn't advise you to do anything that wasn't right. I've told you and I'll tell you again, that if Friar Timoteo tells you that there is no burden on your conscience, then you should do it without another thought.

[96] LUCREZIA I've always been afraid in case Messer Nicia's desire to have children made us do something wrong. That's why, whenever he's talked to me about anything, I've been seized by suspicion and doubt, especially after you know what happened when I went to the Servi. But of all the things discussed, this seems to me the strangest: to have to submit my body to this shame, to be the cause of a man's death for shaming me. Because even if I was the last woman left in the world and if the human race was to rise again from me, I don't believe that I would be allowed to do something like this.

[97] SOSTRATA There are lots of things I can't explain, my girl. You'll talk to the friar, you'll see what he tells you, and you'll do what you're advised to by him, by us, by everybody who cares about you.

[98] LUCREZIA This is agonising.

Scene 11

FRIAR, LUCREZIA and SOSTRATA

[99] FRIAR Welcome to you both. I know what you to discuss with me because Messer Nicia has spoken to me. To tell the truth, I have spent more than two hours with my books studying this case, and after much consideration I find many things, both in general and in particular, that pertain to us.

[100] LUCREZIA Are you serious or are you joking?

[101] FRIAR Ah, Madonna Lucrezia! Is this a joking matter? Have we only just met?

[102] LUCREZIA Father, no. But I think this is the strangest thing I ever heard.

[103] FRIAR My lady, I believe you. But I don't want you to talk like that anymore. There are many things that, from a distance, seem terrifying, unbearable, and strange, and when you are up close they turn out to be natural, bearable, familiar. That's why they say that the fear is worse than the evil itself. And this is one of those things.

[104] LUCREZIA May God so wish it so.

[105] FRIAR I wish to return to what I was saying before. As far as your conscience is concerned, you have these general premises: where there is a certain good and an evil that is uncertain, you should never abandon the good for fear of the evil. Here there is a certain good: you will become pregnant, you will acquire a soul for the Lord God. The uncertain evil is that the man who lies with you after the potion will die. There is record also of those who don't die, but because it is not certain, it is good that Messer Nicia should not run that risk. As for whether the act is a sin, that's easy: because it is the will that sins, not the body; and it's a sin if it displeases the husband, whereas you are obliging him; or if you take pleasure in it, whereas you find no pleasure. Besides this, you have to consider the purpose in all these things. And your purpose is to fill a seat in paradise and make your husband happy. The Bible says that the daughters of Lot, thinking that they were the last women left in the world, lay with their father. And because their intention was good, they did not sin.

[106] LUCREZIA What are you persuading me to do?

[107] SOSTRATA Let yourself be persuaded, my girl. Can't you see that a woman without children has no home? When her husband dies, she is left like an animal, abandoned by everybody.

[108] FRIAR I swear to you, my lady, on this consecrated breast, that the burden of conscience in complying with your husband's wishes in this matter is just like that of eating meat on Wednesdays, which is a sin that can be washed away with holy water.

[109] LUCREZIA What are you leading me into, Father?

[110] FRIAR I am leading you into something that will give you cause to say prayers for me to God forever, and bring you more satisfaction in a year's time than now.

[111] SOSTRATA She'll do what you want. I'm going to put her to bed tonight myself. What are you afraid of, snot-face? There are fifty women in this town who'd raise their hands to heaven for this.

[112] LUCREZIA I accept, but I don't think for a moment that I will be alive tomorrow morning.

[113] FRIAR Have no fear, my daughter. I'll pray to God on your behalf. I'll say the prayer of the Archangel Raphael, so that he'll be with you. Farewell and prepare yourself for that mystery, because it is getting dark.

[114] SOSTRATA Peace be with you, Father.

[115] LUCREZIA May God and the Virgin Mary help me and protect me from harm.

Scene 12

FRIAR, LIGURIO, and MESSER NICIA

[116] FRIAR O Ligurio, come on out!

[117] LIGURIO How is it going?

[118] FRIAR Well. The women have gone home and have agreed to do everything. There won't be any trouble, because her mother will go and stay with her and will put her to bed herself.

[119] NICIA Is this the truth?

[120] FRIAR Well, well! Your deafness is cured?

[121] LIGURIO St Clement has granted him grace.

[122] FRIAR You should put up a votive image to spread the news abroad, so that this too is to my advantage as well as yours.

