

THE PLAY OF POLISCENA

Composed by Leonardo Aretino

THE PROLOGUE OF THE PLAY BEGINS

[The Author] I chastise mothers: let them not take their daughters, whom the extravagance of aristocrats already schemes to corrupt, to watch the splendor of holy men or grandiose spectacles.

I correct the habits of servants and good-for-nothing maids: let them not go astray after dishonest gain, saying suggestive things, or wickedly deceive their masters with deceitful words, persuading them to sell their property in order to pay procurers.

I would like to admonish fathers: let them not give free rein to perverse children, so that useless old age to come may not oppress them in the end; for they do not know how to supervise their offspring.

Read on! Although I am only a comic poet--and glad of it!--, do not disregard the things which my muse censures, oh reader!

THE PLOT OF THE COMEDY

When a certain young man named Graccus, the son of an old gentleman named Macharius, who was laboring in the Tuscan countryside, went to the temple of the gods one day, he saw Poliscena, of beautiful appearance, daughter of Calphurnia. When he saw her, he glowed with sudden love. He was soon revealing his love to his scheming servant Gullet, with whose help he believed he would be able to enjoy the charms of the girl Poliscena. But when Gullet made no progress, Graccus approached an old woman whom he supported at his house, called Tharatantara, promising her many things if she would be of help and assistance in his love-affair. The old lady first approaches Calphurnia, then Poliscena, and she brings the affairs entrusted to her to the desired conclusion with extraordinary cleverness. This

is the summary of the comedy, but the poet develops it with great skill.

ACT ONE

[Scene 1] Graccus, Gullet

[Graccus, alone] Oh God! I wish that a fever had carried me off on this unlucky day; because when I saw her, unobserved, barely hidden by her veil, with her well-bred appearance and in the prime of life, I burned with love on the spot. [Gullet enters unobserved.]

Gullet What's this? I see that the master's son is agitated.

Graccus [reliving the experience] I arrive at the temple of the gods when she does. I look around...

Gullet [aside] I wonder if something dreadful has happened to us. I can't imagine what it can be.

Graccus I set my love-sick eyes on her. She kept her eyes lowered with girlish modesty, because her awful mother, who controls her, practically keeps her in her lap...

Gullet [aside] What's all this talk, I'd like to know?

Graccus Calphurnia! May all the gods and goddesses strike her dead! I stop; I look to see whether anyone observes that I love her. I must be discrete so that if the affair gets in trouble I won't be gossiped about then, and it won't come to be known. If I submit too much to my love and yield too much to my pleasure, they'll have to bury me alive. I'll learn to control myself and my mind. But, don't I see Gullet, my scheming servant? I'll go to him. I have nobody else I can ask to be my confidant in this affair. [He hails Gullet, and they leave together.]

[Scene ii] Poliscena, a young woman

[Poliscena] If a certain modest constraint and respect for my parents did not inhibit me, I would certainly complain with unrestrained voice against those--and it is no less than fair for me to be angry with them--who shut us girls up, rather than the boys, between the walls of the house. I do not know whether they have made it a custom--or rather the means of corruption--because they think we are timid and exhausted by household tasks; and they have condemned us, shut up at home, to death, and so our inheritance is stripped away by the deception of lawyers bit-by-bit, in fees. They then assert that they do this to preserve our chastity--I am aware how far this is from the truth--yet they cautiously take us to visit the temples of gods, to hear the speeches of brothers proclaiming from the pulpit the wonders of hell and heaven. But something else torments us more deeply, which I more and more deplore: when we make our way so modestly, concealed by a veil around our heads, a crowd of young men

tries to stare at us, and if the opportunity for that business is offered, they whisper and make faces and laugh at us as if it were Mardi Gras. I think it would be much better for us to die than to lead this gloomy and unhappy life. Why shouldn't one be allowed to enjoy the pleasure which this joyful, lusty age brings? By heaven, I'll waste away all this time; I won't do a bit of work or spin or make beds or dust furniture or mend clothes until I see that young man who today made me breathless with love.

[Scene iii] Graccus, Gullet

[Graccus] Hello. Are you listening, Gullet?

Gullet Ah, master, why so glum all this time?

Graccus [trying to sound indifferent] Nothing much.

Gullet Be glad.

Graccus Can you just listen to me so that I can tell you what pleasant things happened to me yesterday evening?

Gullet What is it, master, please?

Graccus I have just met a bird ready to be trapped, if you provide some assistance. I know your mind is very sharp in this business.

Gullet If you think some assistance or advice will be useful for your affair, order and command; I myself shall undertake your commands immediately.

Graccus Well, Gullet, as I have always trusted your advice since I was a child--you know?--and so as not to put you off with words, I will explain what I want of you in earnest.

Gullet Out with it then, and tell it in few words.

Graccus I'll do so now.

Gullet If I can, master, you'll never lose sleep again! Your hand on it.

Graccus To begin with, I tell you that you must cast out all fear of my father. Because what we are about to enter is fertile territory, my dear Gullet.

Gullet Why 'fertile'? Stop beating around the bush. Speak plainly.

Graccus Doubtless you are aware how clever my father is, watching for any misdeed. His intellect is sharp.

Gullet [stops his ears and starts to leave] I am not listening!

Graccus Alas, alas, Gullet, where are you going? Listen now!

Gullet Wherever I can go! You are being foolish. [Graccus brings him back]

Graccus Yesterday at sunrise, as religion ordains, I was going to view the sacrifice. There by chance I saw a certain girl--ah me!...

Gullet [aside, suspicious] I dread what these sighs may mean.

Graccus And if it were not on account of the veil covering her, I could go on about her. While I look at her figure

again and again, through a little parting of her veil, the girl's sparkling eyes appear in view.

Gullet [aside] May the gods turn it to good.

Graccus She seemed more beautiful to me than the other girls.

Gullet [aside] Just as I feared!

