

KILL SOCRATES

BY A.J. SCHAAR

FROM
THE TRIAL & DEATH OF SOCRATES

BY PLATO

For Mamacat & Daddio
(The Lady of the Lake and Plato)

“Ladies and gentlemen of the court.
Socrates would like to say a few words.
I know that most of you want to kill
Socrates. And we’re going to kill
Socrates. But remember. A god did say
he was the wisest man, so let’s all be
polite and pretend to listen to him.
Thank you.”

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“To die would be an awfully big adventure.”

J.M. Barrie

“Well I’ve wrestled with reality for 35 years, Doctor, and I’m happy to state I finally won out over it.”

Mary Chase

“Alice: How long is forever?”

White Rabbit: Sometimes, just one second.”

Lewis Carroll

“Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I’m not sure about the universe.”

Albert Einstein

“Estragon: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?”

Vladimir: Yes, yes we’re magicians.”

Samuel Beckett

“You should never, never doubt something that no one is sure of.”

Roald Dahl

**KILL SOCRATES PREMIERED ON JUNE 17, 2021, AT THE
DON BLUTH FRONT ROW THEATRE IN SCOTTSDALE, AZ.**

DIRECTED BY CHERYL SCHAAR

LIGHTING DESIGNED BY DON BLUTH AND BRET REESE

SOUND DESIGNED BY CHERYL SCHAAR AND ROGER MCKAY

COSTUMES BY CORINNE HAWKINS

PROPERTIES BY CHERYL SCHAAR

STAGE MANAGED BY MALCOM HOOPER

THE CAST:

SOCRATES: TOM KOELBEL

PHAEDO: VAN ROCKWELL

MELETUS/GUARD: J KEVIN TALLENT

**“...A DRAMA THAT IS VERY HUMOROUS WHILE ALSO MOVING AND
ULTIMATELY HEARTBREAKING... WITH A TALENTED CAST..STAGED
PERFECTLY... DIRECTED BEAUTIFULLY... KILL SOCRATES AT DON BLUTH
FRONT ROW THEATRE IS A WINNING PRODUCTION OF A FUNNY,
CHARMING, MOVING, INTERESTING AND INTRIGUING NEW PLAY.”**

— TALKIN’ BROADWAY

ARIZONI AWARD NOMINATIONS:

BEST OVERALL PRODUCTION

ACTOR IN A MAJOR ROLE: TOM KOELBEL

ACTOR IN A MAJOR ROLE: VAN ROCKWELL

ACTOR IN A MAJOR ROLE: J KEVIN TALLENT

DIRECTOR: CHERYL SCHAAR

Cast of Characters

SOCRATES	A curious person, big talker
PHAEDO	A man of action
MELETUS	A not-very-good lawyer
GUARD	A sweetheart, really

Scene

ACT 1, Scene I: Outside the court. Before the trial.

ACT 1, Scene II: Inside the court. The trial.

ACT 1, Scene III: Outside the court. Awaiting the verdict.

ACT 1, Scene IV: Inside the court. The verdict.

ACT 2, Scene I: Inside the prison cell. A great plan.

ACT 2, Scene II: Inside the prison cell. A punch-line.

Time

Today.

Setting

All these scenes should be represented by the same set. That is: A bench and a door. There's government for you.

ACT 1

SCENE I

(SOCRATES sits on a bench outside of a courtroom door. He is dressed in odds and ends, he has no money himself. Something about him shows he respects the courts though. Perhaps his hair is as smart as it will be. Perhaps a friend has lent him dress shoes. Smiling to himself he seems completely unconcerned.

Silence.

PHAEDO bursts on, folders of paperwork, suit, scarf, newspaper, coffee. In his rush he trips over Socrates' feet, spilling coffee over him.

Shouts.

Papers flying everywhere.

Scrambling up with difficulty PHAEDO recovers himself.

PHAEDO slaps an unhelpfully helping SOCRATES with the newspaper in frustration and throws it at his feet.

Collects papers and himself. Dignified exit.

Quiet, followed by huge flurry, followed by quiet, in short.

SOCRATES observes his condition seriously.

Decides to smile.

Picks up the newspaper. Notices article is about himself. Reads aloud.)

SOCRATES

I am... 'a poet or maker of gods...'

(Smiling, reading on, then paling, reading on.)

They're, oh my gods they're going to kill me.

(PHAEDO re-enters, having recognized SOCRATES after the fact, genuinely sorry.)

PHAEDO

I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! It's you!

SOCRATES

It's me.

PHAEDO

Hello!

SOCRATES

Hello. And you must be you.

PHAEDO

(Flattered)

You remember! Hello!

SOCRATES

I'm glad that you came back. I'd like to ask you something.

PHAEDO

Ask me anything.

SOCRATES

Am I where I should be? I thought this was a courthouse, but it seems that I'm mistaken.

PHAEDO

No, you're right, this is a courthouse. If this is where you should be, this is where you are.

SOCRATES

Oh good.

PHAEDO

What made you think you were mistaken?

SOCRATES

You. You were moving so *quickly*.

PHAEDO

Oh?

SOCRATES

It seemed unlikely...

SOCRATES & PHAEDO

...In a court house.

(*Silence*)

SOCRATES

Anything moving quickly in a court house... That was a sort of a joke I made there.

PHAEDO

Yes it was, sort of. Well, I thought that I was running late, but I'm the first one here. I'm accusing... somebody. Today. Are you?

SOCRATES

No, I'm not accusing. I'm the accused.

PHAEDO

You're the *accused*?

SOCRATES

The accused. That's me.

PHAEDO

But you're *Socrates*.

SOCRATES

Oh you think so too?

PHAEDO

I, well, yes, I do.

SOCRATES

Me too!

PHAEDO

Me too!

(They embrace. Silence.)

PHAEDO

(Puzzled)

So you're being accused... But you seem overjoyed!

SOCRATES

(Taken aback)

I seem 'overjoyed'? 'Overjoyed'?

(PHAEDO nods.)

Overjoyed... I'm not sure what you mean by that. How can a man be over... joyed?

PHAEDO

Well. I suppose that a man is *over*...joyed when... when he's *more* than just, you know, joyed. He's

(Gestures being above.)

'over' joy.

SOCRATES

So there's joy. And then there's

(Imitates gesture.)

'over' joy?

PHAEDO

That's right.

SOCRATES

But *what is*? What's 'over' joy?

(*Dying to know*)

I'd love to understand what you you've just said. I'm not a clever man; be patient with me here. Let's start at the beginning. What causes a man to be just 'joyful?'

PHAEDO

Well *joy* does. Joyful *things*. I suppose.

SOCRATES

Alright. So what's a joyful *thing*?

PHAEDO

Ah.

(*Stumped, covering*)

Good question, actually. A joyful thing is some... *thing* that makes us... joyful.

SOCRATES

Wait, wait, wait. Go slow for me. You sped right past me there. Are you saying that joy is caused by joyful *things*, and a joyful *thing* is a *thing* that causes joy?

PHAEDO

Well.

SOCRATES

Is that your argument?

PHAEDO

... Yes.

SOCRATES

That's not much of an argument.

PHAEDO

I, I'm not arguing, really.

SOCRATES

Well then let me ask you this then. What makes a man
'overjoyed?' Overjoyed *things*?

PHAEDO

I... don't know.

SOCRATES

But you said that I seemed overjoyed, you must know
what you mean.

PHAEDO

Well it seems that I don't!

SOCRATES

Why did you say it then?

PHAEDO

I don't know!

SOCRATES

What a coincidence.

PHAEDO

What is?

SOCRATES

I don't know either.

PHAEDO

Alright, so neither of us knows what I meant. Are you happy now?

SOCRATES

I'm overjoyed.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

You know, this game you love to play so much can be a, a little, ah, embarrassing.

SOCRATES

So many people say that.

PHAEDO

Then *why* do you play?

SOCRATES

I don't.

PHAEDO

You do.

SOCRATES

I don't.

PHAEDO

You do. You *just* said you embarrass so many people playing it!

SOCRATES

I don't play it. It isn't a game.

PHAEDO

...Fine. Socrates, let me ask *you* something. Why are you here?

SOCRATES

(Staggered)

My gods, *that's* a big question! People have been asking that through the *ages*. And very few people have ever ventured an answer. I mean, Anaxagoras would say I'm here thanks to, oh, anatomy and motor function.

(Conspiratorially)

But I think that's an *easy* out. If I could tell you 'why I'm here...' Well, I'd be the wisest man.

But I don't know.

PHAEDO

Sorry, I meant *here*. Why are you here *at the courts*?

SOCRATES

Oh, *here*! At the *courts*!

PHAEDO

Of course at the *courts*!

SOCRATES

(*Hoity toity*)

Ooh! ‘Of course’ you say! You asked why I was here, not here ‘at the courts.’ Don’t you ‘of course’ me. I do wonder why I’m here...

PHAEDO

But why are you here... at the *courts*, Socrates.

SOCRATES

Oh! Yes.

(*Playing at serious*)

‘Of *course*.’ As you say. ‘Of *course*.’ At the *courts*.

PHAEDO

Of course.

SOCRATES

Of *course*.

PHAEDO

At the courts.

SOCRATES

At the courts. Actually, I was just reading about why I'm here... At the courts. It says here that I am accused of being...

(Reading newspaper.)

'A poet, or, a maker of gods.' Now, isn't that prettily put in, my friend?

(Returns PHAEDO'S paper.)

PHAEDO

Very pretty.

SOCRATES

Yes it is. Yes it is.

(Silence. SOCRATES rubs his forehead. An afterthought, brightening, meaning the paper.)

SOCRATES

Thank you for lending me that!

PHAEDO

Look, I *really* am sorry about...

SOCRATES

And for the coffee too. An unexpected experience.

PHAEDO

I'm so sorry.

SOCRATES

It's still burning my skin.

PHAEDO

Why are you smiling?

SOCRATES

Well, who's to say that unburned skin is better than burnt skin?

PHAEDO

I would for one.

SOCRATES

Why?

PHAEDO

Only one of those conditions would be to me a 'joyful thing.'

SOCRATES

If you know that, then you're a wiser man than I am.

(Silence.)

PHAEDO joins SOCRATES on the bench.

SOCRATES laughs.)

SOCRATES

I'm so sorry, I've forgotten your name.

PHAEDO

(Hurt)

...Phaedo.

SOCRATES

(Remembering)

You're *Phaedo*!

PHAEDO

(Ironically, put out)

You think so too?

SOCRATES:

I do!

PHAEDO

Me too.

SOCRATES

Me too. Me too. You're so grown up since I saw you!
You were such a waif. You'd lean on my knee, let me
stroke your curls, talk. You were so beautiful.

PHAEDO

Unfortunately.

SOCRATES

I suppose it would have been unfortunate, yes. You'd have been luckier to look like me. I take it back, no you wouldn't of. No matter what. I remember when my friend bought you, brought you home, he said he couldn't stand anything so beautiful being forced into that life. He said 'only a war could manage such an injustice to nature.' A bit poetical. Still.

PHAEDO

I, ah, yes.

SOCRATES

Do you still live with him? Your father?

PHAEDO

(Quickly)

Adopted. No I don't.

SOCRATES

Always liked him. Always liked you too! Still do. Even grown up. Even without all your lovely curls. So tell me now, Phaedo: what brings you here?

PHAEDO

(Conspiritorially)

...Anaxagoras would say anatomy and motor function, but I think that's an easy out.

SOCRATES

(A warning look)

Why are you here... at the courts?

(Mocking each other's statements)

PHAEDO

Oh, here at the *courts!*

SOCRATES

Of course at the courts.

PHAEDO

(Laughs)

'*Of course*' you say...

SOCRATES

(Darkly)

Of course.

PHAEDO

Of course.

SOCRATES

(Angrily)

Of course, of course, of course, of course you *silly* man!

(Silence. SOCRATES' head drops.)

PHAEDO

I say what you say... and I'm a silly man?

SOCRATES

(Quietly)

Yes, I think so. No, I don't.

(Avoiding his outburst)

Let's ask ourselves first: what makes a man silly.

PHAEDO

Don't start that again.

SOCRATES

Start what?

PHAEDO

You *know* what. You're the silly man.

SOCRATES

If you say so.

PHAEDO

I do.

SOCRATES

Alright.

PHAEDO

Alright.

SOCRATES

(Now genuinely curious)

What *does* make a man silly?

PHAEDO

I don't know. I don't know what makes a man silly. I don't know what silly means. I don't know. Can't we talk without talking about what we've actually said? Please? You're gods damned *provoking* sometimes, that's what you are.

SOCRATES

So many people say that.

I'm sorry I called you silly. I don't know what it means either.

PHAEDO

(Acquiescing)

Gods. I'm sorry I called you provoking. Even though you *are*. No matter what provoking means. Now I asked you first: Why are you here.

(Quickly)

At the courts. I can't imagine you being accused of anything at all! Who's charged you?

SOCRATES

The state!

PHAEDO

What? The *state*? We've been sitting here talking about what's *over* joy while you're being tried for crimes against the state?

SOCRATES

Yes.

PHAEDO

Gods, Socrates!

SOCRATES

What?

PHAEDO

Who's persecuting you?

SOCRATES

I think that you mean prosecuting. A man of whom little is known, Phaedo, and I hardly know him myself. Maybe you would recognize him. I'd describe him as a man with a beak, and a beard which is ill grown. Meletus.

PHAEDO

I don't know who that is. What's the charge?

SOCRATES

What's the charge?

(*PHAEDO nods*)

Well, a very *serious* charge. Which shows a good deal of character in the man, for which he is certainly *not* to be *disliked*.