[123] NICIA Let's not get into side issues. Is my wife going to make trouble about doing what I want?

[124] FRIAR No, I tell you.

[125] NICIA I'm the happiest man in the world.

[126] FRIAR I believe you are. You'll land yourself a boy child, and those without can go without.

[127] LIGURIO Go about your prayers, Father, and if we need anything else we'll come and find you. Your Honour, you go to your wife to keep her firm in her resolve, and I'll go and find Master Callimaco, and tell him to send you the potion. And an hour after sunset, let's meet again to arrange what we have to do at bedtime.

[128] NICIA Good thinking. Good-bye.

[129] FRIAR Farewell.

Act Four

Scene 1

CALLIMACO, *alone*

[1] CALLIMACO I wish I knew what those two have done. Is it possible that Ligurio's not going to come? It's not late afternoon, it's sunset. I've been so anxious and I still am. Fortune and Nature do, indeed, hold our lives in balance: no good ever comes from one without the other tipping the scales with grief. The more my hopes have risen, the more fear has surged too. Oh, alas! Can I possibly survive this anguish, tormented by these fears and this hope. I'm like a ship, buffeted by two opposing winds, that grows all the more fearful the closer it is to port. Messer Nicia's simple-mindedness gives me hope; Lucrezia's prudence and firmness fills me with fear. Alas, I find no rest anywhere. Sometimes I try to control myself; I reproach myself for my wild agitation and I say to myself: "What are you doing? Have you gone mad? When you get her, what next? You'll realize your mistake, you'll regret the effort and the worry you put into it. Don't you know how little good there is to be found in the things that man desires, when compared to what man imagines he'll find there?" On the other hand, the worst that can happen to you is that you die and go to hell; plenty of people have died, and plenty of good men have gone to hell. Should you be ashamed of going there yourself? Turn and face your destiny; flee ill, and if you can't escape it, take it like a man. Don't just roll over, don't give in like a woman." And so I try to pull myself together, but not for long, because I'm assailed from every quarter by such desire to have just one chance with her that I feel myself faltering from head to toe. My legs wobble, my gut churns, my heart pounds in my chest, my arms go limp, my tongue's numb, my eyes glaze over, my head spins. But if I could just find Ligurio, I could talk to him. But here he comes in a great rush. His news will either keep me alive a bit longer or be the death of me.

Scene 2

LIGURIO and CALLIMACO

[2] LIGURIO I've never wanted to find Callimaco as much as I do now, and I've never had so much trouble finding him. If I was bringing him bad news I'd have met him at once. I've been to his house, to Piazza della Signoria, to the Mercato Vecchio, to the bench outside the Spini bank, to the Tornaquinci *loggia*, and I couldn't find him. These lovers have quicksilver under their feet: you can't stop them.

[3] CALLIMACO What's stopping me from calling him? He seems happy enough. O Ligurio, Ligurio!

[4] LIGURIO Hey, Callimaco, where have you been?

[5] CALLIMACO What's the news?

[6] LIGURIO Good news.

[7] CALLIMACO Really good?

[8] LIGURIO Excellent.

[9] CALLIMACO Did the friar do what was required?

[10] LIGURIO He did.

[11] CALLIMACO Lucrezia is happy?

[12] LIGURIO She is.

[13] CALLIMACO God bless the friar, I will pray for him always.

[14] LIGURIO (That's a good one! As if God grants his grace for vice as well as for virtue!) The friar will be wanting more than prayers.

[15] CALLIMACO What will he want?

[16] LIGURIO Money.

[17] CALLIMACO We'll give him some. How much did you promise him?

[18] LIGURIO Three hundred ducats.

[19] CALLIMACO Well done!

[20] LIGURIO The judge has already shelled out twenty-five.

[21] CALLIMACO How did you manage that?

[22] LIGURIO Just accept that he did.

[23] CALLIMACO And Lucrezia's mother, what did she do?

[24] LIGURIO Almost everything. As soon as she realised that her daughter was going to have a sin-free night of bliss, she did not let up on beseeching, ordering, besieging Lucrezia, until she took her to see the friar and there she kept at it so that she agreed.

[25] CALLIMACO Dear God, what have I done to deserve such happiness? I'm going to die of joy!

[26] LIGURIO (What am I dealing with? First it's for joy, then it's for sorrow – he wants to die whatever happens.) Have you organised the potion?

[27] CALLIMACO Yes, I have.

