

Niccolás Maquiavelo
Mandragola
Act 3, scene 11.

TIMOTEO

Madonna Lucrezia, you've known me a long time. There are many things which seen at a distance appear terrible, unbearable and strange. But close up they're human, acceptable and quite ordinary. That's why we say that fear of evil is worse than evil itself. This is just such a case. As far as your conscience is concerned you must keep in mind this general rule: if you are confronted with an action which will result on the one hand in certain good and on the other in an uncertain evil, then you must never, for fear of that evil, sacrifice the certain good. As far as this case is concerned, the fact that you will become pregnant is a certain good, because you will gain a soul for our Savior. The uncertain evil is that the man who sleep with you after you've taken the potion may well die. But there have been cases when it was not an inevitable consequence. However, as death is a possibility it is good that Messer Nicia should not run the danger. As far as the act itself is concerned, it is absolute nonsense that it should be construed a sin, for it is the will that sins and not the body. The cause of sin would lie in displeasing your husband, but by doing this you would be pleasing him. It would be a sin if you derived pleasure from the act, but it will not give you pleasure. In addition, particular consideration must be given to the purpose of an act; your purpose is to fill a seat in Paradise and satisfy the wish of your husband. It is written in the Bible that the daughters of Lot, thinking themselves to be the only women left in the world, had relationships with their father. But because their intention was good, they did not sin.

Know that a woman without children is a woman without a house. If her husband dies she's nothing but an animal, nobody wants her. Madonna, I swear, by this consecrated breast, that to do as your husband wishes in this matter need worry your conscience no more than eating meat on a Wednesday. A little holy water will just wash the sin away. I'm leading you to things that will cause you to thank God for me. And you'll be even more grateful a year from now.

Why, for a chance like this there are fifty women in this town who'd raise their hands to Heaven. Don't be afraid, my daughter. I shall pray to God for you. I'll repeat the prayer of the Archangel Raphael, so that he'll be your side.

Go and prepare yourself in good time to perform this mystery. Peace be with you.