Graccus What need is there for words? I want her for a wife or to possess her by some other means.

Gullet No one stops you from trying, but there are many obstacles to possessing her: there is your severe father; then there is the girl, who is devoid of whorish wiles, and it is a serious matter to seduce her with deceitful words; then there is the mother. And if it is not done cleverly and your father finds out, oh me, he will kill us with his scolding. And what will you give her? You have nothing except promises of mountains of gold.

Graccus You think I have nothing, Gullet? You don't know that without my father's knowledge I filch from his granaries, his provisions, and his tenants.

Gullet Clever!

Graccus In fact, I have done what very few young persons do, I have myself provided property for myself for when I am of age, and I have already amassed no meager estate.

Gullet You're smarter than I realized. Whom have you consulted?

Graccus No one. What kind of man do you think I am?

Gullet You? Very discreet.

Graccus You're right.

Gullet [aside] What a fortunate old man, who often with Grifo, our neighbor, as they talk under our portico, as people do, boasts that he has a unique son, endowed with every virtue, who does not get mixed up with the enticements that adolescence brings, and he imagines that nothing has been plotted against him!

Graccus What are you talking about?

Gullet How I can satisfy your passion.

Graccus No wonder I love you with all my heart: A witty person, a well-mannered servant? [Graccus hugs Gullet]

Gullet Calm down!

Graccus You may set apart for yourself this sum, with interest, so help me Jesus!

Gullet Forget the present. It's not necessary to overdo it.

Graccus Ah? Why?

Gullet Come, come! I must call on Tharatantara. For though she is old, she will surely bring us advice for this affair. But look! Conveniently enough, I see her coming out of the public baths, spanking clean. [Exeunt Graccus and Gullet in different directions]

[Scene iv Some time later]

Gullet, Tharatantara [enter, deep in conversation]

Tha. What did you say? Do you expect me to believe that?

Gullet I'm not just talking.

CELESTINESCA

Tha. He loves that girl, Calphurnia's daughter? Is this a joke?

Gullet That's what I said. And he has sworn it to me, so that I'll help him. He's dying to marry her or get her some other way, with our help.

Tha. Not with our help but on his own, if possible. If his father found out, he would certainly punish us poor wretches and have us whipped.

Gullet But it must be done.

Tha. Must be? That I should persuade a girl who is a citizen, from a leading family, full of good habits, to do something wicked? I would rather he gouge out these eyes, that he cut my throat with a sword while I'm still alive, that he throw me to the dogs to be devoured. Don't say another word.

Gullet I am ruined! What'll I tell Graccus? He's dying of love and needs advice.

Tha. What? He's made his own bed; let him lie in it!

Gullet Quite right. But I recommend, on the other hand, that we see how we can help our master's son. Otherwise, we are lost. You know how rash he is. His father indulges him too much, while he daily works us to death with threats and blows. Whatever clever thing Graccus does in the meantime, we will be punished for it.

Tha. Oh fortunate old man, who nourishes this monster! You'd better be worried!

Gullet I know for certain that if anything turns out bad, I will undoubtedly suffer the consequences, and the crime will be blamed on me, of course.

Tha. I'm pleased about one thing at least. If with our help the master's son--without ruining his reputation or too much difficulty and without his father's knowledge--gets the girl, his door will always be open to us.

Gullet Consider it done.

Tha. Get busy. May the gods favor what we've started. I've decided never to part from you. Why shouldn't I try to do what makes him and us happy?

Gullet May the gods reward you as you deserve. Listen. Lend me your ear.

Tha. What do you want with me?

Gullet Come here for a moment. [Gullet kisses her.]

Tha. May the gods damn you! Why did you kiss me, you shameless man?

Gullet Ha ha ha!

Tha. You laugh, you ass, but if you don't act your age, I'll break your neck into pieces, and I will poke out your eyes with my spindle. Kissing an old lady! Ugh!

Gullet I'll go inside, and I'll say you have agreed and have talked about the girl and have promised that you will be ready whenever he wants.

Tha. Do as you please.

Gullet Goodby.

Tha. I hope you fare well with this message. [Exit Gullet.]

CELESTINESCA

Tharatantara talks to herself I think that what people commonly say, that "supreme authority is often supreme folly," is likely to be the case. For if Calphurnia--Miss Pythagoras, who thinks she was born with a Platonic mind--had kept her daughter shut up at home and hadn't taken her to public spectacles, except for our ancestral rite, not only would Graccus not have fallen in love with her but she would not have learned, subsequently, what love and the restlessness of hot-blooded adolescents demand. But unfortunately Calphurnia offered the girl a made-to-order opportunity. From what I have learned from Gullet, Graccus has given his heart to the girl. No harm will come to him. Lust thrives on leisure and rich food, and semen increases. And then he has, thanks to the gods, a source of money. And fortunately the place, age, time, leisure, and means are available. Then there is the mother, a widow, trying to make a living with her distaff and needle. The young man will go to the girl, he will pursue her, he will fawn, he will make promises, offering mountains of gold, and as sex is fragile in women, he will corrupt her on the spot, I know. But what's that to me? Graccus will come to me, begging me, as if we were the best of friends, to help him. And it is certainly better to cooperate with the master's son than to worry about Calphurnia or her daughter's chastity.

ACT TWO

[Scene 1] Gullet, Graccus

Gullet I would have come some time ago, Graccus, if our friend hadn't delayed me with her interminable talk.

Graccus Who, if you please?

Gullet [lying shamelessly] Tharatantara, with whom I got furious because she refused to look into that business that you mentioned today. I got angry with her and irritated.

Graccus What then?

Gullet I said that I wanted her to help you.

Graccus Very good!

Gullet Because a woman doesn't hesitate to believe another woman's words.

Graccus That's right. And I think it is better for us to make her our messenger to Calphurnia, who won't hesitate to reveal every secret to her.