(*SOCRATES dislikes MELETUS*)

PHAEDO

What *crime* does he say you've committed?

SOCRATES

Well, he says he knows how the children are being corrupted, and who's corrupting them: Me.

PHAEDO

What, all of them?

SOCRATES

Ask Meletus.

PHAEDO

How are you corrupting them?

SOCRATES

(*Considering*)

I don't think I am.

PHAEDO

This is absolutely ridiculous. Aren't you the wisest man?

SOCRATES

It's been said. I hope not! By the by though, I've observed: if a man makes people *think* they're thinking, they're *delighted*. But if a man *actually* makes people think... For some reason or other, they're angry.

PHAEDO

All you do is talk to people.

SOCRATES

(Defensive)

...I suppose.

PHAEDO

Even though that can be *provoking*.

SOCRATES

Even though.

PHAEDO

That's *not* a crime against the state.

SOCRATES

(Says nothing.)

PHAEDO

Well I say that this whole... thing will end in nothing, Socrates, and that you'll win your trial.

SOCRATES

We'll find out soon enough.

PHAEDO

We certainly will. But ah, on the off chance. What will happen if you're found guilty?

SOCRATES

(Simply)

I'll probably be put to death.

PHAEDO

Put to *death*? You'll be put to *death*? Where are your lawyers? Who's defending you?

(The door to the court opens.)

SOCRATES

I am defending myself.

PHAEDO

Defending *yourself*? You're defending *yourself*? Against the *state*? No, no. I know some excellent lawyers, let me call them for you.

SOCRATES

No need.

PHAEDO

No need? Why is there no need? Is your defense that well prepared?

SOCRATES

I've been preparing it all my life.

PHAEDO

All your life? How can that be?

SOCRATES

I've been a good man.

PHAEDO

That's not a defense!

SOCRATES

Isn't it? Oh. I considered that the *finest* defense.

PHAEDO

You're covered in coffee, Socrates.

SOCRATES

Yes I am.

PHAEDO

God's I'm sorry.

(PHAEDO removes his scarf and wraps it around SOCRATES attempting to hide the stains, and also giving him a Grecian air.)

SOCRATES

I know.

PHAEDO

But you said that you knew nothing.

SOCRATES

There you see! *Another* proof.

(Genuinely)

Thank you. Bye.

(The door shuts behind SOCRATES.)

MELETUS enters. Regardless of SOCRATES' unflattering description, he may be a man of any sort, though he has some form of beard. Waves to PHAEDO.)

MELETUS

Hul-lo! Ages since I've seen you!

PHAEDO

(Distracted, does not remember MELETUS)

Ah. Yes. Long time. Too long. Ages.

MELETUS

How's your father?

PHAEDO

Well he's-

(Looks off towards his own courtroom)

MELETUS

Still scribbling? Poetry! Nothing like it. Up with the birds. Smoke like a chimney. ‘Scotch to reward revision,’ I remember he’d say. I don’t think I’ve ever had a pleasanter time than studying with you and your old man after classes. Poetry. I’m sure I could have made it if I could have hung in a bit longer. Course then there was always *my* father. It was always going to be law school. I was always going to be a lawyer. And never going to be a very good one! Ha!

PHAEDO

(Cursory politeness; not sure who this man is)

I’m sorry-

MELETUS

Oh don’t be. Not today at any rate. This is a simple case. It’s a shame I’ll win, really.

PHAEDO

I’m sorry, I meant to say, I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten your name.

MELETUS

Context. I understand. I understand completely. It’s Meletus.

PHAEDO

(Realizing)

You’re *Meletus!*

MELETUS

I'm glad you think so too.

PHAEDO

You say it's a shame you'll win your case?

MELETUS

Well, not for *me* of course. But, yes. Yes it is. A pity. Bit like your old man this man sounds like. Dreamer, that is. Certainly dreaming to be defending himself! Against these charges! Course he's *very* poor, seems. But he's charged by the state! The whole state! Did you even know they could do that? Nobody asked *me* about charging him, which beats the Hades out of me. But here I am. The persecutor.

PHAEDO

I hope that you mean prosecutor.

MELETUS

Either neither or both. Ah, well, I'll win. Everyone in that room hates him. I mean *hates* him. Five hundred ladies and gentlemen are in that room right there who all resent the pudding out of him.

PHAEDO

That room right there?

MELETUS

Neato, right?

(Looks at watch)

Gods I'm late!

(MELETUS bangs through court door.)

Silence.

MELETUS opens door and looks round it.)

MELETUS

(Grinning)

And I'll *still* win! Good to see you, Phaedo. Give my best to your father!

(Door closes)

PHAEDO

(Reeling, recovering)

Gods, *my* father...

(PHAEDO exits, running, to his own case)

ACT 1

SCENE II

(The bench now represents the INSIDE of the court.

We see SOCRATES enter the court and sit.

As he sits, sounds of a great assembly standing.

He realizes he should stand, and stands.

As he stands, there are sounds of sitting.

Realizes he should sit, and sits. He finds this wryly funny.

MELETUS enters the court in a hurry, we see him shut the door, open it for his last word with PHAEDO, shut the door again, and rush into the court with the written accusation.)

MELETUS

I call Socrates to the stand.

(SOCRATES smiles at MELETUS questioningly.

MELETUS gestures SOCRATES to the stand, that is, the other side of the bench.

SOCRATES moves and stands at the 'stand.'

MELETUS gestures again to sit.

SOCRATES sits.)

SOCRATES

(Bemused)

Alright.

MELETUS

Ladies and gentlemen of the court. I want to warn you before I begin this examination to be on your guard. Do not be persuaded by the force of this man's excellence, no, eminence, no, eloquence. Sorry, I'm a bit blah. This man. This man here, is not, ah, he is not a good man. Because: he does not do good things. He is a, well, an *evil* man then. Because he has done evil things. According to *this*. He is an *evil-doer*.

(SOCRATES is smiling at him. MELETUS pauses to wonder at this)

And a curious person. Socrates, I put it to you that

(Reading)

'you search into things under the earth and in heaven, and you make the worst appear the better cause. And you teach the aforesaid doctrines to others.' To children. And they attempt to emulate you, you an *evil-doer*. The *children*.

(Murmurs)

MELETUS

So far, so good. So, Socrates. What do you have to say to that?

SOCRATES

I don't know, really. Don't know what all that meant. Hardly surprising. I'm not a clever man. Most things people say sound like *nonsense* to me. But then, I enjoy a little nonsense now and then. Aristophanes even wrote me into a play of his where I talked a lot of nonsense myself. Cheeky of him.

(For the crowd)

Cheeky.

(Scattered laughs)

SOCRATES

(To MELETUS)

Very funny play though. I love theatre, don't you?

MELETUS

I really do.

SOCRATES

Though not the written word. Think it's dead on a page.

MELETUS

Objection. I object, sincerely.

SOCRATES

Oh, do you write?

MELETUS

I wrote.

SOCRATES

Well, if you stopped writing yourself, why do you object?

MELETUS

Well my father... No. Sorry. Time nor place. I ah, I take it back.

SOCRATES

Oh can we do take-backs here?

MELETUS

I just did.

SOCRATES

But someone's over there writing all of this down.

MELETUS

Yes... Yes, there is.

SOCRATES

(Grinning)

How do you feel about the written word now?

MELETUS

... Moving on. You say Aristophanes wrote you into one of his plays. And, but, ah, but to be written into a play shows, demonstrates that is, a measure of fame. And you would not be famous if you were like... well, like other men. Who are not famous. This is only

further proof... Proof! Of the accusations against you.
Proof!

SOCRATES

Proof?

MELETUS

Proof!

SOCRATES

Proof of what?

MELETUS

Forgotten it now. No, proof! That you have been doing
strange... *things*.

SOCRATES

Because I talked nonsense in a *play*? I had no idea.
Although I do confess-

MELETUS

He confesses!

SOCRATES

I wasn't finished.

MELETUS

Oh, I'm so sorry.

SOCRATES

That's alright. I was going to say, I do confess that my friend Chaerephon discovered a strange thing that concerns me. But I've been looking into it.

MELETUS

Of course I know what you're talking about. I know all about it. But could you please tell the court, what, ah, strange thing... your friend discovered?

SOCRATES

Yes. Charephon's one of my oldest friends. I think he was your friend too actually, wasn't he?

(MELETUS would rather not be associated)

Yes. 'Was' at any rate; he's dead now. But. One day he asked the Oracle of Delphi to tell him whether there was anyone wiser than *I* was. And the oracle answered that there *wasn't*. That's the strange thing that concerns me. But I've been looking into it. Thoroughly.

MELETUS

I knew that. Let the record show that, ah, I knew that.

(Sotto to SOCRATES)

Thank you, I didn't know that. Does that have any, ah, bearing on this trial?

SOCRATES

(Sotto)

Oh, don't you know?

MELETUS

(Sotto)

Of course I do.

SOCRATES

(Sotto)

Then why are you asking me?

MELETUS

(Sotto)

... Just wanted to make sure that you know I'm not a man to be messed with.

SOCRATES

(Sotto)

I don't like you.

MELETUS

(Sotto)

What?

SOCRATES

(Sotto)

You don't know anything. And you know it.

MELETUS

(Sotto)

Well aren't we hostile. And wrong. I know something.

SOCRATES

(Sotto)

What?

MELETUS

(Sotto)

I know I'll win this trial.

(Addressing the court)

Now, can you tell the court please what bearing your ludicrous story has on this case?

SOCRATES

Yes. It will explain why I'm here. Why I'm a so-called 'evil man.'

MELETUS

(Surprised)

You admit it?

SOCRATES

Yes, I do. Now please don't interr-

MELETUS

(Grandly)

Ladies and gentlemen of the court! He admits it!

SOCRATES

Excuse me. I did ask you not to interrupt. Or I would have, but you interrupted me.

MELETUS

I'm so sorry.

SOCRATES

That's alright.

I may be ignorant of many things. I am not ignorant of my own reputation. But a man's reputation is not a man himself. And his reputation almost never comes close, either for good or for bad, to how deserving he actually is of love or pity or contempt.

(To MELETUS directly)

Or disliking.

MELETUS

Excuse me?

SOCRATES

I continue. When Chaerephon told me what the oracle told him, I said, ‘what can the god mean?’ Because I know that I have no wisdom at all! If I could just find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I could say to the god, ‘*here* is a man who is wiser than I am, and so what do you have to say about that, hey?’

MELETUS

You want to refute a god?

SOCRATES

Only to prove that I’m not a wise man. Let alone the wisest.

MELETUS

Well I guess that that’s alright then. Please continue.

SOCRATES

... I was going to. So, I went to a fellow who had a *reputation* for wisdom. He was a *politician*. When I talked to him, ha, well, I couldn’t help thinking that he was *not wise*. At all. He was thought wise by many. And wiser still by himself! But he was *not*.

MELETUS

So what did you do?

SOCRATES

I tried to explain this to him.

MELETUS

And what did he do?

SOCRATES

He hated me. So I left him alone. And I thought to myself as I walked away: Well, it seems neither of us knows anything beautiful or good. And *yet*. I'm wiser than he is. Because he knows nothing, but he *thinks* that he knows. Whereas I *know* that I know nothing. So I have slightly the advantage of him, see?

MELETUS

I see. But that's only one man. There must be loads of citizens wiser than you.

SOCRATES

You surprise me.

MELETUS

Oh?

SOCRATES

Yes. Because that's just what *I* thought. Surprising that *you* would think something that I'd thought, don't you think? At least I think it is. Surprising.

MELETUS

(Insulted)

You know something-

SOCRATES

I *don't*.

I continue. So I went to another man who had still higher philosophical ah, *pretensions*, and my conclusion was exactly the same. And he hated me too. And many, many more after him.

I can't be unconscious of the enmity, I provoke.

MELETUS

(*Seriously*)

Ladies and gentlemen of the court. As a boy, I would go to my mother and sob, 'it hurts when I do this.' She would ever so sagely reply, 'then don't do that.'

SOCRATES

That's good advice. But I don't think it applies. I'm not sobbing, and I'm not stopping. I'm the servant of a god.

MELETUS

Whom you're, ah, admittedly attempting to refute. Ladies and gentlemen of the court, I ask you, I ask you... Is that nice manners?

SOCRATES

The word of a god must be considered first. I don't care how many men I upset in the process. So many people say they *know*, say they *understand*. I don't. I go to them to learn. And to prove the Oracle right. It's not my

fault that they know nothing. It's theirs for saying otherwise.

MELETUS

But the god never asked you to *prove* anything... Did he?

(Silence.)

The quality of this point surprises them both, momentarily shaking SOCRATES.)

SOCRATES

(Standing, rallying, defiant)

I swear to you Athenians, by the dog I swear, the result of my mission is this: The men of best reputation are all the most foolish. 'Inferior' men are much wiser and better.

(Dissident murmurs)

SOCRATES

You don't believe me? Let me tell you the *whole* tale of my wanderings. Of my '*Herculean Labors*', as I call them. Which I endured only to find at last that the oracle was *absolutely right!*

(Boos)

MELETUS

I'm spectacularly mistaken, or you just inferred that every esteemed person here is a twit wit. How can you claim to be the *wisest* man, if *this* is your defense?

(Laughter)

SOCRATES

You *are* spectacularly mistaken; this isn't my defense. I don't have any defense. To defend myself would mean I had done wrong.

MELETUS

(To SOCRATES)

But this isn't *not* defending; it's incitement!

(Grinning, to court)

Lookit, he doesn't even need a prosecutor!

(Laughter)

SOCRATES

I think that you mean persecutor.

MELETUS

Sorry, what was that?

