**PLAYERS**

1. Socrates  
2. Xanthippe  
3. Sappho  
4. Phaedrus  
5. Plato  
6. Alcibiades  
7. Dionysius  
8. Meletus  
9. Lysis  
10. Anytus  
11. Crito  
12. Protagoras  
13. Alexander  
14. Demetrius  
15. Darius  
16. Court guard

*Trial of the Gadfly* may be performed with as few as 8 players, by the taking on of multiple roles. For example:

1. Socrates
2. Xanthippe - also plays Sappho & Phaedrus
3. Demetrius - also plays Darius & court guard
4. Plato
5. Alcibiades - also plays Protagoras
6. Crito - also plays Dionysius
7. Meletus - also plays Alexander, Lysis
8. Anytus
INTRODUCTION

The period of Socrates’ life was dominated by a patriarchal society, where slavery was common, and homosexuality was the norm for men up until they were married at around 30 years of age. Women were treated as chattels, and romantic love was never sought in matrimonial unions.

Little significance has been alluded to, in the texts of Plato, of the importance of women in Greek culture. Knowing Socrates’ ardent assertion for women’s rights, it thus strikes the author as unusual that none of Plato’s essays quote philosophical discussions with women. Thus, the author has taken license to portray one of the Athenians, Phaedrus, as a women, to balance the male-dominated accounts of Socrates’ life.

In the original trial of Socrates, the court was a large amphitheater where were present 500 judges (Athenian aristocrats mainly) who presided over each case. These obviously cannot be included, and the more important judges represent an amalgam of those originally present at the trial.

Socrates was born around 470 BC. No historical references have been made to his appearance, except to say that he was “a squat, ugly man, who had magnetic charm, like a satyr”. His father was a stonemason and his mother a midwife. Socrates as a boy learned his father’s trade before joining the Athenian army as a foot soldier, where he fought in a number of battles outside Athens. Upon his return at about the age of thirty, he became politically active, joining the Athenian council, firstly as a member, then eventually as Chairman. His growing disillusionment with politics, led him into the agora (open-markets) where he began his lifelong career as a public speaker and advisor on all matters domestic, political and spiritual. He was not a teacher or philosopher in the ordinary sense of the word, rather an intellectual who sought to find a deeper meaning to life through a process of logical investigation.

As ‘Father of Athens’, he never charged for his advice, contrary to most of his philosophical peers. His logic was unfettered by the morality of the time, and he had a firm disregard for a person’s social standing. Thus his rounding and sometimes insulting discourses with men of high standing earned him the title of ‘The Gadfly’, pricking Athens’ conscience as he was, with his criticism of its aristocratic rulers, who by and large, he loathed for their corrupt ways. His opposition was not limited just to aristocrats, but to many popular intellectuals, in particular the Sophists, the Democrats, the Cynics, the mathematicians, and, notably, the politicians.

His closest friends during his life were Critias, Charmides, Phaedrus, Alcibiades, and toward the end of his life, Plato. His formidable opponents, Prodicus, Gorgias, Thrasymachus and Protagoras, tried to denigrate Socrates after his death. However, Plato successfully set down a version of his philosophies in many books which were to follow; importantly ‘Apology’, ‘Crito’, ‘Phaedrus’ and ‘Lysis’. Socrates’ life was also written about by Plato’s pupil, Aristotle.

Toward his seventieth year (399BC), Socrates was charged with committing crimes against Athens. The high councillor of Athens, Anytus, for reasons which must have been more personal than political, charged Socrates with corrupting the aristocratic youth of Athens, and for introducing new gods. Despite introduction of Amnesty Law 403 by the Athenian council some years before, which forbade that such “crimes” be punishable by death, the charges against Socrates were upheld; a majority of the 500 council members voting in favor of the death penalty. Even after a subsequent appeal, with Plato’s futile offer of money to allow Socrates to continue preaching in Athens, the guilty verdict was upheld. Meletus, the chief prosecutor in the case, was in a position to overrule the judgment if he wished. He, however, washed his hands of the affair and allowed the guilty verdict to be passed.

In doing so, Anytus had played Socrate’s bluff. The aristocrats, which included Anytus, wanted to silence the caustic voice of Socrates. They expected that, in fear of his life, Socrates would flee Athens and go
into voluntary exile, as other philosophers had done in the past, such as Anaxagoras. However, bluff called, Socrates was, to use his own words, ‘a man of Athens’, and, sensing that all his teachings were threatened by the charges, took the verdict seriously.

Three days later, after a delay due to a religious ceremony in Athens, Socrates voluntarily drank a cup of hemlock in the presence of a guard and his friends and pupils, Plato, Critias and Phaedrus. Earlier that morning, he had been in discussion with Plato and his wife, and poignantly, discussed trivial matters of husbandry, so as to make light of his death. His final discussions before death were recorded, in elegiac prose, by Plato in his book ‘Crito’. The act of suicide, in the seeming defeat of his ideals, made even his death a triumph, an ultimate affirmation. He had become, by latter day definitions, a saint and a martyr. Though he never set pen to paper, more words have been written about him than any other Greek intellectual of his time, and he set the foundations for western philosophy and politics. His characteristic Socratic dialogue (dialectic) is used even today as a method of philosophical investigation, i.e. answering a question with a question.

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Sappho was born around 612 BC, approximately 300 years after Homer and one hundred and fifty years before Socrates. According to Ovid, Sappho grew up in the aristocratic class, and was of “gentle birth and upbringing”. Her father died when she was about six, and her mother, Cleis, never remarried. When she reached adult age, Sappho became politically active in her native island state of Mytilene. Subsequently, she was exiled by the local Tyrant (mayor), Pittacus. She fled first to Sicily, thence, later in life, to the island of Lesbos, settling there around 591BC. She had three brothers; Larichus, Charaxus and Eurygyus. It appears that Charaxus lived with his sister for a time on Lesbos after a disreputable entanglement with an Egyptian courtesan (high class prostitute).

Sappho’s physical appearance has been described as ‘very ill-favored, being small and dark, like a nightingale with illshapen wings enfolding a tiny body.’ That is not to say she was ugly, merely that short, dark appearances were poorly favored to the taller, blonde features of the northern Europeans.

She was arguably one of the greatest artists; certainly the most prolific and creative, noted not only for her passionate verse, but also her artistic paintings, her dance, and the development of a new musical instrument, the lyre. Sappho formed an Academy, not unlike the ballet schools of today, where she also taught painting, music and poetry.

Because of the destruction of much of her thousand or more verses during the ravages of war and political upheaval, only a fragment remains to this day. Still, the rubbish heaps of Alexandria continue to reveal fragments of Sappho’s work. She died at around her fiftieth year, leaving a renaissance in poetry, which only Rodin and Donatello in sculpture and daVinci in painting could equal perfection.
Act One
Scene One

As the curtains rise, Sappho enters stage left, carrying a white rose. An instrumental piece is played (guitar or lyre), and at the end of the adagio, Sappho speaks.

SAPPHO: [Facing audience] Remember me when next you dream, and call me by my true name, Sappho, and I shall be your loved one, and shall cast light upon your noble deeds. But should you forget me, child born of woe, whose heart bends easy, then you will see no farther than beyond the sunny hills of Athens yonder and wonder, you will wonder, at the meaning of my prophetic words, which like a bottomless well, is endless, yet therein is its truth. Ask not why butterflies so oft fail to return after a day’s sojourn in the field. For quick is life, and deep, and when not fulfilled as asked of by mighty Zeus, is especially spent in reckless discourse with glory and power that is not yours to have. [She then looks sadly at the flower] Desire nothing, not man’s flesh nor woman’s, but mine alone, for I am the spirit of holy Desire. Before this flower wilts, will you see the folly men play at in this holy land. A white rose laid at thy feet, by way of apology, for what Athens will soon do to one so great as the gadfly. [Sappho places the rose at the very front of stage, where it lays unmoved for the entire performance until Xanthippe picks it up in Act Three Scene Three].
Act One
Scene Two

In the darkness as the play begins, an actor, dressed in period costume, displays a banner, which has the words ‘Athens 399BC’. The banner is carried across stage from left to right before play begins. The stage is darkened, portraying sunrise in an orchard just outside Athens. From stage left enters Plato, dressed in a tunic and carrying a roll over his shoulder. He drops his roll to the ground, gazes to stage right, then raises his hand as sunlight splashes onto his face.

PLATO: How strange a city is this, rising up out of the barren soil of Greece, reaching for the heavens, like a conscious being, as if it were trying to say “Beware, for I am the mighty city of Athens, ruler of all the world, of all the seas, and soil, knowing of great things, concubine to the Gods upon Olympus”. Yet look how quietly she sleeps. The guards at the Temple of Hephaestus are drowsy with torpor, which they recognise not. And beyond, I see the Acropolis on the hill, which the sun tries so gallantly to illuminate, yet all it does is cover it in washes of red and gray, as if eclipsed by that great architecture. Man, you have struggled well since last I was here as a boy, but these great feats of Athenian might do not impress me now, for love has dragged me back to this shore a sorry mess of a man, less interested in life as death. Woman, leave me be

[He looks about him as if worries that there was someone haunting him] that I may enjoy this scene. I know that you are here, Sappho. Your voice has haunted me ever since I left the shores of Lesbos. I ask for peace from your ethereal possession. [He shakes his shoulders as if she were sitting upon them, trying to free himself from his burden] Have I done not enough already in freeing your name so that you will be remembered forever? Leave me, I say, I wish no more for your haunting poetry, of love and desire, for they are things which only women know and understand. Not mathematics, nor philosophy nor politics. [He returns to the log] You do twist and turn inside my head, as if you were as alive as myself, but that is not so, for you have been dead for a hundred winters. [He rubs his arms as if cold] Such is the world lost without your poetry. [He lifts up his roll onto his shoulder] I fear all is dead without you. Once you said “The golden muses have ordained for me happiness without reserve, nor shall I be forgotten when I die.” Thus it is true, for your presence is unrelenting, driving me to that oft-visited cliff of hysteria, that I fall into this unknowing and uncaring abyss called love. I know you do not wish to be forgotten. Oh, my beloved poetess, do you so torture me for fun? I feel as if you are alive within this bony skull. [Holds his head within his hands] Let be, I say, so that I may breathe more freely. [Gets to his feet, heading towards Athens in the distance; stage right] Come Athens, embrace me. Your forgotten son returns, heavy of heart, a failure in all things except perhaps wisdom, but then perhaps wisdom is the greatest folly of all, for it lends courage to fools, and laughter to grief. Take me, Athens. This deformed spirit seeks your entreaty. I have made no conquests. Too sad am I for gaiety, or even the company of friends. For I have none, except, [He turns once more to that invisible presence] perhaps you, beloved muse of Lesbos.

Enter Phaedrus and Alcibiades

PHAEDRUS: Traveller, you come to Athens? She is that way, [Pointing to Athens] beyond the brook. Straightway it leads to the council chambers and the agora.

PLATO: Phaedrus? It is Phaedrus, is it not? And Alcibiades? Do you not recognize me?

PHAEDRUS: A mendicant?

PLATO: No, at least not since last I went to pray to Apollo. It is I, Plato.

ALCIBIADES: Plato? Zeus, if it is not. Why, welcome back, great traveller. We have not heard about you for years and assumed you had lost yourself to the prostitutes of Mytilene.

PLATO: Were it not true, I would have been happily lost, for the courtesans of Mytilene have talents beyond your wildest imagination.

ALCIBIADES: See, Phaedrus, rumors have an essence of truth.

PHAEDRUS: Were it up to you, Alcibiades, you would believe the entrails of birds. Plato did not come back to Athens to tell of far places which you will never see. But tell us, Plato,
what brings you back? Your departure sounded so final. I recall the words ‘To turn
ones back upon Athens.’

PLATO: ‘Is to court ruin and disaster.’ Yes, I remember the words well. But I have, good friends,
learned well that ruin and disaster already lay here [Hand upon his chest] rather than in
the great city of Athens.

ALCIBIADES: So you come back to us, a dog with tail drawn thus. [Imitates a dog with tail between its
legs]

PLATO: [Angrily] Less a dog than thee.

PHAEDRUS: You men fight like dogs, were you less smart I’d feed you bones to silence you both.
[Placating the two men beside her] Come, what news have you, Plato?

PLATO: News? I have no news. Travel broadens the backside more than the mind. But seriously, I
return, for I heard gossip about a trial. A charge of treason, no doubt, by Anytus of
Corfu.

PHAEDRUS: Your ears do not deceive you. A trial all right, but not of one against a guilty man. Yet
they will condemn him to death if they can.

PLATO: A sorry state to return to.

ALCIBIADES: No sorrier than any one of us who loves Socrates.

PLATO: Perhaps. So tell me. How goes Socrates?

PHAEDRUS: The man or the myth?

PLATO: I know nothing of myths but what I read in Homer, or the hymns of the Hesperides, perhaps
an angel voice of Sappho. But sadly, if Socrates is now more legend than man, you
can perceive the essence of the flesh which interests me.

PHAEDRUS: [Attempting eloquence] He grows gray, like dusk. More moonfaced, and starry eyed
thus.

PLATO: Like a constellation? How quaint?

PHAEDRUS: Socrates has had his chance over the last few years to be a ruler of Athens. Were he
disposed of more in the way of tact and diplomacy, he would have made an excellent
ruler.

ALCIBIADES: Excellent and wise.

PHAEDRUS: But that is contrary to the nature of the beast.

ALCIBIADES: Yes, the nature of the beast.

PHAEDRUS: As you may know, he held office as Prytan for about a year. In fact, he was chairman of
the Athenian Council on the day of the trial of the generals who had been in
command at the Arginusae. Socrates, for better or worse, was the only man amongst
five hundred councillors to protest against their condemnation.

ALCIBIADES: Oh, tragedy for Athens!

PHAEDRUS: Alas, it did not matter, for they were run through with the same knack as a butcher is
wont with his knife. [Alcibiades hisses in disgust] Then, later, when Socrates refused to
assist in the arrest of the innocent rich metic Bracaetus, he clashed physically with the
council, in particular, his best ally, and long-term friend, Anytus.

Those two were like...

ALCIBIADES: Peas in a pod.

PLATO: [Repeats mechanically] Peas in a pod.

ALCIBIADES: Though not as close as Phaedrus and I are to the master.

PLATO: Master? What is this word. I know Socrates well, and he would never allow for use of such
words. ‘We are all equal’, he has said.

ALCIBIADES: [He quotes] “Slave and free man alike, rich and poor, Ethiopian and white, barbarian
and Greek.”

PLATO: Yes.

ALCIBIADES: We call him master not for this, but for his wiser words on matters of state. Slaves and
women are far less interesting.

PLATO: [Laughing] You should ask this woman her opinion on this matter.

PHAEDRUS: [Resignedly] I am so used to the ways of men that nothing surprises me, not even the
words of Alcibiades, or the master himself.
PLATO: What master? Are you now making the good Socrates into a god? The same man who breaks wind with the best of us, and has tasted blood on the battlefield, who as a youth was wont to sleep with barbarian soldiers rather than women?

PHAEDRUS: It is the Athenian way. Women are not on the same footing as men when it comes to love.

PLATO: So I see. Athens has much to learn...

PHAEDRUS: I have learnt it less painful to see the butterfly, and not the caterpillar it metamorphosed from.

PLATO: How quaint, but excuse me if I do not feel the same sort of reverence.

PHAEDRUS: We are all friends, Plato, free to think and feel as we see fit.

PLATO: Perhaps, [To Phaedrus] So tell me, what has happened for the council to bring charges upon Socrates?

PHAEDRUS: Making enemies with Anytus.

ALCIBIADES: And befriending enemies of democracy.

PLATO: Are you enemies of democracy?

ALCIBIADES: We have no gripe against democracy, only in this Athenian version of it, which is corrupt, with the council growing fat under the yoke of us workers.

PLATO: [Takes Alcibiades hands] These are not the hands of a worker.

ALCIBIADES: [Pulling away] I am a philosopher, good man.

PHAEDRUS: And I too, but do not mock us for it.

PLATO: Mock? I do not mock. [He laughs] But it does seem that idle workers make trouble for bosses.

PHAEDRUS: More so in these times, for knowledge takes away the gnaw of an empty belly.

ALCIBIADES: You get the sway of what we mean?

PLATO: I have seen great poets living on islands beyond this shore, who know nothing of hunger, yet their bodies are skin and bone. Women whose beauty is too much to behold, yet they look more like horses asses. Wiser than Zeus, yet they cannot spell their own name. These women, my friends, make me believe in a life beyond work and struggle. Poetry, my friends, is the greatest of all talents, even more so than mathematics and philosophy. Even politics!

ALCIBIADES: [Laughing] Poetry? It is for women, those weak of head and loins, who fantasize about faithful lovers who never return from their adventures.

PHAEDRUS: Such words I expect of you! Socrates said that we should honor the poets, for they have the muses upon their shoulder as much as any artisan.

ALCIBIADES: Poets? Please! I do not care for them. They are idle, not only of body, but mind.

PHAEDRUS: [Insistent] What say you of me, then? For am I not woman? And are not all women one sort of poet or another?

ALCIBIADES: [Flabbergasted] No more than men.

PHAEDRUS: [Angrily] Yet I know what you imply.

ALCIBIADES: What?

PHAEDRUS: That women are not as good as men. Especially women of talent such as the good Sappho, who was mocked by men. You would not know a rhyme if it bit you on the face. Or a lyre if it was shoved up your...

*Phaedrus has at this stage a hold of Alcibiades hair, who turns, raises his hand to strike her, then thinks better of it.*

PLATO: Please! [Breaks up their squabbling] Speak not of which you know nothing, my friends. Neither of you has met a poet, or you would understand this worrisome look I have, glancing forever over my shoulder at her.

Phaedrus and Alcibiades glance over Plato’s shoulder.


PLATO: I see you are both virgins, and to art moreso. Socrates would be able to see my Sappho, as clearly as I do.

ALCIBIADES: [Offended] I think you are touched with too much sun.

PLATO: [Undaunted] Perhaps. But then perhaps, I see light when all you see is darkness.

ALCIBIADES: [Menacingly] You scoff?

PLATO: Perhaps.
PHAEDRUS: Young Plato, you should not talk about such matters so carelessly. Even Alcibiades, unblessed of reason as he is, refrains from irreverence.

PLATO: Why? Is philosophy such a reverent being that he does not wish to be talked about?

ALCIBIADES: [To Phaedrus] He makes riddles like the Sphinx.

PLATO: The Sphinx? Why Alcibiades, do you know of the Sphinx? Have you ever met her?

ALCIBIADES: Of rumors, we here of Athens have heard many things. She is known to be very wise, yet cunning, that she feeds of human flesh, yet Zeus has made her one weakness to be death, death in the face of a solution to any of her riddles.

PLATO: I know that much.

PHAEDRUS: I know it also to be such.

PLATO: Then you know nothing, for I have seen the Sphinx with these very eyes.

PHAEDRUS: Great Zeus!

ALCIBIADES: That cannot be. The Sphinx is dead. She is but a legend.

PLATO: Perhaps, but then legends also are you both, and even I. Such then, is the Sphinx a legend, for her and I, both legends in your mind, have talked at length on many things.

ALCIBIADES: [To Phaedrus] He is mad, I think? [To Plato] What sort of things have you talked with the Sphinx about?

PLATO: Nutrition.

PHAEDRUS: [Laughing] Nutrition?