[28] LIGURIO What are you sending him?

[29] CALLIMACO A cup of hippocras, which will suit our purpose: it soothes the stomach and lightens the heart. Oh no, no, no!

[30] LIGURIO What is it? What's the matter?

[31] CALLIMACO There's nothing to be done about it.

[32] LIGURIO What the hell is it?

[33] CALLIMACO We've achieved nothing. I've bricked myself into a corner!

[34] LIGURIO How? Why don't you tell me? Take your hands away from your face.

[35] CALLIMACO Don't you remember that I told Messer Nicia that you and he, Siro and I would seize someone to put into bed with his wife?

[36] LIGURIO So?

[37] CALLIMACO So? If I'm with you, I can't be the person who's seized; and if I'm not with you, he'll tumble to the deception.

[38] LIGURIO You're right. But isn't there some way around it?

[39] CALLIMACO I'm sure there isn't.

[40] LIGURIO There must be.

[41] CALLIMACO What?

[42] LIGURIO I want to think it over for a moment.

[43] CALLIMACO That's a comfort. If you have to think it over, I'm done for.

[44] LIGURIO I've got it!

[45] CALLIMACO What have you got?

[46] LIGURIO I'll get the friar, who's helped us up to now, to finish this off.

[47] CALLIMACO How?

[48] LIGURIO We all have to disguise ourselves. I'll disguise the friar: he'll alter his voice, his face, his clothes, and I'll tell his Honour that he's you. He'll believe it.

[49] CALLIMACO I like it. But what will I do?

[50] LIGURIO I reckon that you put on a tunic and you come along with a lute in your hand, around the corner of his house, singing a little song.

[51] CALLIMACO With my face uncovered?

[52] LIGURIO Yes, because if you were wearing a mask, he'd get suspicious.

[53] CALLIMACO He'll recognise me.

[54] LIGURIO No, he won't, because I want you to pull a face, and open your mouth, screw it up and twist it around, and close an eye.... Try it now.

[55] CALLIMACO Like this?

[56] LIGURIO No.

[57] CALLIMACO Like this?

[58] LIGURIO It's not enough.

[59] CALLIMACO This way, then.

[60] LIGURIO Yes, yes! Remember that. I've got a nose at home. I want you to wear it.

[61] CALLIMACO Very well. Then what?

[62] LIGURIO When you appear around the corner, we'll be here, we'll take the lute from you, we'll seize you, we'll spin you around, we'll take you into the house, and we'll put you to bed. And the rest you'll have to do by yourself.

[63] CALLIMACO Making it there is the hard bit.

[64] LIGURIO Hard or not, that's up to you, and it's up to you to make sure you can come again another time.

[65] CALLIMACO What to you mean?

[66] LIGURIO You have to make her yours tonight. Before you leave, you tell her who you are, you reveal the deception, you'll show her the love you bear her, you'll tell her how much you care for her; and how without compromising her honour she can be your friend, and how with great cost to her honour your enemy. It's impossible that she should refuse to come to an understanding with you and that she should want this night to be the only one.

[67] CALLIMACO Do you really think so?

[68] LIGURIO I'm sure. But let's not waste time. It's been dark for two hours now. Call Siro, send the potion to Messer Nicia, and wait for me at home. I'll go and fetch the friar, I'll disguise him and I'll bring him here and we'll meet the judge and we'll do what's left to be done.

[69] CALLIMACO Good plan. Off you go.

Scene 3

CALLIMACO and SIRO

[70] CALLIMACO Hey, Siro!

[71] SIRO Yes, sir!

[72] CALLIMACO Come over here.

[73] SIRO Here I am.

[74] CALLIMACO Get the silver cup that's in the closet in my chamber, cover it with a piece of linen, and bring it to me. Make sure you don't spill any on the way.

[75] SIRO At once.

[76] CALLIMACO He's been with me for ten years and he's always served me faithfully. I'm sure I can trust him this time too; and even though I haven't told him what we're plotting, he can guess what it is because he is a fine rogue, and I can see that he is going along with it.

[77] SIRO Here it is.

[78] CALLIMACO That's fine. Now quickly, go to Messer Nicia's and tell him that this is the medicine his wife has to take straight after dinner, and the sooner she has dinner the better; and as soon as we're all there ready at the corner, he should come down. Off you go now.

[79] SIRO I'm off.