SOCRATES

I said, may I continue?

MELETUS

(Jolly)

By all means! Hang yourself!

SOCRATES

I won't, thanks. But it's so convenient having such a large audience. I'll never have a better chance to-

MELETUS

-Be my guest.

SOCRATES

Thanks.

(Smiles, clears throat, continues slightly manic, brightly)

My Herculean Labors. After the politicians I went to the poets.

MELETUS

I love poetry! Don't you ladies and gentlemen?

(Weak cheers, a laugh)

SOCRATES

I went to the poets after the politicians. I took them passages from *their own writings*, and asked them to explain them to me. And do you know what?

MELETUS

What.

SOCRATES

There's not a person present here who couldn't talk better about their poetry than they did themselves.

(Scattered laughter, boos)

Incredible, isn't it? It's not by wisdom that poets write poetry, but by a sort of inspiration. They're like diviners, fortune tellers, who say very fine things, but don't understand what they mean.

MELETUS

You can't say that about poets.

SOCRATES

And yet I just did.

MELETUS

Yes, so you did.

SOCRATES

And I'll say more! I had had hopes for the poets! But I observed that on the strength of their poetry alone, they believed they were also strong thinkers in *all other* matters. In which they are *not*. So, knowing at least that I know I know nothing, I find that I'm superior to them in the same way I'm superior to the politicians.

MELETUS

And what did you do?

SOCRATES

I told them so.

MELETUS

And what did they do?

SOCRATES

They hated me. Then I went to the artisans.

MELETUS

Gods! You're really something. What's the wordy.
Incorrigible. Isn't he ladies and gentlemen?

(Laughing broadly, he enjoys playing to the crowd)

SOCRATES

(Sotto)

You're really something too.

MELETUS

What was that?

SOCRATES

I went to the artisans. I was sure in their trades they'd know loads of fine things. And I wasn't mistaken! They *did* know many things of which I was ignorant!

(Scattered artisanal cheers)

But I observed that even the artisans fell into the same error as the poets. Because they were good workmen, they thought they had a good understanding of all sorts of high matters.

MELETUS

And they *didn't* really understand them?

SOCRATES

They *really* didn't understand them.

MELETUS

And you told them so?

SOCRATES

Yes.

And I'm superior to them as well, having neither their knowledge, or their ignorance, or both. At least I know that I know nothing.

MELETUS

I'll go out on a limb here. Do the artisans hate you now as well?

SOCRATES

My investigation has led to my having many enemies. Of the worst and most dangerous kind.

(Smiles at the court)

MELETUS

That's what comes of saying you're superior.

SOCRATES

I'm not saying that.

MELETUS

You *just* said that you said that.

SOCRATES

No, a god said so.

MELETUS

...Even so.

SOCRATES

And if a god said so. Of me. (And he did.) Then in his godlike way he *must* be saying that the wisdom of men is worth little, or nothing.

(Murmurs)

MELETUS

Unsettling thought. I don't like that one bit.

SOCRATES

Oh. How do you feel about the truth?

MELETUS

I'm for it. Often.

SOCRATES

Think then. It's true that a god says I'm the wisest man. And it's true that I only know that I know nothing. And it's true that many people say that they are wise. And true that most of them are *not*. So in vindication of the god, I make inquisition into anyone who seems to be wise. And if they're not, I show them they're not. In order to show them the truth.

It's a big job. I have no time for anything else. My wife, my family. I'm in utter poverty. It's why I'm hated. Why I'm a so-called evil man. Why I'm here, in short.

But as you say, you knew that.

(SOCRATES touches PHAEDO'S scarf)

MELETUS

(Squints)

Hmm.

(Silent. Then pompous)

But think of the *children*. Ladies and gentlemen of the court. *Children!*

(An unsettled audience grasps at this in agreement)

SOCRATES

Oh, right. The *children*... Children of the richer classes, they don't have much to do, so sometimes they come

around me. Of their own accord. They like to hear the pretenders examined. It makes them laugh. They think it's *very* funny. They try to imitate me; they examine others themselves. For their amusement.

There are *plenty* of persons, they soon discover, who say they know more than they do. And then those who are examined by these *youths*, instead of being angry with *themselves*, are angry with *me*. 'This confounded Socrates,' they say 'this villainous misleader of youth!' and then if someone asks them, 'Why? Whatever did he do?' they don't know, they can't say, but in order that they may not appear... at a loss, they repeat the readymade charges which are used against all philosophers about 'teaching things up in the clouds and under the earth' and 'having no gods, and making up gods and making the worse appear the better-' did I get that right? Never mind, it's *nonsense* anyhow.

(*Murmurs*)

These people don't like to admit that their ignorance has been detected. By *children*. These people are *legion* now; and they've charged into battle on their high horses; they've filled your ears with their shouts of Indignation, outraged Smears. And *you* listened to them. And now I'm here.

Now that I think of it, I wish you *would* think of the children. I could go home.

MELETUS

Well. You seem very sure of yourself. That's a neat bit of thinking. You're innocent. You've been, what's the wordy... libeled. But you can never *prove* that!

(To court, reassuringly)

He can never prove that.

SOCRATES

Well... I can at least *attempt* to prove it.

(SOCRATES, a bit awkwardly, politely, switches places with MELETUS.)

Let me ask you a question. You think a great deal about the improvement of the youth?

MELETUS

Obviously.

SOCRATES

Then *who* is their *improver*?

(Silence)

You must know. You've determined who is their corruptor, and are citing and accusing me in court. So who improves them?

(Silence)

You have no interest in the matter? Come on, Meletus, and tell us who their *improver* is.

(Silence)

MELETUS

(Uncertain)

The law?

SOCRATES

But that, my good sir, is not my meaning. I want to know who the *person* is.

(Silence)

SOCRATES

(Begrudgingly helping)

Who, for instance, knows the law.

MELETUS

(Relieved)

The *judges*, Socrates. Who are present in this court.

(Waves to judges)

Hello.

SOCRATES

So the judges are able to instruct and to improve the youth?

MELETUS

Certainly they are!

SOCRATES

Really? All of them? Or only some of them, and not others?

MELETUS

No, no. All of them.

SOCRATES

By the goddess. Here! That is good news!

(Regarding the enormity of the court)

There are plenty of improvers then.

(Laughter)

And what do you say of the audience? Do they improve the youth?

MELETUS

Yes, they do!

(Cheers)

SOCRATES

And the senators?

MELETUS

Yes, the senators improve them.

(Stamps added to cheers)

SOCRATES

But perhaps our religious leaders corrupt them?

(Cheers fall)

Or do they improve them?

MELETUS

They improve them.

(A few coughs)

SOCRATES

Then every Athenian improves the youth, with only the exception of myself. I alone am their corrupter. Is that what you affirm?

MELETUS

That is what I stoutly affirm. Yes.

SOCRATES

Well *gods*, I'm very unfortunate if that's true... But it would be a fine thing for the youth if they had one corruptor only, isn't that so!

(Scattered laughs and cheers)

Tell me. Do I corrupt them *intentionally*?

MELETUS

Certainly you do. Lookit. It says so. Here.

SOCRATES

But the children come of their own accord. Examine others of their own accord. I converse with them only by their invitation, and in such conversation, I do not teach but question. I *cannot* corrupt them *intentionally*. Do not. I affirm then that either I do not corrupt them at all, or I corrupt them *unintentionally*.

But if I do *not* corrupt them, you have no case, Meletus!

And, for that matter, if I corrupt them *unintentionally*, you have no case!

The law has no cognizance of unintentional offences. And if *that* is *true*, (and it is) you should have taken me aside privately and warned me, admonished me. If you could have shown me that you're right and I'm wrong I would have stopped what I was doing;

(*To court*)

I would have, too.

(*To MELETUS*)

But you hated to talk with me or teach me, so you indicted me in this court, which is not a place of instruction, but a place of punishment.

(*Murmurs*)

MELETUS

Be that as it may, I say you have *intentionally* corrupted the youth.

SOCRATES

But in what way *specifically* have I corrupted the youth?

MELETUS

You...

(Rereading indictment)

'You do not acknowledge the gods of the state. You have made new gods, new divinities, and/or spiritual agencies.'

SOCRATES

(Scoffing)

'And/or.' You say so?

MELETUS

Yes, I say so emphatically.

SOCRATES

Oh, you say so *emphatically*?

MELETUS

(Emphatically!)

You do not acknowledge the gods of the state!

SOCRATES

Then our gods do not speak through our Delphic Oracle?

MELETUS

Of course they do.

SOCRATES

The same Oracle who called me the wisest man? The same Gods whom I strive to justify? The Gods that I'm acknowledging right *now*, you say I don't acknowledge?

(Silence...)

MELETUS

You are an atheist!

(Outrage!)

SOCRATES

What?

MELETUS

You are a complete atheist!

(Outcries)

SOCRATES

That's an extraordinary statement! You haven't indicted me as such. You've contradicted yourself... Could you tell me why you say that?

MELETUS

(Playing to the crowd)

I swear by *Zeus* that you believe in *not even one god*.

SOCRATES

I teach 'new divinities' yet I am altogether an Atheist? I believe in gods and no gods at the same time?

You're a liar, not even believed by yourself.

(Outrage)

MELETUS

Good gods! Ladies and Gentlemen! Think of the children!

(Angry hubbub)

SOCRATES

(Calmly)

Ladies and Gentlemen, think of the children is a phrase which blatantly appeals to emotion; and as it is being used as both argument *and* conclusion, it represents *perfectly* what philosophers call a formal fallacy.

MELETUS

(He hasn't been listening)

The children! Think of the children!

SOCRATES

(Sighs, then cutting through the chaos, though largely for himself)

I have said enough in answer to these charges. As I said before, I certainly have many enemies, and this is what will be my destruction if I am destroyed; of that I'm

certain. Not this man, nor this indictment, but the envy and detraction of the world, which has been the death of *many* good men, and will probably be the death of many more. There is no danger of my being the last of them.

MELETUS

(Turning dramatically upon SOCRATES)

You are standing trial for execution, Socrates! So you cannot say the life you led was good!

(Cheers, boos)

SOCRATES

No, you're mistaken. A man who's good for anything shouldn't calculate the chance of living or dying. He should only consider whether in doing anything, he is doing right or wrong. Acting the part of a good man or of a bad.

(Regarding the tumultuous courtroom)

I wish that men had an unlimited capacity for harm. Then they might have an unlimited capacity for good.

But.

To you and to *god* I commit my case, to be determined by you as is best for you and for me.

(SOCRATES smiles at the sweeping courtroom.

Argumentative, angry murmurs.

SOCRATES quietly exits through door.)

MELETUS

Ladies and Gentlemen! He confessed! He called you
twit wits! Are you going to stand for this? Think of the
children!

(Voices rise.)

*MELETUS exits to side, shouting to the court,
most likely about poetry and children.*

Banging.

*SOCRATES enters through door, sits on bench.
Bench now represents the hall again.*

Silence.)

ACT 1

SCENE III

(PHAEDO enters, anxious, on recess from his own case.)

PHAEDO

How's it going, Socrates?

SOCRATES

(Grinning, tired)

Just about like I expected.

PHAEDO

So it's going well?

SOCRATES

Well... It was very dramatic.

PHAEDO

Oh yes?

SOCRATES

Oh yes. I spoke to all those people. And the people cheered and shouted.

PHAEDO

(Smiles)

What did the people shout?

(Silence, SOCRATES thinks back, he bites a hangnail.)

PHAEDO

Did it go badly?

SOCRATES

What do you mean by badly?

PHAEDO

Oh for gods- I don't know what I mean.

SOCRATES

No, now I'm curious. This is fitting actually. Would you indulge me, please?

PHAEDO

(Sighs)

Alright, alright.

SOCRATES

Alright. Thank you. So. Suppose you think a thing is bad, but I think a thing is good. How would we reconcile that disagreement?

PHAEDO

By agreeing. And I have no idea how.

SOCRATES

Well suppose we went out to eat, and when it came time to pay the bill, we disagreed about what we each owed?

PHAEDO

That happens every single time I go out. We just keep checking our math. Till we agree, that is.

SOCRATES

Good! Well suppose we wanted to walk to a friend's, but we disagreed about how long a walk it would be?

PHAEDO

We could look at a map. Or measure the miles as we walked. Or just stay in and have some wine instead. We could agree on those things, right?

SOCRATES

Right. But what about differences which can't be decided? Where facts like how much or far can't be determined. What would happen if we just simply *couldn't* agree?

PHAEDO

We would just keep arguing.

SOCRATES

We would. I agree. *Now* tell me: Do you think that everybody loves the things they think are good?

PHAEDO

Yes, that's why they love them!

SOCRATES

And hate the things they think are bad?

PHAEDO

Yes. These are easy questions.

SOCRATES

Does it ever happen that people argue over whether a thing is good or if it's bad?

PHAEDO

Well yes! But I wouldn't say *does it ever*. I'd say, it *always* happens. That people argue whether a thing is good or bad.

SOCRATES

Over the *same* thing?

PHAEDO

The very same, of course. Like eating eggs. Or city living. Or style.

SOCRATES

We argue because we can't say with absolute certainty that the thing is one or the other. Good or bad. Right or wrong. But, even though we can't prove ourselves right. Maybe *especially* because we can't prove it. We are *adamant* we're right, because regardless, we still

truly love what we think is good and truly hate what we think is bad.

PHAEDO

Well, that seems natural to me. I have some very strong, unfounded opinions myself which I refuse to be persuaded from. Even by you. Especially about *your* style.

SOCRATES

(Impatient)

Phaedo. Please. Consider from a generalized perspective of humanity. I may be sentenced to death in a moment.