ALCIBIADES: You mean you have met the Sphinx? That much talked of mythical Lioness? And coming upon its presence, where you saw its razor teeth and long, long claws, and its belly so full of human life, you did but discourse on matters as humble as food?

PLATO: Food is no humble matter. The gods eat well and are immortal.

ALCIBIADES: [Mocking tone] A butterfly partakes of the sweetest and purest of nectar but does not live for more than a moon. [To Phaedrus] Good lord, now I know he is lying, Phaedrus, for a man strong of mind does not make such discourse as food, as is done between two women out shopping.

PLATO: [Unperturbed] The Sphinx is no ordinary woman. She is fond of meat, the human kind of meat, that is. Thus, I chose to discuss with her why she had that particular preference, to which she replied that she did not know, yet that she had suffered that hunger for many thousands of years, since her master first brought her first slave to eat. She did not say if she loved or loathed her diet, but that it was all she knew. It was not easy to convince her to try something else, yet with some convincing, she did. Much to my amusement, I can assure you, for I think she looked longingly at my thigh with moistened lips and drooling tongue.

ALCIBIADES: [Looking at Plato’s naked thigh] So what does your Sphinx eat now, good sir, after denying herself the pleasure of that? Does she partake in grass? [Laughs] Or perhaps stewed lentils with basil and garlic?

PLATO: She eats nothing now. She lives instead in that state of suspended animation where neither hungry nor replete, she rests on her hill, contemplating the constellations overhead, as old as the world itself, and possessing the wisdom of the ages, waiting until the time comes when she is called back by Zeus to his side.

ALCIBIADES: [Nonplused] Oh, good Lord, I cannot stand this fairy-tale. Good Plato, you have missed your vocation as a singer. By all accounts Homeric in proportions. I have talked to others who have, through misadventure, fallen into the company of the Sphinx. One man alone, whom I knew, managed to escape from her clutches with his life, and only because he fell many feet down the cliff whereupon she awaits the unwary pilgrims. He escaped and told me of her savagery and cruelty. Thus I know your story to be either misguided or fabricated.

PHAEDRUS: How did you come upon the Sphinx, friend?

PLATO: A certain person sent me there. A poetess. As a test of my courage.

ALCIBIADES: Oh, what richness of meter in your song. Tell us more? Is her name, perchance, the lovely Sappho?

PLATO: You are very perceptive, my friend.

ALCIBIADES: Ho! I must write this story down. Do go on.

PLATO: There is no more to say. I went, and saw, and discussed the meaning of philosophy and life.
ALCIBIAS: Meaning of life? But you said you discussed food? Tell us now which is the true version?

PLATO: Both. We discussed the lack of virtue in eating human flesh, the sin of murder, and this led, by incongruous paths of conversation, to a discussion of deeply philosophical matters with which I will not bore you two intelligent scholars, for such things, by your reckoning, would be best spoken to washerwomen and house slaves. Perhaps you are right? I will call upon them and serve them a dish of the Sphinx. Who knows, I may even grow rich in this exercise.

PHAEDRUS: [Stops Plato from leaving] Good friend. I have a good sense of a man’s nature, and I know you were also once a close friend of our master.

PLATO: Zeus? I have never met him.

PHAEDRUS: Socrates. Socrates. And thus, you are making fun of us, because no friend of Socrates would ever laugh about such matters as philosophy, the search for meaning, and even this matter of the Sphinx, which I am still unable to judge whether is true or not. Yet I decide now that what you say is true, thus, you must not tell another about these matters, except our master, that is to say, Socrates. I suggest, for I cannot command such an esteemed scholar as yourself, that you come with us soon and meet master Socrates. He is, as we speak, preparing for a most gruesome trial, and afterwards, would be free to meet with you if it pleases you.

PLATO: It would please me immensely. But for now, I must pay homage to those whose seeds planted this wild acorn within my breast.

ALCIBIAS: As cold a reference as ever I heard about one’s parents.

PLATO: [Indifferent] Have mother and father ever been otherwise? Once I have completed my obediences to my parents, I will join with you and the master at your convenience. Say a time and a place and I will be there.

PHAEDRUS: Alcibiades and myself were due to meet with Socrates in the market. Today, as you may or may not know is the Panathenaic festival. A procession will pass the Temple of the Twelve Gods at precisely midday, making its way thence, past the Stoa of Hermes, the markets of Zeus, directly to the South markets in front of the Fountain House, where, in his regal couture, Anytus, High Councillor of Athens will begin the trial against Socrates. If we meet before the procession, you could come with us and greet Socrates as a friend. It would help his cause immeasurably, for as you know, when trouble comes, friends often disappear.

PLATO: It is said to keep friends close, but thy enemies closer, for when trouble comes, one comes and the other departs, and who knows which one it will be, friend or enemy. [Quixotically] My friends, I am no stranger to trouble, nor fear it. Love has constantly been my friend, and enemy. Thus I am a seasoned warrior in such things.

ALCIBIAS: [In jest] Is that a serious statement? What sort of philosopher compares love to a battle?

PLATO: One in search of perfection. Your master used to call it Arete, though I doubt he still uses...

ALCIBIAS: [Interrupting] Yes. yes. He still uses such a term, but not in the sense of pandering to the base love of women.

PLATO: Forgive me my ignorance. Perhaps you refer it to men, instead.

ALCIBIAS: [Insulted] No, not men, either. You are a neophyte, my friend. We, that is to say, Socrates, Critias and myself have all been soldiers in the Athenian army at one time of another. We have known the fear of battle, the pain of defeat and the joy of victory. I suggest you speak of that which you know rather than that you imagine to be.

PLATO: I speak no other way than about that which I know, which as Socrates says, is nothing, but then I know nothing more than you, that is to say we both know nothing, so it is better that neither of us speak. About anything. Then there would be nothing to speak about, thus it is that woman find everything to talk about and nothing, and they have thus mastered philosophy while we simple men are still struggling with the most base of concepts which even the great Sappho perfected, put down in verse, in sonnets so splendid, more than a century ago.

ALCIBIAS: Ah, this man confounds me with his riddles. I would rather the torturous logic of Socrates, who at least knows what he knows, even if it is nothing. Let us go, Phaedrus. We have work to do, unlike this idle gentleman of leisure.
PHAEDRUS: We must go on our way, good Plato. We may be fortunate to meet you at the agora before midday, otherwise, may Zeus protect you on your journey through life.

PLATO: And yours too, noble scholars.

*Phaedrus and Alcibiades exit.*

PLATO: Socrates, you old goat. Look at these worshippers, [*Indicating to Phaedrus and Alcibiades*] who tongue your name as if you were already a god. What mighty imaginings have filled your mind which was before just a paradise of pranks. Have you indeed grown old? Lost your jest? Turned merriment into melancholy and made a wisdom out of it the way magicians make doves of cloth? Who are you, but like this Sappho, you infect me with your spirit? Yet you live, so unlike Sappho, whose spirit haunts me so? What can this mean? What can this mean? That man and woman, life and death, together create this troubled heart. What can it mean, but death. Death. I fear it so, but it is already seen by my eyes. Go away! Begone! Begone! Spirit of song! Dear, dear Sappho! Begone! [*He runs off stage left*]
Act One
Scene Three

Morning, in the Agora (markets) of Zeus. To one side are tables with wares; clothing, bric-a-brac, jewelry, baskets/weaving, fruit, etc. The noises of hawkers can be heard sporadically over the discourse which follows between the philosophers. Socrates is speaking with Lysis (a pupil; aged around 20). Various stools are scattered about, seated upon which are a number of young men and women. Slaves listen eagerly to the debate while working at their master’s stalls. The discussion is lighthearted, with various interruptions of laughter from the audience and students getting up and newer ones sitting down.

SOCRATES: What was that you said, Lysis? I am an old man hard of hearing and much slower than you of wit.
LYSIS: [Laughing] I said, wise sir, that I disagree about your belief that wisdom, or as you call it, knowledge, is the source of all happiness. For parrots can learn great length of verse. I, myself, once heard a parrot sing a full ten minutes of a piece from Homer, but can you say that it was happier for knowing such recitations? I for one, believe that love is the source of all happiness.

SOCRATES: [Nodding his head sagaciously] Wise words, Lysis. And I know that you had once found love behind a stall in this very market. I would ask you her name but I know that you would not tell me. [This evokes ribald laughter aimed at Lysis] But tell me this, my wise friend, who should be up here doing the talking instead of me, do you say whether you are loved by her?
LYSIS: Of course. She has asked me to marry her. [Puffs out his chest proudly] What greater sign of love is there?

General commotion.

SOCRATES: [Laughing] You have got me there, Lysis. How can I compete with such logic? Perhaps? [He speculates on an idea] Let me ask you this. Do you know if you are loved by your mother and father?
LYSIS: [Perplexed] Of course, they have always acted so.

SOCRATES: That is a good thing, Lysis, for in this time of marital disputes and divorce, a love between mother and father and their child is an admirable thing. But tell me also, do they want you to be as happy as possible?
LYSIS: Naturally.

SOCRATES: And do you think that a man or woman is happy when they are a slave and allowed to do nothing they desire?
LYSIS: No. Of course not.

SOCRATES: Then if your father and mother love you as you say, it would be reasonable to assume that they would do everything to make you happy?
LYSIS: Of course.

SOCRATES: So they let you do what you want and don’t scold you at all or stop you doing anything at all?
LYSIS: Heavens no! They stop me from doing a lot of things.
SOCRATES: Yet you say they want you to be perfectly content? And here you say that they stop you from doing everything you want to do. So if, for example, you wanted to ride in one of your father’s chariots and take the reins, he wouldn’t let you?

LYSIS: [Laughing because the question seemed self-explanatory] Of course he wouldn’t. I’d crash it.

SOCRATES: So who would they let take the reins?

LYSIS: One of the servants, a charioteer, who is paid for that sort of thing.

SOCRATES: [Triumphantly] So your father would allow a paid servant to ride his chariot and yet not allow you?

LYSIS: I don’t see how this is important...

SOCRATES: Bear with an old man if you may. I will come to a conclusion eventually. [Someone shouts ‘Ev-en-tu-a-l-ly’ in a sarcastic manner and a bout of laughter erupts, but Socrates continues undaunted] So would your father at least trust you to a pair of mules then? Would he allow you to whip and flog them as you so desired?

LYSIS: No, he wouldn’t.

SOCRATES: Why not? Isn’t anyone allowed to flog the mule? How do you get it to work?

LYSIS: The mule driver does it.

SOCRATES: Ah, the mule driver. [Laughter from the group] And is the mule driver a slave or a free man?

LYSIS: Why a slave of course.

SOCRATES: So a slave is permitted to do what you are not? How strange a relationship you have with your parents. [This insults Lysis] So tell me, Lysis. Is it proper that a slave should be master over a free man? Does your tutor tell you what to do as well?

LYSIS: [Dryly] He takes me to school, protects me from the robbers in the markets. You know, the usual sort of things a slave does.

SOCRATES: Yes. The usual sorts of things. And your teachers at school? Are they your masters as well as your slaves?

LYSIS: My slaves are not my masters, though the teacher tells us what to do.

SOCRATES: And yet your teacher is a slave as well?

LYSIS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So your father deliberately employs slaves to be masters over you? But when you go home, I assume your mother, good woman that she is, does away with this subordination, and allows you free rein, so to speak? She surely lets you do what you want with the wool and loom that she’s weaving, so that she can see you perfectly content? I couldn’t imagine she would stop you from touching her weaving-blade or shuttle or any other of her spinning implements?

LYSIS: [Laughing] Heavens, Socrates! Not only does my mother stop me, but actually beats me if I so much as touch any of them.

SOCRATES: [Looking worried] Goodness! Surely you haven’t done anything wrong to your mother and father?

LYSIS: Of course not!

SOCRATES: Well then, what have you done to make them behave so oddly?

LYSIS: Oddly? They do not act oddly. They restrict me thus, because I’m not yet of age.

SOCRATES: [His face lights up] Ah! [He appears to have made a monumental insight into the boys family. Yet just as quickly, this seems to confuse him more] Yet, if they asked you to read a passage of Homer for example, or to write a letter to the council, would they ask you, for you are in your fifth grade are you not?

LYSIS: That I am, and yes, they would ask me.
SOCRATES: And do they let you play the lyre when you wish? For we all know how beautifully you serenade the girls of the markets.

*General derisive laughter at Lysis’ expense.*

LYSIS: They do let me.

SOCRATES: So what would then be the reason why they do not let you play with the loom, or ride the chariot, or whip the mule?

LYSIS: [Reluctantly arriving at a new conclusion] I guess that it is because I know about the lyre and reading and writing and not about riding a chariot or working a loom.

SOCRATES: [Said so loudly as to frighten the audience] Ah-huh! So your father is not waiting for you to come of age, but for that time when he considers you know how to do what it is he expects you need to know and do?

LYSIS: [Not at all enthusiastic with the conclusion] I guess so.

SOCRATES: So what about your neighbor then? Do you think he would let you ride his chariot if he thought you knew how to?

LYSIS: If he trusted me, yes.

SOCRATES: And what then, about all Athenians and not just your father and your neighbor? Do you think they will trust you to their affairs if they thought you knew how to do it?

LYSIS: [Coldly] I suppose so.

SOCRATES: Then what about the Great King of Persia?

LYSIS: [Aghast] Huh?

SOCRATES: The King of Persia. Would he trust you with the affairs of his state if he thought you capable of it?

LYSIS: If he were not offended with an Athenian running a Persian State, yes, I think he would. [This realization inflames Lysis opinion of himself, his face beaming with the thought that he could rule all of Persia and Greece] If Greece and Persia thought me able, I would be happy to do that for them.

SOCRATES: [In a tone of deflation] Well they don’t! At least not for now. [Laughter from audience. Socrates tone now changes to one of a benevolent leader of the masses. He speaks now more to the audience than the crowd behind him] So I can conclude from all of this, my friend Lysis, that as regards matters of which we possess knowledge and ability, everyone, Athenian and barbarians alike, men and women, free man and slave, will trust themselves to us and we shall do with them what we want, and no one will deliberately stop us, and we for our part shall be free in those matters and masters of other people, and those things will be our business, since we shall profit from them. Whereas regards matters of which we have no understanding, not only will no one trust us, but everyone will do their best to thwart us. And if we become wise, everyone will become our friend, since we will be useful and good. But if you don’t become wise, neither your mother nor father nor all of Athens will be a friend or ask for help. So it seems to me that it is possible, that wisdom, bought by work of knowledge in everyday life will make us friends and much sought after, and thus, can be the only source of true happiness.

*Lysis exits (stage left), rather defeated and scowling, with an eye full of vengeance. But the audience begin to clap, yet as they do, Socrates sees another pupil, off stage right.*

Enter Phaedrus from stage right. She has a dour look, dragging herself along rather than walking. Her countenance suggests someone in deep spiritual confusion.

SOCRATES: Ah, my beloved Phaedrus! How go you on this fine day?

PHAEDRUS: [Affecting a smile] I go well. How is wise old Socrates?
SOCRATES: Old. Old but not wise. At least Lysis thought not, judging from the look upon his face.
PHAEDRUS: Lysis? His face resembled more a lemon.
SOCRATES: Gone sour upon the branch, but then such trees bear sour fruit, which some call sweet. It is good to see you, yet why so long a face?
PHAEDRUS: I have come from meeting with some friends, who say the trial will not go well tomorrow.
SOCRATES: Trials are what they are, and whose outcome lies in the hand of God. Worry more about the state of your shoes [observes her tattered sandals].
PHAEDRUS: I do not concern myself with the appearance of things.
SOCRATES: Alas men do. It is all they see. And you would do well to find yourself a man to keep you warm through the Athenian winters.
PHAEDRUS: I am not beautiful.
SOCRATES: [Laughs] Nor I.
PHAEDRUS: You have that inner beauty so rare in men.
SOCRATES: [Embarrassed] Such words should be saved for a special man, not I. [Holding her face in his hands] There is a cloud covering your face. A cloud of sadness. Why so? I have never seen you so sad, as if you have been rejected by a lover.
PHAEDRUS: Such pain would be a pleasure to compare. In truth, this pain stems from fear. Fear that I may not be able to see you again.
SOCRATES: Grieve the dead, Phaedrus, and rejoice the living. What say you then? Am I one of the living or the dead?
PHAEDRUS: [With a paradoxical tone] A man standing midstream between the two.
SOCRATES: [Putting an arm around her] Ah, poor Phaedrus, what can I tell you to lift the weight on your heart?
PHAEDRUS: [Struggling with emotions] Tell me a truth, a wisdom you know within your heart. Oh, do not play with words and say [elaborately] “I know nothing”, for I know that you, more than any Athenian, know of God and such things which most of us will never come to understand. So do not be modest, Socrates. Feel my heart’s grief and spare me the irony of your wit. What do you say? Have you any wisdom to lift my heart, [looking up at the sky] this fine, but cloudy day?
SOCRATES: [Looks up to the sky] Fine but cloudy? [He laughs] Come, we will walk awhile. There is an orchard not far from here to discuss matters which are heavier than the coins on the banker’s tables.
Act One
Scene Four

An orchard. There are to begin with, the fading sounds of the markets, replaced by the whistling of birds and the hymn of crickets. Socrates and Phaedrus enter (stage left), with Socrates’ arm on Phaedrus’ shoulder. Although not crying, Phaedrus’ face shows an inability to conceal her grief over the imminent loss of her long time friend and teacher.

SOCRATES: Often I come here when there are things which trouble me.
PHAEDRUS: [Gazing about] It is a restful orchard. I did not know there was one so close to the center of the city.

SOCRATES: It is often used by the politicians, though for reasons I think unsuited to their profession. I have seen them come here with their slaves, or wives, and take part in frivolous games, or conversations which seem to serve no purpose but to while away what precious time is given to them by the gods. [Phaedrus sobs] Phaedrus? What grieves you so?

PHAEDRUS: [Crying] Oh, Socrates. I feel possessed of horrors the like of which have never been known to this heart. I am certain that nothing good will come of tomorrow. That the trial is but a theatrical performance by the rich men of Athens whose conscience you have pricked. As much a mockery of justice as was the trial of Anaxagoras. Yet deep down, there is this hollowness, which grows so like a cloud, getting bigger and bigger and darker and darker until all I can do is stop the rain from falling, coming out of my eyes as it does in such a childish, foolish way.

SOCRATES: No. You are the bravest woman I know, Phaedrus. Cry if you feel better for it.
PHAEDRUS: [She says softly] Tell me something.
SOCRATES: What do you want me to say?
PHAEDRUS: Anything. I long to hear your voice. I wish to hear it, so that your words will be forever engraved upon this heart. Amuse me, even if I am being like a mule, dumb and stubborn.

SOCRATES: [Walking aimlessly about, collecting his wits] When gathered before men, I have no shortage of things to say. In the market place, often do they have to gag me with woolen mittens or put rocks into this mouth, this trumpet, to silence an unruly and wild muse. But now that you command me to speak, I find that I am tongue tied. [He laughs at his own quandary] Oh, my muse is a fickle angel. She tells me to speak when I wish not, and silences me when most I desire to speak. Tell me then is possession not akin to the worst slavery?

PHAEDRUS: I cannot say of things foreign. Speak of her. Your muse, I mean. Tell me about her.
SOCRATES: [Deliberating] Yes, if you wish. But, how shall I compare the unknown with the known? Can Heaven be likened to this meadow? So cheaply is it, that leaves fall in autumn, and die, yet in Heaven there is no death?