[80] CALLIMACO Just a moment! If he want's you to wait for him, then wait and come back with him. And if he doesn't want you to wait, then come back here to me when you've given it to him and when you've given him the message. Is that clear?

[81] SIRO Yes, sir.

Scene 4

CALLIMACO, *alone*

[82] CALLIMACO I'm waiting for Ligurio to come back with the friar. People are right when they say that waiting's the hardest part. Every hour I'm a stone lighter, just thinking about where I am now and where I could be in two hours' time, afraid that something's going to happen and spoil my plans. And if it did, then this would be the last night of my life, because I'd either throw myself in the Arno or hang myself, or jump out of those windows up there, or stab myself with a knife on her doorstep. I'll kill myself somehow. But is that Ligurio I can see? It is. He's got someone with him, who looks like some hunchback cripple: that must be the friar in disguise. These friars, you know one and you know them all! Who's the other fellow who's joined them? It looks like Siro. He must have run his errand to the judge. Yes, it's him. I want to wait for them here so I can arrange things with them.

Scene 5

SIRO, LIGURIO, FRIAR TIMOTEO *in disguise*, and CALLIMACO

[83] SIRO Who's that with you, Ligurio?

[84] LIGURIO A gentleman.

[85] SIRO Is he lame or pretending?

[86] LIGURIO Mind your own business.

[87] SIRO Oh, he looks like a proper scoundrel.

[88] LIGURIO Hey, keep your voice down, we're sick of you. Where's Callimaco?

[89] CALLIMACO I'm here. Welcome, one and all.

[90] LIGURIO O Callimaco, have a word with this fool Siro. He's talking way too much nonsense.

[91] CALLIMACO Siro, listen to me. This evening you have to do everything Ligurio tells you. When he gives you an order, just imagine it's me. And everything you see, touch or hear you have to keep absolutely secret, in the name of everything I own, of my honour, and my life, and your welfare.

[92] SIRO I will.

[93] CALLIMACO Did you give the cup to the judge?

[94] SIRO Yes, sir.

[95] CALLIMACO What did he say?

[96] SIRO That he will have everything ready.

[97] FRIAR Is this Callimaco?

[98] CALLIMACO At your command. Let us each give our word: you should dispose of me and my fortune as if it was your own.

[99] FRIAR I understand and I'm sure of it; and I am doing for you something that I would not have done for anyone else in the world.

[100] CALLIMACO Your efforts will not be wasted.

[101] FRIAR Your good will towards me is sufficient.

[102] LIGURIO That's enough formality. We're going to disguise ourselves, Siro and I. Callimaco, you come with us, so that you can go about your business. The friar will wait for us here. We'll be back very shortly and we'll go and get Messer Nicia.

[103] CALLIMACO Good idea. Let's go.

[104] FRIAR I'll wait for you.

Scene 6

FRIAR TIMOTEO *in disguise, alone*

[105] FRIAR It's true what they say: it's bad company that leads men to the gallows. And often people get into as much trouble for being too obliging and too nice as for being too mean. God knows, I didn't intend anyone any harm. I stayed in my cell, I said my office, I looked after my faithful. Then this devil Ligurio landed in front of me, and made me dip my finger in one sin, then my arm and then my whole body, and I don't know where I'm going to land up. But I console myself with this: when something matters to a lot of people, a lot of people take care. But here's Ligurio and his servant coming back.

Scene 7

FRIAR TIMOTEO, LIGURIO, and SIRO

[106] FRIAR Welcome back.

[107] LIGURIO Do we look good?

[108] FRIAR Excellent.

[109] LIGURIO The judge is missing. Let's go towards his house. It's three hours since the sun went down. We should be on our way.

[110] SIRO Who's that opening his front door? Is it his servant?

[111] LIGURIO No, it's him! Ha, ha, ha! Uh!

[112] SIRO You're laughing?

[113] LIGURIO Who wouldn't laugh? He's wearing a jacket that doesn't cover his arse; and what the hell has he got on his head? It looks like an owl-hood like the canons wear. And a little sword underneath, ha, ha! He's muttering something or other. Let's just stand out of the way and we'll hear some drama about his wife.

