

RECOLLECTIONS  
OF  
SOKRATES



**Frank Marrero**  
*Enelysios*

Our conventional image of Sokrates comes to us from countless dry scholarly accounts that present a wise if ironic old philosopher, shuffling and lounging in the streets of Athens, asking questions that never lead to answers, and finally resigning himself in questionable fashion to a scapegoat death on philosophical principle.

But the living Sokrates was a passionate, rollicking, paradoxical figure, a man of extraordinary integrity, depth, intellect and originality who mastered his immense appetites with a warrior's self-discipline. This Sokrates was more Jedi Knight than calm Yoda, more Zorba the Greek than serene Buddha. He was a comic sage and a true hero, tried, tested and proven on the battlefields of ancient Greece. He was bold in action, passionate in love, penetrating in thought and speech, and capable of extraordinary yogic feats of superhuman endurance. His fearless, irreverent, paradoxical behavior provoked such controversy that he was falsely accused by Athens' power elite, and executed by the state. This Sokrates, the complex, compelling human character at the center of this epochal historical theater, has never been dramatically brought to life on the page, until now.

*Recollections of Sokrates* offers a dramatic and intimate view of the life and teaching of the world's protean philosopher, and a ringside seat into the inner circle of an awakened master and his disciples. This living portrait, grounded in abundant historical fact, reflects the great tradition of spiritual and philosophical masters interacting with their initiates for the sake of instruction and awakening. Thus it brings to life the philosophical and spiritual depth of Sokrates that accounts for his decisive impact and lasting influence on Western thought and civilization.

*"Your writings remind me of the work of Blavatsky or Gurdjief, but instead of looking East, you uncover that same mystic ground in the West."*

Norman O. Brown, Phd, Philosophy Emeritus, UCSC,  
Author of *Love's Body; Life Against Death*

*"I am indeed impressed by your exquisite language, but even more impressed by your vivid depiction of Socrates. Of all the biographical and fictional accounts of Socrates with which I am acquainted yours so far proves to be the most eloquent and faithful to the primary sources."*

Luis Navia, PhD, Philosophy Chair, NYIT, Author of  
*Socrates, An Examined Life*

*"Thank you for a lively presentation of an old acquaintance."*

Walter Burkert, PhD, Classics Emeritus, University  
of Zurich, Author of *Greek Religion*

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*Ενελυσιοσ*

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*Note: To highlight the realism of this story, this edition contains representative art from the past twenty-four centuries depicting the events herein.*

In a world that sometimes seems to have forgotten  
more than it learnt since Athens fell,  
the spirit of Socrates can live again.

— F.M. Cornfield



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## **Preface: Philosophical Notes**

Despite the fiction that embellishes the scenes set forth in this book, the evocative words and dramatic actions ascribed to Sokrates are taken from historical report. The rare instances where this representation departs significantly from contemporaneous accounts are discussed in Appendix A. Except for the narrator, all of the characters—and much of what they say here—are likewise rooted in historical record. Brief descriptions of each individual can be found in Appendix B.

A brief note on spellings and translations: In the interest of faithfulness to the original Greek, I have replaced the more common Latinized “c” in “Socrates” and other names with their original Greek “k”. Brackets and *italics* are used in those few places where the translation of certain words is necessary for full understanding.

The accounts and dialogues found within are mostly from Plato, Xenophon, Plutarch, and Diogenes Laertius, since Sokrates wrote nothing. Of course, even this “record” is suspect, for it is difficult to separate Sokrates from the refracted reports of his younger students or the collection of idealized stories handed down across centuries. But by examining the whole corpus of historical account in a mood of openness, we get clear glimpses of the master who inspired these stories. These sightings are themselves inspirational and even transformative, beckoning each of us to grow into ever-greater openness, simplicity, and well-being.

This vision of Sokrates is not cast in the confines of academic abstraction, but is freely reflected in the great tradition of spiritual and philosophical masters in concert

with their initiates. The narrator of this story, the fictional devotee, Enelysios—like so many actual historical figures—became transported by the nonfictional presence, aphoristic words, and bold actions of the Sage of Athens.

The love Enelysios holds for Sokrates is “Platonic”—radiant in adoration and gratitude. This kind of devotion is not erotic projection nor starry-eyed hero-worship, but it is a deep feeling grounded in the discriminative understanding and demonstrative example given by the teacher and gratefully appreciated by his students. Brimming with virtue, Sokrates pointed to the primacy of one’s own psyche, always assigning and assuming responsibility in one’s core feeling as the foundation of real life.

As groundwork for this book, I began by representing Plato’s writings (starting with the Jowett translation and a smattering of other scholars). I freely amalgamated conversations from various dialogues, other sources, translations, and transliterations in the interest of dramatic rhythm and thematic coherence.

To best understand the words and person of this father of Western thought, it is certainly useful to imagine him speaking his words from his soul, his character. Therefore, this telling casts a theatrical enchantment rather than simply being a collection of outward events expressed as a documentary of interesting facts and provocative ideas. Indeed, within this high-stakes Greek tragedy, the depth of Sokrates’ words and actions vaults the drama beyond mere entertainment or conventional teaching. His profundity prompts us to pause and enter into contemplation of the

deep meanings thus revealed. *Recollections of Sokrates* aspires to be a philosophical and spiritual evocation, masquerading lightly as a novel, built upon the actions and words of the man who proclaimed that he knew nothing at all.

It is said that Sokrates is reinterpreted in every age, colored by the conceit of each generation's unseen presumptions and overriding interests. Clarity emerges, I suggest, as we appreciate and aspire to Sokrates' honesty, openness, and passion.



## **Chapter One Agora Theater**

In the end, I was simply in love with him. But at the beginning, I was a complex of questions.

Prior to the two months I was with the Sage of Athens, I had traveled the world for two decades, studying with teachers, priests, and priestesses from the pyramids to the Punjab. Like my hero and distant uncle Heraklitos, I had renounced the path to the throne of Ephesus and instead sought sacred knowledge. In Egypt, I learned the arts of medicine, movement and stillness; in Babylon, I studied the harmonics of mathematics and charted the stars; in India, I was taught yogic practices by naked sadhus, gathered sacred knowledge from forest rishis, and meditated at the feet of revered gurus. From the crossroads of the Mediterranean to the heart of the East, I appreciated the various cultural descriptions of the many gods and the One God, and I learned much from great teachers across the continents. This search for intellectual breadth and spiritual fullness had occupied and deepened me for over twenty years, yet in some essential way I felt a gnawing angst, an uneasy sense that my endeavors could have been more fruitful. I was at the acme of my life and had already learned and experienced a great deal in my forty-three years, but still those years of seeking had not fully quenched my spiritual thirst. It felt like there was something else I needed to know.

Back in my home Court of Ephesus, I heard stories of a “crazy-wise Sokrates” in the fallen city of Athens whose unconventional methods and utterances intrigued me. It was said that he did not teach tested aspirants; he talked to the people in the street! How wise could that be?

As soon as the winter storms abated, I set sail to see for myself. At first, the equinox weather was perfect, and I spent my first day drawing and taking notes in my journal and feeling flush with anticipation. After all my travels, I was gladdened by the thought that I might find living wisdom in my native tongue. Gazing across the wine-dark sea, I recollected seeing Athens at its prime when I was ten years old; even then I was impressed with the glorious estate democracy had engendered. But now, only four years since the complete defeat of Athens by the Spartans, I wondered how much of its former glory remained.

The calm winds did not last. Two days into my voyage, the sky turned tempestuous in a disconcerting series of cold storms. The dark headwinds were so blindingly rough and wet that for many days the sail had to be lowered, forcing us to rely entirely on the oarsmen. The torturous storms ended as we rounded Sunion, just before we reached Athens' sun-streaked port of Piraeus.

Disembarking in the mid-afternoon, I began to trudge toward the High City. I was weakened from the voyage and became exhausted after walking a mere two hundred and fifty paces, a single stadia. Imagining the remaining 49 stadia to the Dipylon [*Double*] Gates, I gladly paid a farmer to ride on the back of his cart of wild spring greens. We bumped along for three long hours beside the ruins of the Long Walls from Piraeus to Athens.

The scars of war slashed painfully across almost every scene. Between the rubble and blackened fields of torched orchards and farmlands, I saw a series of mass graves, each holding thousands or tens of thousands of bodies. Beside the road, the stench of open sewers and

unattended garbage was partially masked by the smell of ashes and the recent rains. Statues and temples were defaced, broken, or burned, and the spiritual wounds of war hung heavy at every corner and encounter. There was one notable exception just beyond the Dipylon Gates: the sacred grove of Akademos with its famous olive orchards had been mysteriously spared the torch of the Spartans. But since my last visit, Athens had not just lost the wars with Sparta and suffered a horrid plague; she had gone from imperial glory to devastation, especially in the outskirts.

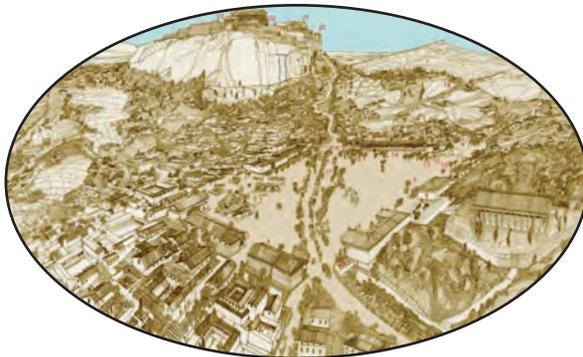
Just outside the Gates in the Kerameikos district (full of potters and stacks of ceramics), I found the room my uncle had arranged for me, where I collapsed and slept the night. I awoke at dawn with a violent sickness, and my host called for an Asklepiian physician. A slender and refined priest, about my age, came with his tree snake and a host of teas and potions. After applying his medicines, his healing touch, and his prayers, he laid his right hand on my heart and his left upon my navel, humming full breath after full breath until I fell into a deep sleep. I was later told that in my slumber, the snake was held so that it licked my stomach and forehead, and then it was laid alongside me to sleep in my warmth and thus deepen my rest and spirit.

That afternoon, I awoke feeling much better and was served fresh bread and a light carrot-lamb soup by my host's wife. Her caring touch was much appreciated—for Athens was mainly a man's world. I asked her about the doctor who tended to me, and she told me that it was common for the healed person to send a cock or pig to the Asklepiian temple in payment for the medicines and transformational services. I asked

her about Sokrates. She said she had never met him, (being confined, like all Athenian wives, to her husband's home), but had heard that he perplexed others and seemed perplexed himself. I was now anxious to find the famed sage, so I gave a boy slave three obols to attend to my payment to Asklepios.

Inside the first gate, I walked through the canyon walls that framed the Double Gates. I departed the armed passage through another grand doorway, and there, just inside the inner city, the view of the Parthenon atop the Acropolis was still a beam of brightness in the late afternoon light. To my right, repair work was beginning on the Pompeion, the temple from which countless parades of pomp proceeded. But in contrast to the nascent rebirth of civic works, anxious faces betrayed how the spirit of the once-glorious and triumphant City of Athena had fallen.

I followed the trail of wagons and pedestrians, and soon we emerged from the little shops and outer neighborhoods and came upon a very large open market and City Center: the Agora. Civic buildings



surrounded a grand marketplace that must have spanned some two stadia in both directions. With its own racetrack, it was populated by hundreds of people

and abundant statuary. I approached the edge of the square's demarcation, where a polished marble stone more than half my height stated in large letters, "I am the boundary of the Agora"; on top of it sat a basin of blessed water. Following the example of those in front of me, I dipped my fingers and touched my head, navel, and heart, as one does when entering a temple.

In contrast to the devastation and depression that seemed to have befallen the outskirts, the Agora buzzed with energy, life, and commerce from across the world. Undeterred by the scars of war, Athens had retained its status as the marketplace of the Mediterranean and, evidently, not all the wealth of Athens had been destroyed!

I made my way along the Panatheniac Way toward the High City, and as I walked I surveyed delectable treasures from near and far. On one side street alone, there were dried pears and apples, imported fresh figs, fine and coarse cloths of reds, purples, yellows, and whites from Rome to Babylon, wheat, mirrors, and flax from Egypt, nearby harvests of fishes, honeycombs, chickpeas, water-clocks, ropes and pulleys, lumber, pottery, pots and pans, works of art, goat and lamb meats, and of course, local breads, cheeses, wine, and olive oil. And except for the bakers, no women. Indeed, the absence of children and women was striking—for the Agora was a business and political site reserved only for men over eighteen years of age.

In the Northwest corner of the Agora, I stopped to admire an unusual, grand, open temple, the Painted Stoa, which did not hold statues, but gigantic paintings on fitted wood, covering its rear wall. But they were unlike any other paintings I had ever seen; in addition to their monumental scale, I stood transfixed by the

illusion of depth that was created by the perspectival, geometrically cast scenes in the style of the great genius,



Anaximander. The spell was pierced when I distinctively heard the name “Sokrates” above the crowded din.

Turning to the direction from which I had heard his name, I left the Painted Stoa, crossed the Way and quietly entered the grand eave of a smaller, civic temple, the Royal Stoa. There I found an agitated group, mostly attired in the cloak-and-tunic style of the common man and eavesdropped upon their banter.

A powerful-looking young fellow carrying an official city standard mockingly squawked, “Why, with his eyes and mouth wide open, Sokrates was musing on the Moon, describing her paths and revolutions, when a lizard on the roof squirted full on him!” The group around him roared with laughter.

A thin, well-dressed, younger man with a beak for a nose wagged his pointed finger in protest. “This is not

a joke, Lykon! I need not remind you how your own son died at the godless hands of the Thirty Tyrants. Sokrates insults our Gods, prying around the dwellings of the Moon. Strike him, I say, for he and his kind have blasphemed the Gods! Listen to their defamation! We can't let anybody say anything they want! We are asking for another plague, mark my words! Anytus is right—we must purge the causes of our sickness if Athens is to rise again!"

A brute of an older man, strong and rough and clad well in thick leather, puffed his chest out and charged, "You speak well, Meletus! Look at the spirit of the people—we live in shame. Gone are the days where we glorified our community and the gods. Now we spend all of our time picking up the scattered pieces of our City. And who twice destroyed our democracy? Students of Sokrates! Everyone knows this."

I listened in confusion, unable to reconcile the reputation of Sokrates as a wise man with the accusations I was hearing.

"He's a powerful enchanter of Athenian youth, a mocking and enamored monster! He makes the poor boys tremble and sob!"

"Yes, but we'll have to watch out. He is a bold rascal and a fine speaker."

"True! Of them all, he spouts the most artful bluster. A fox who slips through a hole, I say."

"I agree. We must resist the urge to argue with him! He's as supple as a leather strap and slippery as an eel."

"By the dog, I say he is a knave with one hundred faces."

The venomous orgy of their attack shocked me. With the arrival of one last man armed with scrolls; the troupe all marched self-righteously into the inner

portion of the temple. I continued into the Agora, puzzled and disturbed. I came upon a silk merchant who smiled pleasantly as I approached, but when I inquired as to where I could find the famed teacher Sokrates, his face contorted into a snarl. Waving his hand dismissively, he laughed at me as if I were a fool and yelled, "He who only asks questions and never gives answers? Who embarrasses everyone? He'll get his!"

Perhaps the prudent course would have been to flee Athens and forget this crazy man, yet I was not only perplexed, but also most intrigued. I pondered the contradictions as I walked along the other edge of the Agora, past a long monument of heroes and other municipal buildings. I admired the international flavor of the Mediterranean's largest marketplace: to the sides were copper from Cyprus, tin from Britannia, books from Persepolis, Alexandria and Jerusalem, swords from Calchis, embroideries and spices from across Persia and even the Indus Valley.

At the eastern corner of the marketplace, I spied a man already gently smiling, a broad-browed cobbler in his fifties with a curly, graying beard. When his kind eyes met mine, I approached and asked him where I could find the supposed sage of Athens. A sweet smile spread across his face and he gladly replied, "He has already passed today, but you'll not fail to meet Sokrates tomorrow." Before I spoke, he noticed my downward pointing finger. "Yes, here, come early. I am blessed with his good company every day."

I stated what seemed obvious. "You have a good opinion of Sokrates."

He was at once matter-of-fact and profound in his reply as he continued with his craft. "By the gods I do. And I am certain that he is the best of men."

“But not all do,” I dared to respond, seeking to clarify what I had already heard.

The cobbler put down his hammer and awl, and fixed his eyes on mine. “Those who think much of themselves often come to feel like fools in his company.” Then his voice rose to a soft crescendo, gently broadcasting his feeling. “That’s because Sokrates is the most passionate, the most discerning, and the most virtuous man in Athens.”

The cobbler’s strength of voice and character carried a calm finality. I wanted to believe him. But I also wanted to make up my own mind. And I needed to understand the complaints I had heard. Any further question or comment on my part would have sounded petty or quibbling, so I held my doubts silently. I nodded in respect, and after a long pause, I ventured hopefully: “He has students?”

“No,” the cobbler said flatly, but before my heart fell far, he extended his hand and smiled. “Sokrates has friends. My name is Simon.”

I shook his hand gratefully. “I am Enelysios, from Ephesus. I have traveled to Athens with hopes of meeting him.”

Simon assured me as he turned back to his work. “You can get an introduction here in the morning.”

I walked away somewhat confused but excited that I would soon meet the man who inspired such intense, adamant, and contradictory opinions. Despite Simon’s suggestion that Sokrates had no students, I set aside ten mina in gold to offer him. I hoped such a sum would impress him that I was serious and convince him to grant me the opportunity to linger in his company for an extended time. I shopped the Agora and retired before the sun had set.

The next morning I arrived early at Simon's workshop. At first, I watched the craftsmen busily attending to their tasks. Each was a specialist, with his own set of glistening iron tools. One did nothing but prepare the leather and cut it in set patterns; another carefully stitched the pieces together; still another did nothing but insert ivory eyelets for laces, while the next craftsman hammered little curved hobnails into the layers of leather, creating the sole. Simon selected the skins, and then moved quickly from man to man, offering instructions or demonstrating a technique, orchestrating and guiding it all, there in the early morning glow and reflected light from the pillars and walls of the Parthenon and the Acropolis.



After the men were set in their tasks, Simon came over and greeted me warmly. "Well, you are serious indeed. Have a seat; Sokrates comes here after the Gymnasium. You might have to wait a while. He's a fiend for exercise, always reminding us that a healthy body is the greatest of blessings." As he began his own work on a hefty pair of boots and leggings, Simon made a pointed request of me. "Tell me why you have come."

I told him that I was of the House of Ephesus and that wise Heraklitos was my great-great uncle and my inspiration in my thirst for wisdom. I told him where I had traveled during the last two decades, seeking knowledge, mentioning my favorite teachers by name. I tried to persuade Simon that I was a serious seeker of wisdom and knowledge, and that I had come because I had a sense that I could gain both right here in Athens from Sokrates.

Simon stopped me with a laugh and counseled, “Well, be prepared to give up all your ideas!” I did not understand the joke, but before I could inquire into his strange remark, a customer approached him for a fitting. Getting back to his business, Simon pointed me across the way to the benches in front of the round Tholos and advised, “Sit there, near where the senators eat, and look up toward the High City.”

I sat in the morning sun with a practiced patience and calmed my excitement at the prospect of meeting this paradoxical man. Perched at the margin of the awakening roil, I witnessed a vendor attempting to console a disappointed customer by redirecting his attention with forced jocularly—a scene I had witnessed the world over. All around my stillness, little storms erupted and passed. Animated deal-making, haggling over price, friendly and fierce squabbles arose and fell, moved and settled into a background babbling rumble. Beneath the rising magnificence of the Acropolis, this place seemed much like so many other cities I had known, its citizenry milling about in the dust of their history, intent on the desires of the day.