PHAEDRUS: [Holding his hand briefly] Do try.
SOCRATES: My muse, if I can compare it to anything, is like a sublime form of possession. Sublime because she is noble, godlike I could say, and beyond my understanding. She is like a butterfly upon my shoulder, whispering soft words of encouragement when I grow worried, chastisement when I grow vain and pompous, and instruction when I failed to understand something she wishes ardently for me to know.
PHAEDRUS: [Laughing in spite of her sadness] It is not often that anything escapes your understanding.

SOCRATES: Alas, it is true, Phaedrus. I am old, as you see, and sometimes, I cannot understand why things are what they are.

PHAEDRUS: All things age.

SOCRATES: You think so? Were age not like the weight of this pebble, that throwing thus, [He picks up a pebble from the ground and throws it up into the air, but does not try to catch it] does sink. But could we think ourselves light, as yonder clouds, resisting the weight of the universe, we could fly always, ageless, eternal.

PHAEDRUS: [Shaking her head] Can age be likened so simply to a rock? That resisting weight we could live forever?

SOCRATES: I confess it but a theory, made up only to make you laugh.

PHAEDRUS: Go on, I am interested.

SOCRATES: There is no more to it.

PHAEDRUS: Your muse, I mean.

SOCRATES: My muse. Ah, well her, little is known, except that she is female. That much I am sure. Her voice is usually suggestive, sometimes chiding, often lighthearted, yet without being effete. She, great muse, first seized upon me on the day of my seventh birthday, when I was but a gentle and virgin soul, and roused me into lyric and other sorts of poetry of words. In some, who are possessed by this muse, she inspires countless other deeds. I know for certain that in poets, should they lose this muse, they will never amount to much. If a poet comes to the door of poetry or art untouched by this divine madness, believing that technique alone will make them a good artist, they will never reach perfection in their art, and will always be eclipsed by those who do have a muse within their soul.

PHAEDRUS: Then what of the soul? What is it? That is something I do not understand.

SOCRATES: The soul is an immortal thing. For what is always in motion is immortal. But that which owes its motion to something else, even though it is itself the cause of motion in another thing, may cease to be in motion, since it is false to its own nature. All things which come into being, the soul included, derive their existence from that divine origin, whom I call God. Moreover, since God does not come into being, for God has always been, it must also be indestructible. Therefore, God is the source of everything, from the smallest ant to the entire universe, and all the things in between. Thus humans have their source of movement from within, from the soul.

PHAEDRUS: Then what of death?

SOCRATES: [Surprised] Death? Death comes to all. And upon death, if a soul has experienced that joyful vision of absolute justice and discipline, it moves up to that arch in the sky, that blue, great blue sky above us. There, beyond the earth, at the very edge of the universe, the soul joins God, and shares its knowledge with that immortal being and thus contemplates what lies around, never to return to the earth.

PHAEDRUS: Yet no poet has ever sung or ever will sing of this experience, for none has ever returned to speak of it.

SOCRATES: That is true. Thus in preparation must every one seek the truth of this in their own heart. I understand your heart, as well as my own. But continue. Your words are sunny.

PHAEDRUS: [Looking skyward] As is the weather.

PHAEDRUS: [Saddened] Not so. I see rain.

SOCRATES: [Bewildered] Such is the weather what you want it to be. Overcast when it is fine. Where was I? Oh, yes. Now with this soul, like a bird, if it has not seen the great vision
desired of it by God, falls back to earth, its wings broken, its feathers tattered, and lands upon the soil, as a seed within the womb, and is born once more. Thus, a soul may take ten thousand years to reach that vision, living, flying up into the stars at death, falling once more, many more times, up and down, until it is ready to fly away forever.

PHAEDRUS: I understand, Socrates. I also understand that in this definition, the judges of Athens will charge you with making new gods, for Zeus has not spoken of such things, neither souls with wings, or possession by muses.

SOCRATES: I cannot help if they suffer from ignorance, my dear friend. Look how I have tried to shed some light upon their wrong ways, but it seems to only inflame their senses.

[Phaedrus holds Socrates hands. Stares longingly into his eyes]

PHAEDRUS: I have longed to be as an equal with you Socrates.

SOCRATES: You are my friend. More than you know.

PHAEDRUS: But no sooner do I approach than you grow more mysterious. Every light within those eyes grow more complex, as each facet breaks upon itself into tinier ones, more splendid than the last, until all I see is a brilliance of light which so overwhelms me.

[Chokes with grief]

SOCRATES: [Lightheartedly] It is a trick. Or perhaps your eyes grow cloudy with cataracts?

PHAEDRUS: [Wounded] Do not mock me, Socrates.

SOCRATES: I do not mock, Phaedrus. Forgive me. Love carries its own burden of responsibility. One which I cannot bear.

PHAEDRUS: Love?

SOCRATES: I meant friendship.

PHAEDRUS: [Caustically] That thing called Arete?

SOCRATES: Yes. [Evading her eyes] Be strong, Phaedrus, I see you in a few years being a noble woman of the senate. You, more than anyone in this generation, will turn the tide of Athenian politics.

PHAEDRUS: Me? Perhaps you do not realize the nature of my sex?

SOCRATES: I am not blind. At least not yet.

PHAEDRUS: Then you know that a woman cannot enter politics? That it is forbidden?

SOCRATES: A woman shackled to the hearth makes hard hearts of a nation.

PHAEDRUS: They would never let me.

SOCRATES: Within ten years you will see this come true, or if not, mighty Athens will surely fall.

PHAEDRUS: Oh, Socrates. Your words do so confuse me as to send me into madness. [She gets to her feet, walks to front of stage away from Socrates] I must leave. Before I disgrace myself in the presence of this man whose boundaries of love I fear to trespass. No God am I, only flesh and blood. [She goes to leave.]

SOCRATES: [Tenderly] Stay awhile. I beg of you. Is friendship, thus made of many adventures, a disgrace.

PHAEDRUS: You do not understand. Oh, do not tarry this heart. It grows hard and brittle by the second. [Phaedrus breaks free and runs off to very edge of stage left, where out of earshot, she muses] Oh, foolish man, sent by Zeus, so blind are you to love. So blind. So blind. That it would make a bat cringe from light.

Phaedrus, distraught and confused with her actions, exits stage left.

SOCRATES: [Stands there, confused and dazed. Lights fade, to suggest that clouds have covered the sun] How the sky grows dark. Phaedrus is a wise woman of weather. [Thunder is heard, and then a flash of lightening] Oh, do I offend thee, God? Have I said something wrong to the
beautiful Phaedrus? Or is this a protest against Zeus? [He turns from where he is looking, to stage right, trying to hear an inner voice] What say you, muse? Speak! [Long pause] Ah, you are as silent as the sky is noisy. Where are you when I need you? Have you deserted me? Speak, my muse. Come, whisper in my ear like you always do. [He begins to search for the inner voice, by walking about, as if it were to be found beneath the stool, or hiding under a bush] Do not hide so well. Like a lizard, I can hear you slithering about, yet I cannot find you. [He stands up, angry] For more than sixty years you have never ceased to annoy me and now, the day before my trial you abandon me! Why is it, fickle being of air, that you betray me so? [Flashes of lightening fills the stage]
Act Two
Scene One

A makeshift screen emulating the wall of a house, through which the audience can see Socrates and his family at supper. Socrates is seated at a table with Xanthippe and their two sons Demeter and Philemon, with the infant Alexander, who lies in a cot beside the table. From off stage, Plato approaches the house, sack on his shoulder. He sees the family having their evening meal. He watches unseen, dropping his sack to the ground, noticing how attentive Socrates is to his wife; occasionally holding her hand, kissing her, then attending to his children.

PLATO: Look at them, Socrates, his wife Xanthippe and their beautiful boys, eating their meal as if there was nothing more important than that restoration of energies which so fills the soul as to prolong its existence upon this earth. Though I see this, they seem more in their affections to each other like newlyweds. Yet look at the mark of the man! How plain and worrisome to me is his face, carved from an apprentices hand, so crude as to let the observer see the rough marks of the Almighty’s chisel. And she, so lovely as to be compared to an angel, and tender in her attentions to him and her children, who so unlike their father are handsome. I could compare them to Cupid and Psyche were it not for poor Socrates’ face, tortured as it is, crushed by mirth art, a joke of sorts, played by who knows what or where. [Socrates plays a joke with his sons, balancing a cup upon his head to make them laugh] And yet, how lightheartedly they play, caring not for the heavy world beyond their door. Oh, God, why had I left all this? I too, could have had such things as wife and children but that my demon forced me to flee in search of something which I have not found. Zeus! Could I not have such things now? I would trade all my anguish for an hour of their pleasures. Simple folk, let me see your heart, let me bleed in your ways, which are so full of simple things that it makes me ashamed to call myself Athenian. We live in such noble, high and uncertain times, blessed with men and women of learning, yet why do I feel this sadness surround me. As if Socrates and this island of peace he has built around himself is lost adrift in a vast sea of ignorance. But I must be brave. [He gathers his sack and approaches the hut] I sense a strangeness come upon this land. A strangeness in the name of loss. But I must be wrong. My muse, [Glances over his shoulder] she is a worrisome woman often prone to misjudgment.

He approaches the hut. Socrates sees Plato. Family rush out to greet him.

SOCRATES: Good Plato? It cannot be? But it is. How my heart races with joy. Look, Xanthippe, our lost son has returned.

PLATO: Son? I have another father?

SOCRATES: More of love than blood.

PLATO: [Sadly] It is true.

XANTHIPPE: Oh, good Plato, how wonderful to see you safely returned. I heard rumors of death, but did not wish to believe them.

PLATO: [To Xanthippe] My how you have grown. I wish I had been here for your wedding. My apologies, but I was in [Thinking] China, I think. Nearly seven years ago, wasn’t it? I mean since you wed this good Athenian?
XANTHIPPE: Has it been that long already? I do not count the years as you philosophers do. Time travels depending on my company, good when I am happy and slow when the company is not as interesting as yourself. How does your mother and father go?

PLATO: My feet are still wet from journeys overseas. I am on my way to see them, but it was the two of you that I longed more to meet.

XANTHIPPE: Such a kind thing to say, Plato, but do not let your parents hear you say that. They have spent good money on your adventures.

PLATO: I am eternally in their debt financially, but only that. You are my family.

SOCRATES: Come. We are eating. Join us. [They sit down at the table] Children, this is the famous Plato whom I have many times talked to you about. Alexander. Demeter. Show your appreciation by greeting him.

Demeter and Alexander greet Plato formally with handshakes.

PLATO: Sweet children, I am the one honored. You have all your mother’s beauty and your father’s wit.

XANTHIPPE: [Lifts out baby from cradle] And this is Alexander.

PLATO: Such beauty. He has his mother’s eyes. So handsome a boy.

SOCRATES: I chance admit they have their mother’s beauty and wit. All they inherited from me, Plato, was a rather clumsy ability to hit rocks with a hammer, of which my father is more responsible for that talent than I.

XANTHIPPE: How did your travels go, Plato? We long to hear of what you say. Are you married as yet?

PLATO: Married? No, your lady. Nor shall I ever be, I think. I am too twisted of heart to ever relax to any woman’s affections. Though I have a love within this breast, of a woman most beautiful as you, Xanthippe, conversant with music, dance and song, who is renowned the world over for her words, yet she lives only here in my heart and no longer in the flesh.

XANTHIPPE: She died?

PLATO: Alas so. Nearly one hundred years ago.

SOCRATES: [Laughs] How goes the youth of today that they can fall in love with someone one hundred years dead as if they were still alive.

XANTHIPPE: Come, good husband. You are traveled in things of the mind, but alas, rather homely in your understanding of woman...

SOCRATES: Perchance she has hit the nail most squarely.

XANTHIPPE: Would you be speaking of a certain lady of Lesbos, who lived with the virgins of dance, singing and dancing in the Academy? If so, I can understand this affliction, for Sappho, though she died one hundred years ago, still lives within the hearts of many.

Socrates is confounded with this talk and watches amazed at the discourse between Plato and Xanthippe.

PLATO: Good lady, beautiful lady, the two, goodness and beauty are both rare and painful and I stumbled once as I do now, upon such beauty and goodness in yourself as I did in Lesbos. Her name was Sappho, the poet. You are astute in your deductions, Xanthippe. Perhaps you were she in another existence?

XANTHIPPE: [Flattered] Sappho? I know of no such things. Only memories of this life. Beyond that is mere idle speculation. Future memories, I have many. Of a sense of something happened once before, yes. That is a common thing, but not the past.

SOCRATES: Are not the past and future merely parts of the present?
XANTHIPPE: [Dismisses Socrates statement with a roll of her eyes] So tell me, Plato, what of this Sappho? Why have not the many virgins who still live in Lesbos and teach Sappho’s arts of love and poetry not broken your heart?

PLATO: Good lady, I was too busy with other things. Of investigative natures and spirits which walked upon the land.

SOCRATES: I would have been more interested in those virgins.

XANTHIPPE: [Elbows her husband] Do go on, Plato.

PLATO: I took a merchant ship to Lesbos, for I had heard of the great development of art at the Academy there, and once upon the shores of that island, whose natural beauty is beyond compare on any island in the sea, I met an old lady, called... [Trying to remember the name] Cleis. Yes, Cleis. She ran the Academy there. I found out that she was Sappho’s daughter. It was then that she took me into her confidence and told me the story of her mother. When upon completing this, she vanished.

SOCRATES: Vanished!

PLATO: That is to say, my eyes could no longer register her. Strange things began to happen [Pointing to his head] within this skull. Activities which defied any explanation, for not before, nor since, have I felt such excitations as to make me question my own sanity.

XANTHIPPE: What sort of excitations?

PLATO: I saw before me a young woman. As beautiful and as young as you, Xanthippe. And I knew that this woman, of looks not unlike yours, of short stature, long black hair, wearing a white flowing dress, as none other than Sappho.


XANTHIPPE: Go on, Plato.

PLATO: I do not know what happened to this woman named Cleis, Sappho’s daughter. One moment she was before me and then there was Sappho, walking about the room as if she belonged there, as if this room in the Academy was as rightfully hers as it was the old woman’s who had been there a moment before.

SOCRATES: [Mocking] A ghost of the younger woman. It is an affliction of every female.

PLATO: I know you do not believe in ghosts. Yet do you not say we have spirits?

SOCRATES: Yes, but not of visible sorts. I believe only that which I see. Nothing ever comes from nothing.

PLATO: Then perhaps this ghost came from the dead Sappho? [Socrates laughs] I tell you without a lie, I saw Sappho.

SOCRATES: My children have more imaginative dreams.

PLATO: I was not dreaming, Socrates.

XANTHIPPE: I do believe you, Plato. I have had such a visitation myself as a child!

SOCRATES: [Horrified] Xanthippe! What news is this? You never told me.

XANTHIPPE: Good husband, you never asked, nor would I expect you to believe me.

SOCRATES: That is probably true, but you should have told me nonetheless.

XANTHIPPE: [Impatiently] Let young Plato continue, husband.

PLATO: I watched for a few moments while this mysterious angel floated about the room, as if of idle mind as to where she was going, when slowly she turned toward me and began a recitation of poetry so profound as to bring me to my knees. Such delight that I cannot describe, so beautiful that for me to repeat it would be turning gold into lead.

XANTHIPPE: Try, my friend. I would like to hear from this muse, for I believe that was what you saw. Perhaps it was Sappho, I do not know, but surely, it would have been a muse of some sort.

XANTHIPPE: Be less judging with your ears. Come, Plato. Do go on. My husband must be left to his opinions as an island is to land. You were saying, Plato? This poem?

PLATO: [Distracted] The poem. [Warmly] Her words were colored by the shock upon my ears, but the poem went thus: [He stands] “Beyond all heavenly fortune seems to me the man who sits facing you and listens intimately to your sweet speech and lovely laughter, which sets the heart flutter in my breast.” [He interrupts his soliloquy to say] She was a most splendid creature, and I remember now that she was quite naked. Shamed, I was to look upon her, never having seen a woman thus undressed before in all her splendid beauty, but I did. I could not escape the capture of her flesh.

SOCRATES: Naked? Quite naked, you say?

PLATO: I do recall most vividly, yes.

SOCRATES: A capture! Of the eyes! Indeed!

XANTHIPPE: [Rather unimpressed] It can be a shocking experience to one unaccustomed. Shocking, as no doubt Socrates was the first night of our wedding.

SOCRATES: Beauty is a godly gift, my wife. Do not mock me, for thus you mock God.

XANTHIPPE: Mock God? Has my husband come to that, to likening himself to a God?

PLATO: I think he meant that the gift was God’s.

XANTHIPPE: [At Socrates, cuttingly] I know what my husband implies, rather than says. He is no more a God than the goat tethered to the barn over yonder. And he [Pointing again to the goat] is often times of more use. [To Plato more casually] Rather, I tease the boy inside the man, who knows how to laugh when he is made fun of.

Socrates laughs mechanically.

SOCRATES: Go on, Plato. Do not pay too much attention to my wife.

PLATO: Xanthippe. I meant to say that innocent eyes can be shocked senseless by beauty. Thus was I shocked when first I laid eyes upon you.

XANTHIPPE: Why thank you, Plato. You are too kind.

SOCRATES: [Repeating Xanthippe’s reply] You are too kind, Plato. [Irritated] Go on with this lesbian poetess. She interests me.

XANTHIPPE: Merely because she is undressed.

SOCRATES: Not so. What does an old man care for naked women.

XANTHIPPE: In the market? Much. They fetch a high price.

SOCRATES: Oh, do go on, Plato. The suspense is killing me.

PLATO: She said more words, and if I recall accurately: “Straightway a subtle fire courses beneath my skin; my eyes see nothing; and my ears are filled with the noise of many waters. The sweat pours down me.”

SOCRATES: Very fluid.

XANTHIPPE: Stop interrupting.

PLATO: “A tremor seizes my whole body. I am paler than grass in the summer heats. A little more and I should die, and yet, let me dare all.” [Plato collapses into a swoon, lifeless on the table]

SOCRATES: [To Xanthippe] What has become of this boy?

XANTHIPPE: He is in love. You do remember? You too were in love once.

SOCRATES: But this is not the Plato I once knew. He was of much greater stature. Most six foot tall and more solid. Now he appears like a fawn, sullen and empty eyed, drooling over some ghostly woman, naked and ill-mouthed.

XANTHIPPE: You think her ill-mouthed? Oh, Socrates, you have no taste for art, nor beauty.
SOCRATES: I married you. That is sufficient defense to prove my tastes.
SOCRATES: Ah, a play of words. We met, we married. I am due half the credit.
XANTHIPPE: If it were up to you, I would still be listening to your pathetic poetry from my balcony. It was I who tempted you up to my father’s house. Who took your hand, and fell in love. I who planted the seed of marriage when you were too busy with puritan thoughts of ideal love.
SOCRATES: Did I really write pathetic poetry?
XANTHIPPE: You may have got better with practice. Pupils invariably do.
SOCRATES: [He leans over Plato] Are you awake?
XANTHIPPE: Let him sleep. He has had a long journey over sea. Children, help your father clear the table. [All arise from the table. Children and Socrates clear the table. Xanthippe helps Plato to a cot. Plato collapses with a groan and sleeps soundly. She covers him with a blanket] Children, fetch us some water down at the stream. And be sure to return before sunset, or the guards will prong those buttocks of yours all the way back.