Scene 8

MESSER NICIA

[114] NICIA What a carry-on from my lunatic wife! She sent the maid to her mother's house and the manservant to the country house. For this I praise her, but I do not praise her for making such a fuss before she agreed to go to bed. "I don't want to! What'll I do? What are you making me do? Oh, Mother of God!" And if her mother hadn't given her a shove up the arse, she would never have gone to bed. A pox on that woman. I like to see women being fussy, but no so fussy. That cat-brained woman has driven us to our wits' end. If I were to say, "May the wisest woman in Florence go to the gallows!", she would say, "What did I do to you?" I know that the cock will come home to roost; and before I throw in the towel, I'll be able to say, like Mona Ghinga: "I saw it with my own hands." I look good, don't I. Who would recognise me? I look taller, younger, slimmer: there's not a woman in Florence who let me pay to go to bed with her. But where am I going to find those chaps?

Scene 9

LIGURIO, MESSER NICIA, FRIAR TIMOTEO and SIRO

[115] LIGURIO Good evening, your Honour.

[116] NICIA Oh, uh, eh!

[117] LIGURIO Don't be frightened: it's us.

[118] NICIA Oh! You're all here, are you? If you didn't identify yourselves immediately, I was going to run you through with this sword, as far as I could up to the hilt. You're Ligurio, and you're Siro. The other one's the doctor, eh?

[119] LIGURIO Yes, your Honour.

[120] NICIA Look! Oh, he's changed himself completely! No one would know him!

[121] LIGURIO I made him put two walnuts in his mouth so his voice wouldn't give him away.

[122] NICIA You're a right donkey!

[123] LIGURIO Why?

[124] NICIA Why didn't you tell me before, and I would have put a couple in my mouth too. You know it's important not to be recognised by our speech.

[125] LIGURIO Here! Put this in your moth.

[126] NICIA What is it?

[127] LIGURIO A ball of wax.

[128] NICIA Give it here... ca! poo! cack! cu! koo! Spth! A plague upon you, you scoundrel!

[129] LIGURIO Forgive me: I gave you the wrong one and I didn't notice.

[130] NICIA Yuckack! Poo! What was it made of?

[131] LIGURIO Aloes.

[132] NICIA Curses on you! Spth! Poo! Doctor, haven't you got something to say about this?

[133] FRIAR Ligurio has made me cross.

[134] NICIA Oh, you disguise your voice really well!

[135] LIGURIO Let's not waste any more time here. I want to be the captain, give the army its battle orders for the day: Callimaco can lead on the right horn, I'll be on the left. His Honour will be between the two horns; Siro will bring up the rear, to help anyone in the company who goes down. The password is St Cuckoo.

[136] NICIA Who's St Cuckoo?

[137] LIGURIO He is the most revered saint in France. Let's go. Let's set the ambush on this corner. Just listen: I can hear a lute.

[138] NICIA Yes, it is. What are we going to do?

[139] LIGURIO We should send a scout to establish who it is; and in the light of his report we will act.

[140] NICIA Who's going?

[141] LIGURIO Off you go, Siro: you know what you have to do. Consider, examine, return at once, report.

[142] SIRO I'm off.

[143] NICIA I wouldn't want us to end up with a lemon, some old man who's weak or sickly, and have to go through this charade again tomorrow evening.

[144] LIGURIO Don't worry, Siro is a reliable chap. Here he is, coming back. What have you found, Siro

[145] SIRO He's the most beautiful fellow you ever saw. He's not even 25 years old, and he's walking along alone just in his tunic, playing the lute.

[146] NICIA He's just what we need, if you're right. But if you're not, then you're in it up to here!

[147] SIRO He's just as I said.

[148] LIGURIO Let's wait for him to appear around the corner and then we'll jump on him.

[149] NICIA Stand over here, Doctor. You're standing there like a lump of wood. Here he is!

[150] CALLIMACO

Since you won't let me come to your bed,
may the devil come instead!

[151] LIGURIO Keep still. Hand over that lute.

[152] CALLIMACO Ow! What did I do?
[153] NICIA You'll see. Cover his head. Gag him.
[154] LIGURIO Spin him around.
[155] NICIA Do it again, and again. Take him inside.
[156] FRIAR Messer Nicia, I'm going off to rest, because I have a killing headache. And unless you need me, I won't be back in the morning.
[157] NICIA Yes, Doctor, don't come back. We can manage by ourselves.

Scene 9

FRIAR TIMOTEO, *alone*

[158] FRIAR They're burrowed in at home, and I'll go back to the convent. And you, dear audience, don't start complaining, because tonight nobody will sleep, so that the acts will not be interrupted in time. I will recite the office. Ligurio and Siro will have dinner, because they haven't eaten all day. The judge will go from the bedchamber to the kitchen parlour, to make sure the roast keeps turning. Callimaco and Madonna Lucrezia will not sleep, because I know that if you and I were in their places, then we wouldn't be sleeping. laces, then we wouldn't be sleeping.