Gullet And I would choose her proven intelligence over the wits of other women. What shall I tell, dear master, about the weakness of women? Their sex holds what is innate or characteristic of them: it is ever ready, second nature, apparent, as their eyes grow excited with a sudden tenderness of the heart; they undo carefully made plans; their expressions change when they are highly aroused.

CELESTINESCA

Believe me, Graccus, when I tell you how sharp-witted these women are when it comes to skullduggery. Hardly anyone of us understands what pompous chatter they spew; yet they are contriving far gentler schemes in their minds. You beg, you plead; they become very angry. Then they give themselves to other men without being asked!

Graccus [aside] This servant of mine seems to me to be steeped in Platonic studies. Don't I see how wittily and elegantly he speaks? [aloud] Wonderful, Gullet!

Gullet Listen, Graccus. I'm preaching the truth now.

Graccus Well by heaven, I think you learned this sermon in second-year philosophy. I might sell you for more than a talent, or rather two-hundred, Gullet! Who, I'd like to know, provided you with this education?

Gullet Bah! You are mocking your servant, master.

Graccus By heaven, I'm not joking.

Gullet How come you didn't know that before?

Graccus How would I have known? Our short acquaintance hasn't permitted that.

Gullet Do you want me to tell you how very graciously and charmingly Tharatantara offered to help?

Graccus Charming? Yesterday, when she was telling me the usual God-knows-what about love, that woman farted more than twenty times, so foully that everyone had to cover mouth and nostrils with his hands, to hold his breath for a long time, and finally to run away.

Gullet Maybe she had eaten figs and honeyed wine.

Graccus True. But what did you agree upon? Tell me.

Gullet I will. As soon as I began to speak and to mention your love affair, as she is sly, she began to bristle, to make an uproar, to spit in my eyes, and nearly to provoke a quarrel.

Graccus They why do you sing the old lady's praises? I told you she was shameless.

Gullet Hee hee hee! She isn't. I insisted therefore that it is necessary for her to help us, willingly or otherwise, in this matter; if not, she will be whipped, and you'll hand her over to the executioner.

Graccus I'll do as you said unless she shows herself willing to comply with my wishes, especially since she lives on my bread and drinks my wine.

Gullet She says it's a disgraceful crime to corrupt a girl, a free-born citizen, from a good family, endowed with virtuous character, and that it's not possible to do it secretly.

Graccus Humph! I certainly don't know where her scruples come from.

Gullet [exaggerating and falling into inconsistency] We spent almost all day yesterday talking like that. And in order to satisfy your desire, she pledged herself to tend to your pleasure and to strive for it rather than be shut out of your house and be beaten by you with rods, and rather than preserve the chastity of Calphurnia and her daughter Poliscena unharmed and inviolate.

Graccus She is only doing the right thing.

Gullet It's the wrong thing, Graccus. Do you think it's right to ruin a girl, to whom one is not married, with the disgrace of rape?

Graccus Go to hell with your scruples!

Gullet Let those who wish us ill go to hell.

Graccus What's to be done now, so that I can have her? If it isn't done quickly, I'll die.

Gullet Tharatantara or I must go to Calphurnia and discuss how Poliscena can be lured or seduced by our promises.

Graccus To lure that girl with words, Gullet? If it isn't done from the heart, it will be useless to try.

Gullet I know it's useless to pour out words. Perhaps we'll soften her up by showing spirit and by offering money, too.

Graccus Show me a man, I ask you, so upright, so free from greed, so reverent toward the gods, that he is not ever corrupted by money.

Gullet It's a trite proverb, Graccus. Do you think I'm so inexperienced in human affairs that I don't know what love wants? Perhaps the girl herself will persuade her mother to give her to you in marriage, when she learns that you love her.

Graccus That's very likely; so try it.

Gullet Then look happy. Stop tormenting yourself, Graccus. In future, I'll take this task upon myself, and together with this woman Tharatantara I will willingly do what I can, so that unless you get your wish, you can make me wear shackles forever and suffer whatever punishment you want.

Graccus I'll love you dearly forever, and I know how I'll reward you for your merits. [Macharius appears.] But, is that not my father coming, all out of breath, from his property in the country? Here he is. Get out of here!

Gullet Stop poking and gouging my ribs with your fists!

Graccus Then go quickly so he won't find us talking. [Exit.]

Gullet I'm going. But first I'll see whether there is anything on the plates in the dining room for me to eat. From there I'll go into hiding. [Exit.]

[Scene ii] Macharius, speaking to himself:

Mach. I harvest more than fifty jars of wine from my nearby Tusculan property, which I stored away for myself when I went to Tuscia to join the troops. Since then I have been in danger of being killed countless times: I have suffered hunger, thirst, cold, heat, the attacks of enemies, the ambushes of brigands, numerous discomforts, an escape from Saracens, ravages of armed men and cavalry. I omit the countless other things it is necessary for a soldier in the armed services to suffer. Yet people who pass their lives and snore away tranquil nights at home and in leisure, with wife and children, may think that a fighting man spends his time abroad enjoying himself. But oh

CELESTINESCA

citizens, see, see my scars; observe me; consider whether by idleness, cowardice, laziness, and sleep, or by work and sleepless nights it was possible for me to obtain all of my wealth. Every day I slave away behind this harrow and plough; everyday I follow the oxen; everyday I inspect the barn; frequently I pull up briars and stumps; I gather twigs and stalks. Finally, I overlook nothing by which I may make it profitable to me. Nor do I spare myself nor even make allowances for my age. Sometimes I swindle people by outwitting them to provide for myself or my son. But alas for me! Whatever is earned from the farm, from buildings, from cattle, the tax collector tries to extort. Every day new regulations appear on the magistrate's docket; every day thugs branded on the face come to my home to serve warrants; they say that on pain of perpetual imprisonment and disinheritance of heirs, I must pay to the prince taxes, surtaxes, fees, and other such things so that he can put tyrannical enemies to flight and repulse their wickedness from himself. Thus they swallow the souls of the poor. I have so little property left--as Jesus is my savior--that I cannot always pay for my son's support except with borrowed money. Alas, my life is certainly a burden to me, wretched as I am! But this folly and the scarcity of food drive me on. But I see my only son, the consolation of my miseries! I'll join him so that we can discuss it together.