I wanted a moment of *Grandeur*.

PHAEDO

I'm sorry. You're right. Even though I'm sure you won't be killed.

(Melodramatically grand)

We are considering mankind resolving unresolvable differences?

SOCRATES

(Grand cont...)

Yes. Can we never resolve them?

PHAEDO

Not yet.

SOCRATES

Nor tolerate them?

PHAEDO

Someday I hope, but not today.

SOCRATES

(With finality)

So there are wars and fighting.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

(Impressed)

That *was* a moment of Grandeur, Socrates.

SOCRATES

Thank you very much.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

Socrates?

SOCRATES

Yes?

PHAEDO

Would you agree that murderers should be punished? I mean, wouldn't *everyone* agree that murderers should

be punished? I mean. No. Of course you agree. There can be no difference of opinion about it.

SOCRATES

(Skeptically)

Really. You've never heard of someone arguing that a murderer should be let off?

PHAEDO

(Conceding)

Well *yes*, lots of people argue that murderers should be let off.

(Bolsters)

But that doesn't mean they shouldn't be punished. People will say *anything* to escape punishment.

SOCRATES

Do they ever *admit* their crime, and then say that they shouldn't be punished?

PHAEDO

... No.

SOCRATES

Then there are *some* things they *won't* say.

PHAEDO

That's just quibbling, quibbler.

SOCRATES

(Hoity toity)

Well! To answer your question: Even *murderers* don't argue that murder shouldn't be punished; that's why they don't *admit* their crime.

PHAEDO

Right. And that's why we gather evidence against them, to have proofs against whatever they say. Because *murder* is *wrong*. And wrong is wrong is wrong. And no one, no one disagrees with that.

(Silence)

SOCRATES

Gods, Phaedo, what have you done. You've accused someone of

(Together) PHAEDO & SOCRATES

Murder.

SOCRATES

Who?

PHAEDO

My 'father.'

(Silence)

SOCRATES

That sweet...

PHAEDO

You'll applaud me.

SOCRATES

Oh good. ...You must be very sure of yourself?

PHAEDO

Yes I am.

SOCRATES

Why?

(Silence)

PHAEDO

Gods, is that the time?

SOCRATES

I see. You mean to say that there's not enough time for me to apprehend your reasons; I'm not a clever man. But surely the judges will understand you, because your reasoning is *perfect*.

PHAEDO

You've seen right through me.

SOCRATES

Oh I see alright. I imagine you're very popular at this moment? Taking such an attack?

PHAEDO

No actually. Come to that.

SOCRATES

Then some people must think that it's *you* who're doing wrong?

PHAEDO

(Wrought)

Yes. Especially my family. Because it is my 'father,' and because he's very old.

(Rapidly)

But a servant of mine died, and I believe he is to blame, because a servant of his beat mine for being drunk, and my father did nothing about it, and my servant died, and I think I am *more* than right in standing up for a servant, even though I must stand against... Just like what you used to say, about doing good, no matter what people say, I think about that, a lot actually.

SOCRATES

(Sincerely)

You're a remarkable man, Phaedo.

PHAEDO

(He wanted that blessing)

Thank you, Socrates.

(Silence. Then, a quick exchange)

SOCRATES

Tell me. Does your father admit his guilt?

PHAEDO

Of course he doesn't.

SOCRATES

But you say that he's guilty.

PHAEDO

Yes, I do.

SOCRATES

And others say that *you* are wrong?

PHAEDO

Violently so.

SOCRATES

Do you admit your guilt?

PHAEDO

(Sputtering)

I haven't done anything wrong!

SOCRATES

But others say you have?

PHAEDO

I'm not on trial here!

SOCRATES

No. Your father is.

PHAEDO

Yes, because! Because he's guilty!

SOCRATES

That's your opinion.

PHAEDO

It's a fact!

SOCRATES

Others disagree?

PHAEDO

Yes but. That's because.

SOCRATES

Did you tell me there could be *no disagreement* about punishing a murderer?

PHAEDO

(Firmly)

There can't be.

SOCRATES

And yet *here's* a disagreement. So by *your* reasoning, your father must not be responsible for the man's death. In which case, *you* are the one in the wrong to accuse him. Do you agree?

(Silence.)

SOCRATES looks toward the door.)

Murderers never admit their guilt; in that way they're just like the innocent.

(SOCRATES briefly strokes PHAEDO'S hair. Silence. They are both melancholic figures.)

PHAEDO

It's too late to drop the charges.

SOCRATES

Why.

PHAEDO

Because... Because.

(Frustrated)

It would be so embarrassing! Anyway, if he's guilty he'll be convicted, and I'll have been right. And if he's innocent, he'll be set free.

SOCRATES

Then your opinion is that it's a greater good to try your father- how old is he?

PHAEDO

Eighty-six.

SOCRATES

To try your eighty-six year old father for murder, than to be embarrassed.

PHAEDO

I didn't say that.

SOCRATES

I must have misheard you.

(Silence. PHAEDO shouts in frustration.)

(Silence. PHAEDO looks absently at his paper.)

PHAEDO

I suppose not many people know about it. After all. There's nothing about it in here. It's all about you, actually.

SOCRATES

I hope your trial isn't in there, my friend.

PHAEDO

Why?

SOCRATES

Because fame is the perfume of *heroic* deeds.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

(Hurt)

I'll take my scarf back now, if it's all the same to you.

SOCRATES

With pleasure.

(He returns the scarf)

The fewer our wants, the more we resemble the gods.

PHAEDO

Who said that?

SOCRATES

I did.

PHAEDO

You're full of grand sayings today aren't you? The wise man.

La dee da.

SOCRATES

I hope so. I think I'll be condemned to death in a moment, and then I won't have much time for saying anything.

PHAEDO

(Struck)

I'm sorry.

SOCRATES

I'm not.

PHAEDO

Why?

SOCRATES

Death may be the greatest of all human blessings.

PHAEDO

But you don't know that.

SOCRATES

No. I *don't* know that. I don't *know* anything. So I won't *presume* to know.

(The courtroom door opens.)

SOCRATES

I should hope for your father's sake it's a blessing! You truly are a remarkable man, Phaedo!

(Shakes PHAEDO'S hand)

PHAEDO

How can you be happy, Socrates?

SOCRATES

Happiness is unrepentant pleasure. I have nothing to repent.

PHAEDO

Not an unjust execution?

SOCRATES

Well, there are two tragedies in life, I suppose. One is to not to get your heart's desire, and the other is to get it.

PHAEDO

Does that mean you want to live or want to die?

SOCRATES

Exactly...

PHAEDO

How can you be so reckless with yourself? You must care whether you live or die! You must care whether or not your death is just! You must be outraged and, and terrified!

SOCRATES

Oh *must* I? And must I seem so too?

PHAEDO

...I don't know.

SOCRATES

The nearest way to glory is to be what you pretend to be.

PHAEDO

Then, are you pretending?

SOCRATES

I don't know. Are you?

PHAEDO

...I don't know.

(Door closes behind SOCRATES.

PHAEDO stands perfectly still in thought. Turns and walks resolutely towards his courtroom.)

ACT 1

SCENE IV

(SOCRATES enters the court and sits.

MELETUS strolls on from off towards SOCRATES with a sealed envelope, sits next to SOCRATES.

Sounds of the crowd throughout this are not as attentive as they were before.)

MELETUS

I have the verdict here. Haven't peeked, so don't you peek either.

(Sets the envelope between them)

Before we read it, I just want to say, man to man, that I know that you don't like me. But I admire you.

SOCRATES

Really.

MELETUS

Oh yes. I'd also like to add, that I know that I'm an idiot.

SOCRATES

Good.

MELETUS

Would you say that makes me just a bit clever? Knowing that I'm an idiot?

SOCRATES

(Looks at MELETUS appraisingly)

I'm sorry that I said I didn't like you.

MELETUS

Don't give it a second thought. You know, I'll be almost as happy if *you've* won this case, as if *I've* won. I mean, I'll be happier if *I've* won, of course. But only this much.

SOCRATES

Let's have that verdict then.

MELETUS

You're ready?

SOCRATES

Oh... Sure.

MELETUS

Peachy.

(Stands)

Ladies and gentlemen of the court! The verdict is in! Socrates, please stand.

(SOCRATES stands.)

MELETUS opens sealed envelope and reads.)

Socrates, to every single charge laid against you, you have been found... guilty.

(Mostly approbatory murmurs.

SOCRATES stands still.

PHAEDO enters the court.)

SOCRATES & MELETUS

(Turning)

Phaedo!

MELETUS

Ladies and gentlemen of the court... just a minute.

(Throwing an arm over PHAEDO'S shoulders)

You sweet man, you came to hurrah me!

SOCRATES

Oh, you know each other?

MELETUS

Please have a seat, sit.

PHAEDO

No. I've come to support Socrates; I want to speak on his behalf.

MELETUS

Oh you know each other? Always nice to know nice people know each other. But I'm afraid you're too late. I'm awfully sorry.

PHAEDO

What do you mean?

SOCRATES

The trial's over, Phaedo. I lost. But I'm still glad you're here.

PHAEDO

But, no.

MELETUS

I wish that you'd said something. You could have spoken before. There would have been plenty of time. No one spoke for Socrates.

PHAEDO

No one?

SOCRATES

No. Please don't worry, Phaedo. What happened with your father?

MELETUS

(Concerned)

What about his father?

SOCRATES

He's accused his father of murder.

MELETUS

What? That sweet old man?

SOCRATES

I know.

PHAEDO

I dropped the charge just now.

SOCRATES

Oh, I'm so glad.

MELETUS

(Huffy)

Yes, I'm glad too!

PHAEDO

I've got *everything* wrong; I was *certain* I was right. If I hadn't been trying my father, then I would have been *here*. I've been a gods-damned schnook.

SOCRATES

Don't be hard on yourself. You're here now. I'm so glad I get to see you. I don't think I'll get to for much longer.

PHAEDO

(Embracing SOCRATES)

Gods!

(Turning on MELETUS)

How could you have won?

MELETUS

(Pointing at SOCRATES)

Well he was a great help.

SOCRATES

Well.

PHAEDO

How could you win? Are you *sure* that you've won? I can't *believe* that you've won! You're *such* an idiot!

MELETUS

(Humble)

Well I'm sure you're right. But I *can* read. You can read it yourself if you like. Here.

(Offers PHAEDO the verdict.

PHAEDO reads it, crumples it up, and bounces it off MELETUS' head.)

PHAEDO

You're still an idiot.

MELETUS

Lookit. I'm not happy about it either. Well, I mean I am, happy, but I would have been happy to lose as well. But as I *have* won, I mean, you don't have to hurrah me, but please don't ping things off me. My father's out there, you know!

SOCRATES

(A lie)

Excuse me. If anyone should be upset here, it's me, and I'm not. You see?

PHAEDO

I see, but I don't see why not!

SOCRATES

Never mind. Let's just... sentence me, please.

MELETUS

Fair enough. Excuse me Socrates, Phaedo.

(Amiable)

Ladies and gentlemen of the court. I propose a penalty of death.

PHAEDO

Why would you *do* that?

MELETUS

That's what I'm *supposed* to do. He's supposed to counter.

SOCRATES

Right. Well. Since I'm certain I haven't harmed anyone; I won't propose *any* penalty.

PHAEDO

(Scolding)

Socrates.

MELETUS

(Helpfully)

You see, you have to propose *some* penalty, or the penalty *will* be death.

SOCRATES

I don't deserve any punishment.

PHAEDO & MELETUS

PHAEDO: You can't just say that.

MELETUS: Come on, now.

MELETUS

What would you say to imprisonment? Could be cozy.

SOCRATES

I'd rather not live a slave to this verdict. But thank you.

PHAEDO

Exile?

MELETUS

They might just go for that!

SOCRATES

No. I...

(He is tempted, then firmly)

No. When I think that my own citizens have found my conversation so hateful and so horrible that they would just as soon *kill* me, I can't imagine people abroad are likely to tolerate me. And I won't hold my tongue to live in peace with strangers.

The unexamined life isn't worth living.

MELETUS

He can be really profound sometimes, can't he?

PHAEDO

Yes he can.

So. How about a fine?

SOCRATES

I don't have any money; I couldn't pay a fine.

MELETUS

Socrates, if you don't propose *some* kind of penalty, you're going to be killed.

*(Silence. PHAEDO and MELETUS worry.
SOCRATES observes this.)*

SOCRATES

(Searches pockets, takes out a coin)

... Well I've got a mina here. If it'll make you happy, I propose a one mina penalty.

PHAEDO

Oh for gods-

(Counting coins from his pockets)

I've got thirty minae here; I can get more!

(There is a banging.)

MELETUS goes to retrieve a sealed envelope.)

MELETUS

(To court)

I have the penalty here.

(Opens the envelope, reads, to court)

Let's see. It says here... Socrates, you have been condemned to death.

(Applause)

PHAEDO

(Raging)

You can't do this! You can't! This man is brave, and wise, and good! He's a veteran, you know! He fought in the wars! He has a family! You can't do this! You can't!

SOCRATES

They did. It's done.

(SOCRATES sits, rubs his forehead, wipes his eyes casually with his palm)

PHAEDO

(Angrily)

Why didn't you defend yourself?

SOCRATES

(Absently)

I didn't do anything wrong.

PHAEDO

God's you're provoking!

MELETUS

Don't speak to Socrates like that.

PHAEDO

(To MELETUS, lashing)

I didn't remember you at first because you're forgettable.
Your poetry. It's forgettable.

MELETUS

How dare you? I've been nothing but kind.