Before long, I settled into a gazing reverie, where the scuffing feet became as birds pecking with uncertain direction. I drifted into a dreamy land, where my own desires sought perfect address. This spell was pierced when something *different* caught my eye: in stark contrast to everyone’s fine sandals and leggings, I noticed the thick, bare feet gliding gracefully across the smooth, grey stones. A threadbare and tattered cloak hung limp around this poor old man’s stout legs, stocky torso, and little potbelly — and his elderly gait seemed to be part swagger, part waddle. In sharp relief, he was framed by statuesque, well-heeled young men striding

with the confidence of youth and by genteel elders in fine Hellenic cloth ambling with elegant grace. At last, my eyes beheld the sight of this strange man's rough, ugly face with its pug nose, bugged eyes, puffy lips, and ears like a baboon! This most unlikely character was leading his handsome and sophisticated admirers into the center of Athens, the city that, not too long ago, had the reputation of being the finest and freest in the Mediterranean world.



A glance at the adoring smile on Simon's face confirmed it; this was Sokrates. In a society that worshipped physical beauty, this coarse-looking man must certainly be a remarkable teacher. He did not look like any of the wise men I had met in my travels. My mind raced in contorted confusion.

As the traveling party approached, their jollity was evident and obviously ringed with a robust love of life, whose center was Sokrates. Even from a distance, it made me glad. What stark contrast was this levity to the wrath and vicious accusations I'd heard before! Still, I decided that I would not let myself be fooled; in my travels, I had seen "wise" men and women whose boldness and charisma fooled many — and emptied everyone's purse.

I watched with a discerning eye as the younger men vied for position, trying to engage their teacher; and in spite of my attempt to maintain a critical reserve, it was a charming and fascinating procession. Strolling through the marketplace, Sokrates opened his arms out to a multitude of vendors' tables and loudly proclaimed, "Look at all of these things I don't need!"

His free laughter punctuated the broadcast exclamation. Then he suddenly paused and pointed, announcing each of his words with a penetrating gaze. "He who is not content with what he has — will not be content with what he would like to have."

Is this always true? A hungry man fed a wholesome meal is contented. Temporarily. Sokrates spoke directly, with layers of meaning, irony and paradox, and yet with a nearly overbearing confidence. His words reminded me of the teachings of Gotama, the Indian Sage of the Shakyas, who also pointed to desire and underlying dissatisfaction. But while the gurus, ascetics, and rishis of India spoke only to tested aspirants in forest retreats or temples, this teacher was confronting the people in the marketplace!

His protruding eyes darted from side to side, surveying all, until they met mine—and with an unbroken and blessing gaze, he walked directly toward me. With the polite and humble civility of a tourist, he bowed slightly and inquired, "Pardon me good fellow, do you know where good bread can be found?"

At first, I was startled to be so immediately included in his public classroom, his theater of instruction. I glanced at Simon, who was grinning. For the moment, at any rate, I trusted the play. I was also intrigued, perhaps even flattered by his attention. I assumed a harmless role, pointing and posturing. "I've only been here for a short while, but that baker's breads are fresh and delicious, in my opinion."

Sokrates continued with utter solemnity. "And can you tell me where good wine can be found?"

It seemed like he was serious, and so with like seriousness, I told him where I had found good wine. But his pretense aroused an inkling of distrust in me,

despite the twinkling of his eyes. How soon would he be asking me for more money than I had planned to offer in payment for his teachings? I played along to find him out, but watched him with eagle acuity.

“Thank you greatly, you’re so helpful!” The sage of Athens acted very grateful. But then he pleaded with all the innocence and knitted brow of a stranger to the city, “But please, let me ask you one more thing: Where can the good and the noble be found?”

I was unable to answer, my mind splintering into a myriad of perspectives all at once: I flashed on a priest of the Pyramids, a kind Satrap in Persia, and a walkabout guru with whom I had lingered in India; I reflected on my uncle, the Archon of Ephesus and I pondered my new friend, Simon. These men each seemed “noble” and “good” in their way. I contemplated the marketplace stalls and tables, and noticed how the good and noble cannot be bought or sold. His question was thought provoking and soul revealing, and I could not quickly plumb its depth. Eye to eye, his gaze was simple, friendly, and innocently inquisitive, and I was confronted by my own anxiety and lack. I painfully noticed my aspiration for a goodness and spiritual nobility that still exceeded me. I looked back at him as if stripped naked, hoping against doubt that I could trust him to be both wise and kind. Thankfully, he smiled at me and broke the silence. “Then follow me in these streets and learn. I am Sokrates. The only idea I have is that I have no ideas.” He punctuated his irony with a laughter that only perplexed me further.

Even as I was attracted, my doubts surged. I still did not presume to believe in him like Simon did, and I

certainly was not about to join his cult — and yet I had sought his company, and now my curiosity was aflame. I glanced toward Simon, who smiled at me like an old friend. Even though my mind began surging with questions and cautiousness, I could not keep myself from bowing in respect.

I told Sokrates my name was Enelysios of the royal house at Ephesus and how I had traveled from the Nile to the Himalayas over the past twenty years in search of wisdom. He suggested that someone so lucky, traveled, and educated as I could teach him the ways of learned men. Fortunately, I did not fall for his ironic ploy, but was instead acutely reminded that I had come to him to learn.

I was also beside myself with questions. No ideas? If he had no ideas, what had he done to provoke the complaints I heard earlier? Was he an authentic teacher? He seemed to eschew every official or independent validation, and with my own ears, I had already heard several who adamantly spoke against him. Amidst my doubts and dilemma, I dared to ask myself: Could this man be living a clarity and natural freedom that I had just glimpsed? For the present, my doubtful and hopeful questions would go unanswered.

I offered him a generous gift of ten mina as payment for his teaching. It was more than enough for a year of very good living.

Unrestrained laughter shocked me into confusion. Then he theatrically shifted his mood quickly into one of seriousness and turned to Krito and asked so sincerely, “What do you think, my old friend and financial advisor, ten mina seems like a great sum, but he’s royalty. Maybe more?”

I felt a momentary wave of disappointment and wariness, until Krito could not keep up the pretense and broke into laughter.

“Money contaminates wisdom,” Sokrates looked me in the eye sternly, gesturing that I put away my golden offering.

His ruse had inverted all my expectations. I had offered heavy gold coins to scores of teachers; not one had ever refused it completely, although a few had asked me to give it to the poor. I was puzzled, and found myself questioning the teachings I had received before. Remembering many of them to be of great value, I respectfully inquired, “What would you do with the money if you could accept it?”

Sokrates was quick. “I’d pay many, many more people to listen to me. But I’ll just have to make do with free.” I was just appreciating the layers of meaning in the words of this free-seeming man, when he gave Simon a decisive nod and suddenly took off, striding deeper into the Agora with a passion.

Accompanying this madman through the marketplace of Athens was unquestionably an adventure of delight. At the stalls selling luxuries, near where I had encountered the rancorous merchant the day before, Sokrates dramatically picked up a purple robe, tried on a silver bracelet, and grasped two silk scarves in each hand as he did an exaggerated dance, singing in a mocking voice, “The purple robe and silver’s shine / More fits an actor’s need than mine.” How he loved to dance! I’d never seen such



dancing in a man of his years. Addressing my wide eyes, he informed me with the friendliest of smiles, “Dancing the best way to stay in shape.” And with his temporary silks in extravagant flourish, he jumped, spun, and laughed at his own coy pretense. What an impromptu show! And everyone laughed along—well, except for the vendor whose fine goods he ridiculed.

Now I understood the merchant’s bitterness; Sokrates taunted him and mocked his trade as well as the social game of luxurious attractiveness. And even though I was highly amused, I was also a bit uncomfortable, because Sokrates seemed so lacking in restraint, always breaking through the superficial dignity of everyone he met.

I wondered whether this show was for my benefit, or if it was a daily occurrence. Still, it felt spontaneous, and the reaction of his friends and the onlookers seemed fresh. I scrutinized everyone’s reactions and responses, to see how many there were amused or offended by the searing jokes made by this passionate comedian, who played at the very edge of the stage of social acceptability.

The rich seemed more humbled and amused than offended, and most of the merchants laughed along with him. And why not? His make-believe theater supplied levity to the social atmosphere; God knows they needed it. But I also noticed the occasional closed and frowning faces, defiant whispers, and “knowing looks” to others that left me with an uneasy feeling.

As we walked and danced along, his mood kept shifting. He spoke soberly here, outrageously there, pretending here, questioning everywhere, morphing into a different person in each new situation; “a knave with a hundred faces” indeed. I had seen many charlatans and some great teachers; I had met prophets, priests, sadhus, sophists, madmen, rishis, and fools of all kinds. Still, I

could not tell what was before me now. Could he be all these at once, or something entirely different? Instead of withdrawing from common society and becoming absorbed in internal states like the wise I had known in India, his friendly, fierce and free engagement with everything and everyone was, to say the least, more like the behavior of a fool than that of a sage.

At a table of fine imported fruits, Sokrates picked up a fig and exclaimed in delight, "Ah, the spring figs are in from the south Peloponnese!" The learned Hermogenes, a nobleman like myself, also in his mid-forties, inquired as to their cost, in order to acquire some for his teacher. When Sokrates overheard their dear price, he implored, "When people pay a high price for fruit which ripens early, do they then despair later when seeing the local fruit ripening at the proper season? I don't need them, Hermogenes. The world lives to eat; I eat to live."

Again, was this penetrating irony or more entertainment? Was he a provocateur or an ascetic? Almost shrieking with joy, he declared loudly. "He is richest who is content with the least, for contentment is the wealth of natural living." At first, I appreciated his defense of simplicity, but then he went over the line into the outrageous. "So I am nearest to the gods, since I have the least needs as well as the least knowledge!"

His solitary guffaw and comparison of himself with gods frightened me; he could be crazy. And what did he mean by "least knowledge"? or "No ideas"? Without knowledge and ideas, we would be animals, not reaching for eternal understanding. Was his performance all arrogance and ignorance or a higher and truer freedom? I was confounded and offended as

well as charmed and intrigued, so I respectfully maintained the silence that was expected of a novice student. But while I watched in baffled amazement, I sought to gauge the reactions and responses to Sokrates' teachings — and come to my own understanding.

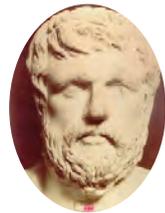
Soon, we were following this dancing ascetic down one street just off the Agora to the northeast, headed for Andokides' house. The master of irony began teasing the fair young Kritobulus mercilessly about how nicely he combed his hair and the feminine touches to his appearance, causing much laughter amongst us, when Sokrates abruptly stopped as if in a trance. He gazed into the distance for a few seconds, in obvious and sudden contemplation, and then made a course correction to the left, going down the narrow alleyway of the cabinetmakers. All but two followed him. These strong young men, Aristekles and Xenophon, bolted

ahead, shouting, "What's he doing? That's the long way! This street is faster."



Aristekles

Before too long, we came upon the young men, filthy and ashamed. With hanging heads, thirty-year-old Xenophon spoke for them both. "We were excited



Xenophon

to best you master, and took off in a hurry. But just as we began to gloat over our upcoming victory, a herd of pigs came running around the corner, filthy and stinking. There was no escaping the slime. Indeed, we got to the marble-worker's before all of you, but..."

Twenty-seven-year-old Aristekles could not believe he had been wrong. "How did you know?" he squeaked in his high, almost bird-like voice.

Sokrates admonished Aristekles while making a word play upon the nickname given him by his wrestling coach. "My young Plato [*platon* means "broad"], all the time you spend obsessed with taking notes, knowing, and being right, I broaden my mind with listening, with no ideas, and with Being itself."

The trauma, smell, and embarrassment must have been too much for Aristekles, for he suddenly threw-up right in front of everyone. A sharp-tongued fellow a bit older than I, Antisthenes, dramatically provided a comic relief to the rest of us. "I see your vomit there, Plato, but I do not see your conceit!"

Antisthenes' remark caused Sokrates to roar with laughter and applause. The two young men received several rounds of hearty, friendly laughter, even as we took care of Aristekles, who quickly recovered. After they cleaned themselves in the river Eridamos, we picked up Andokides and headed back toward the Agora.

As we came upon the Panatheniac Way, a procession of men and horses were marching into the Agora. Aristekles' eyes widened at a magnificent horse neighing and prancing, and went on and on praising it and how good he would look upon it. Sokrates shook his head at Plato's continued conceit and pretended to mount him, announcing loudly, "I think you too would be a very frisky horse!" Aristekles saw his own bright-eyed fascination and lowered his gaze as another round of laughter seared his youthful enthusiasm.

Sokrates stopped, as he often did, back at the stall of Simon the cobbler—not for his wares, of course, but for conversation with Simon and with the youngest minds of all: boys under eighteen. Since the

marketplace was reserved for men over the age of eighteen, and since Simon's workshop bordered the Agora proper, 'under-age' adolescents could come to Simon's to listen to Sokrates converse, confound, entertain and enlighten.

However, it was Simon who asked the sage the most engaging and germane questions. This discourse between friends struck me as a far more nourishing meal than the debates of the furrowed-browed sophists. The speech of hired tongues regarding human nature or social wisdom may be eloquent and impressive, but this was deep heartfelt conversation about friendship, truth, reality, beauty, and the like, not empty pretty words splitting hairs and getting lost in abstractions.

A butcher came in for a quick repair to a piece of leather, and as we waited for Simon to attend to it, the master of inquiry asked the man, "How many sheep do you have?" The butcher answered proudly that he had one hundred and eighty-seven. After some murmurs of polite admiration, Sokrates invited everyone walking with him and several of those listening in to share how many we had. We each reported out, after which he asked us all: "Well, since the best of all possessions is a sincere and good friend, how many friends do you have?"

All paused as he scanned our eyes as a hush of some gravity fell upon us. Puckering those huge lips and pretending to be concerned, he posed, "I find it strange that a man knows exactly how many sheep he has, but when asked about friends, he is sheepish."

Sokrates broke our dumbstruck silence with a laugh and joyfully enjoined us to follow him again into the Agora. At the statuary workshops, Sokrates

carefully examined the Persian artistry, as he and his father had worked in stone. However, our appreciation of the stone carvings was interrupted as we heard the sculptor harshly haranguing one of his apprentices. Casting his eye toward the noise, Sokrates proffered rather loudly with his apparent naiveté, "I'm astonished that the sculptors of marble statues should take such pains to make the block of marble into a perfect likeness of a man, and yet take no pains about themselves lest they should turn out mere blocks, not men!" The artist sneered at us and asked if we were buying anything or just there to bother him. Sokrates carefully examined the offended artist from toe to eye. Then he turned and asked us all, "What is the point of glittering statues, or ships and walls or anything for that matter, if the men who build them are not happy?" The sculptor yelled at Sokrates to move along, which he answered with a long, still smile.



Infuriated, the mason jumped forward and pounded his fists upon the chest of Athens' provocateur and began yanking at the hair on Sokrates' head when young Aristekles and Xenophon jumped in and pulled him away. The sculptor spat at Sokrates and sneered, "Troublemaker! You spend your whole life playing your little game of irony and laughing up your sleeve at all the world."

The august Krito strode forth in defense. "I've known Sokrates all my life, we grew up together in Alopeke district. He is not a sophist for hire; his words are not meant to trick anyone! He is trying to get you to see yourself, you unhappy fool! Don't you see the harm of your speech and actions?"

Obviously, Sokrates irritated some beyond their measure. But in my spiritual search, I had already learned to recognize and respect the sting of truth, and I saw how Sokrates was not afraid to speak the truth, regardless of what anyone might think in the moment. I had seen such true speech in the forests and ashrams of India, within the Courts of Persia and Babylon, and with the priests of the Pyramids, but never on a city street or in the open marketplace! Indeed, his fearlessness seemed outrageous, foolish and dangerous. My conflicts festered. While I saw much to admire and appreciate, Sokrates' continual confrontation inevitably created resistance and resentment. Was he wise and skillful in his aspiration to personal virtue but unwise and unskillful in his relation to the body politic?

Despite the fact that everyone he was speaking to was affected by the sour mood of a dark time, Sokrates was heedless of their irritation and unstoppable, passionately engaging as many people as he could get to listen, for free. He was the center of a moving storm, creating enchanting theatrical moments and dramatic effects wherever he went, one scene after another, all day long. He used every situation to teach; he exposed the presumptions and illusions that enclosed those he met in so many ways, especially in brilliant juxtaposition to the simple joy that his virtue radiated.

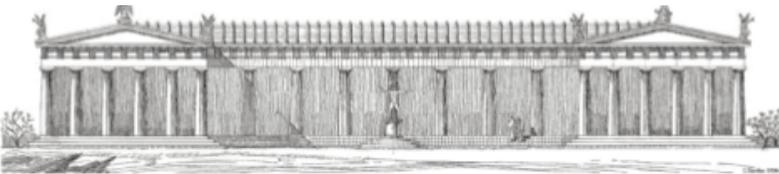
Coming to a table of mirrors, he picked up one of the finest reflectors and wagged his finger with feigned seriousness as he said, "I recommend to the young here the constant use of the mirror." He held it briefly to the face of beautiful Kritobulus and broad-shouldered Aristekles, and 2 or 3 others, so that each in turn could see his own image. "The purpose of this you might

ask?" His penetrating glance darted from one to the other, and he declared pointedly, "Perhaps the handsome of you might acquire a corresponding behavior, and the ugly ones might be inspired to conceal their defects by education!"

Along with everyone, I laughed at his poke and felt the freeing of feeling that virtue bestows. Most were silent in self-reflection, but soon the ever-sharp Antisthenes declared, "Sokrates, I've considered everything you said yesterday about my courtship with my lover Xaris, and I have decided to marry her." He picked out and paid for two exquisite mirrors and announced, "One for my love and one for your lovely wife, Xanthippe. Please give this to her from me, and tell her that she helped me make this decision."

Everyone chuckled, as if laughing at a joke I did understand, so I dared to ask a companion, "How so? Please tell." As it turned out, everyone was intrigued at how the wife of Sokrates, well known as a raging shrew, could have convinced anybody in favor of marriage.

Sokrates beckoned us to sit to hear the rest of Antisthenes' story at "our spot", so we followed him quickly to the Stoa, or covered porch, of the Temple Zeus Eleutherios, the Liberator. The sage of Athens pointed out to me, a newcomer to Athens, his delight in how the outer Doric columns complemented the inner Ionic ones and how the strong and the receptive



together framed a sacred space within. We sat down out of the midday sun for a lunchtime story. Simon the cobbler joined us, and everyone shared what foods we had.



### Xanthippe

Although a very serious fellow, Antisthenes could scarcely conceal his enjoyment as he stood to share the master's instructions, and entertain us.



*A few days ago, as I was approaching the master's house to ask his advice, I could hear Xanthippe's voice from the street. She was screaming at our friend about their lack of money, 'We're down to two obols, Sokrates! Two obols! Some sophists make a hundred drachma for every student! And who's the best tongue in Athens? Oh, it's Sookrates, and he's free!'*

*I knocked at his dwelling and Sokrates opened the door with a smile. 'Come on in, Antisthenes. You've come at a perfect time. A storm has just passed, though it may yet rain.'*

*I told Sokrates about my love of young Xaris and how beautiful and bewitching I find her. He quipped, "Beauty is the bait with which delight allures a man to enlarge his kind. That attractiveness is a short-lived tyranny." I assured him I understood that her youth would pass, and yet I could not imagine marrying another. And so I asked him directly if he thought I should engage this woman to matrimony. He raised his brow, looked me in the eye, and replied, 'Whether you get married or not, you'll regret it!'*

*With those simple words he made me question my underlying belief that I can somehow be fulfilled by another or by life itself. After a humbling few moments of silence*

wherein I gradually began to understand his meaning, I gazed deeply into his eyes and we shared the free laughter of deep recognition. He continued. 'Life contains but two tragedies. One is not to get your heart's desire; the other is to get it.' He paused again to let his words sink in, and my sense of his freedom only deepened. Then, he continued, returning to my original question with a sobering reply. 'But if you are hot for this woman, remember: the hottest love has the coldest end.'