ACT THREE

[Scene i] Tharatantara, Calphurnia

Tha. Tharatantara, such as she is, and even if she were more important, brings you heartiest greetings, Calphurnia.

Cal. And greetings to you. What news do you bring so late?

Tha. Good news. Our household is doing well, thank the gods, except for the master's son.

Cal. Graccus?

Tha. The same. He has recently, in the last few days, been suffering from some illness. He is sad at heart, for some reason.

Cal. What could it be?

Tha. I don't know unless, since he is a lusty young man, his mind is on love.

Cal. On love? How old is he?

Tha. Twenty.

Cal. Do you know with whom he is in love?

Tha. Unless my heart deceives me, I know. But I wouldn't dare tell.

Cal. Oh, tell me, for God's sake.

Tha. If you give me your permission first, I can speak plainly.

Cal. Oh, you have my permission.

CELESTINESCA

Tha. And with assurance that no one else will find out?

Cal. It's as secret as if you were talking to yourself.

Tha. I won't beat about the bush.

Cal. Speak boldly.

Tha. He's fallen madly in love with Poliscena.

Cal. My daughter!

Tha. Yes. To such a degree, Calphurnia, that it is worth while to consider as quickly as possible just how interested in her he is.

Cal. How did it happen, woman?

Tha. Yesterday, when, together with you, your daughter was carefully making her way home, swathed in a veil--do you remember?--he by chance saw the girl, unobserved. He immediately fell in love, followed her, watched her.

Cal. The simpleton feasted his eyes. What then?

Tha. He came home dejected; he can't drink; he can't eat even bread, much less choice bits of meat; he passes sleepless nights. The house is in an uproar. His father has gone to the country.

Cal. Hasn't he returned yet?

Tha. He hasn't returned yet, but we inquire every day.

Cal. What hope does this animal have of getting my daughter?

Tha. I think the man has no hope.

Cal. The animal, you mean.

Tha. The less hope he has, the more he is in love.

Cal. Hope? Hope? If I see him in this steet and he comes to try to bribe me, I think I will so completely destroy him with my hands or feet that he won't dare to touch her or love her or even look at her improperly!

Tha. Do you think you are threatening some eunuch?

Cal. Don't say anything more! Get out of here, if you know what's good for you.

Tha. [aside] Why do I delay? [aloud] Graccus will give you ten minae.

Cal. How many? Ten?

Tha. [aside] She liked the word ten.

Cal. Not if it were a huge sum. What is more, not if he gave me a gold image of the sun.

Tha. For no amount whatever?

Cal. For no amount.

Tha. Oh unfortunate youth! What will the poor thing do? I beg you for some kind words, at least.

Cal. Stop begging or you will hear something bad.

Tha. Ah, with what words will I keep myself in his good graces? With what feet shall I go back home and ask for food? With what looks shall I go into his presence, if I take back such an unexpected message, Calphurnia?

Cal. Did you come here purposely on this business?

Tha. Yes.

Cal. Ho ho! Well done, my good woman! You old bawd!

Tha. I'm ashamed, but I'm afraid of his anger and that he will beat me.

Cal. Leave! Go on! It's getting dark.

Tha. I'm almost out of my mind. What shall I say to him?

Cal. That you have not been able to persuade me by entreaties or bribes or to sway me with words, and that he may consider this business which he has undertaken to be a dream. Goodby, Tharatantara. [Exit Calphurnia, leaving Tharatantara alone.]

[Scene ii] Tharatantara, Graccus

Tha. I'm going, even though what I have said got me nowhere. What shall I say to that love-sick young man? If I tell the truth, he will certainly suspect that it is invented; if I swear it, it's the same. If I call the gods to witness, likewise. Gods have mercy! Give me, I pray, skill with words and elegance of speech so that I may persuade the boy to take his mind completely off this girl. Let him stop tiring poor me out, making me run up and down. I am not much experienced in this business; it's not proper at my age. You see how Calphurnia was beginning to insult me, if I hadn't kept quiet? I heartily admire her, by heaven, because she doesn't want to be tainted by the disgrace of pandering or--as a matter of law--for her daughter to be corrupted. Graccus thought he could cajole her with promises. A waste of breath! If his father should find out, he would not tolerate these foolish actions. [Enter Graccus.] Is that not he? [to Graccus] Why do I see you walking down the street? Why are you standing here, Graccus? Whom are you looking for? Graccus [trembling with excitement] I was waiting for you.

Tha. Are you cold? Let's go in near the fire.

Graccus Why are you out-of-doors so late? Planning some scheme, I hope.

Tha. Well, if you will come inside for a moment, I will tell you at once what a quarrel I have just now had with that wicked woman.

Graccus With whom?

Tha. Calphurnia. [Tharatantara leads Graccus into the house.]

Graccus Did you go to see her on my behalf?

Tha. I have just done it, by heaven.

Graccus What did you say? Out with it! There isn't good news, is there?

Tha. You will hear if you can keep quiet.

Graccus You may consider me utterly dumb and speechless. Please tell me!

Tha. How gracious and clever you would have thought me today in this affair, my boy, compliments and flattering language aside. I hope you believe--as I want you to--that I have undertaken your responsibility for your love affair as if you yourself were there.

Graccus What a charming lady! I can't resist giving you a little hug. [He hugs her.]

Tha. Forget it! I did what was worthy of you and right for me. I'd like--may Jesus save me--for you to take this

girl, who is of good character and of your age, for a wife.

Graccus What do you mean? She is much younger, as if it were of little importance! But tell me quickly about your quarrel.