CHILDREN: [In unison] Yes, Mama.
Children exit, leaving Xanthippe and Socrates watching over the sleeping Plato.

XANTHIPPE: He has grown much since last I saw him. And more handsome. He will make a bride most happy.
SOCRATES: I do not think that Plato is destined for earthly love. I know that look upon a man’s face.
XANTHIPPE: You too had that look.
SOCRATES: I was different. It was true I had no intention of every marrying. At least not before I met you. I was preoccupied with politics. Nothing seemed more important until the one day my eyes fell upon yours in the agora, then you handed me that bushel of figs with all the innocence of an angel and in doing so, broke the shell which confined my being and set it free to play. But Plato? He will meet his soul’s other half, but even then will he resist her. When I met you, I resisted not your beauty.

XANTHIPPE: [Softens] Really? I often thought you married me for my dowry. Such are men of Athens these days that all they care about is money.
SOCRATES: I could have married a dozen women for money, my love. Marry for money and we spend the rest of our life paying for it. But for love. How sweet is the eternal joy. Long ago, I prayed to God that someone would appear to ease the burden of this life, and though in despair I waited long, it was worth it, I can assure you. Is it not better, after all, to have seven good years than seventy dull ones?

XANTHIPPE: [Looking at Plato] His father will be pleased to greet him.
SOCRATES: Dionysius will not care either way, except that now Plato has returned, he may be a useful hand in his business. Such a man is Dionysius, richest man of Athens, a ship builder, merchant, and politician, yet what does all his wealth give him in the way of happiness? Look at his son, who has traveled the girth of the seas belly, only to find a little of the affection his father has denied him. Plucked as that boy was from the nipple at such a young age. Why, he still had milk teeth in his head when he was flung into commerce before he knew anything about life. If goodwill comes from Dionysius, it will be in the way of gold or drachmas, for he has nothing more to give the good Plato, that us in poverty cannot give.

XANTHIPPE: Come, let us leave the boy to sleep.

They move outside the hut, holding hands.
SOCRATES: The night sets upon us quickly.
XANTHIPPE: See how the stars grow brightly, like the sun, as if it were possible they were suns, far away, in other places.

SOCRATES: They do glow brightly. Like your eyes. And shone off your eyes, they do reflect the universe so full of joy everlasting.

XANTHIPPE: [Drawing Socrates close to her. She holds him tenderly, looking up into his eyes] A muse of love looks over us.

SOCRATES: You have made me most happy, my love. Though we met so late, I thank God that our paths did cross. I could not have lived thus without you.

XANTHIPPE: Nor I you, Socrates. Though I have not known your troubles in the world of men, I see you as a gentle man, who is so loving to our children, so attentive to their needs, and so caring to me, that I cannot believe what the people of Athens are saying.

SOCRATES: Do not listen to idle tongues, my most beloved, for tongues are like banners in the wind, and the more the wind blows, the more they waffle. They have no sense but to waffle, no mind controls them except the Furies, whose actions belong to Zeus. I have friends in high places. Meletus has sworn this day that he will protect me to death. And Plato, rich courtesan of the seas that he is, has more wealth than either of us could ever see in a lifetime, and he will not deny me his support. Not after my tutoring him as a boy.

XANTHIPPE: Plato is a loyal friend. But do you forget, dear husband that it was you who brought Dionysius and Plato, father and son, to blows.

SOCRATES: Yes. Well no person can influence another, I always say, Xanthippe. Plato listened to me, but then he made his own mind up.

XANTHIPPE: He was young, and impressionable. And Dionysius is a formidable enemy, rich and powerful. Even more so than Meletus.

SOCRATES: Leave it to the Gods, my love. Let us not waste this beautiful night on matters of state. Let me hold you. [They embrace] I do imagine that Ares felt thus when in the arms of his beloved Aphrodite.

XANTHIPPE: Husband. I have some news.

SOCRATES: [Blissfully] Yes, my love, though no more of the state, please.

XANTHIPPE: Of us, Socrates. Of us. [Growing trepidation in her voice. She looks at Socrates, but he is gazing dreamily at the stars] I am in child, Socrates.

SOCRATES: We all are children, my love. [He kisses her]

XANTHIPPE: [Holding him ardently] Socrates. I am in child, I say.

SOCRATES: [Still not registering] Yes, my love. [He gazes fervently at the stars, then his head lowers from the sky to Xanthippe’s face, the realization coming upon him slowly] What?

XANTHIPPE: We are to have another child.

SOCRATES: [Sadly] Are you sure?

XANTHIPPE: Women are privy to such knowledge.

SOCRATES: [Moving away, holding his chest] Another child? A fourth child? But we have not enough money to feed three.

XANTHIPPE: [Wounded] It is not solely my fault, Socrates.

SOCRATES: [Collecting his sorrow, and smiling] Oh, my sweet cherub, forgive me. I was struck by the suddenness of this news. How long have you been so?

XANTHIPPE: Three months, I think.

SOCRATES: Then I will awaken Plato and ask him for money. There are things we need, a new cot for the baby. Herbs and ointments for it. And more food.

Socrates goes to awaken Plato. Xanthippe suddenly grabs him before he reaches him.
XANTHIPPE: Husband. Do not wake the poor child. He is dead on his feet, having been here less than ten minutes and already you are plying him for money. It is not the done thing.

SOCRATES: What do I care if it is not the done thing? Do you think the Athenian council would care if we starved to death? We have expenses. Tomorrow I must meet the council and pay to enter the courtrooms. Where will we get the money for that? Ten drachmas just to have myself heard in court! To defend myself, an innocent man, having to pay to prove his innocence.

XANTHIPPE: We will find the money tomorrow. Leave him be. [She drags Socrates away, back out of the hut]

SOCRATES: [Dreamily] A baby. What news is this, that forebodes the sins of the morrow, for tomorrow will be a bad day? I can sense as much, but how happy you have just made me, Xanthippe, with this splendid news.

XANTHIPPE: I know our hearts to be pure, and that our new child will be born into a home whose father is of noble and true stature, a giant no less, amongst the lowly politicians of Athens.

SOCRATES: Perhaps. [He glances expectantly into the audience] Where can those children of ours be?

XANTHIPPE: They have no doubt met other children and are playing.

SOCRATES: But it is late. I must go and fetch them.

XANTHIPPE: They will return in due course, my love.

SOCRATES: No, stay. I will fetch them. Tomorrow is a big day. They must get to bed early, like our good fellow, Plato.

Socrates exits, leaving Xanthippe front stage, staring out at audience.

XANTHIPPE: He goes off into the night so casually, as if it were but to collect children, yet I know it is to death. You do not know me, Sappho, though you live inside the heart of my friend, Plato. Oh, poet of Lesbos, where are your words, now that my husband has left me all alone to weather the cold night air? You do not know my husband, Sappho. Not like I do, who would surely die for him if need be. I could have had any number of men but by some turn of fate, he stole my heart so completely, and now, there is nothing to compare to that great man. Oh, muse, you are so painful a torment. [She looks at Plato] I do see you so clearly, living within that boy’s heart, yet it frightens me, for he knows not what you do in that flesh beneath his ribs. And when you leave him, as surely you will if he betrays you, what will he be left with? Will he ask what is the purpose of believing in things that the eyes do not see? Surely these will be his words? For, dear Sappho, you once lived within this breast, [Hand to her chest] this proud breast, and you asked me to stay away from Socrates, because he would hurt me. How true you were, but I could not change it a million times if I had that many offers. For none is greater than Socrates, not even Sappho. Beautiful that you are, noble muse, you have not seen his light. Go now, that I may be spared the anguish of this eternal torment without my one love. Poor Socrates, tomorrow will be our last day, and yet you seem not to realize as I do. But what is there for me to do? What can a woman do in a world run by men? They will not let me speak even if I were Sappho. Even if I were a goddess. A slave am I. Even to Socrates. And widow within a day, I fear. I do not know if Socrates could bear such a burden. Easier it is for him to die and be free than to stay and remain, a sorrowful fate.

Enter Socrates and two children, gaily running toward the hut. They run to their mother who assumes her maternal appearance and cuddles them.

SOCRATES: See how the children come when the father calls.
XANTHIPPE: [Whispers to herself, when Socrates back is turned] Watch how the children cry when the father falls.
Act Two
Scene Two

Markets, just outside the council chambers. Anytus, dripping in gold jewelry, enters stage right. Meletus, wearing the robe of office and carrying documents, enters stage left. He trips and drops the bundle of papers and begins to collect them. Anytus, as yet unseen by Meletus, watches carefully.

ANYTUS: Hark how the boy becomes a man. Why, just the other day he was but a babe at his mother's breast, so pure of skin and without imperfection. Now look at him, so grown and full of important office, that the responsibilities seems to unbalance him. Such a man, I know, can be tipped to one side, like a turtle, who, upon its back, will struggle and push but will not be able to right itself, no matter how hard it tries. I must try and tip this nobleman, tip the balance of his deeds so that the trial will go in my favor. [Anytus adopts an austere tone and approaches Meletus humbly, helping him with the last of his documents] Chief prosecutor, good morning!

MELETUS: Good morning.
ANYTUS: A chance meeting this is, on such a beautiful day.
MELETUS: Yes.
ANYTUS: The rough streets of this city are a dangerous place for the balancing of weighty documents.
MELETUS: These are the streets of my birth, good sir. Every cobblestone and pebble is known to me, but one or two which elude my eye every once in a while. These documents are a trouble, weighty in more ways than one.
ANYTUS: How so?
MELETUS: They concern the trial tomorrow.
ANYTUS: A weighty matter for sure. How does the balance go? Like those of the trader, does it swing in the way of the purchaser or the seller?
MELETUS: Is the fate of men's souls now being likened to silver or bronze?
ANYTUS: Merely an analogy, good sir. So tell me, is there a personal touch to this case? It is well known amongst the council that Meletus was a pupil of Socrates as a boy.
MELETUS: What of it? I was also a pupil to the slave, Recinous, and the Sophist, Pretemus. Does that make me unable to put them on trial as well? Why I'm sure that if one dug deep enough, you would find that every Athenian is related to another somewhere in our ancestry. Thus it is that men make trials against friends, and sentence to death others who may be brothers.
ANYTUS: Be that as it may, there are some friends who will never be brought to trial.
MELETUS: Oh?
ANYTUS: Men of high, noble and honest ways. In particular, I refer to the ship merchant Dionysius, his friend Protagoras, who is one of the councilors.
MELETUS: And, of course, yourself.
ANYTUS: Well I could be included in that group of men who preside over the judgment of Socrates.
MELETUS: I see.
ANYTUS: We would be saddened to think that you would allow friendship with Socrates to interfere with justice.
MELETUS: I am no more persuaded from justice by friendship than the mountains are by a storm.
ANYTUS: Well, true as that may be, Meletus, Socrates does have a special weight upon your heart.
MELETUS: How so?
ANYTUS: Did he not deliver your son for you last year?
MELETUS: [Laughs] An emergency it was. No other midwife would come at such short notice. He
lives but a few houses down from us. He did the job well for a stonemason. I believe
his mother was trained in such things and taught him a few skills.

ANYTUS: [Patronizing] Yes, yes.

MELETUS: This year, I also had the wine merchants press my grapes, and the carpenter build a new
shed for my calves. Many men of trade have helped me in the past and I do not take
special note of it. Were any of them to come to trial I would treat them no differently
than I would a stranger.

ANYTUS: Yes, yes. I’m sure that is the truth. [Looks about, then leans toward him secretively] But none
the less, consider this special, and of course confidential, note. I have been in private
discussions with Dionysius, who, as you know, is building a fleet of ships for the
Council, at much personal expense to himself, I might say. In return, he has asked one
favor of the council, which is to be that you are elected as High Councilor of the
Prytans when I retire next winter.

MELETUS: [Shocked] That is a monumental request. What did I do to be nominated to such a lofty
position? I am but thirty-five years of age, clearly twenty years too young for such an
important position.

ANYTUS: Dionysius is much impressed by you. Quote, “A man of integrity”. You have served the
Athenian council well in the past three years and at our last meeting of the Thirty
tyrants, considering also Dionysius’ request, we have decided to nominate you to
that position.

MELETUS: [Clearly overawed with the offer] Of course such an offer comes with certain prerequisites?

ANYTUS: [Feigns shock] None whatsoever. [Indulgent] However, we would ask that you serve no
personal bias at this trial tomorrow.

MELETUS: I understand.

ANYTUS: We ask that justice be served. No more or less. Also, we have as yet to settle the matter of a
salary, an amount not inconsiderable, or out of context with the seniority of the
position. Shall we say fifty-five minae per year?

MELETUS: [Stunned] Fifty-five minae?

ANYTUS: The work is hard, and there is much responsibility involved. You would hold the integrity
of Athens’s legal system in your hand.

MELETUS: Yes.

ANYTUS: So what do you say?

MELETUS: I am speechless, Councilor Anytus.

ANYTUS: [Laughing] Then I will take your silence as acceptance, if I may? Have a good day,
prosecutor. I will see you at the trial, and afterwards, all going well, a drink with the
judges, where I will announce formally, acceptance of your new position.

MELETUS: Yes, thank you. Good day, Anytus. [Meletus moves to exit stage right. At edge of stage, he
glances back at Anytus, who is looking at a market stall] Fifty-five minae! A price for
securing my own future. How simple seems this coincidence of fate. I will take this
offer. But I will not undo the law for fifty-five minae, nor all the gold in Athens.
Beware, judges of Athens, for Socrates will be set free. Neither he nor I can be bought.

Meletus exits.

ANYTUS: [Cunningly glancing to Meletus as he exits] A turtle is upended. Now, to sharpen the blade...

Act Two
Scene Three

On stage a table and personal effects have been placed. Seated is Dionysius, the ship merchant. Beside him is Darius (slave) going through documents. There is obviously a moment of confusion, because as Darius hands the documents, Dionysius is waving them away, as if trying to find a sheet he has lost. During this paper chase, Anytus enters stage left.

ANYTUS: A moment with you, Dionysius, if I may.
DIONYSIUS: [Angrily] Oh, God, what now! [Looks up to see Anytus, demeanor lightens] Ah, Anytus! What a pleasant surprise. What brings the High Councilor to this part of Athens? You are brave to have ventured through the docks wearing so much gold on your person. Such an adventure must mean important things weigh heavily upon that curiously Athenian soul of yours.

ANYTUS: [laughs] No more or less Athenian than yourself, Dionysius.
DIONYSIUS: Ah, but I am a ship’s merchant, traveler of the seas. I have tasted the sweat and blood of many nations and thus call myself a bastard of this world. Whereas you! You have traveled no further than the Acropolis on a rainy day to talk with your Gods who inspire the tongue which has passed so many Athenian laws of late.

ANYTUS: [Deflated.] You have stolen the wind from my sails, Dionysius.
DIONYSIUS: [He laughs] It is a sailor’s prerogative! But come. This far journey of a mile from your home must not go unrewarded! [He claps his hands] Darius! Bring us some wine. [The slave obeys obsequiously] How goes the councilor’s preparations? I hear the trial of Socrates begins tomorrow.

ANYTUS: A difficult trial, perhaps the most difficult ever for the Athenian council, for he is not without influential friends.
DIONYSIUS: Nor is he without influential enemies. Myself included. He corrupted my son. I could never forgive him for that. He may as well have driven a sword through that boy’s heart as plant those evil notions in his childish head.

ANYTUS: Is there any news of Plato?
DIONYSIUS: None, though every turn of the compass brings fresh rumors and speculations as to his whereabouts. Yet as quickly as the gossip arises, it is disputed. I swear it would be less painful were someone to lay his dead body upon this table and for me to see him with those sad eyes closed than to live another year without knowing of his whereabouts.

ANYTUS: ’Tis the worst thing to befall any father, especially one as noble as yourself.
Darius enters with wine. Pours two glasses.
DIONYSIUS: [To Darius] Leave us. [Darius nods, bows, and exits] Drink, Anytus. You look thirsty. Natural desires should not be denied, contrary to what men like Socrates espouse in the market place. So, tell me, what case have you against this half-naked philosopher?

ANYTUS: Sworn affidavits from over twenty Athenians, confirming Socrates' treasonous acts over the last twenty years.

DIONYSIUS: And the charges?
ANYTUS: Corrupting the youth and worshipping false Gods.
DIONYSIUS: I can verify that he corrupts the youth. And what is to be his punishment?
ANYTUS: Death, in lieu of perpetual exile.
DIONYSIUS: Death? [He laughs, more out of surprise than callousness, for until then, he had not realized the seriousness of the charges] Socrates will fight that one tooth and nail. “A life without
inquiry is a life not worth living”. Such a thing has Socrates said. And I can assure you he will inquire most fervently against these charges.

ANYTUS: I am well aware of this. We are prepared.
DIONYSIUS: Yes, I’m sure.
ANYTUS: [Defensively] Meletus is chief prosecutor as you well know, and I have been to see him, offering him my position at the end of winter when I retire. The promotion struck him irresistibly. He is vain and naive, and his ambition allows him to be led thus. [Emulates a carrot dangling before a mule] Like a mule he can be led. For the time being, I will lure him like thus toward a guilty verdict. He will not betray the course of the trial.

DIONYSIUS: [Flippantly] Thus can the truth be led by parable. Sounds like Socrates is as good as guilty?
ANYTUS: [Pleading] Almost. I have personally been to all the judges, one by one, steadily gauging their opinions on the matter of Socrates, and more than two thirds are ready to convict him of these crimes. It is enough for a verdict to be made. In particular, I have won the support of Protagoras, Prodicus, Gorgias and Thrasymachus. So, I can count on your vote as well?
DIONYSIUS: [Surprised] Me?
ANYTUS: You are one of Athen’s most respected business men and judges. The other judges will listen carefully to your decision.
DIONYSIUS: I never remembered saying I would be involved in this.
ANYTUS: I thought you were with us? You said...
DIONYSIUS: [Interrupting] I said I would think about it. Nothing more.
ANYTUS: But the trial is tomorrow!
DIONYSIUS: I am still as yet undecided. Personally I wish the man dead, for he can be so irritating, but is that a crime? Desires aside, I must honor the law of the land.
ANYTUS: And so must I. But your vote would be a very influential one. Were we to count on your vote, we would have almost unanimous majority.
DIONYSIUS: But for what? You are voting for his death. I hate the man, but not that much. What harm is he to Athens?
ANYTUS: [Feverish] Harm? Good sir, do you not see him down at the markets every day, making fun of the council as they pass from one chamber to another, as if he were in a playground. And the children, he makes them laugh at us.
DIONYSIUS: So it is your pride that is wounded, not the law? Seek retribution with a thug, who can pay a visit on Socrates at night and knock some sense into him. The courts do not need to be delayed with this matter.
ANYTUS: [Almost childishly] You told me you were with us!
DIONYSIUS: Do not press me, Anytus.
ANYTUS: But your opinion is one I value highly. Oh, a stalemate shall be all this work comes to! [He paces about impatiently, Dionysius watching him with fascination] Dionysius, how can I persuade you?
DIONYSIUS: [Honorably] Principles have a price.
ANYTUS: Let us say one hundred minae, then?
DIONYSIUS: [Laughing] One hundred minae?
ANYTUS: The council has put aside monies for expenses to be used for such a case, and your vote is worth ten times that amount.
DIONYSIUS: [In thought momentarily] A fair price, I would say. But I would wager that the other judges get less.
ANYTUS: Of course.
DIONYSIUS: Then I will accept the payment and consider the matter.
ANYTUS: [Anxiously] But I need your verdict.
DIONYSIUS: You will have it when the time is right. In the meantime... [Holds out his hand for payment].