As I was contemplating the implications of his advice, Xanthippe entered the room to serve us water and bread, apologizing unendingly for the humble fare. The master heartily assured her, 'Be of good cheer; for if our guest is a sensible person, he will bear with us; and if he is not, we need not care about him!'



Xanthippe angrily ignored her laughing husband and set about to ungraciously complain to me about her poverty, all but asking me to pay for being there. Sokrates immediately dismissed her, saying again that money contaminates wisdom. But she became enraged, possessed by a fury, spouting her displeasure, and quickly stormed out.

Admiring Sokrates as the finest in heart and in the skill of understanding, I became perplexed by the abuse we had just endured. I finally asked him: Sokrates, I know Xanthippe is very beautiful and almost twenty years your junior, but why did you marry the most troubling woman in the history of Athens?

He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders as if to say that he was a fool, and confessed, 'I guess that I am used to it, just as you can get used to the constant sound of a pulley or the cackling of geese.'

I retorted that geese at least give me eggs and goslings. But he countered, 'I sympathize with her. What a poor

*provider I have been! But listen, I know I live with a young and beautiful shrew, but she has given me the joy of young children. And just as horsemen are fond of spirited horses — for when they have mastered these, they can easily cope with the rest — so I, in the society of Xanthippe, shall learn to adapt myself to the rest of the world! It may be hard to conceive, Antisthenes, but I find it useful to live with a restless woman. She proves I can live happily with anyone.'*

*Xanthippe must have been listening. She made another dramatic entrance to our room, seemingly baiting Sokrates to say something more about her. He immediately complied by turning to me and stating dramatically, 'It comes down to the woman. If you have found a good woman, you'll be happy.' Then he paused, attentive to Xanthippe's sudden silence, and with a twinkle in his eye, laughed, 'And if you don't, you'll become a philosopher!'*

*Insulting though it was, I could not help myself from snickering, and as Sokrates joined me we dissolved in gales of laughter. Xanthippe glared at us, then marched into the bedroom, returned with a bedpan and poured the yellow water over her husband, splashing it onto me as well. With the widest of eyes, Sokrates guffawed and shouted to me. 'Did I not warn you that Xanthippe's thunder would end in rain?'*



Everyone, including Sokrates, laughed and applauded at Antisthenes' retelling of the encounter

with Xanthippe. Antisthenes then turned to Sokrates directly. "Thank you. That's when I realized how lucky I was to be in love with Xaris — by comparison to Xanthippe. I am a philosopher too, and in that spirit I was inspired by your marriage. I am amazed at your patience and steady love of her. You seem to constantly forget how badly she treats you."

Sokrates responded with a grin. "Well, I will give her this mirror from you, but I can't guarantee she won't use it disrespectfully. Remember how she rubbed her feet in the cake Alkibiades sent?" Everyone erupted with laughter, but before anyone could explain the joke to me, Sokrates went on. "I think you and I, Antisthenes, are like dogs! We can be happy just lying on the ground on a rag! I enjoy hearing your logic, but I take no responsibility for your choices. I still don't know if marriage is right for you, since, as I have often said, the only idea I have is that I have no ideas. Yes?"

I had lived with the naked sadhus of India and knew that the free man needs nothing, not even clothing. But I was again confused—the educated mind is far rarer and higher than the clothed body. How does ignorance make us wise? I presumed that knowledge was supreme! Sokrates' assertion of 'no ideas' helped me keep a respectful and ponderous silence. My furrowed brow gave Simon cause to lean to me and whisper in my ear. "He ignores what he thinks he knows; he listens to everyone simply and opens to the life as it flows, inviting us to a similar receptivity and resonance. And because of his steady openness, he is always ready to love everyone, even Xanthippe."

Sokrates must have overheard Simon for he strode out of the shade into the warmth of Helios' sunshine, pointing firmly. "There is one exception, one thing I do

know." He smiled widely and put his fingertip to the center of his breast. "Love is the right way to live."

Though many speak about it casually in a way that trivializes love, I have always been uplifted when I have heard mature praise of love.

His hand opened outwards and he gushed like a young man at first love, "Since Diotima, I cannot remember a day when I was not in love."

I have not heard anyone else say that. Most of those present hummed softly as he spoke, in appreciative symphony with his words.

With his sweet smile, Sokrates issued a loving challenge to us. "So look into the mirror every day and discern if you are devoted to love and virtue. As my beloved initiator, Diotima, instructed me, only by love will you come to the absolute beauty of reality."

I fell into stillness, along with everyone else—lost first in feeling-reflection, then in admiration and gratitude of his demonstration. Sokrates smiled and gazed in adoration of all he saw.

I was struck by the feminine name: Diotima. How fascinating that in this male-dominated culture, his spiritual initiator was a woman. Just the way he spoke her name caused me to take a deeper breath.

The spell of stillness was gently broken by the elder Krito who murmured, "Thank you" to his oldest friend. A soft chorus of gratitude soon followed.

But just after the most pleasant silence, Krito's son, the naïve, rash and handsome Kritobulus, who had been teased for being a pretty boy mercilessly earlier in the day, stepped into the light in front of the gathering, humorously challenging love's servant. "But Sokrates, you could convince us all of anything — even that you are more beautiful than I!"

Sokrates bugged his eyes out and glanced quickly from side to side, taking in everyone's reactions to Kritobulus. Krito feigned shame, Hermogenes frowned, apparently offended, Aristekles' eyes lit up, Xenophon was aghast, and the ardent curiosity on my face must have looked thoroughly silly.

Sokrates slowly stroked his beard as if in deep thought, humoring the youngster. "But let me ask: does beauty apply only to humans?"

"No." Kritobulus eagerly replied, "A ship, a horse, a house can be beautiful."

"But what makes each of those 'beautiful', as you say?" he probed and laid out his trap.

"An admirable utility, an elegant efficiency, I would say," Kritobulus confidently asserted.

Sokrates nodded. "I agree. We do not say that eyes are beautiful when they are without the power of sight, but only when they have that power and so are useful for seeing. Similarly we say that the whole body is beautifully made, sometimes for running, sometimes for wrestling, and we speak in the same way of all living things. A beautiful horse or quail, all utensils, means of transport, all instruments of music and the arts generally—we apply the word 'beautiful' to all of these in much the same way. Don't you agree?"

Kritobulus nodded in affirmation. The trap was set.

"Well, then," Sokrates chuckled as he demonstrated, "my eyes are more beautiful than yours, for you see how they bug out?" We burst with laughter and became bright with anticipation. "I see not only straight ahead, but side to side with efficiency and more utility than yours. And your straight nose points down, Kritobulus, whilst my flat, pug snout sniffs easily all



around and affords no obstacle to my seeing." We could not contain our laughter and he rode our energy like a stallion. Opening his hands outward, he loudly admitted the obvious. "My ears stick out like a dog, far superior to your flat little things." Then with dramatic flair, he closed his eyes and whispered, "And my big, soft, lips welcome sweet kisses way better than those tight little muscles you have." Hoots and howls answered his joke and everyone applauded. When quiet had returned, Sokrates finished him off. "By your very definition, I am indeed more beautiful than you, my dear one." And he bowed low to complete the mockery.

Kritobulus returned the bow, as if captured and surrendered, but upon rising suggestively proffered, "Perhaps." Returning the smile and humor of the master, Kritobulus playfully offered, "Shall we poll our listeners? Let us put it to a vote."

Sokrates gasped with delight at young Kritobulus' play, and then cleared his throat as if preparing to go onstage, "Yes, my, of course, here's one place where opinion might be right."

We submitted ballots on who was more beautiful, Kritobulus or Sokrates, and Sokrates lost: nine to nothing. He feigned to be greatly offended, and then shouted out to a prancing Kritobulus and us all, "Bribery!" Unrestrained laughter enveloped the whole group.

Yet despite this delightful humorous play and his invocation of love, I couldn't let go of a certain fear at the bigness of his being; I distrusted his exaggerated pretenses, his insulting ironies, his defiance of fools, his general lack of social graces, and his assault on ideas and

knowledge. He was stirring a revolution in my heart and mind that was not altogether pleasant. Sokrates countered Kritobulus with his refrain, "Your kind of beauty is a short-lived tyranny!" We applauded anew, with some of his oldest friends shining with grateful recognition.

Our roars attracted attention and unintentionally summoned the Persian, Zopyrus, who was famous as a "face-reader". He stepped up to our gathering as if from stage right and commanded our attention as he called out to the master in an angular, mocking voice. "Look at this hardy, vulgar body and those thick, sensual lips. Sokrates, you have a coarse, lustful, voracious, and vicious nature!" His brash rudeness offended even me, a newcomer. Several young men leapt to their feet, shouting words of defense against the slander.

With the smallest wave of his hand, Sokrates halted them, and stepped toward Zopyrus, confessing boldly, "Yes, good man, you see me exactly. I am the very embodiment of sensuality and animal stupidity." He paused for a minute, causing me to wonder, for I had beheld nobility. "And my appetites and lusts are gigantic as you say." He let the conviction stand for a moment, then instructed, "But you see what I was, not what I am." I thought of my own appetites and how, in spite of my spiritual search, I still struggled to control my impatience with friends, anger with enemies, lingering greed for power, and the furies of every lust. I hoped he had a secret that could vanquish my lower demons. Instead, he challenged us with his disarming simplicity. "I have conquered them all by reason and virtue. I bow to the Delphic wisdom: Nothing in Excess and Know Thyself. Do you?"

His eyes darted from gaze to gaze, innocently penetrating every one with an unarmored clarity. Even Zopyrus was stunned to silence.

Suddenly, the same herald I had seen the day before marched into our midst with three attendants, followed by curious onlookers. He faced Sokrates, unrolled his scroll and barked: "Sokrates! You are charged with crimes against the State: Corrupting the youth of Athens and not believing in the gods the state believes in, but in other new spiritual beings. The penalty demanded is death!" He pressed the paper into Sokrates' hand and his witnesses shouted, "I have witnessed that Sokrates was served his charges", and the tiny troupe marched off.

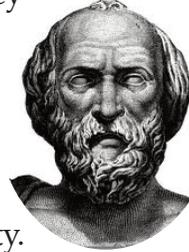
We were shocked by the vicious intrusiveness of this act, the blind stupidity of those involved, and the practical threat to Sokrates' life. "My, my, my," he slowly lamented and sat down beside us. He seemed to be simultaneously saddened and humbly heart-touched by what had just happened. "They are swatting at me now. But what new gods have I introduced?"

"It can only be your guiding spirit, your inner divine voice which has always served you well, even this very day, and those who listen to you!" Xenophon suggested poignantly, as he examined the summons.

Instead of denouncing the lies and hatred at the core of the accusation, Sokrates focused on the ironic echoes of veracity in the accusation. "It is true, I am unlike ordinary men. I am possessed of an inner voice, a daimonion. But I always observe the ceremonies and celebrations of our common gathering; it's just that the divine has seen fit to whisper me a warning every now and then. For as you know, it never moves me to action, never impels me to do something new, but only

whispers a restraint or diverts me to another way than the path I was contemplating.”

We looked to the distinguished Krito, both wealthy and respected, “Yes,” he asserted, “and though we have all been benefactors of your inner voice, they will contend that it is a non-Olympic intermediary. I have overheard people repeating such things and lumping you with the clever and moneyed sophists, claiming that, like them, you are tearing down the old mythic structure of our society.



Most people do not distinguish the service you do from the intellectualism of the tongues-for-hire. They claim you all have desecrated the religious piety of the Gods. By accusing you of impiety, they make the charges against you a capital crime. But let us note: It is not their intention to put you to death, but to silence you by forcing you to leave Athens, like Anaxagoras, Sophokles, and the others had to do.”

Sokrates opened his hands out and then threw up his arms in defiance. “Leave Athens? Ha!” He then pointed one finger and issued a declaration with all the verve of a general on the eve of battle. “I will never cease to serve the divine and the people. I shall never leave my home or give up philosophy or stop exhorting you and pointing out the truth to anyone I meet. I pray that I have the courage to do whatever is required—anything—to promote the virtue that begets the good life and the love of wisdom.”

Again he threw his arms upwards and shook his fists like a prophet proclaiming the truth. “Could I climb to the highest place in Athens, I would lift my voice and proclaim: Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth, and take so

little care of your souls and your children, to whom one day you must relinquish it all?"

The provocateur of Athens paused. In the silence, I felt how he was challenging not just the most craven Athenians, but also me. Dropping his arms and his voice, he turned directly to me, eye to eye. "I tell you plainly, since I may soon be gone: Beware the barrenness of a busy life. Instead, make sure you take care of your feeling being, the spirit that is your psyche; tend to your soul, mould your feeling-psyche to goodness and harmony. This will answer all that needs answering." His fierce, friendly gaze underlined his meanings with penetrating power. Despite my vow to remain independent, I had to take his admonition to heart. I saw how I so often let myself be consumed with the rote mechanics of life rather than noticing its deep substance, despite my intellectual and spiritual search.

He pressed forward. "How do you do this? How do you strengthen your soul? How do you deepen your feeling-psyche beyond the ephemeral to the ground of being?" His inquiry spurred me to review the teachings I had encountered in my travels. In contrast to big ideas, he spoke directly to the core of things, as if acknowledging the most obvious and simple fact of life: "By learning the arts of virtue, temperance, openness, self-knowledge, and inherent being."

How could the man who inspired such wrathful attacks seem so entirely good? Why would he arouse such a fire? All sat in shocked silence, contemplating the mortal threat and his continued equanimity. He was unperturbed and clear about his situation. "I shall do as I have always done: I will hold the natural law of the divine higher than the law of my dear City. You all

know how I have always made every effort to observe and advocate every law we have created for ourselves.”

Xenophon answered his truth. “Yes, you are our City’s most law-abiding citizen.”

Sokrates spoke brightly, animated by joy and yet utterly serious. “So you know I do not take this matter casually. I will continue to teach the love of wisdom, this philosophy, regardless of what any man says.”

Young Xenophon burst forth loudly, as if demanding a response from the whole city, shouting with confident outrage. “How can the greatest amongst us be accused this way?”

Indeed, it seemed to be a criminal misuse of Athenian justice. But Sokrates had somehow summoned this accusation and drama from the Gods. He seemed almost to welcome it. He was even confessing to the crimes. Yet how could these two realities coexist? Was he both the caring sage and defiant gadfly, intentionally taunting and inflaming the brutishness and self-fascination in so many of his fellow Athenians? Was he a virtuous servant of all things good or was he misusing his brilliance to befuddle them, and as such, an arrogant state criminal? Both admiration and doubt riddled through me as I struggled to comprehend the situation and all its layers of significance, complexity, and irony.

Krito put his arm around an assaulted Sokrates. “My friend, you are the most virtuous person of our City. This assault will fail; these charges must not stand.” The elder Krito looked up and addressed the gathering. “Let everyone here investigate what we can and meet at Simon’s at midday tomorrow.”

It was as if I were being flooded with insight, yet my mind continued to grope the many dimensions of this calamity. As a novice, I did what was appropriate and held my silence, hoping that many of my questions would be answered during the next day's gathering. Sokrates joined arm in arm with Krito, turned toward the High City, and dismissed us. We disbanded quietly, thoughtfully, aching with sober intent.

Such was the whirlwind and theatrical spectacle of the first hours I was blessed to spend with this crazy-wise man.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Illuminations**

I awoke the next morning full of energy, riveted by the drama that now engulfed the conversations of intelligent Athenians, and eager to find answers to my questions about the contradictions surrounding Sokrates. However, just after my morning practices and preparations, I was presented with a letter from Ephesus that turned my world upside-down. My beloved uncle, the Archon of Ephesus, was dead, and the letter also carried a request that I return home. It was not a complete shock for someone of his age to pass suddenly, but it had been just three weeks since I had seen him. He must have passed just after I left. I pondered our last embrace as I left for Athens and how vigorously he held me.

This shock in Ephesus at first distracted me from the shock in Athens, as I was consumed with grief over the loss of my uncle and the needs of my family. I was absorbed in consternation over the unsettling commotion in my home court and by images of the lamentations and the ceremonial transfers of power that had most certainly taken place. My first cousin, a good but timid man, would inherit the reins of power, and my presence as a strong, trusted advisor was requested back in Ephesus. With self-important urgency, I wrote a letter of thanks to Sokrates, explaining the suddenness of my departure, and invited him to Ephesus as a royal guest. I sent my message via Simon, through whom I sent my regards to all. I stuffed my bag and left Athens through the Double Gates, feeling torn in two by love of

home and duty on one hand and by my captivating interest in this fount of crazy wisdom on the other.

Just outside the city walls, in the liminal land of potters and prostitutes near the river Eridamos, was an industrial underbelly of Athens. My senses of smell, sound and sight were assaulted on every side. The dirty water coming out of the City fed questionable baths, and vermin buzzed and hummed in shifting shapes of shade and sunlight. Leftover dog and ass-meats were made into sausages and hawked with loud and, at times, phallic crudity. Women of Pornos in every shape and of every age sunbathed their naked breasts in the fresh morning light. Their carnal allure shattered like dropped vases when they turned from their attempts to enchant me to instead trade insults with the sausage-sellers. My fascination by their salacious glances must have invited their barker to swarm over me as he pretended to confide, "You look like you could use a 'middle of the day marriage', my friend," and winked knowingly. My stern expression prompted a quick counter-offer—"Or perhaps pick a boy from the stalls?" He pointed at the row of tiny rooms, each with an older boy sitting and waiting.

"You have misunderstood me." I cut him off and excused myself to drink from the sacred fountain used by travelers. The inherent pleasure of pure water seemed to wash away the distracting power of carnal pleasure and this simplicity illuminated my awareness with a temporary enlightenment.

As I retraced my steps down to the sea, my mind began to churn. I was reluctant at first to admit that I did not want to return to my home city, that even though I loved my family, I feared I would be consumed by its day-to-day affairs of state. I weighed

my search for truth against my loyalty to my family and city. I felt the rightness and honor of service to the polis. In contrast, I thought of my great-great uncle Heraklitos, and how he had despised and abandoned the royal throne and given himself entirely to self-enquiry. His immense legacy had, from my youth, been my inspiration. Thus, my loyalty to Sokrates in his hour of need surged, demanding no compromise, while double thinking agitated my mind.

I trudged further away from Athens with an uneasy quickness, passing the wagons I would have used if I were not in a hurry. The carnal promises, the stench, the rubble and burnt fields altogether reminded me of Sokrates' peril and the death of my uncle, and I felt my world being torn apart. I began to choke with grief and sadness, and it gradually consumed me. My eyes filled with tears as I thought of my dear uncle who I would never see again.

Sorrow opened me to my deeper feeling, and my pace relaxed to a natural stride. Unarmored, I fell into the stark contemplation of my own mortality and the grave moment beyond my last breath, a moment certain to come. How deeply did I trust in the immortal divine condition of all conditions? I could offer no defense to the mass of immaturities that seemed to possess me, despite my attraction to truth.

I could see the world—in between great celebrations, mysteries, prophecies and harvests—was a field of death, and I couldn't bear it. My racing thoughts and gnawing fear betrayed the fact that I had not yet learned enough or matured sufficiently in spiritual depth to outshine the prospect of death, let alone to navigate the afterworlds once the mind and body dissolve. How good an advisor could I be, steeped in

incompleteness? And I was leaving the most complete man I may have ever met, right as fate was asking from him the ultimate wisdom. With every step, I felt farther away, not closer to home.



I came upon the docks at Piraeus at midday and luckily found an eastbound ship loading the last of its cargo in preparation for sailing. I had time to eat and rest before sailing. After taking sustenance, I paused and considered the situation in Athens. If I went back to Ephesus right away, I might not see Sokrates again. He seemed fearless in the face of death. And the reality of mortality was weighing heavily upon me. If I truly valued my spiritual search for wisdom and truth, I had to choose it now. Perhaps Sokrates knew the immortal reality and could teach it to me. I had to know.