Tha. I will. When I went to see what I could obtain, first I said a few words by way of greeting the woman.

Graccus What did she do?

Tha. She exchanged greetings with me, then she waits to see what I want with her. She is amazed; she asks whether things are all right. I say that you are suffering from some kind of sadness of heart...

Graccus You're not inventing anything.

Tha. That she alone is the one who can take this care from your mind.

Graccus That's truer than true.

Tha. Calphurnia asks why. I explain the entire matter frankly: that you have fallen madly in love with her only daughter Poliscena.

Graccus She doesn't deter you!

Tha. I describe the place and time, and when I have done everything carefully and plainly, she abuses me right then with insults and threatens me terribly to such an extent, Graccus, that had I not taken precautions for myself, she, trembling with rage, would have spewed her wrath in my face like vomit.

Graccus Oh, how well you describe the woman's even temper!

Tha. Even temper? So impetuous and rash, Graccus, that she seemed almost like a loathesome Megaera or Thesiphone.

Graccus Ah! She was therefore Cerberus's wife, since she is Thesiphone.

Tha. Her character is perfect for it.

Graccus He'll marry her.

Tha. She's deserving.

Graccus What's to be done, Tharatantara? Advise me, quickly.

Tha. I'll see whether anything comes to mind.

Graccus And hurry.

Tha. I know! Entrust this affair to me. I feel that the gods are going to be propitious and favorable to us-- unless I am mistaken. Hush!

Graccus Have you thought of something so quickly? Oh, if you love me, tell me.

Tha. Hush, I say. I have been very busy. Now I say that unless what I am planning in my mind turns out as you want, you may punish me with whatever punishments you wish.

Graccus May the gods favor our wishes.

Tha. I have heard it said repeatedly that when girls have an opportunity presented to them to which their vigorous youth leads them, the naughtiest ones will be those whose mothers confine them between the walls of the house so they cannot admire men's looks; for that reason they are more susceptible to any incitement. Such is the character of all women that above all they struggle to be master of

CELESTINESCA

their own bodies. As soon as their freedom is taken away, ravished and oppressed, it becomes their heart's delight. [Tharatantara prepares to depart.]

Graccus Where are you going?

Tha. You'll hear where. Since it did no good to pour out halting speeches to Calphurnia, I'll go to the girl herself in secret; I'll speak to her in confidence; I'll persuade her; and I'll pile up every argument of Ciceronian eloquence.

Graccus Gods grant that you may not be frustrated in your hope.

Tha. Don't worry Graccus. I won't give up until I have put her in your arms.

Graccus Oh please! I believe it!

Tha. I promise. Meanwhile, let's go in to dinner.

Graccus Good idea. Let's go. [Exeunt.]

[Scene iii] Macharius, Graccus.

Mach. Oh, Graccus! Did anyone bring word from the magistrate ordering me to come pay taxes?

Graccus Not yet, father.

Mach. Have any long-nosed thugs been here threatening us with lawsuits?...

Graccus [aside] I wonder what the matter is.

Mach. ...and threatening to take possession of our property, in accordance with the magistrate's second decree? May hell swallow those scavengers, ill-disposed as they are!

Graccus They certainly deserve to suffer whatever punishment you want. They have always harrassed us for some reason.

Mach. What do you say? What is the crop worth?

Graccus Very little.

Mach. But how much?

Graccus Twenty.

Mach. Bah! That is very little. I suppose that the tax collector will gnaw away whatever is left in the granaries. Meanwhile he squanders and extorts continually. Ah me! Why don't my affairs change? But I want to live until it's time for the pitiless undertakers to wash me for burial.

Graccus I agree, you know, father.

Mach. Just now as I was coming home, my dear friend Callimacus told me privately that he was going to give his son a wife today and celebrate the Dionysian feast. So you stay at home, and look for me to return soon.

ACT FOUR

[Scene i the next morning] Tharatantara, Graccus, Poliscena

Tha. I am on my way to see her, Graccus.

Graccus Oh? So early?

CELESTINESCA

Tha. Yes, because that good-for-nothing shrew of a mother will be running hither and yon to visit the shrines of the gods, as usual.

Graccus I understand the plan that you are devising in your mind.

Tha. I meanwhile will go to the girl frequently. Whenever she is alone, I'll talk to her. You know what I said to you yesterday evening in the lane.

Graccus I am keeping it in mind.

Tha. I will eventually persuade the girl. I believe that before I leave there I will obtain her cooperation.

Graccus This is the right moment, by heaven.

Tha. Do you think I don't know how important the proper time is in this affair or how it gets results when you fit the times? It's commonly said that time is the greatest wonder of all.

Graccus I believe that you have been steeped in the Hippocrene spring on Mt. Parnassus and that you resemble--one might say--wandering Pythagoras and fluent Demosthenes, who used pebbles. Let's not look for foreign names; I think you have imbibed the spirit of Caspar Pergamensis, the most eloquent man of our time.

Tha. I'm not suffering from stomach trouble, master. Don't give me an emetic!

Graccus Ha ha hee!

Tha. I'm in a hurry. Don't delay me with talk.

Graccus Go. [Exit Graccus.]

[Scene ii]

Tha. If I don't do what I so solemnly promised I was going to do, I am completely ruined. [at Poliscena's door] First I'll knock on the door. Hello, hello! Is there anyone home? Hello! No one answers. Hello, there!

Pol. [voice from within] Who in the world keeps knocking on the door? Who is it?

Tha. Someone who is more devoted and faithful to this house than anyone else! [Poliscena appears at a window.]

Pol. Who? Tharatantara?

Tha. Your devoted! Open up, hurry, if you please.

Pol. I'll open even though mother ordered me not to let in anyone when she is away. [Poliscena opens the door.]

Tha. May the gods give you a fine day and a good year, my daughter.

Pol. May they give you a good day and long life, Tharatantara. What is the matter?