Act Five

Scene 1

FRIAR TIMOTEO

[1] FRIAR I couldn't sleep a wink all night I so wanted to know how Callimaco and the others got on. I set about passing the time in various ways: I said matins; I read a chapter from *The Lives of the Saints*; I went into the church and lit a lamp that had gone out; I changed the veil on a Madonna that works miracles. How many times have I told the friars to keep it clean! And then they're amazed when the faithful don't come flocking. I remember when there were five hundred votive images: and now there aren't even twenty. It's all our fault, because we didn't know how to maintain her reputation. We used to go there in procession every evening after complines, we had *laudi* sung there every Saturday, we always made our vows there so that people would see fresh votive images, and at confession, we urged men and women to make their vows there too. Now we don't do any of these things anymore, and then we're amazed that things have gone cold. Oh, how silly my friars are! But I can hear a great din in Messer Nicia's house. Upon my word, here he is. They're freeing the prisoner. I've arrived just in time. They've squeezed the last drop out of him, and it's dawn already. I'm going to stop and listen to what they say without letting myself be seen.

Scene 2

MESSER NICIA, LIGURIO, SIRO, and CALLIMACO *in disguise*

[2] NICIA You take him that side and I'll be this side, and you, Siro hold him by the back of the tunic.

[3] CALLIMACO Don't hurt me!

[4] LIGURIO Don't be frightened. Off you go!

[5] NICIA We shouldn't go any further.

[6] LIGURIO You're right: let's release him here. Let's turn him around a couple of times, so that he doesn't know where he came from. Spin him around, Siro.

[7] SIRO There!

[8] NICIA Spin him one more time.

[9] SIRO There we go!

[10] CALLIMACO My lute!

[11] LIGURIO Off you go, you scoundrel, beat it! If I hear you've blabbed a word of this, I'll cut your throat.

[12] NICIA He's run away. Let's go and get our gear off. We have to be up and about early so that it doesn't look as though we've been up all night.

[13] LIGURIO You're quite right.

[14] NICIA Ligurio and Siro, you go and find Dr Callimaco and tell him that it all went well.

[15] LIGURIO What can we tell him? We don't know anything. You know, because you were inside. We went off drinking in the cellar. You stayed on hand with the mother-in-law, and we never saw you again until now, when you called us to send him away.

[16] NICIA You're quite right. Oh! I've got some fine tales to tell you. My wife was in bed in the dark. Sostrata was waiting for me beside the fire. I got there with this brute of a lad; and just to make sure that there were no nasty surprises, I took him into a pantry off the parlour, where there was a watery lamp giving off a faint glow, so that he couldn't look me in the face.

[17] LIGURIO Wisely done.

[18] NICIA I made him undress: he whimpered in protest. I turned on him like a dog, and he couldn't wait to get his clothes off: there he was, naked. He's got an ugly face, he had a hideous nose and a twisted mouth... but you never saw such beautiful flesh: white, soft, firm... and don't ask about the rest.

[19] LIGURIO Best left unsaid. What's the point of seeing all of him?

[20] NICIA Are you kidding? Once I'd got my hands on him, I wanted to see if he was healthy. If he'd had sores, where would that have left me? It's easy for you to talk!

[21] LIGURIO You're quite right.

[22] NICIA When I'd seen he was healthy, I dragged him off and took him, in the dark, into the bedchamber. I put him to bed, and before I left I decided to feel for myself how things were going, because I can tell a bee from a bull's foot.

[23] LIGURIO You've managed this with such prudence!

[24] NICIA Once I'd touched and felt everything, I left the room and locked the door. And I went to join my mother-in-law, who was beside the fire, and we sat and talked all night.

[25] LIGURIO What did you talk about?

[26] NICIA About Lucrezia's silliness, and how it would have been better if she had given in at the beginning without so much to-ing and fro-ing. Then we talked about the child: I can already feel myself holding the little fellow in my arms! Until I heard the clock strike at dawn. I was worried that daylight would overtake us so I went into to the bedroom. Can you believe it? I couldn't get that scoundrel up!

[27] LIGURIO I can imagine.