My entire family would assist with the reins of cultural power in Ephesus, so it was not truly urgent that I return immediately. I had already missed the funerary observations for my uncle. If I decided to stay in Athens for a short while, another letter would suffice for now. Before any decision could be made, I needed more information about the charges against Sokrates and a knowledgeable confidant to help me think it through. Thus it was that I posted my letter to my family and court, traveled back to my room in the Kerameikos district by sunset, and showed up early at Simon's the following morning.

Coming to the cobbler's workshop, I saw the same leather-clad brute I had seen that first day shouting and pushing his finger into my friend's face. Simon's laborers were clearly concerned while Simon, facing down the threatening bully, calmly held his ground. "I'll choose my friends myself and I'll buy leather from anyone else rather than you."

I entered the workshop forcefully, standing fiercely next to the older, weaker man and the bully backed off, saying as he left, "We'll see where that gets you and your friends." He pushed his leather-stained finger into my face as well, giving me a chill. He left Simon's workshop and disappeared into the milling crowd, leaving a lingering sourness.

Simon's face turned from fierce to friendly as he embraced me with warmth and strength, and my shock and fear melted. Simon queried, "I thought you had sailed! Do tell."

"Soon I will explain my return," I responded, "but first tell me who that beast was. I saw him the first day outside the Royal Stoa with the others, berating Sokrates." I kept my arm around Simon's shoulder, both to give comfort and receive it.

"Anytus the tanner. He's the ass driving the charges against Sokrates. He likes to throw his weight around and he hates the master."

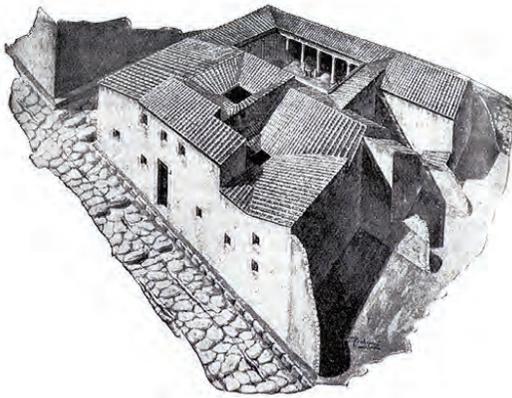
I released my friend's shoulder from my embrace and stood face to face with the finest cobbler I have ever met. I opened my hands like I was holding a fresh loaf of warm bread. "The charges against Sokrates are exactly why I am still here," I explained. "Tell me what you have learned and the seriousness of the charges. If you think they are just sword-rattling, I will return to my family and be back in the summer."

Simon confided, "I can't tell you what to do, for only you know the needs of your family and city. I can tell you that the charges against Sokrates are absurd. This is a web woven from twisted facts, repeated rumors, and false assertions, all given much weight by the manipulative hatred of that bastard. If Sokrates is found guilty, he will be made to drink hemlock. That could be as soon as two weeks from now."

"But that man is obviously a crude brute; how can he effect this?" I protested, in outrage and disbelief.

Simon was patient. "First of all, the master offends everyone, haven't you seen him take apart all of us with his enquiries? That irritation, however serving, gives those — who can't follow his enquiries and hate him — a background of discontent. Now, Anytus is a very successful tanner and vulgar politico, who gained much power as a general in the battle that restored democracy from the Thirty Tyrants. That was barely four years ago. He hates Sokrates for many reasons, but three drive his anger." Simon paused, looked up at the sun and around his shop. "Come, it is almost time for the midday break, let us quickly go to Aristedemus' house and I will fill you in on what you missed. Several others, including Sokrates, will be there soon."

Aristedemus' estate was substantial; it even had a second-floor gathering room with three windows. The front was unlike the other plain walls of stacked stone in this neighborhood, for his was smoothed with stucco. A double-leaved door of thick wood turned freely on vertical pivots. We clanged the knocker, a large ring in a lion's mouth, against the wooden door-board. A house servant immediately came and received us, washed our feet, and took care of our sandals. Walking across the



threshold and down an unadorned hallway, we entered a small open-air court, paved with stone, with all other rooms and the stairway opened to it.

“Come, we haven’t much time before the others arrive,” Simon informed me as we quickly ascended the stairs to the second floor. Entering a large room with six wooden couches, two chests and four three-legged tables, I puzzled at how all the furniture was exceptionally low to the ground. Another slave opened the shutters over the windows, allowing sunlight to brighten the room. Simplicity, elegance, and wealth showed in every detail. The couches we rested upon were all inlaid with tortoise and ivory, but covered with plain, flaxen cushions. Our servant poured each of us fresh water in simple black goblets and offered us dark bread, goat cheese, and preserves of figs upon a plain piece of polished wood. Between each couch stood simple tripod-shaped lamps and the smell of burnt olive oil warmed my face.

“A little history first,” Simon explained. “For a generation, democracy blossomed in Athens and we prospered in a host of ways. Perikles guided us as free men to build the finest city in the Mediterranean, the imperial center of a uniting Hellenic world. But Perikles

pushed democracy on other cities and commanded the central role in an Imperial league. And as Thukydides aptly noted, 'The growth of the power of Athens and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta made war inevitable.' Sparta's strength on land was outmaneuvered by the strength of the Athenian Navy and the Long Walls between the port at Piraeus and inner Athens. Thirty-two years ago, the farmers and country folk had to retreat behind the Long Walls and the population of Athens soared. Amidst the overcrowding, the worst plague since Epimenides struck. Not in two centuries had there been so much death. More bodies than could be counted rotted in stacks and the plague worsened. Tens of thousands died.

"Still, with our navy preeminent and the Long Walls to Piraeus providing unfettered access to the sea, Athens held. Our empire, Delian alliances, and democratic government were strong. Then twelve years back, in the midst of the wars with Sparta, the aristocrats and the democrats were at each other's throats and 400 aristocrats took over the City. They were led by the charismatic and wildly popular Alkibiades, nephew of Perikles. Alkibiades, was, let me just say for now, a passionate devotee of the master."

"Did this lend popularity to Sokrates?" I asked hopefully, but I feared the dark side of the story.

Simon understood my hopefulness. "For a time Sokrates was seen in a favorable light, but Alkibiades was not a good ruler. He was unable to live according to the virtue he had been taught, did not control himself and wasted himself regularly in drink and sexual excesses, despite Sokrates' care and help. The master

repeatedly pulled his beloved student from the beds of beautiful women, but Alkibiades persisted in emptying himself regularly. Despite his charm and popularity, his arrogance depleted



all confidence in the government. And besides, people do not like being ruled by the rich. So the Athenians were defeated in a naval battle when admiral Alkibiades had to go to shore. The democrats rebelled, and they took back government from the aristocrats in a fury.

“For six years, democracy ruled, but the war with Sparta only intensified. They burned our heritage orchards, vineyards, and fields further than the eye could see. We stayed supplied via Piraeus, for the walls and our navy did their job. But four years ago, Sparta routed our ships and blocked the port. We starved, and Athens fell. The Spartans ransacked the city and our treasured edifices were all defaced. Most humiliating, the Spartans stood over us and forced us to tear down the Long Walls with our own hands.”

“I had admired those Walls when I visited Athens as a boy. They were the envy of the Mediterranean.” I heard my voice trail off and echo among the ruins.

Simon nodded, glad I had seen them, and continued his story. “The Spartans installed thirty Athenian aristocrats they trusted to rule our City for them, and those traitors were led by Kritias, a very intelligent but arrogant man who had studied with Sokrates to learn his art of interrogation. When he could

out-argue everyone, he left the master's company. Kritias and his thugs were ruthless beyond anything anyone had ever experienced before. They killed their enemies and dominated with ruthlessness, more than earning the name by which they are known, 'The Thirty Tyrants'. There was bloodletting and power mongering like no one had ever seen."

"Was Sokrates complicit in any way with Kritias?" I asked.

"No," was Simon's quick reply. "But Kritias had come to Sokrates, not for wisdom, but to glean the art of interrogation, so he was seen as a student of Sokrates. There is something else you must understand: everyone who was against the Tyrants fled or were driven out or were killed for their estates. Sokrates did not change a thing. He continued to critique everyone. He lived like he always did and stayed in the City. Therefore, he was seen as 'guilty' of supporting Kritias by that alone."

I understood how he would seem guilty by association, but I could also readily accept how Sokrates just went about his business, somewhat innocently. I was puzzled. "Did Sokrates ever accept the will of Kritias?"

"No," my friend asserted with intent, "and let me point out that when Sokrates was asked by the Thirty to arrest a wealthy democrat so that they could kill him and confiscate his holdings, Sokrates just went home. Neither confrontation nor acceptance. He himself should have been arrested for refusing like he did. He would have been executed. But a battle for the overthrow of the Thirty came just in time and Kritias and many of his cronies were killed in the combat. But since he had been a one-time student of Sokrates and since Sokrates didn't leave the City like many others

did, some say he must be guilty.”

“This is absurd. Is every instructor of every criminal also tried?” I protested.

Simon held his hands up and calmed me down. “I know, I know. In fact, that’s just what Sokrates said yesterday when we met. But that’s part of the story the accusers will use to give credence to their accusations.

“Reason Two. About two decades ago, Anytus was infatuated, and I mean entranced to foolishness, with the beautiful, up-and-coming, charismatic Alkibiades. Once, Anytus invited Alkibiades to his house for a banquet. Alkibiades came hours late, strolled in and picked out the finest foods in the most expensive golden and ornate silver dishes and walked out. Anytus was so infatuated he only lamented that Alkibiades hadn’t taken it all.”

“On his ascension to power, Alkibiades paraded through Athens with flowers thrown at his feet as if he were a god. He accepted a gold laurel in front of cheering thousands. He stood at the very acme of public adulation and power. He rejected Anytus’ advances. While he surrendered himself to a thousand attractive women, he bowed to one man only. At Sokrates’ bare feet, he sang ecstatic songs of the highest praise. Anytus was consumed by envy, and hated the Master for this alone.”

Jealousy. It was a strong emotion. I was beginning to understand, but this was many years ago. “If Alkibiades loved Sokrates, does not that bode well for the trial? You must forgive me, but I have been traveling for some time. I have a feeling that things obviously changed. Am I right?”

Simon answered my proposition. “You are most

correct, my friend. At first, Alkibiades was phenomenally popular. With his straight, light brown hair, deep blue eyes, and high cheekbones, he was the most handsome, intelligent, witty and charismatic nobleman you can imagine. The people were entranced by him, but they never trusted him entirely for they had all known the outrageous arrogance of his childhood. At eighteen, like all citizens, he was allowed into the Agora and city life. Let me just say that he thought very, very highly of himself, a narcissistic golden boy. Thank the gods for the way Sokrates humbled and instructed and disciplined him!"

Simon glanced out the window and announced, "Well, we are in luck. Here comes Aristedemus, finally back from Delphi, and Aristekles. There's a pair: the oldest, shortest devotee with one of the youngest, formidable students. Aristekles was the champion wrestler of all Athens just a few years back, in his late teens. Look at those broad shoulders ... no wonder his wrestling coach—and Sokrates, as a way of teasing him—call him "Plato".

"I must say that his mind is even more impressive. Just seven years back, when Aristekles was twenty, he was writing tragedies, aspiring to be presented at the Theater of Dionysus below the Parthenon, but then he had an in-depth encounter with Sokrates and promptly burned everything he had written before then. Instead of walking around like a know-it-all, he began to sit quietly and take notes when the master spoke.

"Heart-strong and diminutive Aristedemus is good for the heady youngster. I don't think that there is anyone who has been a more devoted friend and ally to Sokrates than Aristedemus. He is a humble and constant attendant of the master. He witnessed the

whole phenomenon that was Alkibiades' rise, tyranny, and fall."

As Aristedemus crossed the threshold, his tiny stature disarmed me; he looked like he must have stopped growing tall around the onset of puberty. But his dwarf-like dimensions were forgotten when he filled the room with his deep voice. "Great is Sokrates!" he proclaimed, and he was met with a chorus of agreement. Though tiny, his chiseled, handsome features, crowned by a small storm of iridescent, silver hair, radiated an aura of nobility. He wore only a simple cloak and his feet were bare like his master's. Once he and young Aristekles had fully come into the room, he added, "Base and foul are those bastards out to get him."

"Indeed," answered Simon for us all, and after receiving Aristekles and Aristedemus, Simon introduced me. He told them about our conversation and my desire to stay. Simon put his arm around Aristedemus like an adoring brother. He boasted, "Aristedemus tented next to Sokrates and Alkibiades thirty-three years ago, at the battle of Potidaea, then two years later at the battle of Delium." Simon looked eye-to-eye at his elder brother-in-spirit and requested, "Please tell the story of those battles to us again now."

Aristedemus was not put upon by the request; in fact, he was honored. With Aristekles, he found a couch and we all received nourishments from the attendant. "Yes, I will tell you about the battle of Delium," declared the deep voice of the small man. We fell silent. "And about Sokrates," and as he spoke the master's name, the softest enjoyment came from his lips.



*"At that time, I was thirty-four. Sokrates was thirty-*

*seven. Alkibiades was just twenty-one. He and Sokrates shared a tent and mess duties. Never have you ever seen such a contrast: the most beautiful example in all of Athens of the beauty of Apollo with the ugliest, coarsest-looking satyr in all the land. I tented beside them, as their servant, since I was not a warrior. Rarely had anyone ever seen such admiration as Alkibiades had for Sokrates, and it was obvious that Sokrates dearly loved his smart, handsome young devotee. Even then, in his loving simplicity, Sokrates saw through everyone's mask. It has always been easy for him to illuminate the costumes in which we unknowingly pose. This was especially true in the case of the golden boy, Alkibiades. Alkibiades would often say that Sokrates was the only man who could see into him clearly and raise him up by chastening him to the core, detailing his deficiencies. The master, in his steadfast simplicity, would often lead Alkibiades to notice how his arrogance and luxurious indulgences misled and diminished him, and how much grander than pride is modesty. Only from the master would the brash Alkibiades hear these truths. And so they loved each other.*

*“Sokrates and Alkibiades first battled side-by-side in the campaign at Potidea. They fought, two men as one, with paramount and ferocious bravery. Together, they gave us a column of strength and valor as we advanced. But then a vagrant sword bloodied Alkibiades' leg and his knees buckled. The Potidean's eyes widened as he grabbed Alkibiades' cloak and drew back his sword for the kill. But suddenly, a shield smacked him hard from the right, knocking him aside and disabling the attack. Sokrates had disposed of his combatant, swung around and, in the last*



*instant, saved Alkibiades.*

*“Moments like this occur in every battle. In this case, it was Sokrates who suddenly had the advantage and could have easily slain the surprised soldier. But he didn’t. He enforced a stillness, as if to say, ‘I can kill you. But I won’t, so let me take my wounded friend.’ And the Potidaean complied and bowed; a quiet dome descended upon us in the midst of the battlefield, and Sokrates safely helped Alkibiades to safety. Even still, Sokrates deferred the honor for bravery to Alkibiades, but those who were there knew who the real hero had been.*

*“As fate would have it, two years later Alkibiades had a chance to return the favor in the retreat of Delium. We all know this was a terrible defeat. But it is also true that our smaller army beat back the Boetians before our left flank gave way and we had to retreat.*

*“Who was it who fought like a lion even while the tide of battle was turning against us? Who was the last to stand down and retreat? Sokrates. Imagine being the last man standing after all your fellows have fled! Death seems certain. But instead of retreating, Sokrates planted his legs boldly, braced himself with his sword, and fiercely bugged out his eyes, daring each and all with his singularity.*

*“At his penetrating look and audacious temerity, the men of Delium came to an abrupt halt! The resultant pause brought amazement to both armies, giving us a head start in our retreat. His penetrating and challenging eyes held the Delium army still for a moment that seemed to last forever. Then suddenly, he turned and sprinted, and with the spell broken, the Delian army ran for him. Thank goodness for the wealth of Alkibiades! He had a magnificent horse; he stormed through, scooped up the master and carried him to safety.*

*“As the chaotic retreat began in earnest, Sokrates — saying*

*later that he was warned by his divine voice—urged all of us within earshot to take an alternate route, sparing us from capture. All who followed Sokrates escaped, but many of those who did not were taken hostage.*

*“We lost only when the line began to crumble and panic set in. If every man had fought like Sokrates, disaster would not have come to us. He was a soldier of uncompromising valor and uncommon awareness.”*



I had not pictured Sokrates so heroic in battle. I knew no soldier-sages, but at least here was further evidence that he was a man of civic service and personal integrity. Of course his past “students”, Alkibiades among them, had brought about terror and disasters. This fact certainly caused people to see Sokrates in a bad light. But Anytus’ fascination with Alkibiades was way past. So I spoke up. “But these incidents have long since passed.”

“Certainly,” Simon agreed, “but still important to any balanced understanding of Sokrates as an exemplary citizen of Athens. That legacy is as real as the misdeeds of the tyrants who had listened to him. In fact, resentment of Alkibiades and Kritias cannot weigh too heavily. To make peace, Athens even issued an amnesty applying to both those periods when democracy was lost, so the prosecution will have to show the master is a continuing threat.

“The present, real reason for this trial is found in Anytuson, the son of Anytus. Just last year, he began to follow Sokrates around the Agora for as many hours a day as he could manage. In time, Agathon invited Anytuson to one of our symposia. Now unbeknownst

to us, Anytus had sent a spy to follow his son to our gathering and informed Anytus where we were. Anytus made his way to Agathon's house and inched himself to a place where he could eavesdrop on us. At this particular gathering, Sokrates was waxing at length on the art of governance, the "steering" of life and state." [The etymological root of "govern" is the Greek *kyber*, meaning a boat's helm.]

Aristekles broke the usual silence expected of the young as he reached into his satchel and pulled out a scroll, "I have notes from that evening, if you would like to hear them." Aristedemus, the eldest of the group, assented, and the once-aspiring playwright Aristekles dramatically read from his scroll the words of Sokrates —acting out the theatre of that night.



Aristekles (dramatically reading his notes of Sokrates speaking):

*'If you were to sail from here to Rhodes in the winter, how would you determine who should hold the helm? Randomly, by lot? By who had the noblest birth? By voting? By the strongest in body? By the smoothest talker? Or would you prefer your captain to be one who knew the safeties and nuances of the helm, sail, and stars?*

*'Real rulers or true kings are not those who hold the Zeus-given scepter of leadership, nor those who owe their power to force or deception, nor those on whom the lot falls, and not even by those who are chosen by the multitude, but by those who know how to rule. And only those who love wisdom exercise the virtues that give this true knowledge.*

*'Therefore, I teach you this love of wisdom, this philosophy. A man who knows virtue and loves wisdom is the*

best politician; one who knows virtue and loves wisdom best sails the ship of state.

*'Until the kings and princes and leaders of this world have the spirit of philosophy and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, the human race will never have rest from evils. Until then, it is the duty of everyone to participate in building community and virtue. The price good people pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men.*

*'Even Perikles, who set the people free to glorify their own city, started the unfortunate war with Sparta, which as you know was a disaster. In this manner, he left our city in worse condition than when he inherited it. I am one of few, if not to say the only one, in Athens who attempts the true art of statesmanship.'*

*At this point, Sokrates turned to the son of Anytus, who could easily become a political leader someday, and challenged him eye to eye. 'Let him that would move the world first move himself.' The master's cadence and slow delivery let every truth ring deeply, like he was speaking to endless masses of people. 'Knowledge is food for the soul. Employ your time in improving yourself by other people's writings, so that you shall gain easily what others have labored hard for. Most of all, learn how restraint [sophryne] and wisdom [sophia] intercourse. You are a bright young man; you should consider not continuing in the servile occupation that your father is providing.'*

*Suddenly, we heard the crash of the door being thrown open as Anytus could stand his stealth no more and barged in with all of his characteristic swagger, overly proud of his money, stature, and animal power.*

*Incensed, Anytus accused Sokrates: 'You want to turn my son against me, despise our business, be converted to your aristocratic snobbery, and become a pro-Spartan—the kinds of which created the Thirty. I will not let you 'Sokrify' my*

son, you windbag, you old man with nothing. By my sweat and skill I am a wealthy tradesman, but you don't know where your next meal is coming from.' Turning to his son, he asked, 'Is that how you want to end up?'