ANYTUS: [Searching his clothes] I do not have money on me. I will send a courier. Can you wait?
DIONYSIUS: Of course. As will my decision. [A pause] So tell me. What brings to bear this desire for Socrates’ death?

ANYTUS: A long standing grudge.
DIONYSIUS: [Smiling] Ah, an old flame burns still keenly. Xanthippe of Athens, no doubt?
ANYTUS: [Embarrassed] Do not confuse desire with ambition.
DIONYSIUS: [In jest] Far be it for me to do so, sir.
ANYTUS: Let me be clear that I do not wish for Socrates’ death, and that it has nothing whatsoever to do with her [Pointing as if Xanthippe were in the room]. Only that Socrates be forever muzzled, so that he will not strike rebellion in the heart of Athenian youths.

DIONYSIUS: [Laughing] You cannot muzzle that mouth. [Flamboyantly] It is bigger than all of Athens. But I agree, he is dangerous. A man of high morals, and piety. One who has no fear of death, or pain, or another man’s wrath. Thus is he to be feared by the government.

ANYTUS: Exactly! A slave will always fear the whip, or torture, or starvation. But a free man? He cannot be persuaded with anything but his mind, so must he be either convinced of the wrongs of his actions or put to death. A society such as Athens cannot progress while men like Socrates live.

DIONYSIUS: I cannot wholly agree. If anything, I favor exile. Besides, I have a ship going to Corsica on the tenth of next month. If he loses the trial, you could send Socrates on my ship. In Corsica, he could drive them mad all he likes with his philosophies, and no doubt amuse the politicians with his heretical notions of godlessness and immorality. I would miss his ardent philosophical jabs, even if one or two are aimed at me. What is life if one cannot laugh at oneself every now and then, eh Anytus?

ANYTUS: [Musing] Corsica? It is a good idea of yours, Dionysius. One which I will mention to the judges when they deliberate over the sentencing of the accused.

DIONYSIUS: I always have need of more slaves to work the oars, and an old man like Socrates would be good tied up at the rear, working the rudder.

ANYTUS: You may need to tie a sash across his mouth. Such words as come from that porthole would incite mutiny onboard your vessel.

DIONYSIUS: [Worriedly] Such a concern may have valued truth in it. I may just chain him above deck. The sun may toast some of his idle dreams of licentiousness. And then he will only have the mules and cattle to talk to, who no doubt will listen quite prudently to his tales of Athens.

ANYTUS: [Finishes his wine and gets up to leave] I will look forward to seeing you after the trial.
DIONYSIUS: And I the courier.
ANYTUS: Yes. I will send it presently.
DIONYSIUS: Can I offer you [Points to slave] Darius, to ensure your safe journey back to Athens? Though he possesses few secretarial skills, he is well trained in the ways of pleasure, and has not unagreeable table manners akin to a well trained dog.

ANYTUS: [Looks longingly at the slave offstage] It is a dangerous journey back to Athens. A noble man you are indeed, Dionysius, for such a magnanimous offer.

DIONYSIUS: Then it is settled. I will expect the one hundred and fifty minae by tomorrow morning. You can have Darius deliver it, with one of your own guards to accompany him on the perilous distance between our homes.

ANYTUS: One hundred and fifty? Yes, by tomorrow. Good day, Dionysius. [Shouts to slave] Come!
DIONYSIUS: His name is Darius.
ANYTUS: Come Darius!
Slave enters, approaches Anytus, who puts an arm around him appreciatively.
Act Two
Scene Four

_Agora of Zeus. Enter Anytus and Darius from stage right, Protagoras from stage left. Protagoras, who has a slave in tow carrying bundles of cloth, has the worst air of aristocracy about him._

PROTAGORAS: Good Anytus, councillor. What a surprise!
ANYTUS: Protagoras. What brings you to here to the agora?
PROTAGORAS: My wife is hither, selling these Egyptian cloths. They are doing remarkably well, though I have spent the better part of the day furnishing her with more supplies. Is it not enough that she has all this cloth but that I have to help as well? [Slave nearly falls under the burden of cloth. He commands the slave off stage right] Go! Take them to my wife. She is waiting anxiously for them. [Turns to Anytus] I see you have bought a new slave. A fine specimen.

ANYTUS: A gift from Dionysius, no less. A strong boned man, don’t you think?
PROTAGORAS: Definitely. Such unblemished skin, and rippling muscles. What woman could compete with these fine looks, I ask you? [He laughs] Rather a slave than a woman any day, for they do not carry the burden of emotions as well as firewood and thus can be moved about more freely upon whim.

ANYTUS: I hope your wife does not hear such things?
PROTAGORAS: My wife has been told many times about such things. Let me tell you, Anytus, that women are inferior creatures given to ideas which come from god knows where, intent on god knows what, and of a use none of us good Athenian men could ever hope to understand. They whine and moan like neglected dogs, yet as soon as you attend to them, they assume control of the pack as if they were on top, and not their proper place underneath. Well may I tell you that women such as that Sappho should have been hung by the neck at birth! What scurrilous ideas has she infected Athenian women with! Ideas of [Exaggerated] love, and [Exaggerated] equality, were never around in my youth and here I am, hearing from my own daughter such poetry which makes me sick to the bones. Oh, if I thought that destroying those books of hers was enough, I would be content, but no sooner do I tear up one than another appears in its place like mice in a granary. If I could pluck out the bud of this nonsense which has infected women, I would die a happy man. Damn that Sappho, if she were not already dead, I would have made sure of it myself. No longer, dear Anytus, will you and I look upon a peaceful Athens, for women have made a mockery of it.

ANYTUS: I think your words have much truth in them. I have heard of this Sappho, and I know my wife has mentioned her once or twice in reference to such matters as love, as if it were something on sale at these markets. Let us pray that common sense will prevail my friend, for I have no need of a woman who desires love.

PROTAGORAS: [Laughing] Nor I, my good man. Love is something only men understand, and enjoy. Women are for children and sewing and such things as husbandry requires. Love is a much loftier sentiment that only we can understand.

ANYTUS: Here, here. [Pause, showing that there is little friendship in common] Let us gather our slaves. I have work to do for tomorrow.

PROTAGORAS: See to it that I have a good seat on the councils table. I wish to eye Socrates directly. He does not favor well when my eyes are upon him. For he knows that we are old
men of battle who have fought together and he has lost as many times as won. Only this time we will fight to the death.

ANYTUS: [Laughing] More his than yours.

PROTAGORAS: Yes! Good day, Anytus. May your slave keep you warm at night. [Gazing idly at Darius] From Dionysius, you say? I will have a word to that ship’s merchant. I have always need of such a fine specimen as he, with the dark skin and sultry looks. Good day.

ANYTUS: Good day, Protagoras.
Act Two  
Scene Five

Stage is darkened to emulate night. At stage right is a double bed, where is sleeping Meletus and his wife, a figure under blankets. After a minute or two, Meletus is seen to be uneasy, tossing and turning. Suddenly a rooster crows. He wakes with a start, then turns to his wife and sees that she is sleeping soundly.

MELETUS: A trumpet! A trumpet! [He looks about the empty room] Ears, you make a fool of me. [He gets out of bed, wearing only a long bed shirt. He goes to the table (stage left) and sits down. In the darkness, he fumbles and finds a candle. He lights it, then pours himself a glass of wine. He sits there dull-faced for some time, drinking, before getting up, and with cup in hand, walks to window and looks outside. A moment later, he places down the cup, blows out the candle and goes back to bed. Soon afterwards, he moves restlessly about once more, and with groaning protests from his wife who is trying to sleep, he goes to the table and relights a candle. He stares at the candle, troubled.] Oh worrisome dreams. Of eagles plucking out my eyes. What meaning has this, that a gypsy may divulge? The troubles of an ambitious man, no less. Whose sight is blinded by his own earthly desires. [He watches his wife for a while, then gets to his feet, troubled] Look how peacefully she sleeps, without the troubles of conscience. Yet here am I, made mortal by wrongful wants. What will I do? Oh, Socrates, you have pulled me so far along this spiritual tightrope that I fear I will fall, far down onto rocks or worse, into the maws of sharks, and destroy myself completely. Oh, my one curse, is this love of life. How so unlike Socrates, who wishes often for death, that which seems to be the fate of any true philosopher. Yet, though I look like Socrates, I confess to my soul, up there beyond the roof, that I cannot be like him. Spare me this anguish, God, for I cannot live without needs. I cannot do without the wants of the flesh. [Deciding] Besides, they cannot convict Socrates on these charges. I shall appeal the law of Amnesty. Yes, that is it. Law 403 of the Athenian Legal Code. Should anyone ask for death, then I will appeal against it. [Almost laughing with excitement] Anytus will have his verdict of guilt, but I will press for exile. [Triumphantly] What does Socrates care if he preaches here, or in another country? Words will never be amiss, not here or there. [Tortured] I only wish they could have left him his assets after the fiasco, when he stood up and denounced the judges for being fools. How did he know the Thirty Tyrants were going to double cross the Athenian council? But for that, Athens strips him of his status, and throws him out into the streets like a beggar? Well what do they expect for him to do, but bite back. And bite he has. For twenty years. And they have only themselves to blame, for it is well known that a man spurned cannot be bought with any amount of wealth. They spurned him once, and they will spurn him again. [Growing defensive] But my conscience must be freed. It is not my responsibility to save every man’s soul from its fate. Who do you think I am, Socrates? I am Meletus, chief prosecutor. [His voice fades, in a defeated tone] Fifty minae is a year’s wages. My wife can have her new house. My children, a slave for their tutoring. I cannot stand this poverty any longer, and if I fold my arms thus [he folds his arms] and do nothing to defend, or nothing to attack, the good name of Socrates, then though I may not be doing my utmost as prosecutor, no man can honestly say that I contributed to the outcome of the trial either way. [Affirmation] This will be my stand, should any one ask. [He blows out the candle, then moves back toward the bed, when suddenly there is a roar of wind and the room
grows cold. Meletus shivers, and before he can return to his matrimonial bed, he sees Sappho standing at stage left, near the table. A spotlight illuminates her presence. The shock of seeing her causes Meletus to stumble] Who are you, that you can move into this room without the stirrings of the dogs or any protest from the guards?

SAPPHO: I have been known as many things, but you know me as the poetess from Lesbos.

MELETUS: [Recoils in horror] Not so! My eyes are betraying me. You cannot be she. She is dead.

SAPPHO: What is death but that the teachings of Socrates has proved to be otherwise.

MELETUS: [Wrings his hair with extreme fear mixed with disbelief] Are you real, or am I imagining this? [He moves toward her, and as he does, the spotlight fades from her. Fade to black momentarily. Sappho moves in the darkness to another spot closer to Meletus. The spotlight shines on her new position. Meletus is seen looking in the place where she was previously. He sees her standing to his right and recoils] You are a ghost! A being of angelic beauty, of death come alive. Save me, creature, from my madness. [He flings himself to the ground near her, hands together in supplication] Forgive me of the errors which have surely driven you to this place when you could have been elsewhere. What must I do to earn your forgiveness?

SAPPHO: I have come here not to command you to do anything, for spirits have not that power. Instead, I ask that you search into that once noble heart of yours. It has grown cold, and does not see what you are doing to Socrates.

MELETUS: I do nothing that I am not paid to do.

SAPPHO: You know within your heart what it is you do. No payment can force a man to be slave. It is by his own will that he allows himself to be treated so. Be warned, one day, you may be in Socrates place, for the law is like a snake, that has been known to swallow its own tail.

Exit Sappho

MELETUS: [Watching the light of Sappho disappear until he is alone once more in the room] Do not leave me, beautiful angel. [He looks around the empty room, then sees the bed, where his wife is still sleeping] Did you not see, dear wife? The angel cometh to me and did you not witness this visitation? [He runs to the table and drinks a heavy mouthful of wine] Oh, what horrid news is this? You pain me so. [He moves drunkenly, from fear of unearthly spirits. Pours another cup of wine, and speaks to the cup] May one spirit destroy another. [Drops the cup to the table and wanders about stage] What is this that has happened? Who am I but a lowly man of Athens? Adrift in time. In a civilization so grand that I am but a newt upon its head. [He laughs, then stumbles drunken toward the bed. He then growls, recollecting the ghost] Leave me, witch. I am too fond of sleep to be awoken now. [He looks around to see she has gone] I woke once, but the pain [Gets into bed], the pain [climbs in beside his wife] it is a pain too hard to bear. [Yawns] The comfort, [He kisses his wife] the comfort, I do so like this comfort which surrounds me.

The wind blows. Meletus goes to sleep. The wind roars louder, but the occupants of the bed do not move. Suddenly, Sappho appears stage left, and runs across stage, a spotlight illuminating her way. As she runs, she screams an unearthly cry, a tone full of vengeance and hatred, but the occupants of the bed do not stir.
**Act Three**

**Scene One**

Athenian courtroom. Guard standing to stage left, restricting an audience (amount variable), allowing entry to those who have authority to be heard. Meletus and Anytus seated at judges’ table. A bar separates them from the audience. Approaching the bar is Xanthippe. The guard detains her.

GUARD: Is there a matter with you, woman?
XANTHIPPE: I wish to speak with High Councillor Anytus.
GUARD: [Pompously] He is busy with important things [Haughtily] beyond the comprehension of women. There is a trial to commence soon. You wish to see him? Come next week.
XANTHIPPE: [Angrily] I can not. I must speak with Anytus. Concerning my husband, Socrates.
GUARD: [Impatiently] Wait then. I will ask the High Councillor.
Guard goes across to Anytus and Meletus. He has a word with them, then Anytus nods in Xanthippe’s direction. Guard returns to his station.

GUARD: You may approach the bench.
ANYTUS: [Impatiently] Come here, woman. [Xanthippe approaches] I hope this is important? I do not wish to hear every version of this sad tale. I do have your statement here. [He sorts through documents, but gives up trying to find it] I hope you will not be bringing your crying children here to woo the judges during the trial.
XANTHIPPE: No, sir. If I may have a word with you in private, Anytus?
MELETUS: [Offended] If it is a matter of state, then I will hear it as well.
XANTHIPPE: You would do well to attend to something else, for your poet’s ears would not be versed in the language of which I wish to discuss.
MELETUS: What is this, but an insult to my intelligence.
XANTHIPPE: [Explosively] That you had any left to insult! You, who professed once of being my husband’s friend!
MELETUS: Once!
ANYTUS: [To Meletus] Relax, chief prosecutor. Whatever she wishes to speak of, I’m sure Athens will not collapse because of it. [Gets up and leads Xanthippe aside] Come, madam, make your matters heard quickly, for there is much to be done today.
XANTHIPPE: Good sir, would I be here if it was to discuss matters that are conveyed in the markets? My husband is to go on trial today.
ANYTUS: We are well aware of that, madam.
XANTHIPPE: And are you well aware that you and Socrates have been good friends for nigh on twenty years? I cannot understand this sudden hatred you have of him.
ANYTUS: [Defensively] It is neither sudden nor hatred, my dear.
XANTHIPPE: Did we not invite you to our wedding?
ANYTUS: Yes. That you did.
XANTHIPPE: And sat you on his right side as if you were my brother and I your sister?
ANYTUS: I hardly see what relevance...
XANTHIPPE: Look now at how coldly you treat us, when just before we were thick as blood.
ANYTUS: [Laughing] Thick as blood? You are mistaken, madam. Nor do I hate anyone, especially your husband.
XANTHIPPE: Look me in the eye and tell me that, Anytus. Were you not a friend and ally? A good friend? So kind and ever thoughtful of me before I was married?
ANYTUS: Yes, but that was before.
XANTHIPPE: You and Socrates have shared so much. Why now have you become so cold toward us? Were I not a woman, I would be able to talk to you as an equal, but as I must come to you on bent knee and downcast eyes, I ask, can we not clear up this malice between our families?

ANYTUS: I say again, I have no feelings either way toward your husband. If your husband is innocent of these charges, I more than anyone, will be happy to see his name defended. If not, I have no choice but to follow the verdict of the judges.

XANTHIPPE: But you are high councillor! Does not that conflict with friendship?

ANYTUS: A call of office is above friendship. Besides, the laws of Athens are quite rigid...

XANTHIPPE: [Raising a fist angrily] The laws of Athens? Do not mock me, Anytus. You know as well as I that the laws are what the judges chose to make of them, and how well Meletus prosecutes them. But Socrates is not a criminal. What crime has he done? Who has he killed or stolen from? Answer me that.

ANYTUS: [Impatiently] I do not know, to be honest, which is why we are here. To get to the truth. I pride myself with being fair to all criminals. Now, unless you have any further matters to discuss...

XANTHIPPE: [Shouting] He is not a criminal.

ANYTUS: Kindly control yourself or I will have the guard throw you out.

XANTHIPPE: [Trembling with rage] It is because he shamed you before the Thirty Tyrants, is it not?

ANYTUS: [Laughs] Do not think I am so easily shamed. If you must know, he made a fool of himself rather than the judges. Your husband may be a philosopher, and, as he himself professes, a moral man, but I have seen the fruits of his logic, and believe me, madam, they leave a lot to be desired. Teaching the youth things such as questioning their elders is tantamount to treason. We have waged war with many countries for threats of lesser things. So it is inevitable that sooner or later he was to say something which offended the very good nature of Athenian politics. Honesty has been my highest virtue. [Xanthippe laughs mockingly] I, myself have heard him say that Zeus does not exist. And that democracy is not a right of Athenian politics.

XANTHIPPE: He has said a lot of things, Anytus. Things he at one moment refutes and at another bends allegiance to. You know that many a time he is merely thinking aloud, weighing up the truth, this way and that, until he arrives at a conclusion he is satisfied with.

ANYTUS: I am not his protector. If you want to do something helpful for your husband, be quiet during this trial. Your anger will only worsen matters.

XANTHIPPE: Worsen matters? I came here thinking you would be able to talk to me as a friend, and spare Socrates this anguish.

ANYTUS: Spare him? From what? Justice? I do not think even Socrates would approve of that. He himself has said that every man must face the law, regardless of his position in the city. [Takes her hand] You and I have been friends for many years, Xanthippe. I was fond of you as a child, as you well know, and though you did not accept my hand in marriage, I did not begrudge you taking Socrates as your husband. Though he is not, really, the most handsome of choices.

XANTHIPPE: I have no regrets. My husband may have some physical imperfections, but his soul is as beautiful as that of Aphrodite.

ANYTUS: [Laughing] That is very noble a thing for a wife to say, and I wish I had been the husband you had been saying such things about.

XANTHIPPE: And would you wish for his life now?

ANYTUS: I would not want to be him, right at this moment, no.
XANTHIPPE: Then you would never have been my husband, for I have always admired a man of chaste principles and firm resolutions, so if you had been my husband, you, as much as Socrates, would be in this very position.

ANYTUS: [Shocked] What a thing to say? That who ever you married would have come to this very same situation? If I were your husband, I would never had acted the way Socrates has. Discussing the men of this council as if they were fools to be made fun of by the street boys. That is tantamount to... Well, I've said enough already. Madam, you are so ambitious!