[28] NICIA He'd enjoyed his muffin! But he did get up: I called you and we brought him outside.

[29] LIGURIO It all went well.

[30] NICIA What will you say if I tell you I'm sorry?

[31] LIGURIO What for?

[32] NICIA For that poor young man: that he should have to die so young and that this night should cost him so dearly.

[33] LIGURIO Oh, don't give it a thought! Let him worry about that!

[34] NICIA You're quite right. But I can't wait to see Dr Callimaco to tell him how happy I am.

[35] LIGURIO He'll be out here within the hour. But it's already light. We'll go and take these costumes off. What will you do?

[36] NICIA I'll go home too and put on my best clothes. I'll get my wife up and washed, I'll get her to come and be churched. I want you and Callimaco to be there and I want us to speak to the friar to thank him and reward him for the good turn he has done us.

[37] LIGURIO Good idea: that's what we'll do. Until later.

Scene 3

FRIAR, *alone*

[38] FRIAR I've heard their conversation and I like it all, considering what a fool the judge is. But I'm particularly delighted by the last bit. And seeing that they're coming to visit me at home, I won't stay here any longer, but I'll wait at the church where what I have to offer will have greater currency. But who's that coming out of the house over there? It looks like Ligurio, and that must be Callimaco with him. I don't want them to see me yet, for that very reason. And even if they don't come and see me, I'll still be in time to go and see them.

Scene 4

CALLIMACO and LIGURIO

[39] CALLIMACO As I told you, my dear Ligurio, I was reluctant until the early hours of the morning; and even though I took great pleasure, it didn't seem right. But when I had revealed to her who I was and how great was the love that I bore here, and how easily, on account of her husband's folly, we could live happily and without infamy at all, and when I promised her that, whenever God otherwise disposed of him, I would take her as my wife; and when, in addition to these true arguments had tasted the difference between my embrace and Nicia's, and between the kisses of a young lover and those of an old husband, after a sigh or two she said: "Since your cunning, my husband's foolishness, my mother's simplicity and the wickedness of my confessor have led me to do what I would never have done on my own, I will judge that it is the result of a heavenly disposition that so desires, and I am not capable of refusing what heaven wants me to accept. Therefore I take you as lord, master, guide. I want you as my father, my defender, and as my dearest good. And what my husband desired for one evening, I want him to have forever. You will become his best friend, and you will come to church this morning. From there you will come here to dine with us; and you'll come and go at will; and we will be able to come together at any time of the day, and without arousing suspicion." When I heard these words, I almost died of delight. I couldn't say a fraction of the things I would like to have said. As a result, I find myself the happiest, most contented man ever in the world; and if death and time do not bring this happiness to an end, I'll be more blessed than the blest, more sainted than the saints.

[40] LIGURIO I'm delighted with your success, and that everything I promised you has happened to you. But what do we do now?

[41] CALLIMACO We go over to the church, because I promised her I'd be there, when she comes with her mother and the judge.

[42] LIGURIO I can hear noises at his front door. It's the women, coming out, and the judge is right behind them.

[43] CALLIMACO Let's go into the church and wait for them there.

Scene 5

MESSER NICIA, LUCREZIA, and SOSTRATA

[44] NICIA Lucrezia, I think things should be done in accordance in a god-fearing fashion, not by running around like mad.

[45] LUCREZIA What's to be done next?

[46] NICIA Look at the way she answers! She's very cocky.

[47] SOSTRATA Don't be surprised: she's a little different.

[48] LUCREZIA What do you mean?

[49] NICIA I mean that I should go ahead and talk to the friar and tell him to come to the door of the church to meet you and take you inside to be churched, because this morning it is just as if you were reborn.

[50] LUCREZIA Why don't you go?

[51] NICIA You're very bold this morning. Yesterday evening she seemed half dead.

[52] LUCREZIA It's thanks to you.

[53] SOSTRATA Go and find the friar. But there's no need: he's already come out of the church.

[54] NICIA So he has.

Scene 6

FRIAR, NICIA, LUCREZIA CALLIMACO, LIGURIO, and SOSTRATA

[55] FRIAR I'm coming out here because Callimaco and Ligurio have told me that the judge and the ladies are coming to church. Here they are.

[56] NICIA *Bona dies*,¹⁰ Father.

[57] FRIAR My ladies, you are most welcome and congratulations Madonna Lucrezia: may God give you a handsome male child.

[58] LUCREZIA May it be God's will.