Not interested in the answer, Anytus whirled back to Sokrates and barked, 'If you had any relevance you would have gone into politics and really helped the people.'

Sokrates smiled lightly and slowly addressed him, 'My "inner voice" tells me to avoid some ventures—and every time I have not listened to this guiding spirit, it has ended in some kind of disaster. And it continually tells me not to enter politics.' But seeing that Anytus had taken leave of himself in anger, Sokrates punctuated his offense: 'Besides, I am really too honest a man to be a politician—and live.'

Anytus retorted, 'Who gives a crap about voices? You are trying to steal my son to your ways of trick-thinking, and amount to nothing.' Anytus shoved his face into the master's and raised his fisted finger, 'I heard you. You said I was dishonest, and that wisdom was a better service than politics, and that even the great statesmen of Athenian history have nothing to offer in terms of an understanding of virtue.'

Sokrates stood firm; his logical and caring voice not raised an iota. 'Your son is smarter than you, and headstrong; I'm sure you know this.' Then his voice rose ever so slightly. 'But let me warn you: If your son is without a worthy advisor, he will fall into disgrace and will surely go far in the career of vice.'

Anytus, insulted and enraged, had to stop himself from striking the master; instead he issued a strong accusation and warning, shouting, 'Sokrates, you are just a sophist, another mind-trickster twisting words and meaning. I think that you are too ready to speak ill of the statesmen of Athens; and, in most cities it is easier to do people harm than good, and

*particularly this one. If you should take my advice, I would recommend you to be careful.'*



Aristekles paused as he looked at everyone, fully realizing the current impact of his story, then whispered, "And the way he pointed at Sokrates and warned him 'to be careful' is evident now. This trial is his revenge."

Simon elaborated. "Indeed, but because of Anytus' foul reputation for bribery, he is using Meletus as his front and Lykon as his entertainer. Anytus is driving this charge."

I recognized immediately that the charges arose from an easily understandable quest for personal revenge, but I knew that legal verdicts often belch forth from murkier depths. Now I understood clearly. Sokrates was not a criminal at all. He was fearless and spoke freely. While free and fearless speech was cultivated in cloistered environs, in every city it was dangerous. My doubts were dispelled; now I knew I could trust Sokrates. But I saw more clearly than ever why the charges were so serious. I made up my mind to stay until the trial. So I asked, "And who are Meletus and Lykon?"

"Both vulgar literalists," Aristekles asserted.

"Meaning?"

"For over two hundred years, from Orpheus, Thales and Anaximander to Xenophanes and Anaxagoras and now to Sokrates, we have understood the deeper dimensions of reality by illuminating the hidden meanings of the myths and the stories of the gods. The common and vulgar believe the myths

literally, but dating two hundred years back to Orpheus, superior men have pointed to the heavenly understanding that dwells in their metaphorical and deeper significance. Well, Meletus is a young poet with a weak beard, long straight hair and an angular beak of a nose. He makes every appearance to be well-intentioned, but he is a righteous literalist about the gods, and an enthusiastic one, one who wishes always to work up the passions of crowds. And Lykon is an orator, also popular with religious fanatics, and he carries a City Standard."

I had seen many a common priest and orator who seemed to know a lot about exhorting those around them, but who knew very little about reality or virtue. Even in the best of times, these people could be dangerous.

Aristedemus, seated by the window, called out, "Here comes Sokrates, with Aristekles' brother, Glaukon, and Hermogenes."

Aristekles jumped up to catch a glimpse. "What's my brother doing with the master?"

Simon answered, "He persuaded Sokrates to accompany him to the Stoa where he could pay any fines that might release the Master. But the somber look on Glaukon's face suggests the situation does not look promising."

Fifty heartbeats later, Sokrates, Glaukon, and Hermogenes were welcomed into the gathering. Everyone surrounded Sokrates expressing love and their dearest sympathies. Their teacher and best friend was under attack. Aristekles and Aristedemus rose

from their couch, giving their place to Sokrates. Then Aristekles and his much-older brother Glaukon settled together on yet another divan. Glaukon appeared to be about my age, and with his fine linens, his owl-like eyes and broad shoulders; he clearly resembled Aristekles.

Settling on the main couch with Hermogenes, Sokrates announced, "They set a court date two weeks from tomorrow. If I am found guilty, I have only a few more days with you."

I quickly calculated that the date fell in the darkest phase of the moon—not a good sign. My spirit sank. I said nothing and examined Sokrates, curious to see how he was facing the approach of death.

The Sage of Athens was unchanged. I watched him with acuity, looking for signs of fear or postural clues of weight or defeat. I saw neither. He breathed evenly and deeply. His face shone in natural joy and he spoke with rested clarity and practical simplicity. "But while I was there, I ran into Euthyphro, an exemplary literalist, so I inquired of him as to the meaning of the piety I was accused of violating. We spoke at length on the nature of holiness and the gods."

Simon tried to bring the discussion to the legal matters at hand. "Did any helpful points arise for your case? Let's discuss how we may use them and what we think the prosecution will argue."

Sokrates announced, "You'll have to forgive me, gentlemen. I have decided my defense will simply be the spontaneous truth. For the last two days, and especially while speaking to Euthyphro, my damonion warned me continuously not to put up the usual theatrics with the jury."

Puzzled alarm and disbelief formed upon every face. Hermogenes spoke for us all. "What do you mean? How can you not answer the charges?"

Sokrates reiterated, "I will do only that: answer the charges with the simple truth. No pleading, no prepared speech, no bringing my wife and children in for sympathy, none of the usual theater."

Simon queried incredulously, "Did Euthyphro say something to make you think this way?"

"No," Sokrates responded in his usual openness. "While he spoke at length on the nature of holiness and the gods, he could not say whether an act was holy because the gods loved it, or if the gods loved it because it was holy. He could tell me nothing about piety in truth, only in example. But all the while we spoke, my innermost voice was objecting to any effort to prepare a defense."

Hermogenes objected incredulously. "Sokrates, ought you not to be giving some thought to what defense you are going to make?"

Sokrates replied, "Why, do I not seem to you to have spent my whole life in preparing to defend myself?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, all my life I have been guiltless of wrongdoing; and I consider that to be the finest preparation for a defense."

Hermogenes pleaded, "This is crazy, the court is a theater to please the jury and crowds. Do you not observe that the Athenian courts have often been carried away by an eloquent speech and have

condemned innocent men to death? And often on the other hand the guilty have been acquitted either because their plea aroused compassion or because their speech was witty?"

"Indeed!" Sokrates informed us, "and let me tell you, while I have tried twice to compose a defense, my divine guidance decidedly interposes."

Hermogenes was ever-supportive but concerned. "That is a surprising statement, master. But others can speak for you instead, if you will not do so yourself. I will beg Lysias to draft a response to the preposterous charges these despicable people have lodged against you."

Sokrates countered, "Don't you think it surprising that even God holds it better for me to die now?"

We were silenced at his inquiry. I appreciated how Sokrates freely spoke of "God" and "the gods," it reminded me of India and Egypt. The One Divine Godhead peering out through ten thousand divine faces.

The sage of Athens went on. "Do you not know that I would refuse to concede that any man has lived a better life than I have up to now? For I have realized that my whole life has been spent in righteousness toward the divine and man — a fact that affords the greatest satisfaction. Indeed this verdict of soul-depth I find reflected in the view of my friends and intimates." As heartening and confident as his words were, we all still feared for his defense.

"But now," he continued, "if my years are prolonged, I know that the frailties of old age will

inevitably visit me — I shall find myself slower to learn new lessons, and after to forget the lessons I have learned. This awareness of failing powers, this sting of self-decay, is beginning to fill my view. What prospects do I have of further joyous living?”

“Perhaps,” he added, “God in his kindness is seeing after me and securing for me the opportunity of ending my life not only in a grand philosophical lesson but also in a way that is easy. It was perhaps with very good reason,” Sokrates proposed, “that my divine voice opposes my studying up for my defense speech, or even that I should pursue some plea or approach that would effect my acquittal. For if I am acquitted, it is clear that instead of passing out of life soon, I merely have provided for dying later — in the throes of illness or vexed by old age, the sink into which all distresses flow.”

I thought of how I would die. I felt sure it would happen to me, not be chosen by me. I was stopped in my tracks at his unflinching welcoming of death.

“As Heaven is my witness, Hermogenes,” Sokrates emphasized, “I shall never court that fate; but if I am going to offend the jury by declaring all the blessings that I feel gods and men have bestowed on me, as well as my personal opinion of my own soul, I shall prefer death to begging for a longer life.”

The shocking impact of these words put to rest any lingering doubts I had about his character; Sokrates was a man of virtue. The charges were petty personal vengeance. I was glad I was staying, but now I only feared what this fearless man would say at his trial.

Noble Aristedemus spoke assuredly. "I went to Delphi to ask the oracle about my favorite niece's first-born daughter. In the sacred adytum I heard a reverberating, 'Blessings' through the smokes and vapors. But after I had gratefully bowed and was turning to leave, the Sybil of the sacred Tripod spoke unbidden — 'His prayer is heard.' All were surprised by the god's spontaneous utterance. At first I was confused, but then I realized it was for you, Sokrates. I witnessed Apollo's blessing upon you, master, that your prayer is heard."

Sokrates rested his chin upon his hand, deep in thought, and mused aloud, "As we have all wrestled to discern the true meanings of the oracular ravings from Delphi, who can say?" Rising upright, he held his forearms out and hands up, "But, indeed, I accept the blessings of my chosen god, Apollo. Thank you, Aristedemus."

"Apollo's blessing bodes well for the trial, I say," proclaimed Hermogenes assuredly.

Sokrates countered our naiveté, as he often did, "Can what is given always in overflowing abundance increase one day more than others? And what is my prayer? This I can say: That the call for the love of wisdom be heard. Who knows whether death or life best answers this supplication?"

"But this charge is being brought by an unenlightened few; we can defeat this," Glaukon retorted, not understanding Sokrates' inquiries.

The master paused for a long, full breath, while staring at the moving shadows reflected from the street

on the wall of Aristedemus' sitting room. "Let me offer a parable to illuminate how much our nature is enlightened or unenlightened." Suddenly, we all realized that Sokrates was holding class, and despite the circumstances, our hearts were glad, and we warmed to his instruction.

He described a strange scene, drawing us to imagine a deeper dimension of the world of mind and life. "Imagine human beings living in an underground den or cave, which has a mouth open toward the light. Reaching all along the den, people have been there from their childhood, and they have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see what is before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads toward the light. People in the cave can do nothing but stare straight ahead, at the back wall. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a low wall built along the way, upon which marionette players cast shadows of objects onto the wall in front of the prisoners. For them, those shadows are the only reality."



Glaukon interrupted. "You have shown us a strange image, and they are strange prisoners."

"Like ourselves," the sage of Athens replied, and then continued without pause. "And now imagine again, what would naturally follow if the prisoners are released from their chains? At first, when any of them is liberated and turns his neck round, he or she would walk toward the fire, and suffer sharp pains as they look toward the light; the glare will distress anyone who dares, and he and she will be unable to see their former state as shadows. Will they not be perplexed? Will they not presume that the shadows which they formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?"

Sokrates paused as we contemplated his thought experiment. Everyone began nodding at his question, so he posed, "Don't you think it is better to be the poor servant of a impoverished master, and to endure anything, rather than think and live in such a dark manner?"

"True," Aristedemus responded, for he had heard the depth of the master's tale. "It is better to live in reality than in a dream."

Sokrates had only begun. "And if he or she were compelled to look straight at the firelight, will they not have a pain in their eyes which will make him or her turn away? But if they understand the shift in perspective and soberly take in the objects which they can now clearly see, isn't it obvious they will conceive a reality truer than the shadows before?"

Again, we all nodded as we followed our teacher's propositions. He pushed his metaphor further. "Now

what would happen if one of these prisoners freed from bondage saw the fire and the people with the objects, then went further, and escaped from the cave into the sunlight. How would he feel? What would he think?"

Our teacher paused to give us time to ponder. No one broke the silence. Sokrates was challenging my presumptions and demanding leaps in the breadth of our thinking. I understood the fire of reason being more real than the shadows of mere mythology. But I could not comprehend the above-ground, absolute light of the divine domain.

The air around him seemed to shine and his very skin seemed to glisten as he continued, in his understated, matter-of-fact fashion. "Suppose, now, that this escaped prisoner, having grown accustomed to the real world above, returned to the cave, and tried to tell the other prisoners what he has experienced. What would happen?"

Glaukon responded, "The returned prisoner would have great trouble adjusting to the darkness."

The sage of Athens clarified his point, "Do you suppose that the other prisoners would have trouble adjusting to his insistence that there was a higher reality outside?"

"Your image is starting to strike home, Sokrates," Glaukon confessed.

Sokrates did not let up. "And the prisoners who had never left the cave would refuse to listen. Right?"

"Right," Glaukon agreed with a heavy breath.

The master leaned forward and queried him with sharp intent. "And if they were able to get their hands

on the man who attempted to take their chains off and guide them up, wouldn't they put him to death?"

Glaukon admitted reluctantly: "They certainly would."

My mind and heart were swimming in whirlpools of reality and unreality, illusion and light, life and death. My insides churned in the way that a winter storm boils a dark sea and still somehow, in a small but deeper way, I was yielding all the while into the mystery of a new day.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **The Road to Love**

Despite the proceedings against him and the way his friends huddled in worried circles, debating his defense, Sokrates seemed unconcerned, as if he gave not a thought to his fate. He lived as he always did. He engaged those who sought him out as well as those who happened to be in his path. Every day he went to the Gymnasium, the Agora, the Theater, or the Acropolis. Wherever the largest assemblage of people was to be found in the City, that was where you could find him. And his challenging questions, proclamations and inquiries — those joyous stings he imparted to those with ears to hear — never ceased. As always, he was holding up a ruthless mirror, undermining the delusions of this one and then that one, young and old, rich and poor, farmers and politicians, challenging, questioning, interrogating, embarrassing, and illuminating anyone who dared to engage him.

We'd begin our days with Sokrates at the Gymnasium, where we would try and keep up with our elder friend in his exercises. He'd be matched in his workouts only by the young: the sturdy and methodical Xenophon, and of course by Aristekles — known at the gymnasium only by his nickname, Plato. The Gymnasium had a wrestling court within it and we'd all watch in delight as the young and muscular Plato still reigned champion most days. Our day's instruction in the contemplation and simple enjoyment of life began in the flesh, with us coming together as strong

naked bodies, stretching, oiling, flexing, tumbling, competing, and bathing.

Glowing with our athletic vigor, we would follow Sokrates from the Gymnasium as he visited Simon and then to the marketplace. All the while, his passionate consideration of philosophy and truth continued unabated. In the afternoon, he'd review the main events of the day, whatever they were — civic congregations, the racetrack, the conversations in the Agora, and he'd impregnate all with ears to hear not just with mere speeches, but with penetrating self-awareness. As always, he left a trail of laughter and joy, hurt pride and insight, resentment and enlightenment.

He made it to his home by sunset and we to ours, but after attending to his family, the later parts of each evening were usually spent again with his friends. Nearly every night we'd toast a hundred times in celebration of his truths, reveling in his words and humor. But his legal situation was never far from everyone's mind — and this inescapable threat seemed to make his every word dearer and compellingly resonant.

The evening gatherings were charged with the most delightful symposia [sym-pota = drinking together], which included feasting and the drinking of spirits. At first, I was taken back — for my idea of



spirituality was more along the lines of ascetic practices of purity. Sokrates sensed my uneasiness and whispered to me, "Among those who are able to resist pleasure are not just the best but also the worst of mankind."

At these events, a particular theme would be chosen for consideration. Each in turn reflected on the evening's chosen subject — afterwards Sokrates would question and interrogate us about the implications of what we had just said. By such labors, he continually awakened awareness of logical contradictions we hadn't before noticed, moving us toward a fresh and penetrating understanding. He compared what he was doing to his mother's art — that of midwifery.

Although these nightly feasts certainly included wine, what distinguished these symposia were not the rituals of Dionysus; rather, it was the transmission of spirit. Like in the sacred mysteries, a vibrant force coursed through our gathering, and was felt in and as our very souls.

Of course, there were more than a few occasions in which we simply could not understand the Master's questions, and in those cases — with the help of stronger potations — our stubborn dullness would be relaxed until we could follow his inquiries through to their conclusion. He drank with us, drink for drink, and yet he never seemed to be very affected by the wine — he said it was like water to him, and he would drink us all under the table! Even while we required a period of recovery and would sleep through the morning of the next day, he would be up and out on his regular

business at dawn, with both his sobriety and his humor fully intact.

Of all of the symposia I attended the weeks until the trial, one stands out in particular. Words cannot do it justice; it was indescribably delightful — the most spiritually moving event I had ever been graced to experience. It started as a simple celebration. Agathon had won first place in the theater competition for the tragedy he had written and was throwing a banquet. Sokrates

showed up fresh from the bath, hair brushed, skin oiled, and even his bare feet were



sandaled! The sight of the sandals was most unusual. Aristodemus queried him, “Now where are you going, now that you’ve been transformed into such a dandy?” The master reciprocated Aristodemus’ loving smile, as if that answered his question.

Sokrates took his place on the couch, and dined with the others: roasted lamb cut into thin strips, soft and hard breads, spiced chickpeas, a variety of olives, spreads, cheeses, dried figs, and dried pears re-softened with honey-water. Libations were poured, toasts offered and a hymn was sung to Zeus Soter (the divinity of grace), along with the usual ceremonies. The radiant company of the master, accompanied by the music of the lyre and the pleasing lightness of the flute girl,

imbued this gathering with a particularly noble and rarefied Olympian atmosphere.

After the room was cleared and herbs were burned — as we were about to commence our drinking — Pausanias, Agathon's partner, stood to present us with a consideration: "My friends, confess it, we rived the Great Dionysia last night! The weaker of us are already coming apart! Kissing Agathon, I found my soul at my lips, hoping to cross over! A kiss for the fair, but a thousand kisses for the good! I cannot drink so much again tonight! My question to you is this: how can we still drink this evening and celebrate Agathon's victory with the least injury to ourselves? Let us consider how the spirit of Dionysius can be summoned and invoked least painfully."

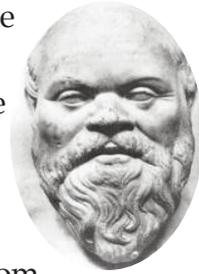
"I entirely agree," hiccupped Aristophanes with exaggerated emphasis, as if he were already intoxicated, "that we should by all means avoid hard drinking and stay with the more diluted mixture tonight. For I myself was also one of those who were yesterday drowned in drink."

"Then," said Eryximachus confidently, "as you are all agreed that drinking is to be voluntary, and that there is to be no compulsion, I move, in the next place, that the flute-girl, who has been quite bewitching, be told to go away and play in the women's quarters." Everyone heartily voiced their assent.

Sokrates raised his glass and teasingly confronted our idealism, "Let us toast to it!" And we did, with contemplative chuckles.

After dinner, the sage of Athens looked at each

person face to face. He then gazed into the distance, absorbed in contemplation. We knew not to disturb him when he became so transfixed, but instead chose to join him in his potent silence.