XANTHIPPE: No more than you. [Pleading] Please, Anytus. I beg of you, as a friend, to leave this malice aside.

ANYTUS: [Sitting closer and watching to see that no one was watching them] I do love you, Xanthippe. As much as ever. Say that you feel so about me, and I will do my utmost to free Socrates. [Holding his hands up before her] Do you think I want blood on these hands?

XANTHIPPE: I do not know what you want.

ANYTUS: We have known each other too long to not know what pains the other. Come, tell me your feelings. I know I do not have Socrates wit and charms, but then I do not stand out in the markets in the middle of winter half-naked, chanting like the Oracle to disbelievers. I have money to look after us both for the rest of our lives. Jewelry to adorn this beautiful neck and arms, perfumes from Egypt, clothes as soft as the robes of gods. I can give you all these things, Xanthippe, if you but say you love me.

XANTHIPPE: How can I say that? You have been a friend, but look at you now? I see not the same man of compassion I knew at my wedding. Only a vulture.

ANYTUS: [Holds her hand. Tries to embrace her] Not a vulture. An admirer of the first degree. I have always stayed true and loyal to the one person I value most highly above others.

XANTHIPPE: [Whispering angrily] Liar. That is what you say to the prostitutes? I have talked to them, and they say you are always so full of empty affections.

ANYTUS: [Shocked] You, my dear, are as above them, as the sun is the moon, and more brighter. [Pulling her close] I am a lonely man, who has to make do with what affections come his way, forced as I am to live in the shadow of this love of yours and Socrates.

XANTHIPPE: [They struggle] Do not make me laugh. If all it took was to sleep with you and Socrates would be a free man, I would not batter an eyelid, for that great man is far more important than you or I. You have become as fickle as a drowning scorpion, who has no more heart than to sting its savior. [Fighting him off] So, you will get no closer than this, even if I have to die as well. Cursed is the woman who bore you, Anytus, for she suffered much pain to deliver such an impure creation into the world. Shame on you for ever being born. If Socrates is right, and there is life after death, may you pay eternally for what you have done to him.

ANYTUS: [Wrathful] What is this, Xanthippe? I have done nothing. [Forcefully pushes her away] But begone with you. If that is how you feel, then I care less for you than I would for a woman who lifts her skirt for a coin. Damn your husband for ever crossing my path, for I will not step aside, not unto death. [Waving a finger in her face] And if he is right about immortality, then I will await that judgment with much amusement, for I am pure of heart as you shall see.

XANTHIPPE: [She spits on him] Filth. May Socrates’ spirit haunt you in your final hours of life. She tried to strike Anytus, but he restrains her.

ANYTUS: Guard! Get this woman out of my sight.

The guard enters, drags Xanthippe off stage. Anytus returns to judges bench.

MELETUS: You seem to have wrought a melancholy upon her.

ANYTUS: She is a vile and pitiful woman. Offered herself in exchange for her husband’s freedom.

MELETUS: A not totally disagreeable proposition.
ANYTUS: I have a reputation to consider.
MELETUS: If I had a coin for every woman who offered herself to free her husband, I’d be a wealthy man.
ANYTUS: What are you saying, Meletus? You are already a wealthy man.
MELETUS: [Scoffs] I have a list of creditors as long as my arm.
ANYTUS: And property titles much longer.
MELETUS: I am poor, Anytus. It is you who are rich.
ANYTUS: Hah!
Enter Phaedrus with Guard.
ANYTUS: Who comes before the council this day?
PHAEDRUS: Phaedrus, daughter of Oxaetus.
MELETUS: Where is the accused, woman? You were supposed to present him here at noon.
PHAEDRUS: There is a small problem. Socrates is detained.
ANYTUS: Detained?
PHAEDRUS: We were approaching town, through the streets when, in the midst of a sentence, walking amongst the crowd, saying something about the rights of slaves in a free Athens, Socrates stops, and there he still stands, motionless as a statue. Not a movement of an eyelash. There is a crowd gathering, watching him. I do not know how long it will be before he frees himself from this meditation.
ANYTUS: This is absurd! Bring him here at once! Guard, fetch Socrates. I do not care if you have to drag him by the hair. I will not have this council waiting on Socrates’ pleasure.
Guard nods and exits.
MELETUS: I have heard of Socrates doing this before.
ANYTUS: [To Phaedrus] Out, I say, and do not be wasting my time unless you come bearing Socrates with you!
Phaedrus exits
ANYTUS: Oh, he is trying my patience, this fool. He is deliberately doing this to annoy me.
MELETUS: For twenty hours I saw Socrates standing stiff as a marble monument in the middle of a field of snow, his face staring, but not seeing, an idea in his head so possessing that nothing we could do would rouse him. We all waited like fools, and it was not until the following morning that he became aroused once more of his senses, having completed the thoughts he had been discussing the previous day, walking off as if nothing had happened.
ANYTUS: He is mad. All the more reason why we should get rid of him before he makes a total mockery of Athens. It amuses me no end that Athenians can take this fool so seriously when I know that it is nothing more than a sickness he bears. It is true he has a hard bearing, that he can walk barefoot in the snow, have no thought for food or water, or woman or song, that nothing can change his mind once it is made up, but those are not the workings of a great man. For I have seen such sentiments in fools and idiots, who live longer than us, but do not possess any special key to immortality.
MELETUS: What do you say to these charges? Will Socrates do as you expect, and take exile?
ANYTUS: [Confident] Deep down, everyone fears death. For all his smart words, when it comes to the sight of a sword, he will have as much courage as a young girl. He will leave Athens, you mark my words. Before this week is out, I’ll rattle the guards sword in front of him and you will not see him for dust.
MELETUS: It may not be as easy as that, Anytus. I have known him to be very stubborn.
ANYTUS: Pah, stubbornness is just a thin veil hiding fear. And Socrates’ greatest fear is to be thought a fool by his peers. We will make fun of him and he will leave in shame, his tail between his legs like a dog.
MELETUS: I hope, for our sake, that it will go that way, Anytus. I have had bad dreams of late.
ANYTUS: Then you should have less spice before you sleep.

Enter Protagoras, decorated in gold jewelry and wearing an expensive robe. He sits at the table.

ANYTUS: Welcome! Athens is proud to be honored by your presence, Protagoras.

PROTAGORAS: Honored? Good grief, Anytus. I leave this city for twelve months, and look what becomes of it. What are all those wretched stalls in the agora, where once Zeus walked with his ladies? Its enough to frighten the living daylights out of any one. Goat and horses on every spare piece of ground, shitting on the pebble stones. Prostitutes on every corner. Men proclaiming the virtues of this new cloth as if it were manufactured on Olympus by the hand of Apollo, when I know in fact that it was spun by the slaves of Egypt. I had a man just now, trying to sell me a robe, and when he said he wanted half a minae for it, I laughed and called him a thief, to which he grew most indignant. Is this the progressive Athens you have been telling me about?

ANYTUS: Well I see that you bought the robe, nonetheless?

PROTAGORAS: I cannot deny that it is good workmanship, but the prices, and the noise.

MELETUS: We do not apologize for our industrious workers, Protagoras, who hawk for their living, no more than we complain about the birds singing in the trees.

PROTAGORAS: Meletus? Is that you, Meletus? I watched you sitting on the lap of your father when he was chairman. It was but twenty years ago. How you have grown!

MELETUS: Age has an untoward effect on bones, good sir.

PROTAGORAS: And tongues, too. Come now, gentlemen, let us get to the order of today’s work. As chief advisor to the Oracle of Delphi, I wish to convey a message from her that we should tread carefully with Socrates. Personally, I think this council is a sham, and I hope you have all noted my disgust as such, but let us continue. [Curtly] Has the accused arrived? There is much material for us to cover.

ANYTUS: I have sent a guard for him. He will be here presently.

PROTAGORAS: Good. You realize, gentleman, that the accused, in his defense, is sure to use Law 403? And there is little we can do to oppose that.

MELETUS: Yes, yes, of course.

ANYTUS: [Self-satisfied] Yes. [To Protagoras] On the matter of amnesty, it may be difficult to find guilt, if Socrates tries hard enough. But we will give the judges evidence yet. Of inciting rebellion in the youths of the aristocratic class. Personally, I think this council is a sham, and I hope you have all noted my disgust as such, but let us continue. [Curtly] Has the accused arrived? There is much material for us to cover.

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PROTAGORAS: A rather unusual interpretation of the law, Anytus. You may have trouble convincing the rest of the judges. [Impatiently] I do not see why we all have to be brought into this trial? The Tyrants advised us to leave it to the Prytans to resolve this matter. Why does the trial of Socrates become so important that all us politicians in Athens need be involved? He will plead guilty and if that happens, he will be exiled, like Anaxagoras. What is the use of all this?

ANYTUS: Good man...

MELETUS: [Interrupting] If I may interrupt, Anytus, let me say, Protagoras, that Socrates is no ordinary man.

ANYTUS: As I was going to say before Meletus interrupted me, Socrates is no ordinary man, as we all well know. Thus I wish to make sure that no accusations of impropriety about any of us councilors is made by the Athenian people, who will be watching this case most carefully.

PROTAGORAS: [Standing] I am sick of this delay. Where is the accused?

MELETUS: Be patient sir. Socrates is indisposed at present. We await his call of nature.
PROTAGORAS: Council awaits the call of nature? Great Zeus, what sort of council is this? I would have a man flogged for so much as thinking of excusing himself for a piss, and here we are waiting for how longer? An hour? Until Socrates returns from his ablutions.

ANYTUS: It is not the usual call of nature, Protagoras. Rather one of a musing type.

PROTAGORAS: Amusing? I see nothing amusing in expectoration, urination or defecation, rather they seem to me...

ANYTUS: I meant musing, Protagoras, in reference to the divine muses. It seems Socrates if afflicted with a rather urgent call by one of his muses.

PROTAGORAS: You jest? Tell me you jest? Since when has any court paid allegiance to the winds, and the unseen voices of the head? You have all gone mad, I am sure.

A throng of voices heard shouting outside the courtroom


ANYTUS: Let him enter. But bid the rest to remain outside. This courtroom is already crowded.

Enter Socrates, dressed in rags, looking down-and-out.

PROTAGORAS: Ah, the dog has brought in a bone. [Disgusted] Sit! You, who has not the decency to bathe before you enter these rooms.

SOCRATES: If Zeus asked me to appear before him, I would not be dressed otherwise. [Offended] I will leave, if you like? I have other more important things to do.

PROTAGORAS: Oh, yes? What can be more important?

SOCRATES: My goats are in need of feeding, my wife’s shoes need mending. My grave needs a headstone.

PROTAGORAS: [Laughing] You make light of your own death? Such a things is akin to madness. I rule we have a physician examine this man’s health of mind before we waste any more time on this matter.

ANYTUS: [Whispers] There is nothing wrong with this man’s mind, I can assure you, Protagoras.

[Shouts] Come, enter the hall, Socrates.

MELETUS: Who defends this man against the charges?

SOCRATES: I do, gracious Meletus.

MELETUS: You? But you are not trained in the ways of the law?

SOCRATES: No less than any man here.

PROTAGORAS: Really! This is outrageous.

SOCRATES: [Ignoring Protagoras] I beg your pardon, Anytus. A lawyer for thirty years. So are you aware of all the rules and regulations of this land? Aware of the infinite variations and permutations, the manifold interpretations, of all the statutes and rules set out since Zeus first came down and gave us his rules of moral conduct? Perhaps Protagoras, goat-herder from Macedonia, you may be more familiar than my Athenian friends here?

PROTAGORAS: [Standing in protest] How dare you! I’ll have you know that I am not a goat-herder.

SOCRATES: No? Was not your father a goat-herder?

PROTAGORAS: [Taken aback] That is irrelevant.

SOCRATES: But if your father was a goat-herder then you have been raised the son of a goat-herder. Thus it is that you still are a goat herder.

PROTAGORAS: Preposterous! This is absurd.

SOCRATES: Even if you have done a hundred jobs since your youth you are still a goat-herder.

PROTAGORAS: [Looking at the judges] Are you men going to let this man treat me like this?

Anytus and Meletus evade his gaze.
SOCRATES: I, for example, am the son of a stonemason.

PROTAGORAS: Oh, do shut up!

SOCRATES: And my mother, bless her soul, was a midwife. Now, considering both professions which I have worked, firstly as a stonemason, thence as a midwife, I can say that now I am a midwife, not only to woman, but also, more importantly, to all Athenians, bringing their ideas to life from that restless womb the mind. Yet, though I am this, I am ever conscious of the law, firstly the laws of this great city of Athens, and those of the natural world beyond it, and also to God, and finally, to myself.

PROTAGORAS: Guards! Silence this man.

ANYTUS: Guards! Silence this man.

ANYTUS: Go on, Socrates.

SOCRATES: A man amongst wolves.

SOCRATES: Thank you, Anytus, my friend.

PROTAGORAS: A wolf, now is it?

SOCRATES: A man amongst wolves.

SOCRATES: Now, if I was asked which law is more important to me, I must say that I first pay allegiance to myself, then God, the natural world, Athens and finally to man. Thus, to me, appears a logical progression of nature, and having considered all things thus, I am happy to say that I am fond of, and at the same time earnestly learning, the laws of man, nature, the gods and myself. Now, if there is a man here, who professes to know all these laws more than I, then I will call him a man greater than myself and can be my legal council for this trial? Otherwise, he is as ignorant as the fools who flail themselves with the whip and charge through the streets of Athens like stubborn mules, with one idea in their tiny head, and call themselves Ascetics. Is there one of your wise men amongst this crowd?

PROTAGORAS: Insolence! How dare you ask such insolent questions? You insult the ascetics! Men who have given up all material wealth to be closer to God.

SOCRATES: I have met these Ascetics, and though they have no possessions, how ardent they think about them. Like hungry dogs they do salivate, at the thought of gold which they lack, but never cease talking of.

PROTAGORAS: I have studied the law for twenty years, my good man, and I can tell you that there is nothing of laws which I do not know. Now sit down. I will not be talked to in such a disrespectful way.

SOCRATES: If there is a wound unhealed, Anytus, it is because it festers, is it not?

MELETUS: This is not a medical court, Socrates.

SOCRATES: A gangrene of the heart.
MELETUS: [Jumps from his seat angrily] Enough!
ANYTUS: Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Let us be civilized and not act like barbarians. We have business, important business, to conduct. I ask you in future, Socrates, to refrain from such eloquence of verse.

SOCRATES: Eloquence? [He laughs] I have been called many things, Anytus, but never eloquent. I insist that eloquence is something reserved for the fathers, such as yourselves, not I.

PROTAGORAS: Now he accuses us, of eloquence! I have never heard of an accused making the accusations. What next from this foolish man?

SOCRATES: To know that, you would do well to ask God, for he alone knows what comes next, and often it is without warning. Are you prepared?

PROTAGORAS: Is that a threat?

SOCRATES: When it comes to God, I make no empty promises.

Guard enters.

ANYTUS: Stand back guard. Leave Socrates. [Consoles Protagoras] He is harmless, good sir. [Guard backs away] But I warn you, Socrates. Keep to the matter at hand and please refrain that sharp tongue of yours or I will not be responsible for the outcome of this trial.

SOCRATES: No man is responsible for anything except that which he cares for.

ANYTUS: What say you, Socrates, to these two charges laid upon you? How do you plead?

SOCRATES: I plead not guilty.

ANYTUS: Let it be written that the accused pleads not guilty to the charges.

PROTAGORAS: Do you have anything else to say against these charges?

SOCRATES: I do. [Pauses] Now you all must not be angry with me if I speak not in a set oration, for I have not rehearsed this speech, and it is coming directly from my muse and not myself. Nor do I, as you good gentleman have the distinguished education to do, speak with ornaments, words as beautiful as silk, lapis lazuli or gold. I am a poor man, even poorer of tongue, who knows only words used in the streets of this fine city. In addition to the formal accusers I see before me, Anytus, Protagoras and Meletus...

MELETUS: I am but the prosecutor, Socrates. I am not one of these accusers. I wish that to be made painfully clear.

ANYTUS: Let it be known that Meletus makes himself in pain that he is innocent of making these accusations against Socrates.

SOCRATES: You too, are guilty, Meletus, but I will not hold you to these charges, rather God. Nonetheless, beside you men here who charge me, I have those beyond these rooms who also charge me with these crimes. Ever since you judges were children, you have gone about speaking of “a man called Socrates, a wise one, who speculates about the heavens above, and who searches into the earth beneath, and makes the worse appear the better cause.” Such men, I say are supposed not to believe in the existence of gods. This old accusation by public opinion is more dangerous than the formal indictment by you men, the more so as I do not know who are these men from where these accusations come from, except from you, Anytus, who charge me with denying the presence of almighty Zeus. Now let me make it quite clear, that I am not a man of science, unlearned as I am, of mathematics, music, poetry, or any of the talents which makes the well rounding of a man’s knowledge, and brings him into the light of Athenian society. Thus I am by all reckoning, quite an ignorant man, who, added to this, does not charge for his services, not one minae, unlike the Sophists who do, and
finely, and who dress in expensive robes [Stares at Protagoras, who looks guiltily at his robe] and wear expensive gold jewelry and speak of things they know nothing about. I, unlike them, know nothing, and am quick to tell everyone that I know nothing, and that I charge nothing for this knowledge I do not have, and from this has come these accusations, which by all reckoning, based on the absence of knowledge, money, and reputation and education, are charges based on thin air and therefore groundless and worthless.

PROTAGORAS: [Bored] Words! Words! You play with words, yet there are still charges against you, my man. Can you tell us why there is smoke if there is no fire?

SOCRATES: Some do try hard to fan old coals, and make them grow red like real fires, but they are old fires. And it is not I who does the fanning, [Looking at Meletus] I can assure you.

PROTAGORAS: These charges are not speculations, Socrates. They are based on facts.

SOCRATES: What then is the spurious reason why I am called wise and have such evil fame?

ANYTUS: Who calls you wise?

SOCRATES: The Oracle. 

Derisive laughter by Protagoras.

ANYTUS: Your wisdom, purported by another, who is even not here to defend these words, is not the issue here, Socrates. You are charged with different crimes. Those of corrupting the youth of Athens and making new gods.

SOCRATES: I beg to differ, good friend. [Angry whispers, the word ‘disrespect’ muttered] It is my reputation that has brought these charges upon me. Now, the Oracle of Delphi was once asked if there were anyone wiser than Socrates, to which she replied that there was not. I profess to be completely puzzled by this, since I know nothing and yet cannot a God such as the Oracle lie? Subsequently, I went into Athens and talked with men who were, by their own reputations, wise men, to see whether they could convince the Oracle of her error. First I went to a politician, [Pointing to Protagoras] who was thought wise by many people and still wiser by himself. I soon found that this man was not wise, and explained this to him, kindly but firmly and the consequence was that he hated me.

PROTAGORAS: What do you expect, my friend?

MELETUS: [Angry at Protagoras] Leave the man free to speak!