[59] FRIAR It will be, to be sure.

[60] NICIA Do I see Ligurio and Dr Callimaco in church?

[61] FRIAR Yes, your Honour, you do.

[62] NICIA Call them over.

[63] FRIAR Come over here.

[64] CALLIMACO God save you.

[65] NICIA Doctor, take my wife's hand.

[66] CALLIMACO Willingly.

[67] NICIA Lucrezia, this is the man who has provided us with a prop to support us in our old age.

[68] LUCREZIA I am indebted to him: and he must be our dear friend.

¹⁰ Good day.

[69] NICIA God bless you! And I want him and Ligurio to come and eat with us this morning.

[70] LUCREZIA Of course.

[71] NICIA And I want to give them the key to the door downstairs that opens onto the loggia, so that they can come back whenever it suits them. They have no women at home, and they live like animals.

[72] CALLIMACO I accept, and I'll use it when I can.

[73] FRIAR I'm owed money to distribute as alms.

[74] NICIA Rest assured, sir, it will be sent today.

[75] LIGURIO Hasn't anybody remembered Siro?

[76] NICIA All he has to do is ask. What's mine is his. Lucrezia, how many groats do you have to give to the friar for churhing you?

[77] LUCREZIA I can't remember.

[78] NICIA Come on, how many?

[79] LUCREZIA Give him ten.

[80] NICIA A pox choke you, woman!

[81] FRIAR And you, Madonna Sostrata, you seem to have sprouted a new shoot.

[82] SOSTRATA What woman wouldn't be happy?

[83] FRIAR Let's all go into the church, and there we'll say prayers of the Ordinary mass. Then, after the office, you will go and dine at your leisure. And you, dear audience, don't wait for us to come out again. It's a long office. I'll stay in the church and they will go home out the side door. Farewell.

Songs composed for the performance in Faenza in 1526

Song

to be sung before the play by a chorus of nymphs and shepherds

Because this life is short
and many are the pains
that we all suffer in life's grinding course,

we're following our whims
and passing time we know will not return,
since those who renounce pleasure
to live with anguish and with suffering
will never know the world's
fair wiles, or wicked ways,
or know the cruel events
that so oppress us all as mortal men.

To flee such tedium,
the solitary life is what we have chosen;
in joy and celebration,
we live as fair young men and happy nymphs.
We've come here now, and bring
our harmony to you,
to honour with our song
this happy feast and sweetest company.

Another reason brings us:
the reputation of your governor,¹¹
in whom all those good things
that God bestows are seen to come together.
For such supernal grace,
and fortunate condition,
you can rejoice, enjoy,
and give thanks to the one who sent him here.

¹¹ Francesco Guicciardino, sent by Clement VII as governor of Faenza. The *canzoni* at the beginning and between the acts of the play were added at his request. They arrived with Machiavelli's letter of 3 January 1526, not in time to be included in the edition that Guicciardini had printed in Cesena between December 1525 and January 1526.

II

Song after the first act

The man who does not know,
O Love, your mighty grandeur, hopes in vain
to ever bear true witness
to what is surely Heaven's greatest treasure;
he knows not how man lives and dies at once,
or how he can pursue ruin and flee good,
or how he loves himself
less than he loves another, or how fear and hope
do oftentimes both freeze and melt men's hearts,
nor does he know how men and Gods alike
do fear the weapons with which you are armed.

III

Third song after the second act

Anyone can see how happy the man is
who is born a fool and believes everything.
Ambition does not drive him,
fear does not move him,
the two things that are so often the seed
of tedium and sorrow.
This judge of ours,
in his desire for children,
would believe that pigs fly;
and he's put every other good thing out of his mind
and set his heart on this alone.

IV

Fourth song after the third act

So mellow is deceit
when carried through to its desired end,
that it relieves all anguish

and makes all taste of bitterness now sweet.
O rare and noble remedy,
you show the direct path to errant souls;
you, with your power so great,
bring blessing to mankind and wealth to Love;
you conquer, with no more than blessed counsel,
stones, poisons and enchantments.

V

Fifth song after the fourth act

O sweetest night, o blessed
hours of calm and darkness,
the boon companions of desire-filled lovers,
in you there gather all
the pleasures that make you
the single source of our blessedness.
You dispense just rewards
to all the throngs of lovers that befriend you
for their tireless labours.
O happy hours, you set
the ice of every breast afire with love.