After a brief eternity of peaceful presence, the master “returned” to the room, looked around at us, lifted his goblet, and invited all to toast to the divine presence of Apollo. We did, heartily. And amidst the murmurings of praise, our host, Agathon, begged to sit on the couch next to Sokrates. “May I touch you?” Agathon implored, “And have the benefit of the wisdom which comes into your mind, and is now in your possession?”

“How I wish,” Sokrates lamented, “that wisdom could be infused by touch, out of the fuller into the emptier man, as water runs through wool out of a fuller cup into an emptier one! If that were so, how greatly should I value the privilege of reclining at your side! You would fill me full with a stream of wisdom, plenteous and fair. Whereas my own nature is a very mean and questionable sort, no better than a dream, yours is bright and full of promise, and manifested forth in all the splendor of youth.”

“You are mocking me, Sokrates,” cried Agathon, “for who bears the true palm of wisdom? May we let Dionysus be the judge?” Agathon raised a glass, in defiance of our earlier agreement — “to our master, who is resonant with the truth” — and we all toasted him again and again. Agathon turned close to Sokrates’ face, lowered his voice, and confessed, “I just wanted to

touch you, to feel the vibrant pulse of your brilliance.”

I understood what Sokrates was saying, yet I also sympathized with Agathon for wanting to be close to the master. I ventured to break the silence of a novice and offered, “In the words of the great Orphic master Eleutherios: ‘The process of the relationship between me and my devotees is not mediumistic but synchronistic. There must be natural love, or coincidence and duplication, rather than an exclusively passive and separated attitude that seeks only to receive, to be affected to the point of happiness, and to reside at the opposite end of a line of transmission.’”

Sokrates smiled slightly, raised an eyebrow, pierced with me with his gaze, and motioned with his finger as if to say, “Exactly!”

Hearing this, Agathon’s misconceptions suddenly fell away, and he perceived the essential distinction between true, natural love and his own mode of dependent passivity. So he announced, “Then let the evening’s topic be on Love.”

Sokrates grinned with a soft and sweet magnanimity as he put one arm around Agathon and opened his other to us all. “Yes, let us be joined together by Love.” Everyone smiled broadly and murmured assent as we applauded softly for an extended time.

Young Phaedo resembled a fawning female in his utter adoration of the master. He leaned toward him, quoting the great teachers of the past who taught that Love is the original divinity, without genesis, most honored and most beneficial — as when a lover is inspired to earn the admiration of his beloved. Phaedo concluded by saying in obvious overtures to the

inspiration he was receiving from Sokrates, "A handful of inspired men, fighting side by side, could defeat practically the whole world." The love of the two men was mutual; while the young man spoke, Sokrates gently caressed Phaedo's hair.

Then a whole series of others rose in succession to speak. Pausanias, the legal expert of the group, made the point that love must be seen distinct from the passion of wantonness, but spent most of his time discussing the seemingly endless legal technicalities regarding permissible and forbidden pederasty. Aristophanes was the next in the circle to rise and speak, but he suddenly developed another case of the hiccups and had us laughing even before he spoke! He passed on his turn with comic hand signals that kept us chuckling in delight.

Returning to the seriousness of our subject, Eryximachus the physician spoke poetically, waxing on about the love of home, and how love is the essence that governs medicine, music, and the stars. He said that he thought love was even medicinal. "Love as a whole has total power and is the source of all happiness," he said. "It enables us to be friends with each other and with the divine domain."

By the time the physician had exhausted his muse, Aristophanes' hiccups were gone, and he took the stage to weave an absurd and hilarious comedy of gods and mortals, who were trying to recover their primal nature through love.

Once we recovered from our laughter, Agathon stood and spoke softly. He observed that the previous

speakers had congratulated mankind on the blessings of love, but failed to give due praise to Eros himself. Agathon, in full theatrical postures, proceeded to address Eros. He said Love is sensitive, delicate, and likes to tiptoe through the flowers, for Love never develops where there is “no bud to bloom.”

### **The Lineage of Sokrates**

Others spoke, man after man. Only after everyone had expounded upon what he had in mind about love, did Sokrates, still seated, speak his heart. On this night he began by reminiscing. “As a preamble to what I want to say about the divinity of Love, allow me to recapitulate the way I came to reside in my soul, in the core of my being. Looking back on my life, I have been most fortunate. My father was admonished by an oracle that I should not be compelled or dissuaded from any interest, but to be set free to question and explore. Since I was a little boy and knew what words meant, I was most interested in the essence of the good, the right, and the true. And I was blessed to be free to follow such inquiry.

“Also, like everyone, I was impressed by the miracle of learning the arts; for after I learned the skills of any art and memorized its forms, I married this preparation with an inner brightness — and a divine sense of consummation took me over. Of course, I am speaking of the Marriage of Bright Zeus and Mnemosyne [*Memory*] and the resultant birth of the Muses. I stood amazed at how their divinity takes you

over, and how the muses play for you as you merely tend to their forms — the music and the artist becoming one, the dancers blending into the dance, poetry melting into bright truth ... what else is inspiration than this? And by this consummation, I learned to court the Muses. Thus I follow the same divinity of harmony and insight that the Muses themselves follow — Phoebus [Bright] Apollo! And so he became my chosen deity.” Upon hearing those words, we shouted praise and drank a loud and hearty toast to Bright Apollo, son of Bright Zeus.

Kebes asked Sokrates to tell us exactly what he had learned from his chosen god.

In the mood of a caring teacher, the master generously shared with us. “As you know, Apollo holds two stringed instruments: the Silver Bow of far reaching insight, and the Golden Lyre, whose patterns of harmonia can help anyone — from the simple farmer to the Orphic mystic.

“Each of Apollo’s instruments is played upon by the restraint of a string. That attentive restraint is the setting apart, and then it is released in the coming together of Logos. We all know how Heraklitos described the blessings of this attentive restraint as ‘The back-stretched harmony of the bow and the lyre.’” At this point, Sokrates gave me a nod, like he always did when he quoted my great-great-uncle. “With the bow and arrow, Apollo penetrates to the far-reaching target. By following this divinity, I grew in the temperance that makes for evocative harmony and penetrating Logos. I learned the necessity of restraint as the precondition of

wisdom. This temperance is the ground and substance of virtue, yes?"

"Of course, much was given to me by my birth. My mother's name was Phaenarete, 'to show virtue', and my father was Sophroniskos, 'a little restraint', so I naturally observed these. I am their offspring."

In a mood of perfect seriousness, he exaggerated the obvious. "Of course, I was always ugly and grotesque, even as a boy, and was teased to pain as a youngster. But this pain was a small price for the freedom to attend to my soul and to learn to open my feeling into the everlasting depth beneath the ephemeral. Thus I was moved early by the divine to the divine."

That Sokrates spoke of his homely appearance as a gift was a perfect expression of his disarming clarity. Everyone is given discomforts, challenges, and apparent disadvantages. But he treated every appearance, event, or condition as an opportunity to learn—as a test or a lesson—as well as a blessing.

Sokrates continued to confide in us, inspiring us with his words and demonstration. "I saw the demonstration of divine revelation with the Orphic realizers, such as the passionately ecstatic Empedokles, who was a master in both the mystic and the scientific realms.

"But, being very practical as a young man, I was primarily drawn to the calm logic of Anaxagoras and the genius with which he understood perspective. I was thrilled to learn how he figured the sizes and distances of the sun and moon and recognized the marks on the moon as shadows caused by mountains. He argued that

right and wrong were not the absolutes of deities, but conventions—just human ideas. He penetrated the sleepwalking that passes for thinking among so many Athenian citizens, until his assertion that the sun was not a god but a fiery rock got him threatened with something like the same summons as I have received. He chose exile, as you know.” Sokrates’ voice rose pointedly, “And the people slept on.”

“I was fortunate in my youth that Anaxagoras’ devotee, Archelaus, attended to my learning. Like his master, Archelaus argued that at the very origin of all things is not water, as Thales purported, not air, as Anaximenes suggested, not even “the unlimited” as the great Anaximander claimed, but living intelligence, “Nous”. He instructed me to see this living intelligence everywhere, to see that conscious radiance in everything, to see the Mind or living intelligence of all things. And like Pythagoras taught, he pointed out how this numinosity can even be seen reflected in patterns of numbers and logic.

“Being young, I was ambitious to learn science, to know that discipline of philosophy that investigates nature. I craved knowledge of the causes of things, and why a thing is created or destroyed. Engaging in these inquiries appeared to me to be a lofty profession. And I was always agitating myself with the consideration of endless questions. For example, I would ask, Is the growth of animals the result of some decay of hot and cold principles? Is the blood the element with which we think, or is it air, or fire? Or perhaps nothing of the kind — was the brain perhaps the originating power of the perceptions of hearing and sight and smell? And could

memory and point of view arise from the senses themselves? Is science then based on memory and point of view?

“And then I went on to examine the corruption of the senses, memory, and opinion, and then to the things of heaven and earth. But it was endless. Finally, in all honesty I determined myself to be utterly and absolutely incapable of such enquiries.”

Now Sokrates sat most upright, held his finger forward, and stated emphatically: “For I realized that I had become fascinated by them to such a degree that my eyes had grown blind to things I had previously known quite well. I forgot what I had previously seen as self-evident truths — such as the fact that the growth of man is the result of eating and drinking; that when food is digested, flesh is added to flesh and bone to bone. Was not that a reasonable notion?”

“Yes,” said a grateful Kebes (to whom Sokrates had been looking again and again), “I think so.”

“Well, yes, as far as it goes, but let me tell you a story. I heard someone reading aloud from a book of Anaxagoras that the luminous noetic was the disposer and cause of all. I was delighted at this notion, which appeared quite admirable. I said to myself: If the noetic mind is the disposer, conscious intelligence will dispose all for the best, and put each particular in the place best for being. Therefore a man had only to consider the best for himself and others and this Nous could be realized.” He looked at us in the perfect mood of a good friend, then chuckled and mused aloud, “He would also know the worst, since the same discernment comprehends both.”

A new round of foods and wine were brought in, and as their fragrance flavored the air, we slowly partook of these pleasures in perfect silence. As we feasted, Sokrates resumed his speech. "I rejoiced to think that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher I desired, who taught the real causes of existence. I imagined that he would tell me first whether the earth is flat or round. I imagined that he then would teach me the nature of what was the very best in every person, situation, and thing I encountered.

"I thought that I would then go on and ask him about the sun and moon and stars, and that he would explain to me their comparative swiftness, and their returnings and various states, active and passive, and how all of them were for the best. Would he concur with the great Anaximander who said the earth is not resting on anything but floating in space by its equidistance from all?

"For I could not imagine that when he spoke of *Nous* as the disposer of them, he would give any other account of their being. My hopes infused his precious scrolls as I took them home. I would not have sold them even for a large sum of money. Accordingly, I read his collection of scrolls as fast as I could."

Sokrates paused, letting us linger in the logical expectation that he had found the truth via Anaxagoras's scientific philosophy. Then he humorously threw up his hands and opened them towards the heavens and confessed emphatically, "What expectations I had formed, and how grievously was I disappointed!"

Fixing his gaze on one of us, and then another, he explained, "As I proceeded, I saw my teacher altogether forsaking *Nous* or Intelligence, or any other principle of order, but resorting instead to air, and ether, and water, and other less fundamental causes. I might compare him to a person who began by maintaining generally that my mind is the cause of my actions, but who then endeavored to explain the causes of my actions only in the most mechanical detail.

"For example, Anaxagoras taught that I sit here because my body is made up of bones and muscles; and the bones are hard and have joints which divide them, and the muscles are elastic and cover the bones, which have also a covering or environment of flesh and skin which contains them. He explained that the bones are lifted at their joints by the contraction or relaxation of the muscles, and that I am able to bend my limbs, which is why I am sitting here in a curved posture—that is what he would say. He would have a similar explanation for my talking to you — which he would attribute to sound and air and hearing. He would go on and on in a myriad of other similar causes. Always he would be forgetting to mention the true cause, which is that the Athenians have thought fit to condemn me, and accordingly I have thought it much better and more virtuous to remain here and to undergo this trial."

I was as fascinated by his story of his philosophical exploration as a boy sitting under the stars regaled by heroic war stories told around a fire. Sokrates always spoke about ordinary people and things and situations, even while communicating his truly extraordinary brilliance. His ideas were sometimes profound and

philosophically difficult to comprehend, but I was always helped and impressed by the way that he invariably grounded his metaphors to sensible examples and ordinary human implications.

The sage of Athens summarized: "Indeed, I am inclined to think that these muscles and bones of mine would escape my summons and would have long ago gone off to Megara or Boeotia! 'By the dog' they would, if they had been moved only by their own idea of what was best, and if I had not chosen the better and nobler part, instead of playing truant and running away. Not being a dog, I will endure any punishment which the state might inflict." Even under the threat of death, he served us with the admonition to virtuous nobility.

He lowered his eyes and made a remarkable confession. "I have failed to discover the very best mode of enquiry. So I will exhibit to you, if you like, what I think is a second-best mode of inquiring into the cause."

"I should very much like to hear," Kebes replied.

Sokrates proceeded with a slow gravity to emphasize his point. "I thought that I had failed in the contemplation of true existence ... and I ought to be careful that I did not lose the eye of my soul."

His pauses served to underscore his essential message as he proceeded, point by point, with his explanation. "As people may injure their bodily eye by observing and directly gazing on the sun during an eclipse, so in my own case, I was afraid that my soul might be blinded altogether if I kept looking at things only with my physical eyes or tried to apprehend things and events only through my mere senses. This

gave me the thought that I had better have recourse to the world of intelligence and seek for the truth of existence there."

In a strange aside, Sokrates turned to Aristekles and spoke sharply, as he often did with him. "Listen up, Plato. I dare say that the simile is not perfect — for I am very far from admitting that he who contemplates existences through the medium of thought sees through a dark glass any more than one who considers existence merely in action and operation. I am just trying to help you get over your bright conceit."

Sokrates turned back to us with a smile. "This was the method which I adopted: I first assumed some principle which I judged to be the strongest, and then I simply affirmed as true whatever seemed to agree with this — and that which disagreed I regarded as untrue."

The master saw Kebes' questioning eyes, and reached out to help him. "But I should explain my meaning more clearly, as I do not think that you understand me."

"No indeed," admitted Kebes, "not very well."

"There is nothing new," the master announced, "in what I am about to tell you; but only what I have often told you on other occasions. Let me repeat it again. At first, I was enthralled; I thought that logic, math, and science had found the truth. And while there is great worth in such an approach (as in knowing enough math to survey a field you purchase), knowing about the mountains of the moon with their shadows is not as important as soul-depth and the contemplation of real existence — and so I left the study of the natural sciences and listened to those who spoke about this

deeper matter. I studied with students of the great Heraklitos, Pythagoras, and Xenophanes. I was most impressed with my brief encounter with Parmenides, and later with his devotees Zeno and Demokritus.

“Parmenides shone in Zeno and Demokritus; for in them his presence was replete. He taught that there was Being only. Persistence as This eventually outshines the illusion of many — and all things with their motions dissolve in the singular radiance of One Being.”

Sokrates uttered these words with rare conviction. We received and rested in their meaning as much as each could for one full breath before he continued more softly. “I remember how they would repeat the call of their master, who said, ‘Come, I will tell you: heed well the words that you hear as to the ways of inquiry. Yield toward the feeling of being. How being, without genesis, is also without destruction, complete, alone without tremor and not still requiring completion. This is the path of justified confidence, for it follows the open truth.’

“Parmenides demonstrated what he taught with awe-filled radiance, and I was glad to have been reminded that the feeling being is primary. Since words do not hold the depth of his teaching, everyone tried to ‘save the motions’ and give justifications for obvious movement. But such talk, while interesting to many, was not for me, nor was it the point of being’s singularity.”

Phaedo pointed out, “You have taught us that thinking and talking about wisdom is not the love of wisdom.”

Sokrates turned to Phaedo, raised a drink, and exclaimed, "Praise to Pythagoras! It was he who first called himself 'philosopher' — not a wise man but a lover of wisdom."

### **Diotima's Beauty**

That wonderful evening, which had begun with a serious if paradoxical toast to moderation, was about to begin on a new octave. Sokrates set aside his goblet and opened his hands out like he was at a sacred event. "Fortunately, instead of the brief encounter with Parmenides, I reveled at length in my beloved Diotima, 'the honor of Zeus', the teacher whose vibrancy of truth was fully baptismal. Since I was anointed in her company, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love. Praise unending to her — Diotima of Mantinea!"

Sokrates again lifted his goblet and we all joined him in toasting his initiator. I had waited since the first day I was with Sokrates to hear him speak again about the woman who initiated him. He spoke of her in a blaze of glory and unbounded admiration.

"So now in my story, I have arrived with our evening's theme. Let me rehearse a tale of love I heard from my beloved Diotima, a woman wise in many kinds of knowledge. She was my instructress in the arts of love, and I shall repeat to you exactly what she said to me, and how she questioned me, for I have repeated her words in my mind, time and time again."



First I said to her, in nearly the same words that Agathon said earlier, that Love was a mighty god, and likewise fair.

She asserted, "Love is neither fair nor good."

I came back quickly, asking, "What do you mean, Diotima; is love then evil and foul?"

"Hush," she cried; "must that be foul which is not fair?"

"Certainly," I said.

She inquired, "And is that which is not wise, ignorant? Do you not see that there is a mean between wisdom and ignorance?"

"And what might that be?" I said.

"Right understanding" she replied; "which, as you know, is not knowledge. So clearly there is something which is a mean between ignorance and wisdom."

"Quite true," I replied.

"Do not then insist," Diotima said, "that what is not fair is of necessity foul, or what is not good is evil; or infer that because Love is not fair and good that he is therefore foul and evil. He is in a mean between them."

"Well," I said, "Love is surely admitted by all to be a great divinity."

"By those who know or by those who do not know?"

"By all."

"And how, Sokrates," she said with the dearest smile, "can Love be acknowledged to be a great divinity by those who say that he is not a god at all?"



*"And who are they?" I said.*

*"You and I are two of them," she replied with a deep smile then spoke with a whisper, as though telling a secret. "Through Love, all commune with God, whether awake or asleep. All other wisdom, such as that of arts and handicrafts, is vulgar in comparison. The spiritual arts are how love intercourses and converses with the divine."*



The master turned silent, allowing Diotima's wisdom to sink in. I examined how I understood her words, "Intercourse and converse with the divine through loving." Those words meant everything. Diotima's transmission of her divine state through Sokrates was palpable in the room; all were redolent in Love. How can I explain it? When I looked across the room, rather than seeing many heart-struck people, there was simply a wide intuition of a singular divine sweetness.

Sokrates flared his eyes at us and told us with the greatest heart-emphasis, "You should have seen her, so alive with love!" Like an actor upon the stage of Dionysus, Sokrates continued to re-enact her instruction to him.