SOCRATES: Thank you, Meletus. I then went to the poets, and asked them to explain to me the meanings of the passages of their writings, but they were unable to do so. Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write verse, but by a sort of genius and inspiration. Then I went to the artisans, but found them equally disappointing. In the process, I made many dangerous enemies. Finally, I concluded, after this harsh and bitter experience, that only God is wise, and thus I intend to show to you gentlemen that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing. [Silence] Thus, in my travels, I have come to the conclusion that he is the wisest, who like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is, in essence, worth nothing. And it is this business of showing up to pretenders to wisdom the error of their ways that has taken up all my time, and left me in utter poverty. But I feel that it is my duty to vindicate the Oracle. Now children of the richer classes have nothing to do most days, for they do not have to work as the slaves and women do. Thus do they enjoy listening to my expositions of cheats and liars and if they proceed to do likewise of their own initiative, then is that my fault?

ANYTUS: To prey upon the weak is a crime.

SOCRATES: What is prey, but that I invite them to speculation. To use their own minds to think, for that is what God gave us this faculty for, is it not?
ANYTUS: Inexperience has its own weakness, Socrates. Children are not ready to know of politics at fifteen.

SOCRATES: Really? Were you not the lover of Anaxagoras at that age?

MELETUS: Is this true, Anytus?

ANYTUS: Yes. But it is irrelevant to this trial.

PROTAGORAS: [Directed at Socrates] A sticky bee is this that turns the flower upon itself. What are you up to, man?

SOCRATES: I mean to show that inexperience of the mind is merely relative. What say you to that, Anytus?

ANYTUS: [Frantic] I ask that this be struck from the records.

Enters Dionysius

DIONYSIUS: Good morning, gentleman. My apologies for being late. I hope I have not missed much?

Judges stand and bow

SOCRATES: Merely the balance of a man’s life upon the scales of justice.

DIONYSIUS: How goes you, Socrates!

SOCRATES: Well for a man waging war single-handed. How goes the good merchant of the seas? Are the winds still, that you do not sail and, instead, becalm yourself in court?

DIONYSIUS: [Laughing] I had a wager that you would talk yourself out of this mess, Socrates. Prove me right, and you can have the winnings.

SOCRATES: How much good sir, did you wager on my life?

DIONYSIUS: [Laughs] Five minae.

PROTAGORAS: Too much I say.

SOCRATES: Way too much. For the gods will show that you will lose.

DIONYSIUS: Oh? Are you not a man of confidences?

SOCRATES: It is God who is confident, not I. Who was the wager with? No let me guess. [Looks to Anytus] Thus gold accumulates gold. Good Anytus, will you give the five minae to the poor when we are finished here?

ANYTUS: [Evasively] I know nothing of this wager. Do go on with your speech, Socrates. Time is fleeting.

SOCRATES: Not so, Anytus. Time is dead, for when a man condemns another, is his life ended as surely as the condemned. [Meditates on his defense once more] But where was I before Dionysius blessed us with his presence?

MELETUS: [Reading trial excerpts] Thus do the young enjoy listening to me exposing people.

DIONYSIUS: [Mocking] You do expose yourself as much as others.

SOCRATES: Your son would be ashamed to hear such things.

DIONYSIUS: My son? He is not here.

SOCRATES: [Evasively] Where was I?

MELETUS: [Evasively] Where was I?

SOCRATES: Ah, yes. Thus do young enjoy listening to me. And what can I do if they are such an entertaining audience? But alas, this has also increased the number of my enemies, for those whom I expose do not like to confess that their pretense of knowledge has been detected. [Concluding his speech] Thus, you cannot rightly accuse me of corrupting the youth of Athens, for they, pure children of heart, act of their own volition in so much shedding light upon the darkness of ignorance which the Oracle was the first to illuminate.

MELETUS: [Concluding] If there are any responses to Socrates’ defense, let them be heard.

A silence for five seconds.

ANYTUS: Then we will recess for deliberation.

The judges rise.
SOCRATES: [Continuing despite the judges gathering their papers to begin deliberating the verdict] I am not finished yet. [Anytus waves the judges to be seated again] Now Meletus, I ask you who are the people that improve the young of Athens?

MELETUS: Why, the judges and makers of the law.

SOCRATES: But who then improves the judges and the makers of the law?

MELETUS: Improves?

SOCRATES: Makes better their souls. Attunes their conscience with the rest of Athens, correcting their wrongs, etcetera.

MELETUS: [Looking anxiously at Anytus for help, but Anytus is evasive] I would have to say that it would be the men and women of Athens.

SOCRATES: Does that include myself?

PROTAGORAS: No!

MELETUS: [Agreeing with Protagoras] No. It doesn’t Socrates.

SOCRATES: So we would assume that it is everyone in Athens except the accused?

MELETUS: [Annoyed] If you wish.

SOCRATES: Wishing is for fools, for naught comes of wishing but desire and look where that got Anytus with my wife just this morning.

ANYTUS: [Stands, thumping the table in outrage] What is the meaning of this?

SOCRATES: Truth travels fast, my friends, whereas dishonesty labors under the weight of its sins. You did but barter with my wife, did you not? Flesh for flesh? But, lest I forget, it is I on trial, am I not? Nevertheless, sins of the judges aside, I congratulate this city of Athens on its good fortune that it has all these wise people to help improve the young. I believe that it is better for good to live amongst bad, for this would have the effect of improving the general good of the community would it not? [No reply from the judges] And therefore, I cannot be so foolish as to corrupt my fellow citizens intentionally, for good always improve bad and not vice-versa, the one lifting the other up, inspired by law and the teachings of the gods. Is this not so? [No answer from the judges] Now if I unintentionally corrupt the young of Athens, then it is truly unintentional, and I would ask one of you to set me right on this matter and tell me where in this logic I have gone wrong. Anytus, I ask you, no implore you, that you instruct me, set me right, not prosecute the ignorant who knows not where he goes wrong.

PROTAGORAS: You are not an ignorant man, Socrates. Though you are a stonemason’s son, you have studied under many philosophers, not to mention Anaxagoras. So do not use ignorance as an excuse, when it is inadmissible. We all know from innumerable confessions [Waving a handful of affidavits in the air] full well that you have made a conscious effort to corrupt the youth.

SOCRATES: What force was used to obtain these confessions?

ANYTUS: None. All signed with consent.

SOCRATES: [Shakes his head] Consent? What strange use of a word. Then I disagree most vehemently, gentlemen. If I acted, it was obviously out of ignorance, for if you have been following my logic, you should not be able to see any flaw in it whatsoever, unless of course your own logic is flawed...

PROTAGORAS: Now he accuses us of being stupid!

SOCRATES: They are your words, not mine. As I have said, the Oracle is the only wise person amongst men.

PROTAGORAS: I grow tired of this man’s rhetoric...

SOCRATES: Perhaps if it were your life hanging upon a thread of ignorance, ignorance which lies in your mind and not mine, you would be less weary. It is I who has traveled the furthermost to get to this place, not you.
PROTAGORAS: I have come from Cyprus, good man, whereas you have only come from the markets.

ANYTUS: [Clearing his throat] I do not think that Socrates was talking in geographical terms.

SOCRATES: [Resuming his argument] I have been charged with not only denying the gods of the state, but also introducing others. The prosecutor, Meletus, however, says that I am a complete atheist, for it is known that I do not recognize Zeus, which is true. I have been quoted as saying that “the sun is made of stone and the moon of soil.” Am I, alone, the only atheist? Then Meletus must also charge the great philosopher Anaxagoras, whose views, the same as mine, may be heard in any theatre in Athens for one the cost of a melon. Yet I refute the charge of atheism, for I have shown you all that God alone has wisdom, that I am ignorant and that God exists and is infinitely wise. Thus, you all charge me wrongly. If I may digress, I was a soldier earlier in my life, as you may well know, and I remained at my post in spite of Athens being rocked by the barbarians from the north.

ANYTUS: We do remember the battle. You fought well and bravely for Athens against the insurgents in Macedonia.

SOCRATES: [Dryly] Fought well and bravely. They are kind words. And spoken with the tone of a true public speaker. Similarly, to that time of battle, God ordered me to fulfill the philosopher’s mission of searching for truth and it would be shameful to desert my post now as in a time of battle.

MELETUS: [This statement appears to infuriate Meletus] Do not be a fool Socrates!

SOCRATES: [Unrepentant] Why?

MELETUS: Because it is suicide.

SOCRATES: We all kill ourselves, Meletus, consciously or otherwise.

PROTAGORAS: Your time is up, Socrates.

SOCRATES: A moment longer if I may.

ANYTUS: Be brief.

SOCRATES: As death is long so will I be brief. Of battles thus fought, this is a battle as much as the one I fought as a youth. There is that element of danger, of the potential loss of life, the struggling against the mortal senses and emotions. Fear of death is not, to me, a sign of any wisdom.

DIONYSIUS: Yet you say you have no wisdom!

SOCRATES: [Vigorously] Yet I seek it! Oh, how earnestly I seek it my friend! And I would urge you most strongly to do likewise. [Laughter from audience] For it is the meaning of existence, is it not? Fear of death is not wisdom, as I said, since no one knows whether death may not be the greater good. If I were offered my life on the condition of ceasing to speculate as I have done so freely in the past, I would reply to those who limit that life of mine, and say “People of Athens, I honor and love you, but I shall obey god rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting anyone whom I meet.” For I know that this is the command of God, and I believe that no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service.

More cheers from audience.

ANYTUS: [To audience] Silence!

SOCRATES: I have something more to say, at which you may be inclined to cry out; but I believe that to hear me will be good for you, and therefore I beg that you will not cry out. I would have you know that if you kill such a one as I, you will injure yourself more than you will injure me. Nothing will injure me, not Meletus, nor Anytus. They cannot, for a bad man is not permitted to injure a better man than himself. I do not deny that Anytus may perhaps kill me or drive me into exile, or deprive me of my civil rights,
and I may imagine as others may imagine that you are inflicting a great injury upon me, but there I do not agree. For the evil of doing as you are doing - the evil of unjustly taking away the life of another - is greater by far. Thus it is for your sake, my judges and friends, that I am pleading.

Audience cheers.

PROTAGORAS: Now I have heard everything!

SOCRATES: It is true, my friend, though you will not understand this until I am dead. I, friends, am the gadfly, given to the state by God and if you get rid of me, it will not be easy for you to find another.

PROTAGORAS: [Laughing] Who says we want another?

MELETUS: [To Protagoras] Do not mock the accused!

Protagoras sobres. Anytus gives Meletus a worried look.

SOCRATES: I dare say you may all feel out of temper, like a person who is suddenly awoken from a deep sleep, and you may think that you would easily strike me dead as Meletus and Anytus have advised.

This accusation by Socrates baits Meletus. Anytus shakes off the accusation with a brush of his hand over his robe.

MELETUS: [Standing angrily, shaking a fist at Socrates] How can you say that?

ANYTUS: Sit down, prosecutor.

MELETUS: [Tortured] I have advised no such thing, Socrates! I find no grounds to charge you! It is you, who wishes for death, when all I seek is justice!

ANYTUS: Meletus, sit down!

SOCRATES: Are not the two, death and justice, the same in this case, Meletus? [Meletus collapses in his chair] Easily you may all strike me dead, and then you will sleep through the rest of your life all too blissfully, until God, in his wisdom sends you another.

MELETUS: You fool!

PROTAGORAS: Here, here!

General commotion ensues.

ANYTUS: Socrates has touched a nerve which is common to us all. One of a sense of impropriety, but I assure you that Socrates has meant nothing personal in his attacks. [Looking at Meletus] Nothing.

DIONYSIUS: [Sarcastically] Are you siding with the accused now, Councillor?

ANYTUS: I seek only justice, as does every man here, and Socrates has to defend himself against you wise and experienced judges. Thus I say, do not go at him like a pack of wolves. If he hangs himself, it will be of his own torturous deeds and admittances. Not by yours. Be seated. Please.

Judges resume their seats.

SOCRATES: [Watching the judges faces restore civility] Logic reigns in the end. [After calm is restored] Argument is, though heated, a good source of wisdom. As I have often said, gentlemen, “it is in the seeming contradictions of life wherein lie all truths”, and it is there where we all must look for truth, universal truth, which does not lie in books, but in the hearts of people.

PROTAGORAS: You have spoken of this Oracle, this god and also of this muse. But such things do not exist in nature.

SOCRATES: No more than Zeus.

ANYTUS: Please explain yourself, Socrates.

SOCRATES: You have heard me speak at sundry times and in diverse places of a sign which comes to me and is the divinity for which I am ridiculed. This sign of the Gods is a kind of voice which comes to me, ever since I was a child. It always advises, never
commands me to do anything which I am going to do. That is what deterred me from being, any longer than I was, a politician, for in politics, no honest man can live long.

DIONYSIUS: I have been a politician for twenty years! Some of us longer. And we are not dishonest men.

SOCRATES: Thus speaks the words of a politician who condemns an innocent man. You see not what is truth. Thus it is that you condemn. But let me say this. Twice I have been mixed up with politics, firstly when I resisted democracy, and second when the Thirty Tyrants were acting illegally.

ANYTUS: [Exhausted] It is not the tyrants who are on charge here, Socrates.

PROTAGORAS: [To Dionysius] Though if Socrates had his way he would wish it otherwise. All except Anytus and Socrates laugh.

SOCRATES: Probably, because I have nothing to lose and they everything, most especially their privileged positions and wealth. But that is not important. [Despondently] Among those present, are many old pupils of mine, [Points them out] Anytus, Meletus, Protagoras, turned enemies. And it is you enemies who seek my death, for you know I refuse to continue defending myself against these trumped up charges. I am not a babe who requires the hot milk of its mother’s breast. Nor would I bring my weeping children into this court to soften your hearts. Such scenes make the accused and judges alike, ridiculous. It is my business now to accept the conscience of almighty Athens.

[Socrates falls silent]

ANYTUS: Well, it appears that Socrates’ muse has deserted him. All that is left to do is decide the verdict. I would ask you to leave, Socrates, unless you have further matters to discuss.

SOCRATES: I do not, good Anytus. Except that is, if I am found guilty of these charges, I wish to suggest as punishment, a fine of thirty minae, a not inconsiderable sum by way of penalty for these preposterous charges.

DIONYSIUS: Where would a man of professed poverty get the great amount of thirty minae?

SOCRATES: From a friend.

DIONYSIUS: Who? For such a person must be of considerable wealth.

Enter Plato.

PLATO: I offer the surety on Socrates’ behalf.

DIONYSIUS: [Shocked] Son!

PLATO: [Angrily] Who is my father? You? Who wagers a bet on my friend’s life? [He slams a purse of gold coins onto the judges table] Here is thirty minae. I hope this court will accept it on behalf of the accused.

There is confusion over Plato’s sudden appearance.

ANYTUS: [After order is restored, he turns to Plato] We acknowledge the offer, Plato, son of Dionysius. We will consider the matter duly.

PLATO: Consider also that I am one who follows the teachings of Socrates and would take over where he left off, if and when he is exiled.

ANYTUS: [Patronizing] Thank you, Plato. We will consider what you say. Thank you both. Now we will have to ask you to leave, while we weigh up this important matter.

Exit Socrates stage left. Dionysius gets up to greet his son.

DIONYSIUS: Son!

PLATO: Get away from me!

As Dionysius approaches Plato, he runs off stage left. Dionysius follows him out of the court room, exit left, shouting.

DIONYSIUS: Plato, come back. Come back!
ANYTUS: Well good men, we should weigh up these matters, which Socrates has discussed, carefully. I would suggest a ten minute recess. After which, we shall give our verdict.
Act Three
Scene Two

Courtroom. Judges seated at table. Enter judges. Meletus returns to the judges table, rather pale-faced. All stand. Anytus holds up the verdict written on a sheet of paper.

ANYTUS: [Stands, addressing the guard] Call in the accused.
GUARD: [Shouts offstage] Call in the accused!
Enter Socrates, followed by Plato and Xanthippe.
ANYTUS: Good Socrates. I have known you since your mother delivered me as a babe, and I am sure that never will I know as great a man as you, who is standing before me. We have listened most carefully to your argument and were impressed with your speech. [Plato and Xanthippe excited. Socrates stone faced] The judges here have similarly heard your argument and without a doubt have never known such a wise and learned man as yourself in the past. Thus it is that as High Judge, I have considered the matter gravely, knowing full well the responsibility of my position and the consequences of my decision when a verdict is made. I have noted on the records my protest against the final decision, but unfortunately a verdict of guilty stands. [Xanthippe screams and throws herself around Socrates feet] Control that woman or she will be required to leave the court. [Plato pulls Xanthippe aside and consoles her] The judges have not made light of these charges and we have decided also to reject the consideration of an alternative punishment of thirty minae. Charged with these crimes, we have no alternative but to exile you for the length of your life in Corsica.

SOCRATES: [Controlled] Such a punishment is not satisfactory. I will not leave Athens except upon pain of death.
XANTHIPPE: You fool of a husband. You will die. Do not barter with your life.
ANYTUS: I would ask you to reconsider, Socrates. Listen to your sensible wife. Do not make a martyr of yourself.
SOCRATES: No man makes himself a martyr, but that by God he is decreed to.
ANYTUS: Then under Athenian law, I have no other option, my friend, but to condemn you to death. [Meletus hangs his head in shame. Anytus shakes his head in disbelief. Plato holds Xanthippe, who is struggling to reach her husband]
PLATO: I pity Athens for what she has done today.
MELETUS: I wash my hands of this.
SOCRATES: What do you care, Dionysius, but that you lost your bet and your son has threatened to disown you when I am gone?
DIONYSIUS: [Furious] We offer you this life rope and you spit in our faces. Damn you, Socrates. Damn you.
SOCRATES: It is you who is damned, Dionysius. I go to an immortal life, but you must live with your conscience. And you, [sarcastically] wise judges of Athens, I pity your sleep, for it will be forever troubled.
PROTAGORAS: Not so, Socrates. I have never had trouble sleeping, nor will I. I am of sound and good mind. You are the guilty one.
ANYTUS: Does the guilty have anything further to say?
PROTAGORAS: Perhaps he has another charge to lay against the judges of Athens?
SOCRATES: What is that?
PROTAGORAS: None of your business.
SOCRATES: Would you rather I told the court what you said?
PROTAGORAS: I said nothing.
SOCRATES: [Threatening] My version or yours? [Long pause] Audience of the court, Protagoras the goat-herder, now judge, has said that I, Socrates, charged with fallacious crimes against the state, wish to make more charges upon this wise and noble country. Well if he asks me, then I have no choice, do I? No choice but to make further charges. [Protagoras laughs. Socrates, then says, with statesmanship] O men before me, foolish, sad men that you are, I would not make false charges, for to do so would be to equal myself with you. Instead, I have something more. [He deliberates upon a word for a while before deciding]

PROTAGORAS: Oh, no. More musing! We may be here for a while, I fear.
Socrates gives Protagoras a cold look, which frightens him.
SOCRATES: I have decided something more amusing. Prophesy, my good friends.
ANYTUS: Prophecy?
PROTAGORAS: Prophecy? This is blasphemy? Who has the power of prophecy except the Oracle or Zeus?
SOCRATES: I have, my good friends and judges of Athens, for as you know, I am about to die, and in the hour of death, men and women are gifted with prophetic power. [The judges scoff this remark] And I prophesy to you, who are my murderers, that immediately upon my departure from this earth, punishment far heavier than you have inflicted upon me will surely await you. And if you think that by killing me, you are getting rid of the annoyance of a gadfly, think again, for what awaits you is worse. No matter what you do, you cannot prevent someone from censuring your evil lives. Can’t you see that you have to improve yourselves and remove the ignorance within your hearts and minds, as I have done and taught, these last few years? You, Protagoras, Anytus and Dionysius, who have voted for my death, let me tell you that in all which I have done and said today, my muse has never opposed me, though on occasions she has stopped me in midst of speech. And during this trial, she has never once told me to be silent. [Protagoras rolls back his head in disbelief] Thus, I can only say that if your hearts are resolved on this sentence, then it is an intimation that what is to happen to me is a good thing, and that those of us who think death is evil are in error. For either death is a dreamless sleep, which is plainly good, or else the soul migrates to another world. And what would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die and die again. [Xanthippe screams over and over].