PHAEDO

Says the man who just got Socrates condemned to death!

MELETUS

Says the man who tried to condemn his own father!

PHAEDO

(Sputtering)

You-! You've led a democracy to murder a man for speaking freely! Is that what you've done! Are you aware of that? Gods!

MELETUS

I won't listen to this from you! You were a prisoner of war, made a slave and a whore! You've accused the man of murder, in his dotage, his dotage, I add, who saved you from that ugly, awful life; and, *and*, you forsook your friend here in his need. So there!

PHAEDO

... You're right! I'm a bad person! I'm so sorry!

MELETUS

I'm so sorry too!

PHAEDO

I just can't believe Socrates is going to be killed!

MELETUS

I can't believe I got him killed! It's all so terrible!

(They embrace.)

Silence.

SOCRATES clears his throat.)

SOCRATES

Do you think that I might say a few words?

MELETUS & PHAEDO

(Recalling themselves, moved)

MELETUS: Of course!

PHAEDO: Oh please!

MELETUS

Allow me? Ladies and gentlemen of the court. Socrates would like to say a few words. I know that most of you want to kill Socrates. And we're *going* to kill Socrates. But remember. A god did say he was the wisest man, so let's all be polite and pretend to listen to him. Thank you.

(Sounds of an unenthusiastic crowd settling)

SOCRATES

Thank you.

(PHAEDO and MELETUS sit on the bench, giving SOCRATES audience.)

SOCRATES stands. Takes a breath and sighs. He briefly drums his fingers on his thighs.)

SOCRATES

Well. I'd like to say that

(Cocky, a smile)

...I could have been acquitted if I'd wanted to!

But I didn't have the impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked. Crying and lying and flattering, and doing and saying the things which you're accustomed to hearing, and which are unworthy of me.

I could have dragged my wife and children out cowering as a spectacle for you. Could have had my friends come praise me and cry mercy.

There are always ways to avoid death if a man is willing to say or do *anything*.

(To MELETUS)

Isn't that right?

MELETUS

Oh yes, that's right.

SOCRATES

But I thought that I ought not do anything common or mean in the hour of danger. Nor do I now repent my

defense. I would rather die having spoken in my own manner, than to speak in your manner and live.

I want to say though, while you're all here; if you think that by killing men, by killing me, you can escape the accuser finding fault in your lives, you're mistaken. There isn't a way of escape which is possible, or, honorable. The easiest and the noblest way is not to crush others, but to improve yourselves.

MELETUS

(Rapt)

The loveliest, the unlikeliest.

PHAEDO

You're right. They'd rather crush. And when this pack of assassins realize there's no difference in their little lives because Socrates is dead; they'll see that they were wrong to murder him. But they won't admit that to themselves. They'll find someone else to blame.

(Realizing, quietly)

It will be you, Meletus.

SOCRATES

(Sotto, to PHAEDO)

Now, now Phaedo. If you can't prophesy something nice, don't prophesy at all.

(To court)

I don't know what death is. You give it to me because you think it's the last, worst evil. But I'm not afraid of death.

If death is nothingness, it's an unspeakable gain. All eternity then is just one dreamless night.

And if it's a transmigration of the soul to another world, and as many men say, *all* the dead are there. Well. I'll question everyone there, just as I've done here. All the heroes of old... I doubt I'll be the wisest man there. At the very least, I doubt they'll *kill* me for my questions there. I'll be dead already!

I'm not angry with my accusers, or condemners. You have done me no harm.

(Scolds)

Although you meant me no good.

(Stoic)

For that, and that alone, I gently blame you.

(An aggressive banging.)

MELETUS rises and manacles SOCRATES with some show for the court.

Sounds of an assembly leaving.)

SOCRATES

(Calling over the rising noise, in good natured farewell)

The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways!
I to die, and you to live! Which way is better, god only
knows!

(SOCRATES bows, grandly.)

LIGHTS

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

SCENE I

(The GUARD is standing guard. He is patiently smiling.)

Silence.

PHAEDO enters, trench coat, collar up, chin low, overtly casual because he is extremely nervous.)

PHAEDO

Hello there. I'm here to visit Socrates.

GUARD

Oh, you startled me! Hello. What's the name?

PHAEDO

You need a name. Of course. Of course... Do you really need to know?

GUARD

Can't get anywhere without a name.

PHAEDO

Of course. Of course.

(Reluctantly)

It's Phaedo.

GUARD

Oh, I'm sorry, sir. We don't have a Phaedo. I'd thought at first that you'd said 'Socrates.'

PHAEDO

I did say Socrates.

GUARD

Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I could have sworn you just said Phaedo.

PHAEDO

I did say Phaedo.

GUARD

I'm sorry, sir, you've confused me now. You didn't say Socrates?

PHAEDO

I did say Socrates. But then I thought you were asking my name.

GUARD

Your name's Socrates? That's a coincidence. We have someone here called Socrates.

PHAEDO

Yes I know. I'd like to see him.

GUARD

But I thought you wanted to see Phaedo?

PHAEDO

No. I'm Phaedo. I thought you were asking for *my* name.

GUARD

Oh! *You're* Phaedo!

PHAEDO

You think so too?

GUARD

I do!

PHAEDO

Me too.

(Silence)

GUARD

(Gets it)

And you'd like to *see* Socrates.

PHAEDO

Yes!

GUARD

I see.

(Silence. The GUARD is pleased that he has figured all this out.)

PHAEDO

So may I? See Socrates, please?

GUARD

(Suddenly)

That rhymes you know. 'Socrates, please.'

PHAEDO

Does it matter?

GUARD

He's been setting things to verse. Thought it might amuse him.

PHAEDO

You speak to him?

GUARD

I do.

PHAEDO

May I?

GUARD

May you what?

PHAEDO

Speak with him?

GUARD

...If you ask me nicely.

PHAEDO

May I *please* speak with Socrates?

GUARD

(Enjoying the rhyme)

‘May I *please* speak with Socrates.’

PHAEDO

Yes, may I?

GUARD

May you what?

PHAEDO

(Agonized)

May I please-

GUARD

Got you. Walk this way, sir.

PHAEDO

...Thank you.

(GUARD and PHAEDO exit through door.)

SOCRATES enters from off, manacled. He is in his cell. He has papers and pen and book of Aesop’s Fables. He is happy.

PHAEDO and GUARD enter from door.)

PHAEDO

Oh Socrates! I-

*(Looks at GUARD still standing there.
Dismissing him.)*

Thank you.

GUARD

Not at all sir. Just doing my job.

(The GUARD remains standing.)

PHAEDO

Socrates, I-

(Notices the GUARD is still there. Severely)

Thank you.

GUARD

(Gratified)

You're very welcome.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

You can go now.

GUARD

(Disappointed whining)

Oh!

PHAEDO

Socrates? Could you...?

SOCRATES

Phaedo my friend, I'm delighted to see you. But you've made my new friend go 'oh'. Is that nice? Let the man stay.

PHAEDO

(Disappointed)

Oh!

SOCRATES

(Amused)

Oh! I'm the one being killed here. I sent the women away to avoid this sort of thing. Now both of you stay and be good. I've heard it said that a man should die peacefully.

PHAEDO & GUARD

(Not wanting him to die)

Oh!

SOCRATES

(Groaning)

Oh! No more of that! For my sake. Please. Alright my good man?

GUARD

All right Socrates.

SOCRATES

All right Phaedo, my friend?

PHAEDO

But Socrates...

SOCRATES

Yes?

PHAEDO

(Conspiratorially)

I have something to say to you which this man shouldn't hear.

SOCRATES

Yes?

PHAEDO

(Sotto, shutting out the GUARD as best he can, which is, not at all.)

I have a plan.

SOCRATES

You have a plan? How wonderful.

(To the GUARD)

Listen my good man. He has a plan!

PHAEDO

Shh!

GUARD

A plan?

PHAEDO

Shh!

SOCRATES

Don't 'shh.' You're too modest, you remarkable man.
What sort of plan?

GUARD

Yes, what sort of plan?

PHAEDO

(Agonized)

A plan to...

(Desperately gestures escape)

GUARD

(Delighted)

Charades!

(Silence)

PHAEDO

Socrates. Please.

GUARD

He said it again! Did you see that there? That rhymes,
Socrates!

SOCRATES

What rhymes my good man?

PHAEDO

(Begging his attention)

Socrates, *please!*

GUARD

Ha! That.

SOCRATES

Ha. I like that! Think of that. 'Socrates please.' Thanks
for pointing that out. I might use that you know.

GUARD

I thought you might like it the moment he said it. I told
him so, didn't I, Mr. Phaedo?

(Laughs at so-Phaedo rhyme.

GUARD points at PHAEDO.)

PHAEDO

What.

GUARD

I told you Socrates would like you saying that.

PHAEDO

I thought I asked you to leave.

SOCRATES

And I asked him to stay.

GUARD

If I may, I'd like to stay. Ha! That rhymed there too, Socrates.

PHAEDO

(Desperate)

Socrates, please!

SOCRATES

Yes, I've heard that one, thanks.

(PHAEDO sighs with frustration.

Silence.)

GUARD

(Conciliatory)

We want to hear your remarkable plan.

PHAEDO

(Childish)

It's not for you.

GUARD

(Whining)

Oh!

SOCRATES

Oh! Now don't start that again! Phaedo. The suspense. Please share with us your plan. He wants to hear it too, don't you?

GUARD

I do. ... And that rhymed too. ... Ha!

SOCRATES

Well there now. You want to tell us your plan, and we're longing to hear it. Phaedo. The bench is yours.

(SOCRATES gestures an unwilling PHAEDO to stand upon the bench to share his plan.

The GUARD eagerly sits next to SOCRATES on the ground to listen.

PHAEDO eventually steps helplessly upon the bench.)

PHAEDO

(Attempting a gallant whisper to SOCRATES although the GUARD is sitting next to him.)

Socrates, you saved me from making an awful mistake, and now my father's saved as well. I thought I'd known what right and wrong were, from long ago, thanks to

you. But now I see what right and wrong are. Again, thanks to you. In short, I owe you one. So fear not, Socrates! I come to right a wrong! I come to save you! I have discovered the means whereby we shall spring you from this rank cell of injustice!

(An awkward pause. He had imagined this going differently.)

The guards...

(He looks at GUARD. To himself)

Just get on with it...

(Continuing)

The guards are far from exorbitant in their demands. A very little money will satisfy them.

(The GUARD nods in friendly agreement. PHAEDO observes this.)

I'd guess that I could bear the cost myself.

(GUARD shrugs)

But if you're too shy to spend all of my money, I have arranged other men, strangers to you, who will give you the use of theirs too. We have allies in Thebes and in Cebes and-

(GUARD points at SOCRATES for the rhyme. SOCRATES smiles.)

... Do not hesitate in making your escape.

(SOCRATES begins to interrupt)

And don't say what you said in court about not being able to make new friends in new places if you escape. Men will love you in other places than *Athens*. I have friends in Thessaly, if you'd like to go to them, and they'll ensure no

(Hesitates)

Thessalians will give you any trouble.

GUARD

Thessalians? Is that what you call a man from Thessaly?

PHAEDO

(Ignoring him. Now full voice.)

Socrates, I won't be persuaded that you are justified in betraying your own life when you might be saved. This is playing into the hands of your enemies and destroyers. Murderers. And

(Bolstering)

moreover I would say you were betraying your children, whom you are leaving to take their chances! And your wife.

SOCRATES

Oh she won't miss me.

GUARD

Your lovely bride won't?

SOCRATES

No she won't miss me. And no, she's not lovely. But I love being married. I think everyone should marry.

GUARD

Oh really, sir? Why?

SOCRATES

Oh by all means marry. If you marry well, you become happy. If you marry badly, you become a philosopher!

GUARD

Ha!

SOCRATES

Ha!

GUARD

But *you're* a philosopher!

SOCRATES

I am a philosopher.

GUARD

So you and your wife aren't happy?

SOCRATES

Oh.

GUARD

That's too bad.

SOCRATES

I don't know. It may be my grandest gesture. I say that I know nothing. And there's my vow for proof!

PHAEDO

(Impatient, removing trench coat)

Excuse me.

SOCRATES & GUARD

Yes?

PHAEDO

Forget about your wife.

GUARD

(Insulted)

Excuse me?

PHAEDO

Not you.

SOCRATES

Oh me?

GUARD

Must be, I don't have one.

PHAEDO

You!

SOCRATES

Now why should I forget her?

GUARD

Yes, why should he forget her?

PHAEDO

Because she doesn't, never mind. Just, then, think of your friends.

GUARD

That's nice!

SOCRATES

It is nice. I like to think of my friends.

PHAEDO

(Encouraged)

Think of your friends.

(Pained)

We'll look *awful* if you're put to death.

SOCRATES

Tch. I hadn't thought of that.

PHAEDO

(Worried, frustrated)

Well you should! Selfish.

GUARD

Say, don't talk to Socrates in that tone!

PHAEDO

(To GUARD)

I'll talk in any tone I like.

(To SOCRATES)

I'm ashamed of you Socrates. And ashamed of us, your friends, when I think that this whole business will be blamed on our lack of courage. The trial might never have happened! Or it might have been brought to a different verdict! And the... end of all... which is the crowning absurdity, it will all seem to have been *permitted by us*, through cowardice and, and baseness. Because we might have saved you. Because there is no *difficulty in escaping*.

(Bluntly, to GUARD)

Isn't that right?

GUARD

(To SOCRATES)

That's right as rain.

PHAEDO

Just think how disgraceful we'll look if you don't escape from here. And it'll be all your fault! So make up your mind. No, have it made up already.