*"Still" she pointed out, "the answer suggests a further question: What is given by the possession of beauty?"*

*"To what you have asked," I replied honestly, "I have no answer ready."*

*"Then," she suggested, "let me put the word 'good' in the place of the beautiful, and repeat the question once more: If*

*he loves the good, what is it then that he loves?"*

*"The possession of the good" I said.*

*"Yes, yes, but what does he gain who holds goodness, and what is good?"*

*"Happiness," I replied; "there is less difficulty in answering that question."*

*"Yes," she confessed, "the happy are given happiness by their embrace of the good. Nor is there any need to ask why a man desires happiness; the answer is already final and self-evident."*

*"You are right." I replied for I have always appreciated what is self-evident.*

*But her inquiry was relentless. "And is this wish, and this desire for happiness, common to all? Do all men always desire their own good, or only some men? What say you?"*

*"All men," I replied naively. "The desire is common to all."*

*"Why, then, Sokrates," she rejoined, "are not all men loving and happy, but only some of them some of the time?"*

*"I myself wonder why this is," I confessed.*

*"The simple truth is that wise men love what is good."*

*"Yes," I asserted. "They love being possessed by what is good."*

*"Yes," she affirmed. "Marvel not at the love which all men and women have of their offspring; for that universal love is for the sake of immortality."*

*Astonished at her words, I implored, "Tell me more. Is this really true, my dear Diotima?"*

*She answered authoritatively: "Of that, Sokrates, you may be assured. Immortality is what mortals would love to have. See how people seek the immortal in a myriad of ways?"*

*See how children, fame, and legacies occupy many? All seek a birth in beauty — whether of body, society, or soul. Isn't this obvious?"*

*I was silenced by the contemplations opened by her interrogations and her instructions.*

*"These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you, Sokrates, may enter, and then proceed to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these. And if you pursue these esoteric mysteries in a right spirit, they will lead to a vast sea of beauty. I do not know whether you will be able to attain this. But I will do my utmost to inform you; please follow the best you can."*

*I swore I would.*

*"One who would proceed in this sacred way should begin in youth to engage and delight in beautiful forms. First they are guided by their instructor to love one chosen form. Out of loving one other person, fair thoughts are given birth. Through fair thoughts, they soon perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another. If beauty is their pursuit, how foolish would it be not to recognize the beauty in every form, yes?"*

*"In the next stage one considers the beauty of the mind, and how meaningful appreciation is more honorable than the beauty of any outward form. Thus, one becomes compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of community with its connective institutions and balancing laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is that we are of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle.*

*"After community's laws and institutions, one will go on to the sciences, that one may see their beauty. In every arena and place, one comes to see that which can be called 'the*

beautiful’.

*“Slowly drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, one creates many noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore one grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to you of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere.*

*“I will elaborate; please give me your very best attention. One who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty (and this, Sokrates, is the final cause of all our former toils) — a nature of wondrous beauty which is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning. Secondly, this beauty is not fair in one point of view and foul in another point of view, as if fair to some and foul to others; true beauty is not confined to duality. Nor will you see beauty merely in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, but subsisting of itself and by itself in an eternal oneness, while every lovely thing partakes of it. This true beauty is in every being and every animal in heaven, on earth, or in any other place; and so it is a sacred beauty, set apart from all lesser beauties — beauty absolute! Simple, everlasting, without diminution and without increase or any change, even as it is given to the ever growing and perishing beauty in all things.*

*“Being led to the things of love is to begin to grow from the beauties of earth and be attracted upwards for the sake of that sacred beauty, that absolute beauty. Our distractions by earthly forms are steps only — so that you go from one beauty to two, seeing beauty in two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices and fair notions — until from fair notions one at last arrives at the notion of*

*absolute beauty, and at last knows what beauty is in its very essence.*

*“This, my dear Sokrates,” said the angel of Mantinea, “is the real life which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute — a beauty which, once beheld, can be seen to utterly surpass the entrancements of gold and embellished garments, or fair boys and young women.*

*“What if one had eyes to see true beauty — divine beauty, I mean; pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life. Remember that in communion, beholding beauty with the eye within, one will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities. To see true beauty, one is not beholding an image, but reality.”*



Having concluded Diotima’s sublime instruction, the master sat for a brief eternity in perfect silence. His face and gaze were so transfigured that I saw with plain eyes the divine beauty itself everywhere. Listening to Sokrates giving voice to Diotima, we had long since been transported into a rarefied stillness — a vast silence beyond thought, where the nectarous force of communion transfigures the mind into mysterious luminosity. Breath after breath of beauteous silence and communion filled the space, and the master spoke Diotima’s final admonition: “Bring forth true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man or mortal woman may. Would that be an ignoble life?”

Sokrates went on. “Such, my dear Phaedo — and I speak not only to you, but to all of you — were the

words of Diotima; and I am persuaded of their truth. Being persuaded of them, I try to persuade others. To come to absolute beauty, human nature will not easily find a helper better than Love. And therefore, also, I say that every man and woman ought to honor Love as I myself honor him, and walk in Love's ways, and exhort others to do the same. I praise the power and spirit of Love in accord with my ability.

"Revel in the words which I have spoken to you, Phaedo, for they are a revelation and celebration of Love."

Sokrates smiled lovingly as he raised his open hand to us, indicating that he was done speaking. A long applause broke out, as if our thunderous appreciation would help us to sustain the joy with which he had filled and permeated us.

I often think of that night when I think of the master. The spiritual baptism of love and adoration washed me into the beauty of reality, a divine feast of forever in the ground of supreme being. His eyes, her love, truth's bliss.

Even with the limitations of his appearance, Sokrates was a true sage, a wild and free manifestation, and a transmitter of spirit-force. Because of the overwhelming spiritual baptism I received on that night of Love's symposium, it was obvious that Sokrates was an authentic portal to the heart of reality. This was beyond doubt and beyond mere belief.

Aristodemus had invited me to stay with him, so I was surrounded by good company day and night. His own sweet presence and unceasing praise of the master

nurtured in me an ever-deeper trust in the sage of Athens. With doubt of the master put to rest, I was ripe for doubt of my self and the limited mind with which I had identified.



## **Chapter Four**

### **The Trial of the Master**

A few days after that wild night's symposium on love, only moments after finishing our morning contemplations, ablutions, and refreshments, Aristodemus and I heard a loud banging at the front door. We could hear a flurry of oncoming footsteps.

It was Hermogenes. "Good news!" he shouted enthusiastically as he burst in, "The trial had to be delayed until the day after the new moon!"

"Good news indeed, Hermogenes. That should be an auspicious day for the trial," Aristodemus said, his voice somehow conveying both hope and solemnity. He turned to me and explained, "It is the beginning of the Delia — sacred to Athens and to Phoebus Apollo, the master's chosen divinity."

It seemed good that the trial date had been moved from the dark of the moon to the new one, but I did not know the local celebrations well enough to understand the exhilaration. "What exactly is the Delia?"

"You know the story of Theseus, don't you?" Aristodemus raised his brows, as if he were offering to explain.

Indeed, I knew this mythical, Hellenic "history", but "the Delia" was an Athenian tradition unknown to me. Aristodemus was a masterful storyteller and I loved to listen to him, so I said: "I remember some of the story of Theseus from when I was a boy learning my letters, but how does this relate to the Delia and the trial?"

Aristodemus gestured for us to sit on the benches, which framed a small but dramatic stage on which he could tell his story. “Let me first summarize. It is said that in the distant past, Minos of Crete gained his kingship by divine grace, after offering his prize bull to the God of the Sea. But once Minos took his throne and it came time to sacrifice the magnificent steed he had promised to Poseidon, Minos substituted a different one. Because of this substitute sacrifice, Poseidon sent his own stud bull to seduce the king’s wife — and she gladly embraced him. Minos’ selfishness cursed his kingship with tyranny and his wife gave birth to a monster, the Minotaur. Every year, Crete’s Athenian colony was required to send seven youths to be sacrificed to the monster of a distant tyrant. To free Athens from this terror, Theseus set sail.

“Empowered by his mission of service and using a gift of thread from Minos’ own daughter, Theseus was not victimized by the labyrinth. As you’ve undoubtedly been taught, with help he solved it and not only found the Minotaur but slayed him. Unfortunately, in his excitement and pride of having killed the monster, Theseus forgot the arrangement he’d made with his father to change his black sail to a white one, signaling success. His father, Aegeus, watching for his son from atop a high cliff, saw the original black sail—indicating that his son was dead. The despondent Aegeus threw himself into the sea far below. To this day that sea is called the Aegean.”

I nodded, “Yes I knew that part, but ...”

“I’ll come to answer your question in just a minute,” Aristodemus stopped me. “Brave and

intelligent Theseus is the father of all Hellenes who love liberation from tyranny, and as such, he has since ancient times been beloved. But even Theseus was touched by pride; thus his story also teaches us always to be aware of hubris. At the womb [*delphys*] of the world in Delphi, what is written on the Temple wall? 'Know thyself'. Awareness of hubris is the lesson at the core of every tragedy.

"Ever since, upon the second moon of every spring, Athenians send a sacred ship — said to be the very one Theseus had used — to Delos in the middle of the Aegean Sea, the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis, to commemorate Theseus and to appreciate our liberation. This celebration of liberty (and awareness of hubris) is known as the "Delia". The trial of Sokrates will be heard in Court on the very next day after the sacred vessel of Theseus sets sail to Apollo's birthplace. And until the ship returns, the whole City must observe ceremonial purity."

Hermogenes positively glowed. "The oracular voice of Delphi is being seen! Apollo blesses his servant!" I identified with Hermogenes since we were much alike. We were both single men in our mid-forties, scions of nobility, with a taste and aspiration to the divine, and yet far weaker than we should have been, given our blessings.

Aristodemus concurred, though more carefully. "I pray that your intuitions are correct, Hermogenes. I think so as well."

Like Hermogenes, I was infected with confidence. It was obvious that Sokrates was not a criminal, and I felt sure that he would expose the accusers for what

they were, and their blind hubris would become obvious to everyone. Every day Sokrates engaged anyone who would listen to him; he was a master of dialogue, inquiry, and interrogation. I began to make plans to return to Ephesus once Sokrates was acquitted. I even talked to Aristodemus about a possible return in the early autumn.

At the launching of the sacred ship to Delos, the day before the trial was to start, an associate of Anytus confided that Anytus and his son had argued vehemently. Anytus subsequently offered that if Sokrates left Athens, no one would follow him or persecute him in foreign cities. But Sokrates dismissed the idea entirely, which I took to be a sign of great strength and confidence. I was sure the enquiries of the sage of Athens would slay any argument proposed.

The dawn on the day of the trial would have made Homer sing: crisp winds, feathers of light clouds, and rosy fingers streaked across the changing blues of a brightening sky. Starlings tumbled out across the countryside like fluttering leaves scattering before the breath of Aeolus. Krito and Sokrates arrived and we embraced one another in brotherly love. Phaedo, Aristekles, and Glaukon came immediately thereafter and we set off to the city center sober yet confident, empowered by our caring friendship.

Walking into the Agora, we followed the stream of people headed to Court. Soon, our group was all-but-surrounded by short brown cloaks, the typical attire for farmers. Aristekles addressed my puzzled look. "For the token honorarium of three obols the jurors receive for their service, poor farmers populate the jury."

The Court was as long as the width of the Parthenon, about 20 fathoms, and nearly square, with ample space for the citizen jury of five hundred as well as the hundreds of spectators. Next to the door we entered, a relief of the blindfolded Dike held aloft her balance scale of justice. Inside, a wide inner porch wrapped around a center Court open to the sky. The red clay floor was baked all day by the Athenian sun, Helios, so the Court was known as the Heliiaia. The overall impression it gave was of a colossal courtyard, as if the Grand Temple were the Polis of Athens itself.



As we came into the open square, to the right and just under the eave, we saw three sets of chairs and benches for the prosecution, the officials, and the defense. Behind each section was a small room for rest and preparations. Between the defense and prosecution stood a few rule-wise magistrates with their Archon, the leader of the day, chosen by lot. Guards stood flanking the magistrates and also at the entrances. There were no judges, for in Athens the people's jury would pass the judgment.

On the western half, receiving the morning sun, the 501 jurors, or heliasts, sat on three sets of benches that stretched from one porch across the open court to the other side. The heliasts each cast a certain die to indicate their verdict; thus they were also known as dikasts.

Across the center, the Court was bisected by a small hedge, which separated the jury from the spectators. Hundreds of men, mostly Athenian citizens, filled the eastern side.

We walked to the benches and tables reserved for the defense, where some of our friends were already seated. I sat with Aristekles and Glaukon to my left and Simon to my right. Behind me were Kritobulus, Phaedo, and Agathon, in front of me Krito. Aristodemus and Apollodorus flanked Sokrates. To our left was the jury and to the right were the crowds. And pervading it all, a theater of life and death.

As the sunlight reached the first jurist, the formalities of the trial began as the Archon and lead guard stood on the round, inset stone before the heliasts and instructed them to stand and repeat the Heliastic Oath to Zeus, Apollo and Demeter. They rose and repeated the words after he spoke each phrase: "I will cast my vote / in consonance with the laws and decrees / passed by the Assembly and by the Council / but, if there is no law / in consonance with my sense of what is most just, without favor or enmity. / I will vote only on the matters raised in the charge, / and I will listen impartially to the accusers and defenders alike." The herald then proclaimed to the heliasts that they were formally under oath [*juris*].

The area for the citizens was crowded and crawling with movement, conversation, and excitement. Our friends and allies were clearly among those present, but unsettlingly, I saw large numbers of unseemly characters, many with the stained fingers typical of the crude tanners. Simon followed my eyes and spoke my

fear, “Lackeys of Anytus.” Even the angry Persian sculptor and the silk merchant were there, near the front. My early morning confidence started to crack.

Taking in the whole scene, Sokrates turned to us and joked, “My trial will be akin to a doctor being prosecuted by a pastry-cook before a jury of children!” As we laughed uncomfortably, the face of the sage of Athens shone with a gentle smile. He stood strong upon his bare feet and ambled three steps across the red clay to a marked stone, the spot where he would be formally accused. Every eye examined him, except for the elder Aristodemus and young Phaedo — they only adored him, hardly noticing anything else.

Mad Apollodorus, with his disdain of everyone except Sokrates, turned to us and whispered, “Of the younger, more powerful men in the jury, I only see a few that I know to be friendly to the master. I recognize more men that the master has recently offended or exposed as fools.”

Glaukon agreed and wondered aloud, “Anytus is known for bribing jurors, but he can’t get away with that here, now. Is it his plan to use his influence to seat those who already resent the master?”

As orange morning light flooded the Court, the trial proceeded. The herald walked to the middle, turned to the heliasts and formally proclaimed, “This indictment and affidavit is sworn by Meletus, the son of Meletus of Pitthos, against Sokrates, the son of Sophroniskos of Alopeke. ‘Sokrates is guilty of refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state, and introducing other new divinities. He is also guilty of corrupting the youth. The penalty demanded is death.’”

Grumbling and hissing filled the air. Was the malice directed against Sokrates or directed at the complaint? One thing was for sure—the atmosphere was bitter, and that was enough to deepen my worry.

Apollodorus warned, “Here come their lies.”

“Lies can be slain with the truth,” Krito countered.

Sokrates, hearing our conversation, turned to us and reassuringly stated the obvious. “A life devoted to the divine is the best defense.” That gave me hope. And it was not just his words, it was the presence of his nobility.

### **The Morning Prosecution**

The herald then walked to the northwest corner of the Heliaia and ceremoniously pulled the plug on the grand water clock. Its dripping marked the time for the prosecution’s three hour period of presentation. The three accusers would take turns delivering their opening speeches to the jury.

Meletus began the charade with a sympathetic sense of lament, “O men of Athens! It is a tragedy we are here today. We don’t want to condemn an elderly man, but this one leaves us no choice. Sokrates has maliciously misled our brightest young men, and is actively instilling in our younger generation a morally nihilistic, disrespectful attitude. Worst still, he teaches them to be atheists like himself. But today it is time for him to learn that such behavior is a capital crime.

“Respected jurors under oath!” Meletus gave the crowd no time for further grumbling, but raised his voice in a tone of helpful advice. “When it comes time

for Sokrates to answer these charges, remember how a skilled Sophist can twist the truth and make the stronger argument the weaker. Do not let yourself be deceived by his eloquent trickery!" His friendly words ended with a sharp accusation. That incited some in the jury and crowd to comment and exclaim. Meletus stepped from the center with the hint of a swagger, his stride betraying his Narcissistic frame of mind.

I looked toward Sokrates. His face and body showed no reaction, but he must have felt my stare, for he glanced back at me with a bright, uncompromising glint in his eye.

Aristekles commented to Hermogenes, "Who rails against the intellectualism of the Sophists louder than the master?"

"This is really hard to take." Hermogenes agreed.

Anytus took the center and waited until the hundreds of conversations subsided before he announced loudly to the jurors, "I myself have heard Sokrates speak ill of our democracy, calling it 'a bazaar and an entertainment'." Loud boos and remarks were hurled by the some in the crowd, "Spartanophile!" "Traitor!" as Anytus nodded in acknowledgement. The pro-Sokrates contingent, at first shocked and silenced, then began to shout "Lies!" but by then, those voices were mostly drowned out by the accusations of the rabble.

Anytus turned from the jury to face the crowd. He raised his voice above the tumult and yelled, "And I've heard him say that ALL the greatest leaders of our City, including Perikles, were lacking virtue!" Howls, insults, and boos did not slow Anytus as he built momentum,

snarling loudly over the boiling throng, "Let there be no doubt! Sokrates caused those who conversed with him to despise the established laws, by saying how foolish it was to elect the magistrates of a state by beans!" As he bellowed this, Anytus looked straight at the Archon, the man who held the first chair amongst the magistrates, and who had been chosen by lot, using beans.

Anytus paced before the ranks of the jurors and exhorted them. "Such remarks excited the young to condemn our established form of government, and disposed them to acts of violence. Who will defend our city if our own young men are turned against us by 'schools of thinking'? Doing this is nothing short of treasonous! That's what it is! Treason! Our times are tough and we need our young men fighting for us—not wasting their time in argument and questioning their elders! Decide for yourself—is the 'virtue' Sokrates teaches to be found in his disciple Kritias?"

At the name of the hated tyrant, curses rang out. Anytus gestured to the crowds spitting forth their bitter disapprovals, making his point to the jury. Then he raged on in the loudest of voices, "It is the students of Sokrates who have ruined us! Kritias was the most avaricious and violent of all the Thirty Tyrants, and Alkibiades was the most intemperate, insolent, and unstable leader in our history!"

Again the crowds roared. The city was in ruins and many Athenians blamed these very men. My heart sank. Agathon voiced our common thought. "They do not observe how they are being manipulated!"

"Anytus has obviously been coached by his orator friend, Lykon!" muttered Simon.

Hermogenes comforted Phaedo, who looked forlorn, "The truth will have its turn. Don't worry."

In dramatic fashion, Anytus turned to the jurors, raised his forearm and pointed his finger in the air, "Some will say that you cannot blame the teacher for the evil of the student. Do not forget, my fair-minded jurors, Sokrates' sedition did not just happen long ago. He is known even today for such treasonous speech. Earlier this year, I myself heard him doing further damage.

"I listened to Sokrates tell my son to ignore his father, not to take up my thriving business, not to participate in politics, but instead to follow his ways of trick-thinking! How would you feel if you heard anyone tell your son to disobey you? For foolishness? Our city is founded on the morals and the power of the gods and of our families, and yet Sokrates teaches our young men to ignore our laws and to treat our traditions as foolishness. He reduces the gods to children's stories! This has not happened only to me. It is typical for his students to confront and disobey their fathers!

"Sokrates has long been known to advocate Spartan practices of elitism. He favors something like Spartan oligarchy to our noble democracy. Where do you think the Spartan-installed Kritias got his anti-democratic ideas? It is no secret what Sokrates teaches."

I looked around and saw several jurors clearly resonating with Anytus's anger, glaring darkly at Sokrates. Anytus paused and held up his finger as if he was a teacher and reminded the jurors, "The amnesty

that applies to the past does not apply to the present. If he is not stopped now, he will convince more of our finest youths to ruin us once more.”

Anytus at last pointed directly at Sokrates, stared him in the eye and blurted, “Perhaps you made a mistake to have come before the court, but now that you are here, the dikasts have a duty to award you with the death penalty.”

Shouts of “Guilty!” shook the air from the far side and “Lies!” was bellowed back from the near side. Raucous cries were hurled back and forth until the Archon stamped his Standard and soldiers took one step forward.

As the crowd noise subsided, Apollodorus spat. “Anytus is behind all of this—those noisy bastards must be his paid shills!” Krito and Aristodemus touched the master and held his hands. Sokrates seemed unthreatened; he parodied Anytus’ act and smiled sweetly at his dear friends, giving as much comfort as he received.