In the next world, I will converse with others who have suffered death unjustly, and, above all, I will continue my search for knowledge. In that other world [Pointing heavenward] they do not put a man to death for asking questions. Assuredly not! For besides being happier than we are, they will be immortal, if what is said by Zeus and the Oracle of Delphi is true. [He hangs his head as if in shame] My muse has just said what I have said needs correcting. That Zeus and the Oracle of Delphi are not to be trusted. That life is immortal, not in the way they have advised, but in a better way. [This seems to delight Socrates no end, but makes a ruckus of the judges, who shout protest and stand indignantly.

PROTAGORAS: [Outraged] Never have I met in all my years as a judge a more dishonorable man than you Socrates. A man so full of treachery and disrespect that it gives me much pleasure to sentence you to death.
SOCRATES: Good Protagoras, are you so depraved as to demand the death of a fellow Athenian? If it is so, I pity you and trust that hereafter none will ever hear such a sentiment expressed by an Athenian magistrate. [Undaunted] However, I go to that place of your bidding with much expectant pleasure, Protagoras. For I do not have to live your lies for another twenty years. [He turns to the audience of the court] The hour of my departure, good friends, has arrived and we go our separate ways, I to die and you all to live. Which is better only God knows.

ANYTUS: Socrates of Athens, you have heard the charges made upon you, and the verdict arrived, and the punishment determined. Do you have anything further to say?

SOCRATES: Only to thank you judges. Thank you I must, for in doing as you have done, you have made it easier for God to decide, and believe me, you will learn of her ways soon enough.

PROTAGORAS: [To the guard] Chain the prisoner!
The guard picks up chains from nearby judges table. As the chains rattle out of the box, it is a signal for Plato to enter.

Enter Plato.

PLATO: [Obstructing guard] Socrates is a noble man. He does not need these chains.

ANYTUS: Very well. Remove the chains.

PLATO: How is the execution to be effected?

ANYTUS: By drinking hemlock. And we will not force your hand, Socrates. Though I do advise you to at least await until after the procession, as the guards will be preoccupied. Of course, after that, you may drink the hemlock [added in a casual tone, as if he expected it to be tomorrow or twenty years hence,] at your leisure. I consider this case closed. Court is adjourned.

All rise. Judges exit stage left. Socrates led off stage right. Courtroom is cleared, except for Plato.

PLATO: Oh, by what foolishness do the wise men of Athens conduct their work? Deaf are they to the voices of their muses and the cries of the gods overhead. [Hand against chest] Be still, restless muscle. Your mentor will not die. Did not Anytus say that Socrates may drink the hemlock at his leisure? At his leisure! Yes, that is the escape! I am sure of it. Were I not such a cynic, I would have said that Anytus loves Socrates, but that could not be so. Poor Xanthippe, how her heart must twist and turn with all these plays of words, caught between two men, like a doll between two babes. Socrates, you do fly in the face of authority. Were it up to you, you would have been dead yesterday, but that I stopped Protagoras from hiring an assassin. You owe me thirty minae for that, which I will take out of you by labor of the brow, or tuition or some such thing, but for now, let me get you to safety, and prolong the flight of sand within the hourglass, stop its’ movements altogether, so that leisure may be made to last a lifetime.
Act Three
Scene Three

A prison cell. At stage right is a small table with pitcher of water. Lying on a cot is Socrates, asleep. He is fastened, by a long chain, to a grommet in the floor/wall. The room is dark, but slowly light comes, then a rooster crows. A guard enters, carrying keys. He walks to the bed, unshackles Socrates chain, awakens him.

GUARD: Awake, prisoner. It is morning, and people are waiting to visit you. Socrates stirs. He sits up, then releases himself from the chain. He stands, watches sleepily, as the guard exits stage right, then rubs his left wrist where the chain dug into his flesh. A commotion is heard. offstage. Guard exits stage left.

GUARD [Offstage]: You all must wait until the sun is up. Get back I say. It is barely daybreak.

XANTHIPPE [Offstage]: Please may I enter before the rest?

GUARD [Offstage]: Be brief.

XANTHIPPE [Offstage]: Thank you.

Xanthippe enters stage left. carrying baby.

XANTHIPPE: Morning, husband. [She kisses him. There is no expression of grief, as yet, on her face] I brought the child as you requested. [Socrates smiles, then kisses the baby] Be brave my husband. [Socrates nods, his face showing only calm resolution. At this point, Xanthippe breaks down] Oh, my love, that you could come home. I know I said I wouldn’t cry thus, but it hurts. I feel as if my heart is being drawn out from my chest. Were I more of courage, I would join you. [Socrates shakes his head, no] I know you are too brave to run away. Though Plato has money to pay for an escape, I told him you didn’t come this far to turn back and renounce a lifetime’s work. [He nods happily, and touches Xanthippe’s hand] I understand. I understand. There is no other recourse, but to remain, defiant. Otherwise all the good you have done... [She bites her lip lest she cry more] I will bring the children up in the way you have advised, although this one will not become a soldier. It is bad enough that my husband dies without one of my children following that same reckless path. [Socrates sighs, then shrugs his shoulders] I have been to the bankers, and there is enough from my dowry to fund the children’s education. We will manage quite comfortably, Socrates, so you need not worry. [Socrates nods his head, yes] I do love you with all my heart. I just wish it hadn’t come to this. [He nods once more] I understand. I do. I do. But, yet my mind cannot fathom the depth of it all. It is as if I were swimming in a deep ocean, and now I am sinking beneath the surface, drowning, drowning. [Socrates comforts her with an embrace] Oh, forgive this foolish woman. I said I would be brave, and I will be. Permit me not to stay for the end. I wish to remember you always like this. A brave and heroic man, a wonderful father and lover. The other half of my soul. Tied together, forever, without separation. [Socrates looks away, fighting off tears] Oh, my love. [There is noises off stage left, of impatient friends] Listen to them! Friends. Friends. How they pushed me, as if I had no rights as your wife. [He moves to touch her hair but she pulls away] I must leave, husband, but know that you have never left me. Not even in death. I will wait outside for the trumpet to announce your death. [Socrates nods. He pulls her toward him, kissing her for a long time] No greater man has God ever put upon this earth. [He kisses the baby. She turns away briefly, to hide her grief. She turns back to look at him, smiles, then, briefly, regrets] Have you nothing to say to your dear friend and wife?

SOCRATES: We will be together soon. I love you.
Ever so slowly, Xanthippe moves off stage left, taking baby with her. At the last moment, Socrates’ outstretched hand draws her back and they kiss once more. Then she runs off, crying, to exit stage left. Socrates goes back to his bed and sits down, head in his hands. The noise from stage left grows louder, then the guard allows his guests to enter. Enter Phaedrus, Crito, Alcibiades. As men are entering, Socrates begins rubbing his sore wrist.

SOCRATES: Good morning gentlemen. Did you sleep well?

SOCRATES: [Looking at the sore upon his wrist] Oh, I slept like a babe until the rooster crowed. Someone should wring its neck, for often it crows at midnight and two in the morning for no reason apparent.

PHAEDRUS: What reason does a cock need to crow, but for the world to know of its existence.

SOCRATES: [Laughing at Phaedrus’ attempt at a joke] Yes. [Becomes distracted by his sore wrist] What a strange thing is that which men call pleasure.

ALCIBIADES: How so, good sir?

SOCRATES: [Wagging his finger at Alcibiades as if he were a naughty boy] Ah, Alcibiades, this is no philosophical statement. Just an observation that this chain, which was on my wrist, caused me much discomfort, yet when it was released, how pleasurable the sensation. So odd that they come one after the other, pleasure and pain, as if joined at the hip.

Enter Plato, later than the others. Socrates observes that Plato is unusually distracted with something.

PLATO: Good morning, gentlemen.

CHORUS: Good morning.

SOCRATES: Young Plato, why this abstraction to a foreign muse? Do you suffer from some malady of the flesh? A melancholy of the head, perhaps.

PLATO: I have brought bad tidings with me this morning, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Oh? What worse tidings than that today is to be my final day? That within the hour, I must drink the poison, and be forced to separate from much enjoyed discourse with scholars? Do tell us all.

PLATO: [Looks uneasily at the crowd] It is Meletus, chief prosecutor of Athens. He was found hanging from a tree in the agora this morning. A chorus of amazement and disbelief.

SOCRATES: [Standing, shocked] Oh, that it was not so. Meletus, you say?

PLATO: Yes

SOCRATES: [Sits down on bed] Such a sad waste of life.

PHAEDRUS: Poor fool. How sad.

ALCIBIADES: [Arrogantly] No sadder than the death of the great Socrates. Justice has been served, [To Socrates] and to a man but half your stature.

SOCRATES: Not so. He was a foot taller at least. And more so in soul, but that someone had put his soul into a lion’s mouth. Who was this traitor who did this to the noble Meletus?

PLATO: No foul play was suspected.

SOCRATES: I mean, who tempted his soul with bribe. For surely he was bribed to make this guilty verdict. Thus did he have want to kill himself from outraged guilt. General agreement. ‘Yes’ spoken by all except Plato and Socrates.

PLATO: I suspect it was one called Anytus, who put Meletus in the lion’s mouth.

SOCRATES: Anytus? Oh, that you were lying, Plato. It cannot be.

PLATO: It is. And in cohorts with that wretched man my father.

SOCRATES: Dionysius. The good Dionysius?

PLATO: As ever was good that came from a whore’s loins.

SOCRATES: [Shocked, sitting back down on bed] Anytus and Dionysius! My life long acquaintances. Dionysius, I forgive you, for you never pretended to be a solemn or close friend. But
Anytus! Who has sat on the right side at my wedding, now finally twisting the knife into my very guts.

PLATO: I believe it is over Xanthippe that this grudge is squared.

SOCRATES: How squared but that love becomes a triangle of pain, two sad and one dead, and for what? [He goes to Plato for comfort] Oh, not only must I bear the guilt of being a criminal in the eyes of Athenian men, but that I must be responsible for Meletus’ death also?

PLATO: [Said with utter confidence and conviction] No man forces another to death. Each takes his own life fully, of his own command and intent. ‘Twas not your fault, Socrates.

SOCRATES: [Impressed with Plato’s words of comfort] Thus the pupil eclipses the teacher. [Plato looks at Socrates and is embarrassed by this statement. In a hiatus of silence, Socrates looks at the sad faces around him] Come, everyone, let us make light of this matter of death. [He goes to the table, and pours a drink. The guests assume it is the cup of hemlock and gasp in horror. Phaedrus, possessed with fear, runs to Socrates and throws himself at Socrates’ feet]

PHAEDRUS: No master! How can you be so casual toward death? Collective horror. Voices of indignation and protest at Socrates’ actions. Alcibiades runs to Socrates and tries to stop him from drinking.

SOCRATES: [Freeing Alcibiades hand from the cup] What is the meaning of this? Kindly let me be. I am thirsty. Drink! [He offers the cup to Alcibiades]. Drink, I say! [Alcibiades shakes his head painfully] It is only water! Did you think I would take the hemlock now? Before I have even seen the sun upon this floor? It is morning, but the sun is not within the tavern of sky. I have at least a few moments left to ponder the existence of life. [Walks about the cell, musing] I had a dream last night, my friends. I dreamed that a beautiful, fair maiden, like my Xanthippe, only a stranger, who came to me in white raiment and said to me “Socrates! On the third day thou wouldst come to fertile Phthia”.

CRITO: A strange dream.
PHAEDRUS: A symbol.
SOCRATES: Perhaps it means that for three days I will lay within the earth and then go to the angel in the white dress.
CRITO: I think it means that you will escape. To be with your wife Xanthippe! [Chorus of agreement] Yes, I think it means you must escape. For what have we if you die. We lose a friend and a great teacher. And you lose children and a beautiful wife.

SOCRATES: At least I do not lose the favor of men. For if I escape, it will be to disgrace my own name, and that I cannot do. Now, I have sniffed out this plot you all have been scheming! Out with it then!

CRITO: [Shamefaced] We have friends. Money has allowed them to help you escape. Even as we speak they are preparing a ship for your hasty retreat to Thessally.

SOCRATES: Thessally! [He laughs] That land of chaos and lawlessness? And who put you up to this? Why all this money must have come from none other than Plato, for you have both money and your father’s ships, have you not? [Plato looks downcast] Shame on you, Plato. Shame on you all. If I, for one moment, considered that I could benefit from leaving, I would have done so myself, for I am not without friends in this city. Do you not think that I have weighed all these things up? How I am leaving a wife with three children, and one on the way. But it seems to me more important that a man must hold to his convictions. I am not like a child, who when threatened with goblins, runs in fright. The council threatens me with imprisonment and death, yet I will not bend to their beliefs, or to a law that is unjust. I believe with all my heart in this great state of ours and will defend it to the death, yet if I find it wrong, in law of action or deed, then I will forever act to point it out to Athens that she is wrong. I will not complain through violence or corrupt acts, but by constant nagging and complaining, to get my
message through. Were I to do otherwise would be to betray not only Athens, and
Athenians such as yourselves, my wife and children, myself, and my soul, but also
God, and it is to God that I must pay my greatest allegiance.

PHAEDRUS: [Angrily] Then if you do not escape, I see nothing but a coward!
SOCRATES: If I leave it is saying to Athens that I do not abide by her laws.
PHAEDRUS: Her laws? What sort of law condemns such a man as yourself to death! I do not
understand.

SOCRATES: I defend Athens to the death; right or wrong. Such is my belief, as I would defend every
one of you present here. That is not to say that I agree with you on anything, for in
discussion we have found many things to disagree upon, but that is irrelevant. If I
had to die to keep you alive, I would not hesitate in that act, as I am now.

PHAEDRUS: You sad martyr!
Exit Phaedrus, crying.

ALCIBIADES: Phaedrus!

SOCRATES: Let her be. It is from fear that she runs. [Alcibiades runs off stage left] Martyrs come from a
peculiar possession, my friend, of which I have always been guilty.

PLATO: Then do it now, that we may be freed from this torture.
SOCRATES: [Saddened] As you wish. Guard! Bring me the drink.

Plato, hearing Socrates call, becomes more enraged. The crowd watch in disbelief as guard enters with poisoned
cup. Socrates takes it from the guard.

SOCRATES: [To the guard] Thank you.
[He raises the cup before his friends] To peace.

This final act drives the group of pupils to the other side of the stage, as if possessed of some madness. Plato
alone, approaches Socrates.

PLATO: Kind sir. Please. There is still some time.

SOCRATES: See now, how the sun casts its fingers upon the floor. [Floodlight lights the floor, creeping
along from stage left toward Socrates and Plato] Come, a word to fuel my bravery.

PLATO: [Pitifully] I can think of nothing.

SOCRATES: Then let me toast a wise and noble friend who will go far in mathematics.

PLATO: I am no more a mathematician than you are a stonemason.

SOCRATES: Then a writer you will be. I have a last few words to give you which I could not share
with my wife. [Pulls Plato aside] Words which the inmost of love cannot share because
they are too close for words. Thus is love, in completion, a state of bliss, where there
is no need for words or actions, only being.

PLATO: [Heeds the meaning of these words] You are wise, good man. Wise and humble to the end.

SOCRATES: It is too late. I have something important to tell.

PLATO: [Earnestly] Yes, what is it, noble sir?

SOCRATES: [Playing to the tension in the air, leans exaggeratedly toward Plato in solemn confession] Last
week, over yonder to Crito did I come, empty of purse and begged for food.

PLATO: Yes?

SOCRATES: Kind man that he was, gave me a chicken, which we ate that night you came to our door,
seasoned with the bitterness of poverty and the weight of my trial. I ask...

PLATO: [A little confused that this speech had not yet become so profound] Yes?

SOCRATES: I ask that you could in your generosity find a chicken to replace the one I borrowed.

[Plato does not know whether to laugh or cry. He chooses the latter, but Socrates steels him
with a hand clap on the shoulder] Be brave, for wisdom is the greatest of all happiness.

[He takes the poison cup and drinks it. There is a collective shout of hysteria] Be calm. You
will frighten my wife, who waits for a sign from the trumpet. [Socrates retires to the
bed. A shaft of light fills stage right] Look how the sun calls me hence. [The poison works
quickly. It is a swift but painful death, and as Socrates struggles his last, all but Plato rush to
his side]
PLATO: [Moves front stage, teary eyed] Oh, most gracious Sappho, can you but correct the poison in Socrates' chest, and turn it upside down as you do men's minds and free him from this death? [Socrates is almost dead, convulsing violently] Oh muse of Lesbos, ask you what price I must pay, but deliver him from this fate, but in saying no, I will never heed thy voice. What say you Sappho to these charges? [Socrates dies. Crito, Alcibiades and Phaedrus collapse to the ground beside the cot, lamenting their loss. Alcibiades cries “He dies!”] So say you, so say I. Begone forever, my muse, and come this way not again, for I need none that fails my friend and teacher. [He moves away, as if fearful of catching the sadness of his companions] Look at their pitiful sounds, like babes, not men. When all along, Socrates taught of the immortality of the soul, none of you understood him. Words, he spoke to you, but they were not words, they were sounds of his spirit, imparted thus [Touches his heart] into the flesh beneath your chest. Begone men of Athens, ashamed of you am I.

Enter Xanthippe, alone. She sees Socrates on the cot, walks steadily toward him and kisses his hand. Then, she moves to Plato.

XANTHIPPE: Kind friend, I heard a trumpet sound within my head. Did you too not hear it?
PLATO: [Pointing to those around Socrates’ cot] No sound but the lamentations of inhuman grief.
XANTHIPPE: How calmly he sleeps. So proud in death as ever he was in life.
PLATO: Thus proves his greatness, kind lady.
XANTHIPPE: A riddle. For though he sleeps, [She holds her head with both hands] I feel he still lives.
PLATO: Thus has he always been, but a riddle to both man and the gods. Good-bye, Xanthippe. I am honored to have known you, and he, who is greater than all except you.

Plato moves to exit stage left. Xanthippe holds his hand as he leaves.
XANTHIPPE: Before you leave Athens, come for supper.
PLATO: I will.
Plato exits stage left.
Xanthippe faces audience.

XANTHIPPE: There lies my dead husband where but a moment before he was so full of life. How do you say it husband? “Wherein the seeming contradictions, lies truth.” When yes and no are both right, then between them is the answer. [She raises both arms skyward] Begone sweet angel of flight, whose wings are destined for such great flight that migratory birds would tire before a day of your speed. [She goes to very front of stage, picks up the white rose, placed there by Sappho in Act One Scene One and crushes the petals between her fingers, casting them into the air] And yet on and on will you journey, beyond the stars, beyond this universe, to be at the side of God and see those visions where he, your eyes, could not more clearly see, but what was your life so proudly lived and thus you died for our sake, and not yours. [Beckoning Socrates’ soul skyward] Fly, Socrates. Fly. Fly! Concern yourself no more with those you love.

She rushes off stage left.
CURTAIN