Tha. I have something to tell you.

Pol. To tell me? [aside] Oh, I wonder what it can be?

Tha. Yes, something that you will like very much.

Pol. So long as its good and respectable.

Tha. But I'll bolt the door; then let's go a little way inside.

Pol. All right.

CELESTINESCA

Tha. First, to do as I've been ordered: the master's son sends you his most cordial greetings.

Pol. Why? What has that to do with me?

Tha. You ask? I can't but be amazed at how he is overcome by a singular affection for you, Poliscena, that is so powerful that unless you love him in return, he is determined to die soon because of sadness. [aside] She trembles from modesty.

Pol. How did that happen?

Tha. You shall hear. Yesterday when you and your mother were unobtrusively going to St. Francis' Church to hear the brothers bawling about the almost unbelievable portents of Orcus, Acheron, and Cocytus, he by chance saw you, unobserved. Do you remember, daughter?

Pol. How can that be? Since my head and my entire face were hidden, how could he tell what sort of looks I have?

Tha. Oh Poliscena! You don't know how perceptive a connoisseur of beauties is, especially of your kind of beauty.

Pol. You're right. But I am not of this sort, and I have nothing worth looking at or beautiful. I think you are joking and not speaking seriously.

Tha. Joking, you say? The matter speaks for itself: as Jesus is my savior, since he fell in love with you, I have never seen him cheerful. He is pleasant to no one. I have my hands full making all the delicacies I know how out of fish and meat. I cheer him up with words as much as I can. But he can't eat or drink; he spends sleepless nights. He weeps constantly; I ask him if he wants me to call the doctor immediately.

Pol. [aside] This woman doesn't know how love-sick I am. If she had lynx-eyes, she would see plainly that I have fallen in love with him, as she says he has with me.

Tha. He says, "Mother, let me dissolve into tears, as Narcissus wasted away, since I can't even talk to her--much less have the girl I love more than my life."

Pol. [aside] Should I entrust to this woman my feelings toward him? No, I won't confide in her. Yes, I will! [aloud] Are you saying these things sincerely and truly, Tharatantara?

Tha. Certainly!

Pol. Please don't deceive me with your talk.

Tha. What? An old lady deceive a young girl?

Pol. Do you want me to confide in you freely?

Tha. Give me your hand on it. I'm not like others. You don't yet know how sharp my mind is in affairs of this sort, and how discreet. It isn't easily deceived. Ah, what did you say daughter? I would rather die than let someone find out from me. Don't be afraid. I am not so inhuman and ignorant that I don't know how hard it is to control the urges of youth.

Pol. But I'm afraid.

Tha. Have no fear. You don't know whom you're talking to.

Pol. I do know, but if...

CELESTINESCA

Tha. Your mother will not know.

Pol. Yesterday when I saw that young man, and...

Tha. Yield without fear, my precious doll, dear heart, my rosebud! [*aside*] I have what I want!

Pol. ...he kept looking at me, I said to myself right then, "I think this young man is in love with me and wants me for himself."

Tha. So I am not lying to you!

Pol. I began to love him so violently, therefore, that I immediately went home; I sat down and cried; I sighed and sobbed; I didn't do any of my work.

Tha. [*aside*] The beginnings are good.

Pol. My mother asks, "Why are you crying? Why all the tears?" She threatens me to make me tell her everything. Why mince words? I want him to be my husband, forever.

Tha. You are doing the right thing. I would rather see a noble, good-natured young woman united in legitimate matrimony than bewailing a spinster's life beyond the proper age. Shall I tell him what you've said?

Pol. Whatever you think best; but...

Tha. Stop! You know: I'll whisper it in his ear.

Pol. To tell the truth, you don't need any advice. It's commonly and widely said that a wise man doesn't need a patron saint.

Tha. [*aside*] Well, if not with wisdom, at least with cunning I'll see to it that nothing done through or by me may seem to be done without purpose.

Pol. I am convinced; so I am not at all afraid to entrust my secret to you; and I wouldn't have had such great faith in my patron saint--so may Jesus save me.

Tha. Don't swear. So that the poor boy won't torment himself any more, I will say that you beg him to come talk to you tomorrow after your mother has left.

Pol. Leave out the "beg". Tell him to come, and you pretend that I know nothing about it.

Tha. What time can you talk inside, so that your mother won't catch you?

Pol. As you said.

Tha. Good enough. Do you want me to do anything for you?

Pol. If you tell Graccus for me that I commend myself to him, you'll be doing a lot.

Tha. Do you want anything else?

Pol. No. Do you?

Tha. No. [*singing*] "There is snow on my head and a furrow in my cheek." That's enough, my darling.

Pol. Goodby.

Tha. And farewell to you, my daughter. Remember Graccus and me.

CELESTINESCA

ACT FIVE

[Scene i] Graccus, Tharatantara

Graccus [alone] Unless fair hope deceives me, Tharatantara is bringing good news, because she's more cheerful, by heaven, and is moving faster than usual. As soon as she saw me in the distance she perked up. See? She is smiling triumphantly, by God. Has she achieved what I ordered her to do, I wonder? I'll go meet her with thanks.--Hey, hey, Tharatantara! What news, what news?

Tha. Good news!

Graccus I'm out of my senses! It turned out well!

Tha. Celebrate, I say celebrate, Graccus! Everything is going well. Nothing that I had planned went wrong.

Graccus Really?

Tha. Really.

Graccus Put my mind at ease, please. Tell me what good things you did.

Tha. Oh, it would be unwise to tell it in the street.

Graccus Let's go, then.

Tha. Don't push me! Stop pulling my dress! It's worn, and it will tear easily.

Graccus Run a little faster, then.

Tha. If I could! Do you think an old lady runs?

Graccus [leading Tharatantara into his house] If you're tired, mother, sit down now and tell me quickly just how everything happened. But take care not to raise my hopes in vain.