(Gallantly)

For there is but one thing to be done for it, and it must be done! This very night! I beg you, Socrates, be persuaded by me, and do as I say!

(Silence)

GUARD

(Impressed. To SOCRATES)

You'd better go with him. Come on.

(PHAEDO descends from the bench and both he and GUARD help SOCRATES up and to the door)

SOCRATES

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

(They wait)

Phaedo, my friend, your zeal is magnificent! *If* your plan is good. But if your plan is wrong; the greater the zeal, the greater the evil.

(GUARD quickly takes his hands off SOCRATES as though burnt.)

We need to think whether these things should or should not be done. Forgive me for... this. But I have, and I've always had, one of those natures that must be guided by reason. That is, whatever the reason may be, which after careful thought, appears to my nature to be best.

PHAEDO & GUARD

PHAEDO: Of course.

GUARD: Sure, Socrates.

SOCRATES

Thank you. Now, I do have reasons for being here. I do have principles which I am honoring in staying. I thank you for the fortune you have thrown upon me, Phaedo. But I can't just accept it, can't just put those reasons and principles aside, unless we can find other, better ones for leaving.

(Silence)

I would love to go with you.

(Silence)

But unless we can find those better reasons, I am *certain not* to go with you. Not even if the power of the multitude could inflict many more imprisonments, confiscations, deaths... bad dreams.

But how shall we consider the question...

Let's...Phaedo. Remember our talk about

(Grand)

resolving unresolvable differences?

PHAEDO

(Grand)

I do.

SOCRATES

We agreed that a man can love a thing which he can't prove is good, and hate a thing he can't prove is bad; and we agreed that men can hold these different opinions over one and the same thing. Did I get that right?

PHAEDO

I remember.

SOCRATES

And we said that if men can't find a way to agree, then they must keep arguing. Right?

PHAEDO

Right.

SOCRATES

But what did we decide about a situation where eventually an argument *must* be decided?

PHAEDO

I don't think we ever decided.

GUARD

Ha!

SOCRATES

Well then, how *shall* we decide an argument that must be decided?

PHAEDO

We'll have to choose the opinion of some men. And not the opinion of others.

SOCRATES

Makes sense to me. But whose opinion should we choose?

PHAEDO

(Sotto, to self)

Mine.

SOCRATES & GUARD

What?

PHAEDO

(Innocent)

What?

SOCRATES

Whose opinion should we choose?

(Silence)

GUARD

(Hesitates. Ventures)

Good men's?

SOCRATES

You think we should choose the opinion of good men?

GUARD

(Hazarding)

I think so, yes, because. No. Yes. Because good men are wise men. So they would have good opinions, I think.

SOCRATES

Sounds good to me. But how, sir, will we know who the good men are, and who the bad men are?

GUARD

(Delighted to be a part of this philosophical conversation)

I have no idea!

SOCRATES

That's alright! Let me ask you this then. Are the majority of people wise or unwise?

GUARD & PHAEDO

Unwise.

SOCRATES

Alright then. Now we're cooking. So we won't choose the opinion of the majority of people.

PHAEDO

That sounds dangerous!

SOCRATES

Dangerous for who? Tell me, for example, if a man were dying of a disease that could be cured, should he listen to the opinions of the many, or to the opinion of his doctor, who understands the disease?

PHAEDO & GUARD

PHAEDO: To his doctor.

GUARD: To his doctor. My mother always said.

SOCRATES

What if he ignored his doctor and instead followed the opinion of all other men put together?

GUARD

(Sadly)

He would probably die!

SOCRATES

Because his body would fail?

GUARD

(So sadly)

Yes! That poor man. That's so sad.

SOCRATES

It is hypothetically sad. Well you're both so clever! Let me ask you this. Can a man live if the *higher* part of him fails? Not his body, but the part of him that's just and honorable?

GUARD & PHAEDO

GUARD: (*Moved*) No.

PHAEDO: Yes.

SOCRATES

Aha. Why do you say yes, Phaedo?

PHAEDO

Because the body would still be alive.

SOCRATES

Why do you say no?

GUARD

Because. Um. Because life without goodness isn't a good life.

PHAEDO

(*Shocked*)

Gods, he got me there! Ha!

SOCRATES

(*Smiles sadly.*)

Alright then. So in order to live a good life, we must consider what is just or unjust, fair or foul, good or evil. And *these* are the subjects of our present predicament! So to find them out, should we follow the opinion of the many, and fear the consequences?

GUARD

No, we'll follow the one man!

SOCRATES

Good, good, good. Then we all agree that we must not worry about what the many will say of us, friends. Whatever happens.

PHAEDO

I'm not sure I do agree with that. I am worried about the many.

SOCRATES

Why?

PHAEDO

The many can kill us.

SOCRATES

You're telling me.

PHAEDO

The many put you here. You staying here agrees with the many.

SOCRATES

The many say I should be killed; I don't.

PHAEDO

But you *will* be killed! They get their way!

SOCRATES

But we won't worry about them.

PHAEDO

I'm worried about you.

SOCRATES

Thank you. And yet, I find our argument is still unshaken. Unless we reconsider our friend's statement here. That a life without goodness isn't a good life. Do you disagree?

PHAEDO

Socrates, I...

(PHAEDO realizes the argument is lost, and so, consequently, is his friend.)

GUARD

(Has not realized this)

I'd rather lead a good life.

SOCRATES

Me too. So. From *there*, let's decide if I should or should not *escape*. We agreed that we'd like to live our lives as good men. Right?

GUARD

Very good men.

SOCRATES

Then we should do no wrong?

GUARD

Or at least try not to.

SOCRATES

But what if we're ever hurt by someone? Should we hurt them back then?

GUARD

No. Because we don't want to hurt anybody, ever, at all.

SOCRATES

Even though that's what the many would do?

GUARD

We don't want to be like the many!

SOCRATES

You're a very clever man, my friend! Would you tell me if I've got what you said straight?

GUARD

Yeah.

SOCRATES

We should never retaliate, or render an evil for an evil, to any one, in any way, no matter what hurtful, unjust thing's been done to us?

(GUARD nods. SOCRATES laughs.)

I want you to think if you really mean that, my friend. Because that opinion has *never* been held, and never *will* be held I'd bet, by any considerable number of people.

(GUARD shrugs, aloof.)

The people who don't hold this opinion can only hate the people who do, because they don't understand why you do.

(GUARD looks to PHAEDO, who is lost in thought.)

However, this has always been, and still is, *my* opinion. If you disagree, I'd love to hear what you have to say. But if you share my mind, then we'll proceed. Alright?

GUARD

(Looking back to SOCRATES. Decisively)

Proceed, Socrates.

SOCRATES

Thank you very much. We can ask the big question now.

If I leave this prison...

(Silence. He would desperately love to leave the prison.)

If I leave this prison...

(Silence. SOCRATES wipes his eyes briefly and dismisses the action.)

If I leave this prison, am I doing anyone wrong? Because we don't want to wrong anyone, do we? No of course we don't, no matter how *unbelievably* we may be wronged ourselves, we will not-

(Silence. Wipes eyes. Firmly.)

We will not.

GUARD

(Concerned)

Socrates?

SOCRATES

So let's consider the state. The state that has condemned me. The laws I should say, because what's a state without laws? How can you *love* a country without laws? And I have loved it. My father married my mother. Through the laws of this state. I was born. Here. A citizen here. Went to school here. Through the

state. Have always lived here. The streets I've walked.
Talked. Friends. Fools. I've loved it so well I never left
it, not even to see the games! Except once.

(Remembering)

When I went to Isthmus. And of course in the military.
And there's another good.

I had my boys here.

All this is good.

If she leads us to wounds or death in battle, we go to
them, because that's right. And we must not yield, or
retreat, or leave our ranks, whether in battle, or in... a
court of law... Or

(Looks at his cell)

in any other place. We must do as our country orders
us.

And if we have a different idea of Justice, then we must
change our country's view of what is Just. Through the
strength of our ideas, alone.

And if we fail... Well. As we've asserted, we want to
be good men; so we don't want to wrong anyone even
if we've been wronged ourselves... So. If we fall. If we
fail. We can *still* be *good men*. No matter what the
consequence.

Isn't that so, my friend.

GUARD

But the many. The many don't want you to escape, so.
So you should escape.

SOCRATES

The many *would* escape.

GUARD

(It is dawning on him that SOCRATES won't escape.)

I... Well... Mr. Phaedo, sir, please say something?

(PHAEDO is looking at the ground. Silence)

GUARD

What about the hurt you'd be doing to your friends,
who will be so sad if you're killed?

SOCRATES

What do you think will happen to you if I escape?

GUARD

I don't care.

SOCRATES

I do. What do you think will happen to Phaedo here if
he's caught?

GUARD

...What about your kids?

SOCRATES

Do you think I should take them with me on such a dangerous trip? And Thessaly, which Phaedo suggested, is a country going through great upheaval. Would that be good for them, or safe?

GUARD

Then leave them here, and at least they'll still have a father!

SOCRATES

Do you think they'd be better taken care of by my friends if I were alive in Thessaly, than if I were dead here?

I doubt it.

Not if my friends are truly my friends.

And I don't doubt that.

(Silence)

So I *can* escape, my friends!

(PHAEDO looks up)

I can escape, *if* I return an evil for an evil, an injury for an injury, and put all the friends I'll ever have in harm's way. *Or* I can die a *good man*. A victim. Not of the laws, but of men.

This is what seems right to me. But, my good friends, I would *love* to escape with you. *Please*.

(Begging)

If you disagree with this, *please speak.*

(Silence.

GUARD is speechless.)

PHAEDO

Socrates I-

(Silence)

I have nothing to say.

(PHAEDO and GUARD leave solemnly.

SOCRATES picks up a bundle of papers and spreads them on the floor to view his work.

Picking up a book, he lies down on the bench to sleep.)

ACT 2

SCENE II

(It is very early.

The GUARD is sleepily standing guard.

Silence.

PHAEDO enters, wearing black, he is restless)

PHAEDO

Morning.

GUARD

(Startled)

Oh, good morning, Mr. Phaedo. What are you doing here so early?

PHAEDO

Can't sleep. ...It's today.

GUARD

I know.

PHAEDO

Can I see him?

GUARD

I think he's still asleep.

PHAEDO

He's asleep? How can he sleep if I can't sleep?

GUARD

He's a marvel of a man.

PHAEDO

He is... Can I see him?

GUARD

If you promise not to wake him.

PHAEDO

Alright.

GUARD

Promise?

PHAEDO

Promise.

(They move to SOCRATES who is fast asleep.

They whisper while he is asleep.)

GUARD

Look at that.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

(Looking at the papers)

What is all this he's working on? Something serious before he...

GUARD

(Shakes head)

Poems.

PHAEDO

Why?

(GUARD shrugs.

PHAEDO picks up the book of Aesop's fables)

PHAEDO

Aesop's Fables. Children's stories?

(Looks at SOCRATES)

Why...?

(Looks to the papers.

Picks one up.

Looks at GUARD.)

GUARD

Will you read it to me?

(PHAEDO nods.

They sit together against the wall.)

PHAEDO

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

By Socrates.

From 'The Wolf and the Lamb' by Aesop

(Very conscientious to write that all out. Ahem.)

A wolf was feeling famished,

When he met a lamb astray.

The newborn lamb lamented,

When he saw wolf's dossier.

Dossier?

(GUARD reacts)

Said the wolf 'I will not hurt you,

'Til I've justified my right;

So I've papers here that charge you:

You stole from me in the night!'

Said the lamb, 'That cannot be sir,

I've not eaten any grass.

Nor drunk from any well, sir.

I drink mother's milk! Alas!'

Said the wolf, 'No matter for that,

You insulted me last year!'

Said the lamb, 'Impossible, sir,
I wasn't born, I fear.'
'You refute my imputations,'
Said the wolf, 'It's very true.
But I'm afraid that will not stop me,
Making dinner out of you!'
And the wolf ate up the lamb,
As it bleated mournfully.
A tyrant uses any pretext,
To create a tyranny.

(Silence)

Well I can't see why he'd find this relevant.

GUARD

Poor lamb.

(Silence)

PHAEDO

Poor lamb.

(They watch SOCRATES sleeping in silence.

The poem falls from PHAEDO'S hand.

*SOCRATES wakes. Realizes the two men are
staring at him)*

SOCRATES

(Surprised, bleary)

What? What are you doing here? It must be so early!

PHAEDO

It is.

SOCRATES

I mean, what time is it?

PHAEDO

It's still dark.

SOCRATES

(To GUARD)

Why did you let him in?

GUARD

I wanted to see you too.

SOCRATES

Did you just get here or...

GUARD

No we've been here for a while.

SOCRATES

...Just sitting there and... watching me sleep?

GUARD & PHAEDO

Mm-hm.

SOCRATES

Why would you do that?

PHADO

You sleep so peacefully. I can't sleep at all. I've always known you as a happy man, but I've never seen anything like the cheerful, easy way you handle this *calamity!*

GUARD

(So sad)

Oh don't say 'calamity!' Don't talk about the, the. This is the last time you'll be able to talk to your friend, Mr. Phaedo, or he to you, or...

(GUARD puts his face in his hands)

SOCRATES

(Exasperated)

Alright. I'm awake.

GUARD

(Tragedy!)

Oh, we've woken him up, and he was sleeping so soundly, and this is the last time he'll, this is the last day that, and we've woken him up! Oh I'll never forgive myself, sir!

SOCRATES

This is the last time I'll put up with any of that.

(SOCRATES sits up, winces, the manacle is hurting him, he fixes it.)

SOCRATES

Pain is a singular thing. And curiously related to pleasure. One would think they were opposites, but anyone who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take both. I can't help thinking that if Aesop had noticed it he would have made another fable. Something about God trying to reconcile them, and when he couldn't he just, lightning bolt! Locked them together.

PHAEDO

About Aesop... Socrates, why, when you're in prison about to... Why are you putting Aesop's fables, of all things, into verse?

SOCRATES

To obey a dream.

(PHAEDO and GUARD stare)

All through my life I've had dreams telling me that I should 'make music.' Up 'til now I imagined that was just to encourage me in my pursuit of philosophy, which is the best and noblest music!

(Troubled)

But it occurred to me, the dream may have meant
'music' in the *popular* sense. Hm. Put like that, it seems
more likely. At any rate, I thought I'd better write a few
verses before I depart. And since I have no, ah,
invention of my own, I am setting Aesop to verse.
Because I ought to tell a good story if I'm to be a poet.

PHAEDO

'A poet, or, a maker of gods.'

SOCRATES

What?

PHAEDO

That's what they charged you with being.

SOCRATES

Ha! Perfect! My dreams agree with my death!

GUARD

(Hurt)

You act like you can't wait to leave us.

SOCRATES

No offence, my good man, but I can't.

GUARD

But why? Why should the wisest of men want to leave
all his friends?

SOCRATES

Well that's a pretty big question! Should I answer it
Phaedo?

PHAEDO

I wish you would. I'd like to know myself.

SOCRATES

Shall I defend myself as if I were in court?

PHAEDO

If you like, Socrates.

SOCRATES

(Sly)

I must try to make a better impression on you than I did
on the *judges!*

(Laughs)

I proceed.

(Formally, he's a little manic)

I have a very good hope that all is not done for the
dead-

GUARD

Mr. Socrates. Please sir. Forget that I asked. You really
shouldn't be talking. If you talk too much, you'll get
excited, and the heat interferes with the, the poison.

People who talk too much sometimes have to take the poison two or three times!

SOCRATES

(Impatient)

Then be ready to give me the poison two or three times, that's all!

GUARD

I was afraid you'd say that.

SOCRATES

Never mind.

(Formally again)

And now I will make answer to you, my judges, why a man who has lived as a *philosopher* has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die.

(Thinks. Speaking as friends now)

First, let me ask you: is there such a thing as *death*?

PHAEDO

I'm sure about that one. Yes.

GUARD

Me too.

SOCRATES

And is death the separation of the soul, or self, whatever you'd like to call it, let's just call it soul, from the body?

PHAEDO

Yes.

GUARD

That and the body dying.

PHAEDO

(To GUARD)

The soul leaving makes the body die.

GUARD

(To PHAEDO)

Or the body dying makes the soul leave.

SOCRATES

Either way. Death is the separation of the two.

GUARD

Right. Why should anyone be happy about that?

SOCRATES

I think most people *aren't* happy about that. I'm talking about philosophers.

PHAEDO

(To GUARD)

Pay attention.

GUARD

I'm so sorry.

SOCRATES

Don't be sorry. Just tell me. Do you think philosophers care much about eating and drinking?

GUARD

No.

SOCRATES

Expensive clothes?

GUARD

No.

SOCRATES

Sex?

GUARD

(Laughs)

...Well. You tell me!

SOCRATES

I will. I don't. I care about love. But that's for the soul to feel, not the body. In fact, above all men, a

philosopher does everything he can to be quit of the body and look to the soul. Look at it this way.

(Laughs)

The rest of the world will look at someone who wants no physical pleasures and say,

(Valley girl)

‘Oh my *gods!* It’s like he’s *dead!*’ Isn’t that true?

GUARD & PHAEDO

That’s true.

SOCRATES

But look at what philosophers are. They love knowledge. And when you try to acquire knowledge, is the body a hindrance or a help? I mean to say, do eyes and ears have any truth in them? Or are they, like the poets always tell us, false witnesses?

GUARD

I know just what you mean. One time I was *positive* that a coat on a chair was a goblin when it was dark in my little room. And I was *really* looking at it too...

(Reassuringly)

It wasn’t a goblin.

(Silence)

SOCRATES

...Then when we look for truth in company with the body, we're deceived?

PHAEDO

Well that doesn't give us much of a chance, does it? I mean, we're always in our bodies!

SOCRATES

We have to look for truth in thoughts alone, that's all. And thought is best when the mind is gathered into herself, with no sights or sounds to trouble her.

GUARD

That's when I think best. When it's nice and quiet. Like in a nice bath, say. Like that. Course I do play in the bath too, because there are bubbles, of course. But I think as well.

SOCRATES

Then we agree.

PHAEDO

(Incredulously eyeing GUARD)

Do we?

SOCRATES

I think we all agree that while we're in our bodies, while the soul is mingled with this mass, our desire for truth can never be satisfied. The body is endlessly

interrupting. Food. Diseases. Lusts, fears, fancies, obsessions... every sort of folly is always keeping us from thinking... and leading us to wars and fightings and factions... in order to make money... in service of our bodies! I would be *quit* of the body.

GUARD

(*To PHAEDO*)

That's what I was trying to say.

PHAEDO

Alright, I do agree with that. But just because bodies are a nuisance sometimes, doesn't mean we should be happy to leave them. Does it?

GUARD

Oh that's a good question.

PHAEDO

Thanks.

SOCRATES

Some men, when they die, are happy to think they'll see their earthly loves, their wife, or child, and talk with them.

GUARD

I want to see my mother.

PHAEDO

Me too.

SOCRATES

I want to see Wisdom. And I'm convinced that only without the body can I find her, and worthily enjoy her in her purity.

GUARD

(Sotto, to PHAEDO)

Wisdom sounds sexy.

(PHAEDO laughs despite himself)

SOCRATES

It would be absurd if I were to fear death.

PHAEDO

Maybe. Maybe. But I still say... you're very brave.

SOCRATES

I flatter myself I am! Because courage in the face of death is a contradiction in *most* men.

PHAEDO

How's that?

SOCRATES

Because to most men, death is frightening. So they're said to be *courageous* because they're *afraid*! Isn't that a contradiction?

(GUARD quietly gestures that his mind is blown)

PHAEDO

I agree with all you're saying, Socrates. But in what relates to the soul... Gods, I hate to say it, but I'm dubious. How can we *know* that when we die, when the soul leaves the body, that she's not destroyed?

(Unconsciously dramatic)

Maybe she rises out of the body like smoke on the air, and scatters away into nothingness.

GUARD

(Spooked)

I'd like to hear your answer to that too, Mr. Socrates.

(Silence)

SOCRATES

I think that no one who heard me now, not even one of my old enemies, could accuse me of idle talking about matters in which I have no concern...

(Pleased)

Sure. Let's attempt to *prove* that the soul exists after death!

PHAEDO & GUARD

Wow.

(Silence)

SOCRATES

Is it true that all things are generated out of their opposites? I mean, for example, a great thing becomes greater because it had been less before?

GUARD

(Sotto, to PHAEDO)

What does that have to do with the soul?

PHAEDO

Yes, something becomes greater because it was less before.

SOCRATES

And a lessened thing becomes lessened because it was once greater?

PHAEDO

Yes.

GUARD

(Delayed)

Yes.

SOCRATES

And so the weaker from the stronger, and the swifter from the slower, and the worse from the better?

PHAEDO

Yes.

SOCRATES

And is this true of all opposites? Are we convinced that all of them are generated from their opposites?

PHAEDO

Yes.

GUARD

I'm convinced...

SOCRATES

Alright! Then. Isn't there an opposite of life?

GUARD

Oh I see!

SOCRATES

What's the opposite of life, then?

GUARD

Death!

SOCRATES

Death is the opposite of life?

GUARD

Yes!

SOCRATES

So they're generated from each other? Life and death?

GUARD

...Now I'm not sure.

SOCRATES

Well, what's generated from life?

GUARD

...Death.

SOCRATES

So what's generated from death?

(GUARD thinks hard.)

PHAEDO

(Sotto, helping GUARD)

Life.

GUARD

Life?

SOCRATES

So the living enter the world of the dead...

GUARD

Alright...

SOCRATES

And the dead are born into the world of the living.

(Silence)

GUARD

Ooh, I just got chills.

PHAEDO

I think I'm convinced that our soul has to exist *before* we're born. From the dead or no. I mean, because something has to! But I don't see how that proves that the soul continues after we die, and doesn't just scatter away. I mean, how can anybody *know* that?

SOCRATES

You like that image of 'scattering.' Think a soul would be destroyed more quickly on a really windy day?

(GUARD and PHAEDO do, but don't want to seem like they do)

SOCRATES

Oh, you just want to pick at my argument because you still believe in childish monsters!

PHAEDO

Alright. Maybe you're right. Maybe there is a, a 'child' in us to whom death is like a 'monster.'

GUARD

(Scared)

Maybe. And maybe you should convince that child too! So he won't be afraid. When he's sometimes alone with that monster. In his little room. In the dark.

SOCRATES

Alright, alright, alright. Here's another question for you. Are there things that we *can* see, and things that we *can't* see?

GUARD

(sotto, to PHAEDO)

What does *that* have to do with the soul?

PHAEDO

Yes, there are things we can see, and things we can't.

SOCRATES

Can we see the body?

PHAEDO

Yes.

SOCRATES

Can we see the soul?

GUARD

Oh I see.

PHAEDO

No.

SOCRATES

Does the body change?

PHAEDO & GUARD

Yes.

SOCRATES

How about the soul?

PHAEDO

...That's what I want to know.

SOCRATES

Well, we already agreed that when the soul is in the body, it is deceived and distracted by the senses. Especially as the body changes and they get worse and worse!

PHAEDO

Right.

SOCRATES

And we agreed that the soul works best removed from all that, curled into herself, because then she can reflect on the realm of Absolutes, which we *can't see*, but which *must exist*; absolute Purity, and Eternity, and Immortality, and Beauty, and Good. In other words, the soul's natural place is with unchangeable, unchanging things.

GUARD

Oh, I like that.

SOCRATES

So we agree the body is changing, and the soul is unchanging?

PHAEDO

Seems likely.

SOCRATES

(Scoffs)

'Likely.' Alright then. Think of this! Does the body rule the soul? Or does the soul rule the body? Say for example, which is the one saying, 'write that thank you to your grandmother...'

GUARD

Ha! The soul.

SOCRATES

So the soul rules the body?

GUARD

Yes. Thank gods.

SOCRATES

And would you say the divine rule the mortal?

GUARD

(Thinks, perhaps he's not religious, but, in all fairness)

Or something like that.

SOCRATES

So the body is the very likeness of the mortal, being changeable, unintelligible, and well, destructible.

PHAEDO

Corporality.

SOCRATES

And the soul, being intelligent, unchangeable, indissoluble, and ruling over our temporal bodies; that's the very likeness of the divine!

GUARD

That's lovely.

SOCRATES

That's another proof.

GUARD

But what happens to the soul after the body dies?

SOCRATES

Well I say there's great hope for the thinking man. Because if the soul has only been concerned with the immortal and rational, then when the soul is released into the invisible world, she will know to make straight for that immortal, rational place! By rights, the soul of a thinking man should live on in the realm of absolute Goods.

GUARD

(Self-conscious)

What about the souls that aren't so smart?

SOCRATES

Well, I think it follows that a soul fascinated by their body wouldn't know what to do without one. I think they would prowl around the earth looking for another body, maybe around graveyards and sepulchers. Maybe worrying over the place they died. Don't people say they've seen things like that? Ghosts?

GUARD

(Chilled)

That makes a lot of sense. Poor souls!

SOCRATES

I suppose they'd find their way back to a body eventually.

GUARD & PHAEDO

(Horried)

What?

SOCRATES

Well, say some of those souls walking the earth were consumed with power and tyranny. Don't you suppose they might come to inhabit something like a wolf or a hawk?

PHAEDO

I bet they'd love that.

SOCRATES

And epicurean souls that loved to have sex and get drunk may pass into... bonobo monkeys, or animals like that?

GUARD

Well, that's not so bad!

SOCRATES

And some souls that walk the earth may be even happier than philosophers. The sweet souls that practice civil and social virtues but were never intelligent. They may pass into the good lives of kittens and bumblebees. Or maybe back into a man!

GUARD & PHAEDO

(Pleased)

Aw.

SOCRATES

So don't worry, my friends, that your souls will be 'scattered' in the winds, and be nowhere, and be nothing. Myself, I hope my soul will reach the gods.

(Silence.)

After a while, GUARD and PHAEDO whisper quietly to each other.

SOCRATES observes this.)

SOCRATES

Ah, if you're talking about something else, I'd rather not interrupt. But if you're not sure about my argument, I wish you'd speak up. Can I be of any help?

PHAEDO

I'm sorry, Socrates. I admit... we do have doubts. But we weren't sure if we should say so under the... present circumstances.

SOCRATES

Ha! I'm the only one here that isn't troubled by my 'present circumstances.' I look forward to my death just like a swan. When swans realize they're near death, they sing more than ever. They rejoice at their fate! And you two are like the men who say that the swan's song is a lamentation, because they're afraid of death themselves. You won't trouble me. Ask away, my friends.

(GUARD and PHAEDO look at each other.

GUARD gestures for PHAEDO to go first.)

PHAEDO

Alright. About the visible and invisible being destructible and immortal... It doesn't work for music. Take a guitar. The guitar is visible and destructible. The music is invisible, and I suppose immortal. But if the guitar is smashed to pieces and the strings all cut... It

may be true that music still exists; but the music of *that* guitar will never be heard again.

(Silence)

SOCRATES

That's a very good point.