Tha. Oh, do you think me a beast or a human being?

Graccus A human being, by heaven, as good and loyal as I've seen today with these eyes.

Tha. Sit closer so no one will hear us.

Graccus All right.

Tha. Right off, when I knock on the door, she opens it. After the usual courtesies, Poliscena asks what I want with her.

Graccus I'm afraid!

Tha. I ask her on your behalf if she will talk to you. She is amazed, her expression becomes stern. First I beat around the bush: I praise her beauty to the skies. She smiles. When I mention your name, she blushes.

Graccus That's a very good sign.

Tha. She doesn't reject anything.

Graccus And that isn't bad either.

Tha. I say that you're going to die unless they agree to give her to you for a wife or--by bribery or persuasion--for a mistress.

Graccus What did she say then?

Tha. She blushed somewhat, but the speech pleased her.

Graccus I am ecstatic! But for God's sake take away the suspense and tell me in few words what has been done.

Tha. All right. Prick up your ears, Graccus.

Graccus I'm listening.

CELESTINESCA

Tha. We decided that you will go there tomorrow.

Graccus Who, me?

Tha. You.

Graccus You're joking.

Tha. Please believe me.

Graccus I believe you. But when: morning or evening?

Tha. Morning, when her mother leaves.

Graccus Tell me please how I am supposed to do it.

Tha. [aside] He's all pale, and his teeth are chattering from fear. [aloud] Dear boy, are you cold?

Graccus What's wrong with that? I'm cold. Just tell me what I want to know.

Tha. Haven't I told you? As soon as Calphurnia goes to the shrines of the gods, you come out from hiding in a corner across the street and go into the house quickly. Do you understand or not?

Graccus Yes, yes.

Tha. [aside] I wish there were a way for me to eavesdrop through some little crack and hear how he begins his conversation with the girl. The coward is about to faint.

Graccus What did you say?

Tha. Nothing, but I advise you, Graccus, to act like a stout, bold young man. Don't be routed by words; don't fail in your duty at any point where she threatens, but attack her somehow.

Graccus You will be declaring, by heaven, that it depended on a generous and bold character: you don't yet know how clever I am at affairs of this sort.

Tha. [aside] I believe a man whose legs are trembling like a reed? [aloud] Open your mouth, dear boy. Show how many teeth you have!

Graccus What could go wrong? I'll act like a man. Don't worry.

Tha. War is arduous! [aside] I wish someone could be there to protect your head with a helmet so that the girl's weapons won't hurt you!

Graccus I am ready, but when the time comes, call me so that I won't fail to be there.

[Scene ii two days later] Calphurnia, Macharius

Cal. [to herself] Will Calphurnia perchance bear calmly and bravely such a notable insult, this devious crime? Will this wicked Graccus, who so has wrongly dishonored me and ravished my daughter, go unpunished? By God, he'll pay the penalty. He is not yet aware of how unbending and inexorable is Calphurnia's character; but he will now see for himself.

Mach. [unobserved] Don't I see Calphurnia hurrying toward me? The wife of my late friend Gripho? It is she. I don't know whom she is threatening.

Cal. In a free city! Does he not fear God? Will he try to overthrow the law?

CELESTINESCA

Mach. Unless I am mistaken, the poor woman has suffered some insult. Highly-placed scoundrels try to take advantage of widows, frequently for the purpose of seizing their property--when in fact they rarely have any.

Cal. First I'll call on the unfortunate father of that monster. I'll explain the whole affair to him; I'll frighten him with words. I'll say I'm going to take him to court. I'll call everything to mind.

Mach. She's coming right this way.

Cal. I'll declare that the law demands that a man who rapes a girl must either marry her or as the robber of her virginity must pay with his head.

Mach. Why do I delay going to meet that woman, so that I may be of service to her, if need be. [aloud] Where are you rushing, Calphurnia? Do you hear? Wait up a moment, please.

Cal. Who wants me? Hah! I'll come to you, oh unluckiest or rather unhappiest of men!

Mach. What is it, pray?

Cal. You ask? Where is the honorable Graccus hiding now?

Mach. My son?

Cal. Yes, your son.

Mach. [aside] What is she going to start now? [aloud] Why do you ask, Calphurnia?

Cal. You shall know at once--as if it were necessary! But I had sensed it earlier, wretch that I am!

Mach. He hasn't done any harm, has he?

Cal. A very great one! Ah me!

Mach. Don't cry. Tell me what he has done.

Cal. Oh, alas, poor me!

Mach. Hold back your tears and stop beating your breast.

Cal. I want to die! I can hardly keep life in my body! Oh me! Alas, alas!

Mach. Why?

Cal. Because your wicked son has done such a terrible thing to me. Oh my!

Mach. When?

Cal. Yesterday.

Mach. What did he do?

Cal. He has ruined and ravished my only daughter Poliscena.

Mach. Oh! What are you saying? Where were you yesterday?

Cal. I was, as our religion requires, going to the sacred churches; and he went to my house as bold as you please and eventually seduced the girl, who remained at home, with friendly words.

Mach. I'm leaving.

Cal. Oh Jupiter, Oh Juno, Oh Lucina, Oh heavens! I warn you, Macharius. I have decided to go to court.

Mach. Hah! You won't do that. I've never known you to be so cruel that you would seek to harm friends.

Cal. Friends? Do you call those who perpetrate such crimes, friends?

Mach. I call friends those who do things out of true affection, not hate. And he did it out of affection.

CELESTINESCA

Cal. You can argue all you want, but I have appointed lawyers to be on this case for me: either you take my girl as your daughter-in-law, or that fine young man will be condemned to death under the law to serve as an example for others, so that they will not take pride in perpetrating such crimes.

Mach. [agreeing eagerly] Put this anger out of your heart, Calphurnia.

Cal. All right...

Mach. Ah, Calphurnia, do I not want from this affair a lasting, firm, well-joined marriage?