(To GUARD)

Why don't *you* answer him?

(Silence)

Never mind. Let's just. Let's hear your question.

GUARD

(With difficulty)

I'm just still not sure the soul keeps going *forever* after we die. I'm sorry. I think maybe we can live a *few* times. But how can we *know* if we just keep going on and on and on?

(Sotto, to PHAEDO)

I'm going to try to do the thing where you set up the thing.

PHAEDO

(Sotto)

You're going to posit a case?

GUARD

(Sotto, squints)

...Maybe.

(*Full voice*)

I'm thinking of... of a tailor. Say this tailor dies, right? But the coat he wore is still in pretty good shape. Say a man asks, 'do men last longer than their coats?' And another answers, 'of course they do.' Then the first man might say, 'then the tailor can't be dead, because his coat is still in pretty good shape!' But that can't be true. Because the tailor *is* dead. The tailor made and wore out lots of coats in his lifetime. But he was outlived by the last one. So... couldn't a soul make and wear lots of bodies, but eventually, die in her last one? And how can we know which one that is? How can we *know* it's not *this* one?

(*Silence*)

SOCRATES

(*Frightened, defensive*)

You know, *politicians* are all about convincing their *listeners*. *Philosophers* try to convince *themselves*.

(*Blustering*)

Convincing other people is a secondary matter for me!

(*Silence. GUARD and PHAEDO look down, abashed.*)

But. Still. Look what I gain by talking to you two: Even if there *is nothing* after death, in the short time I've got left, I keep you two from crying. And whether or not

anyone is convinced, I'll learn the truth for myself soon enough. So. Well.

(Clears throat)

Alright, so Phaedo, you say that if the soul is like music, and the body is like an instrument, then the soul would be destroyed when the body is. And you, my good man, say the soul may outlive many bodies, but die in her last. Did I get that right?

PHAEDO

Exactly, Socrates.

GUARD

That's mine alright.

(Sotto to PHAEDO)

Philosophy.

SOCRATES

Okay... Okay. Phaedo. Do you still agree that the soul, or self, commands the body?

PHAEDO

Absolutely.

SOCRATES

But the music can't command the instrument. The instrument commands the music.

PHAEDO

That's true!

SOCRATES

The music can't argue with the guitar, or play opposite its parts.

PHAEDO

No...

SOCRATES

Then we can't be right in saying we're like music and instruments. That would be a contradiction. And the *opposite* of the soul *ending* with the body, is the soul continuing on!

(PHAEDO whistles)

GUARD

Oh my gods! When I heard his question I couldn't imagine an answer, and here you've just knocked it down in one round! One-two, pow! Do mine now, please Socrates?

SOCRATES

(Pleased)

Well. Well. Don't be too sure of me, you'll jinx me.

Now. I think what you're really saying is that whether a soul lives once or many times, it makes no difference to our fears. To our uncertainties. Our not *knowing*.

(To self)

I suppose any man who *feels* has reason to fear if he has no *proof* of immortality.

(Silence. SOCRATES thinks hard)

This is a very serious inquiry you're raising.

(GUARD is tentatively pleased)

You want it proven that we shouldn't be afraid?

(GUARD and PHAEDO nod)

That's what you want proven? That... we shouldn't be afraid. That's what you want proven?

(Eager nods.

Tentative)

Alright.

(SOCRATES paces, thinks.

He picks up two sheets of paper, uses them for the following.

Slowly.)

I could never understand why one and one make two.

When they're separated, they're each one. Is it just the *nearness* of them that makes them two? Why should that matter? Is it that one of them is now two, and the other one lost itself completely in the two-ness of the other? And why

(He drops one sheet and rips the other sheet in half)

when one is divided, why does that make two? Why should a different process produce the same effect?

(Slowly, looking at the papers)

One. And one. Is two.

I don't understand.

But, I read a book once, by Anaxagoras, and he said that 'the *mind* was the disposer and the cause of all.' I think that's wonderful. Admirable, don't you?

One and one make two... because I decide that it does.

You know... *it is* possible to look too closely at these things. If you look directly at an eclipse of the sun, you can blind yourself. You have to look at it in dark, reflective ways. If we look directly at the truth of our existence... I think we may blind our souls.

Do you *think* your soul is immortal?

GUARD

(Thinks. Convinced)

Yes.

SOCRATES

Shall we say that this is proven?

GUARD

(A big word)

Abundantly, Socrates, yes.

SOCRATES

Then there's nothing to be afraid of.

GUARD

... There never was.

SOCRATES

Well said. What do you say, Phaedo?

PHAEDO

I. Well. Greatness of subject, feebleness of man, all that, can't help feeling a little. Uncertain.

SOCRATES

You know what I say?

PHAEDO & GUARD

PHAEDO: What, Socrates?

GUARD: What?

SOCRATES

Stardust is to our souls what the air is to us. The venture is a glorious one.

(They think of that.)

Silence.

Then cheerful, giddy.)

And now it's nearly time to drink that hemlock. I'd like to go clean up a bit to make it easier to deal with my dead body!

(Giddiness fills the room)

PHAEDO

Thoughtful to the last!

GUARD

He's a good man, a good man! I'll walk with you to the showers, Socrates!

SOCRATES

No need, no need!

GUARD

Yes there is!

SOCRATES

Why is that?

GUARD

I'm a guard!

SOCRATES

So you are!

PHAEDO

I'd sort of forgotten that!

GUARD

I'd sort of forgotten too!

SOCRATES

I hadn't! Well then, shall we walk together to the showers?

GUARD

It would be my pleasure Socrates!

SOCRATES

Oh good!

PHAEDO

Don't forget your dreams now! Be sure to sing in there!

SOCRATES

I will!

GUARD

He says he will!

PHAEDO

I heard!

SOCRATES

He heard!

GUARD

I heard he heard!

PHAEDO

He will.

(GUARD leads SOCRATES off.

PHAEDO is standing alone. The smile fades from his face. Silence. He sobs.

He crouches down among the papers trying to control himself. Shaking, he grabs them by the handful and presses them to his chest and then his face.

GUARD reenters and stands near the door looking at PHAEDO blankly.

GUARD shuffles towards PHAEDO.

He bends down to pick up a handful of papers. He holds them gently to his chest.

He crouches down to PHAEDO'S level. He seems pained but calm.

Distantly, we can hear SOCRATES singing.)

GUARD

(Decidedly)

He'll be alright.

(GUARD pulls out one of the papers, and shoves it in his mouth.

PHAEDO is surprised, laughs.

*GUARD chucks his handful of papers in the air.
PHAEDO laughs. GUARD laughs.*

*Together they throw the papers, laughing
violently.*

*Begin to destroy the papers. Even harder
laughing.*

*The room becomes covered in a snow of
Socrates' poems.*

The singing stops.

SOCRATES reenters, squeaky clean.

GUARD and PHAEDO stop. Silence.)

SOCRATES

Don't like them?

PHAEDO

We love them.

SOCRATES

(Surprised laugh)

Why did you destroy them?

(Silence)

SOCRATES

(To GUARD)

It's time, you know.

(GUARD nods, walks out, dazed)

SOCRATES

(To PHAEDO)

He's such a charming man! All the time I've been here, he's come to talk with me. He's just as good as he can be to me. Absolutely charming man.

PHAEDO

Yes.

(Silence.)

GUARD returns with the poison in a cup. By the end of this he is smiling through tears.)

GUARD

Now, Socrates. You are the noblest and gentlest and best of everyone who ever came to this place. And I know you won't be angry with me, like other men are, who swear at me when I give them their poison.

(Hesitates)

I'm sure you won't be angry with me.

(Hesitates)

And... so... well,

(His idea of formal respect)

fare you well, Socrates.

SOCRATES

(Shakes GUARD'S hand.)

Thank you.

(He takes the cup.

Looks at it.

Silence.

Looks at GUARD)

Could you please give me directions as to how I should proceed?

GUARD

Oh! Ha. You, well, you drink the poison. And then you just walk around until your legs start to fall out from under you. And then you have a nice lie down. And then the poison will...

SOCRATES

(Looking at cup)

Would it be in bad taste to raise this in a toast?

(GUARD shakes his head no, trying hard to keep it together)

To the glorious venture!

(SOCRATES readily and cheerfully drinks off the poison. Both GUARD and PHAEDO are audibly stifling sobs.)

I must have misheard about ‘dying in peace.’

PHAEDO

Oh!

GUARD

Oh! Sorry, Socrates.

SOCRATES

That’s all right, you’re all right.

(SOCRATES is walking in circles in the cell.

He completes two circles perfectly normally.

In the third circle he notices one of this poems still intact. He bends down to pick it up. Reads the title. Smiles.

As he tries to right himself, one of his legs fails.

He stands again. Takes a few halting steps, before his legs come out from under him.)

PHAEDO and GUARD rush to him and help him to the bench, and to lie down.

GUARD pinches SOCRATES’ foot, hard.)

GUARD

Can you feel that, Socrates?

SOCRATES

Feel what?

(GUARD presses his calves)

GUARD

How about that?

PHAEDO

What are you doing?

SOCRATES

Yes, what are you doing?

GUARD

I'm seeing how far the poison has moved. When it reaches his heart that's when...

(PHAEDO worriedly presses SOCRATES' thigh)

PHAEDO

Can you feel that, Socrates?

SOCRATES

(Sitting up)

I can't tell what you're doing.

(GUARD takes SOCRATES' hand and presses it to his hip)

GUARD

Can you feel that?

SOCRATES

...No.

(He lies back down, and covers his face with the poem which he has held on to.

Long moments pass.

The men feel he has died.

SOCRATES uncovers his face.)

SOCRATES

Phaedo-

PHAEDO

Yes, Socrates?

SOCRATES

(Conversational)

I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?

PHAEDO

I'll pay the debt Socrates; is there anything else?

(No answer. In a moment or two, a movement is heard. SOCRATES' eyes are set.

PHAEDO closes his eyes and mouth.

Silence.

GUARD gently picks up the poem which SOCRATES holds. Looks at PHAEDO.)

PHAEDO

A poet, or, a maker of gods.

GUARD

Why did we destroy his poems?

(Silence)

GUARD

Will you read it to me?

(PHAEDO nods and takes the poem carefully)

PHAEDO

The Astronomer

By Socrates

From 'The Astronomer' by Aesop.

(Smiles.)

An astronomer would walk at night,

And look up at the sky.

He thought if he looked hard enough,

He could on Heaven, spy.

One evening as he wandered,

Staring at the firmament,

And not where he was going...

He met with an accident.

He was bruised and he was bleeding,

At the bottom of a well.

He cursed his injuries so loudly,

That a neighbor heard his yell.

When he learned what had happened,

The man howled out in mirth,

'If you try to spy on Heaven,

You won't see what's here on Earth!

(PHAEDO looks at the paper.

Holds the paper to himself.

He looks at the GUARD.

The GUARD nods.

PHAEDO violently rips the paper.)

LIGHTS

END OF PLAY

A FEW HISTORICAL ITEMS,
BECAUSE KNOWING NEVER HURTS

Socrates lived 470-399BC.

He was a veteran of the Peloponnesian War, where he was noted for his courage in battle.

He successfully opposed the 30 Tyrants (no small feat), saving a prisoner, ironically, from a wrongful execution.

His trade is speculated to have been Stone Mason, which was his father's.

His friends have called his wife, Xanthippe, 'undesirable.' She thought him careless with his family (and he was).

Socrates was convicted by a vote of 280-221. That's a very big jury.

Meletus is believed to have been a very young and unsuccessful poet, and a religious zealot. After the death of Socrates, it is reported that the Athenians executed Meletus out of guilt.

Phaedo in this play represents three of Socrates friends. Euthyphro is one; he seems to have been an unpopular but determined soothsayer. Crito is another: a wealthy businessman who made his money in agriculture and married into aristocracy. And Phaedo: of high birth, he

was made a prisoner of war in his youth, and was sold into slavery where he was used as a prostitute. He is said to have been beautiful. He was freed by one of Socrates' friends, became a student of Socrates (who would stroke his long hair), and eventually founded his own school of philosophy.

Chaerephon shows up in a number of Greek writings: Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes. He seems to have been a very popular and very unusual man, lean, nocturnal, energetic, and intellectual. He would have died fairly recent to these events. His brother was supposedly in the court.

Anaxagoras lived 510-428BC. He was the first philosopher of Athens and was *also* charged with impiety and exiled. He introduced the concept of 'Mind.' He also named the Milky Way, and provided an accurate explanation of eclipses - which Socrates mentions - although his description of the sun was 'a mass of blazing metal larger than the Peloponnese.' He was the first to explain that the moon shines from the reflected light of the sun, although he also said that moon had mountains and believed they were inhabited. 'Everything is in everything' he is supposed to have said. He thought BIG.

Aesop died at least 150 years before Socrates did, so his stories were already quite old. (Incidentally, none of his works have survived. What we know is simply attributed to him.)

The poison given to Socrates is widely believed to have been hemlock, though we can never know what species.

Some of modern medicine and botany believe Plato's depiction of the death is far too sweet, that Socrates should have been bloating, vomiting, slobbering and blue. Other's state that there are species of hemlock which act exactly as Plato describes, shutting down the nervous system and leaving the brain completely sound until the last. Either way, it seems in large part thanks to this famous death that hemlock is so well avoided that few modern studies are made of the plant.

Asclepius, whom Socrates mentions at the last, is the Greek god of Healing. The meaning of Socrates' offer is widely interpreted.

And,

None of Socrates' written works survive.



Socrates' Prison.



Hemlock.

SOCRATES.
MUST.
DIE.

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