Cal. ...provided you do what the law requires.

Mach. Indeed I want to, for if it isn't done, I will never keep my son at home when he realizes how advantageous such a marriage will be for our affairs.

Cal. What you are doing is right and just. [to the audience] And you, applaud and farewell! Don't wait for the marriage or the wedding song to be prepared. Everything will be taken care of, properly and solemnly, inside. Again farewell, farewell.

* * * * *

Leonardus Arentinus concludes successfully.

Printed at Schussenreid Abbey, 1478 A.D.

CELESTINESCA

Excerpts from PRACTICA ARTIS AMANDI

[147] Remarkable examples, apt and quite indispensable for the better illustration of this method.

A Representation of clandestine marriages which are brought about by foolish old female go-betweens.

[149] Speakers: Tharatantara, an old woman; Graccus a young man in love; Poliscena, his mistress.

ACT I

Tha. I remember how I used to be loved by many men and how I very often made great sport of many of them and dragged them about as if they were bound with a rope. But alas, now that I am worn out, the avenging fates await me. I am not sought after as I was long ago. Nor can I repair by any skills my youthful vigor, though I try to daub my face and even my old woman's wrinkles with ointment and thick bean-paste. (My wrinkles serve me as nets with which I catch fleas, when I contract them tightly.) But people easily smell out the deception, and they laugh at me and say to my face that I am about as beautiful as a piece of dung in a lantern, fit only to emit light in a dark, gloomy place. Even when I annoint my head with nard or some other sweet-smelling substance that refined lovers enjoy, nevertheless they become nauseated when they smell a certain vapor which silently issues from my back door; for I cannot entirely trust my anus, which hisses at nearly every step I take. And indeed every time I draw a breath, [150] I exhale a cough. They are unafraid to call me a witch, and they accuse me of coaxing them with false allurements and of trying to take their lives by magical incantation. Ah, how wretched is the lot of old women! But I must take other ways, try something better, so that I won't fall completely out of favor with the young men. Who knows where Fortune may be hiding? I shall go to see a young man I know who is not averse--up to now--to secret love-affairs, and I shall either interest him in myself, or if that doesn't succeed, I'll bring about a love affair between him and a girl who is not altogether unfamiliar with this business: which will provide me with some profit and advantage. But look! There he comes, by coincidence. I'll speak to him, since the time, place, and occasion are favorable. Hail, Graccus, glory and crown of handsome young men! Where is Your Honor going? Oh how rosy are your cheeks! Oh how lucky is the girl on whom you plant soft little kisses!

Graccus. You evil witch, what are my cheeks to you?

Tha. Hey! Though I am wrinkled, my wrinkles won't do you any harm.

Graccus. Fooley! Who would want to sleep with you in the same bed? You have only three teeth, and they're pitch-

black; and not many more hairs! Your eyes are as weak as an owl's in the daytime! Look at those flaccid breasts, that sunken chest, those cheeks, as wrinkled as a country man's purse. Who will hug you? Everyone runs from your arms as worse than a dog or a snake. And you're suspected of witchcraft.

Tha. First hear what I want. I'm not pleading my own case but someone else's--for whom, I know, you will eagerly make room. [151]

Graccus. Who else's? I am unaware of anyone's interest in me.

Tha. I believe you. There are, however, those who watch you, who are in love with you, and who want only you.

Graccus. Me?

Tha. Yes indeed. And they also accuse you of arrogance because you are contemptuous of them.

Graccus. They are certainly mistaken. But I am always suspicious that if I try to please them they may be contemptuous of me: I know a little bit about women's character.

Tha. I have removed all suspicion of arrogance which they had conceived of you, but they do not trust my words altogether. There is, in this city, a very handsome young woman one who always has you on her lips, who does nothing but sigh deeply and sigh again. I'll describe her "etceteras" to you in private. Every time she has seen you pass, she watches and counts each footstep. But what tortures her most is that you do not even greet her with a nod; for she is ready to return your greeting.

Graccus. Why should I speak or greet her, since I don't know her except by sight. And she might perhaps betray me if I tried anything on my own. If you could do something in this case, you will not have wasted your time on an ingrate. You had better not be deceiving me! I begin these actions unwillingly because I know that girls' minds are sometimes sly.

Tha. Banish doubt. She loves you more than anything. I'll go at once to the girl to find out what time and when you can safely speak to her. You stay at home, meanwhile. So goodbye; keep up your hope.

Graccus. Goodbye; give my regards to the girl--though [152] I didn't know until now!

Tha. Never fear: I'll handle your affair honestly.

[Act II of "A Representation of clandestine marriages..." consists of the last part of Act IV of the Comedia Poliscena, beginning with Tharatantara's words, "Heus, heus! Quis huic domo inest?" Act III of the "Representation" is Act IV, scene i, of the Comedia, with numerous minor variants, most of which are an editor's efforts to make sense of dubious passages in the Comedia, and it concludes with the following addition:]

[158] As for further progress, these things are done in secret; that way, nothing will be revealed by accident. It will probably move forward on its own to fulfilment, etc.

Compio mres gnatas ne numia ducant
 Sanctos spectare viru / nec grandia gesta
 Quas pceru jamja lactat seducere lupus
 Seruoz mores / ancillas corngo / ne quam
 Ne turpe questum sectetur lubrica fando
 Ne ve suos fallat falleratis turpiter leros
 Verbis vt prediu vendant lenones alendo
 Ipse monere patres velim ne prauis habenas
 Indulgeant libere / inere futura senectus
 Vos premit demu / nec nozint parca tueri
 Perlege tu quenq; comicu iuuat esse potam
 Que mea musa notat nec despice credere lectoz

COMEDIA POLISCENA de Leonardo Aretino [fol. 2r].



¿Cuál dolor puede ser tal
que se iguale con mi mal?

Ilustración al Acto 1^o por Escobar. Barcelona, 1888.