Anytus stepped from the speaker’s center, openly smug in his performance and the way it had stirred up the crowd. With soldiers on guard, the Archon again stamped his Standard long and loud, at last restoring order to the Court.

Lykon the Orator stepped onto the speaker’s circle amidst the noisy tumult Anytus had incited. His persona appeared to be more refined and sincere, as if to attract individuals of a less vulgar sort. He checked his notes often as he acted his part well.

“I speak for all concerned citizens, my friends, to detail for you the crimes of Sokrates, son of the midwife

Phaenarete and Sophroniskos of Alopeke. As you know he is charged with introducing false gods and corrupting the youth." Reading from his notes carefully, Lykon's demeanor seemed to suggest he was just doing his duty by disclosing what he knew. "The truth is that Sokrates has brought horrific pain to all of us. He is famous, as we all know, for defeating any argument. But this is real life, not a game of argument. We must do justice today that will protect the future of Athens. So beware when he comes to defend himself. He is a trickster who will probably try to divert you from the facts.

"The great Hesiod wrote these wise words, 'Often an entire community will suffer because of one bad man.' Think about that and follow me as I detail our recent tragedies—all caused by this one man. I know it is painful to recall, but we must do so if we are to purge our city of the malaise we have been suffering."

It was predictable. Blame every ill conceivable on him. It was fascinating to listen to their twisted sculpting, shaping an image of a unacceptable citizen.

"Remember once more how we lost our democracy to Sokrates' favorite disciple, Alkibiades and his oligarchy of twelve. Remember how we suffered? Remember again our loss to Sparta and how they installed another of his students, the haughty Kritias, as the leader of the Thirty Tyrants. Remember the tyranny and the way we suffered then? It was a horror! No one in our history ever brought so many evils to our city as Kritias. Never before in the history of Athens were such mass murders conducted—it even got to the point that no good soul could rest in his bed. Remember?"

As Lykon spoke of Kritias, he gradually morphed from his dutiful citizen persona to a second bellowing demagogue. "Every neighborhood here knows many good men from good families who were murdered by those thugs. Do you?" He pointed to the jurors on the left. "Do you?" He pointed to the right. "Do you?" He pointed to the crowds.

The crowds roared angrily, shouting their lamentations, "My son!" "My father!" "My neighbors!"

With the background of their evidence, he confronted the jurors with feigned restraint. "I lost my own son to the Thirty! My own son!" His performance was well done, informed by his own pain. Thus, he had the sympathy of the jurists. "Do you remember who was at the head of the Thirty?"

Again, the crowd angrily voiced the name, "Kritias!"

With a suddenly even demeanor and a smoldering smile, Lykon gazed across the jurors' faces, glancing from eye to eye, "It is your duty to remember the hundreds of good families driven out of their homes, and the thousands more who left in protest. Can you remember who stayed in the city all the while? Can you remember who taught Kritias that democracy was an inferior form of government? Who was it? Is he still here now among us?"

Now the crowd was barking, shouting, thundering, "Sokrates! Sokrates!"

Lykon turned to us, widened his eyes, and pointed. "Just look at who sits with him at the defense side right now! There are the brothers, Aristekles and Glaukon, both nephews of Kritias! Need I say more?"

He was not finished, however. For the rest of the hour, Lykon detailed the suffering of the people at the hands of “Kritias, the student of Sokrates”. For a second hour, he shared the speaker’s circle with Meletus and Anytus as they recounted every licentious, irreverent, and greedy deed of Alkibiades, and shoved in the faces of the jury, rhythmically tying them all to one name—Sokrates. As he neared the end of the allotted time, Lykon praised the greatness and glory and wonders of Athens and proposed that nearly every achievement was the fruit of democracy. Anytus reminded the jurors again and again of Sokrates’ anti-democratic words, telling the jurors that Sokrates was continuing to teach his students to be tyrants, that he was patently guilty of corrupting the best young men of Athens, and, worse, that he was still a continuing threat to the safety and security of the city.

In conclusion, Meletus spoke piously about his love for the gods; he waxed on at length on how great are their blessings when men and women are rightly aligned to them. But Meletus was an ugly little man. It was transparently all for effect, when, at his climax, he spoke about defending piety, and with fervent indignation, accused Sokrates of being an atheist. “Sokrates is the very personification of hubris!” he thundered. According to Meletus, Sokrates was only another smooth-talking, word-twisting sophist, one who taught that the gods were the creations of humans and that Helios, who was now high in the sky, was not a god, but really a burning rock. The crimes of Sokrates were not just crimes against Athens, but heinous blasphemy against the gods themselves.

Their timing was immaculate. When the jurors had become thoroughly incensed and the crowd seething with hatred of Sokrates, the water clock that had timed the prosecution's proceedings emptied its last drop.

### **The Afternoon Defense**

The herald shouted praises to the gods and asked for their blessings, marking the midday break. The crowd's murmuring grew loud, then receded, as they went on to the urgent business at hand: relieving themselves in chamber pots, and making their arrangements for mid-day food. Some flooded into the Agora or the attached long Stoa, while others simply sat down in circles and shared what food they had.

I was in a daze. Sitting with the defense, I realized I was feeling as though I personally had been assaulted, abused, and beaten. My shock and trauma broke only when I had the conscious thought "I am not on trial here."

And yet there he was, the same as ever. Relaxed, serene, resting easily, smiling, relishing the humor of this absurd spectacle, enjoying the simple pleasures of breath and life and friendship. Barefoot, and with the same ashen rag he always wore for a cloak. His enormous spirit shone brightly like a big, wise child.

I was suddenly disoriented. It was as if I were seeing the master for the first time—so lighthearted and free; he was utterly unlike any human being I had seen in all my travels. I could not help myself as my jaw hung low and I gaped at him. He looked back at me, widened his eyes and exquisitely parodied my slack-

jawed amazement. The tension of the assault lifted as everyone broke into laughter.

Sokrates humorously declared. "Well, if these accusers are the voice of the people, I am indeed a dangerous man! I seem to have driven them so mad they can't help but try to convince themselves that their inner darkness is virtue. Thus deranged, these people who have slandered me become genuinely formidable. They've used envy and lies and made themselves very difficult to deal with. I cannot possibly cross-examine their every slander and refute each of their charges. I'd have to defend myself as if I were boxing with shadows." And he laughed and playfully pretended to swing at a ghost; giving each of us a chance to release our tension in sustained hearty laughter. He was a master humorist; he played the conventions of ordinary conventions with exaggerated perfection. His humor was a primary vehicle whereby he served our self-understanding. It stood out as amazing: how, no matter what the circumstances, he served our sanity.

As temple priests offered water to the sun and set about refilling the water clock for the defense, Hermogenes presented the orator Lysias to Sokrates. Lysias had written a defense for the master and we sat in silence while Sokrates read it over. With a smile, Sokrates declined it. "A fine speech, Lysias; however, it is not natural to my tongue." It was more forensic and judicial than philosophical.

Lysias countered, "It is perhaps my finest speech; I am sure it will bring you an acquittal. How can that fail to suit you?"

“Well,” Sokrates replied, “would not fine clothing and fancy shoes be just as unsuitable to me? I have lived a simple life of love, service, and fidelity to the truth; that is my defense.” There was no dissuading Sokrates from his path. He was not going to play the legal game according to its crude conventions. Still, I had faith, and took solace in that unreasonable hope. He was going to speak the truth as he always did, and the accusers and their sham would be revealed for what they were, and the whole thing would collapse.

The herald called everyone back. Just as the crowd had gathered again, he announced the reconvening of the Court and ceremoniously pulled the plug on the refilled water clock for the defense. Then, as if Kronos Himself were slowing down the passage of time, Sokrates strode slowly to the middle of the Court, planted his bare feet upon the center stone, and put his hands upon his walking rod. But he just stood there silently, looking at each juror. Was it one of his visitations? It did not seem so.

The crowd fell still. The silence stood in deafening contrast to the prosecutions’ incitements. I must have looked confused, for Agathon, the tragedian, leaned over and whispered in my ear the historical facts that everyone else there seemed to know.



*Sokrates is famous for the power of his stillness. Thirty-three years ago, he was a soldier during the summer siege of Potidaea. The men were camped together but there was no prospect of action. There wasn’t much to do except sentry*

*duty, sleeping, and talking about home. The men were bored and the air was full of endless complaint.*

*One morning, a bit after dawn when the daily stream of grousing had begun, the sentry on duty noticed that a soldier had hiked in his bare feet to the crown of a mild rise. He found a spot and planted his staff, just like he has done right in front of us now.*

*He just stood there, quiet, eyes open, simply attentive and receptive — as if he were seeing, hearing, and adoring something no one else could perceive. It is his special power of perception — his ability to feel the feeling of being itself. And as he stood there at Potidaea, the minutes became hours. In contrast to his fellows, he needed nothing to rest in simple happiness. Some men came around Sokrates and fell silent, enjoying the depth of the silence and air of joy around him. More hours passed, and Sokrates stood, his body soft and relaxed, unmoving save his breathing adorations. By lunch, everyone had noticed him standing there in motionless absorption. By dinner, many of the men ate quietly around him, enjoying the sweet stillness that filled the air. At midnight, some went to bed, but many of the men dragged their bedding out into the field and stayed there with him until the dawn. Sokrates stood there as erect as a phallus until the sun shone bright again, and everyone else awoke to find him still standing just as he had been doing ever since the morning before. When the sun came to the same spot it had been the day before, he bent forward and backward; he held his hands to the sun and did his salutations to Helios, chanted his prayers, turned, and went about his day as if nothing at all had happened.*



Although I had been gazing at him all the while, when Agathon stopped speaking, my attention became completely absorbed in Sokrates' stillness. With so many others, I gazed in silent admiration of the master's depth of stillness. I had seen similar absorptions in people sitting in the Pyramids and throughout India, but not with eyes open, standing in a group. Krito whispered back to Agathon, "Let's hope this is not going to be his defense."

After silently showing himself and inquiring of the faces of those who would judge him, Sokrates took a deep breath and spoke calmly to everyone, "How you have felt, O men of Athens, at hearing the speeches of my accusers, I cannot tell." He paused and chuckled alone, "As for myself, I know that their words were so persuasive they almost made me forget who I was!"

Sokrates faced the heliasts with serious intent, gesturing with an upward pointing finger. "Yet they have hardly spoken a word of truth." Opening both his hands and arms, he offered, "But from me you shall hear the whole truth: not, however, delivered in their manner..." then proceeded to imitate Lykon's gestures and rhetoric, "... in a set oration duly ornamented with words and phrases, spoken in a cadence to rile you up!"

The master's parody garnered a few friendly laughs, but the jurors were mostly stone-faced. Sokrates dramatically opened his hands, emphasizing the absence of notes. "No indeed! I shall use the words and arguments that occur to me right now, in the moment, not from any prepared or fancy speech. I am certain that this plain and spontaneous speech is the right



approach. At my time of life I ought not to be appearing before you, O men of Athens, in the character of a juvenile orator — let no one expect this of me.”

Sokrates turned his fierce, penetrating gaze upon Lykon, Anytus, and Meletus to emphasize who he meant by “juvenile.” He seemed to be posing a rigorous defense and all looked upon him as a formidable speaker. As I looked in turn at each of my new fellows, all around me nodded affirmatively and appreciatively, as if to say, “He’ll slay their arguments, just watch.” I had to agree.

“Good citizens of Athens,” he confessed, “I am not a clever orator, although my accusers keep saying otherwise in their fear that I will use ‘eloquence’ to sway opinion to my side. But if by ‘eloquence’ they mean truthfulness, then, yes, I would have to agree, for I do genuinely speak the truth, and I am better at that than they are.”

His directness conveyed his strength of understanding as clearly as his strength of heart. The mood of the jurors seemed to lighten as many souls appreciated his simplicity.

“I am old now, over 70, and I beg you to judge me plainly, based on my words and their meaning, not by

my manner, since I am only a clumsy newcomer to this kind of court proceedings.”

Because of the silence Sokrates had engendered, Anytus could be easily heard muttering between clenched teeth to Meletus, “What bullshit!”

Sokrates gazed down to the ground, letting his eyes close on his gentle face and deep breath, and his peaceful silence answered the insult perfectly. He looked up at the jurors and gestured with open hands, “I will start at the beginning, and ask: What has given rise to this slander of me? What exactly has moved Meletus to proceed against me? Well, to answer that, let’s examine the evidence. What do the slanderers themselves say?”

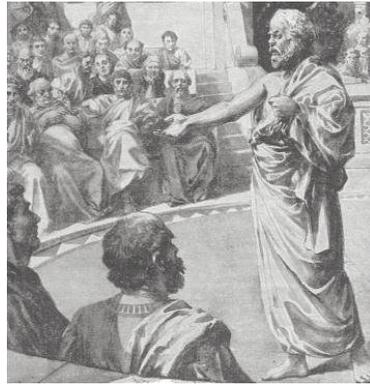
He restated the prosecution’s argument with his subtle irony. “Let me sum up their words: ‘Sokrates is an evil-doer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse argument appear to be the better — and he teaches other to argue as well.’”

With every word, phrase and clarifying point, hearts were gladdened. The tide was turning. His way with words and soulful demonstration was a thing of beauty.

Sokrates spoke like the caring teacher he was. “That is the nature of the accusation, and that is what you have seen yourselves, many years ago, in the comedy of Aristophanes. It was a comedy, for God’s sake! A satire! Twenty-four years ago! But there were always some who didn’t understand the joke. Thus many decent people who weren’t paying attention were influenced.

When many of you were just boys, those false characterizations of me may have seemed to resemble one side of a legitimate debate, didn't they?

"This is how those who refuse to understand themselves began poisoning your mind against me. Attributing to me the shortcomings of others, the rumors said that I committed foolishness, even evil; and through clever arguments that I could make bad alternatives appear good, and vice versa. You were impressionable then, easily swayed by their confusion. You have grown up in a culture where otherwise good people have been repeating this fiction and rumors as if they were true. It is easy to see how my accusers can confuse me with others, yes?"



Sokrates looked across the wide range of jurors, recognizing many. "There are several of you who know that I have been maligned by this accusation, for they have been with me during my conversations with people. I ask you to speak up, you who have heard me. Tell your neighbors the truth so that they will know that I am innocent."

The universally admired Aristodemus spoke out, "Innocent in every way! These accusations are lies!" His words were not only an assertion, but also an invitation to those friendly faces in the audience to voice their sympathies with the sage.

But just as the allies of Sokrates turned to their fellow jurors, before they could say a word, Meletus cried out, "Improper proceedings! Archon! Instruct the heliasts to maintain their silence! They are supposed to be listening, not talking. If Sokrates thinks he can break any rule, he's proving our case!"

Indeed the Archon nodded to the lead guard who pounded his Staff at the jury, silencing the mouths but not the flashing eyes of those who knew the Master.

Despite Meletus' interference, I was pleased. Sokrates was proceeding as I had hoped: calmly revealing the real nature of every lie. In contrast to Lykon's sly performance, always playing to fears, prejudices, and resentments, and thus orchestrating the passions of the bold and thoughtless, he waited for his words to settle into the intelligence of each listener, and resolve into a moment of calm.

"Then there are those who say that I teach for money. That charge has no basis in fact. There are some other men who make the rounds of cities to teach for money, such as Gorgias of Leontium and Hippias of Elis. Young men who could learn for free from their own citizens willingly pay these men. Right now a Parian named Evenus is living in Athens. He gets a payment of five mina a lesson — that's 3,600 obols! I know this from Kallias, who pays Evenus to teach his sons."

It was an extravagant and impressive sum. Jurors must have been thinking what they would do with one to three years of earnings. Sokrates tossed his head to one side as one tells a private joke. "Well, good for Evenus if it is true that he is wise enough to offer

teachings of such value. If I had such knowledge, I would feel proud and self-satisfied. But that's not how it is for me. As I have said many times to those who know me, I really do lack knowledge."

"And money," Krito called out, making it plain that Sokrates did not charge.

Yet again, I did not completely understand Sokrates' assertion of ignorance, and I was sure it sounded like a ploy, even to the ears of the most simplistic jurors. I wondered why he chose to continually assert this point.

Although Sokrates always held himself upright, he then drew himself up and stood taller still. And then he spoke, confessing in apparently sincere astonishment, "One thing that I marvel at in Meletus, gentlemen, is his assertion that I do not believe in the gods worshipped by the state; everyone has seen me sacrificing at the communal festivals and on the public altars."

Opening his hands in disbelief, he mused, "The charge makes no sense. On one hand, Meletus says I am an atheist. On the other, I have introduced 'new divinities'. This is obviously a contradiction."

I was comforted by his method of argumentation. I hoped he would go on to defuse their every assertion. Aristekles spoke for us all when he said; "He shows the foolishness of a false argument better than anyone."

Sokrates moved and gestured freely, yet it seemed to me he always did so with just the right amount of expression, his gestures never ineffectual nor overly exaggerated. "As for introducing 'new divinities', how could I be guilty when I tell you that a voice of God speaks to me? Surely those who take their omens from

the cries of birds and the utterances of men form their judgments on 'voices'. Will any one dispute that thunder — an omen of the greatest moment — utters its 'voice'? Does not the very priestess who sits on the tripod at Delphi divulge the god's will through a 'voice'?"

Up to this point, it seemed that he had everyone agreeing with him, following his line of inquiry. But then he crossed a line, saying, "I too hear a divine voice."

There was a collective gasp in the jurors and crowd. Was he comparing himself to the sacred Oracle? He suggested as much, or so it seemed. Surely he knew what he was doing, but I did not understand the tack he was taking, or perhaps his lack of tact. Aristedemus whispered supportively, "He must know how this sounds; he must have something in mind."

Sokrates continued to set forth his risky claims. "We are all interested in divine foreknowledge and forewarnings; these are terms that all men use. The only difference between them and me is that they call the sources of their forewarning 'birds,' 'utterances,' 'chance meetings,' 'oracles' and 'prophets,' I call mine a 'divine' sign, a theophany."

He spoke patiently, as if he were a schoolteacher speaking to young boys, in the manner of explaining the obvious, but this grand speech and subtle meanings went over the head of most of his listeners. He seemed arrogant, and quickly lost the favor he had gained. In the face of this discontent, as if to make matters worse, he began to add more power to his voice and claimed,

“And when I use the word ‘prophecy’ I think I am speaking with more truth and deeper religious feeling than do those who ascribe the gods’ signs to the flight of birds.”

Shouts of “Heresy!” “Impiety!” “Hubris!” rose from the crowd, and even some jurors. We looked at one another in alarm. What was he doing?

Sokrates waited calmly until the commotion subsided before he continued in the same bold vein. “Now I do not lie in the presence of the Gods and I have the following proof: I have revealed to many of my friends the counsels which God has given me, and in no instance has the event shown that I was mistaken.”

“This is true,” Krito claimed, looking at the jurors, and we all nodded emphatically.

“Blasphemer!” a man standing near Anytus shouted, and the crowds again began to rumble.

Among the friends of Sokrates, a distressed Apollodorus gave voice to our common concern. “Look at the people! To them, Sokrates seems to be arrogant and defiant. What is he doing?”

Indeed, with every truthful insistence, the jury was becoming more uncomfortable with him. Of course, he charged forward, “I dare say, Athenians, that someone among you will reply, ‘Why is this, Sokrates, and what is the origin of these accusations of you? Surely there must have been something strange that you have been doing? Tell us, then, why this is, as we don’t want to hastily judge you.’”

He swung freely from logical calm to bold

assertions, from self-deprecating humor to bold claims, "Although some of you may think I am joking, I declare that I will tell you the entire truth. Men of Athens, listen up! Let me tell you something, so that those of you who feel so inclined may have still greater disbelief in my being honored by Heaven."

Greater disbelief? Personal honoring by the gods? We all were shocked into silence by this apparently unskillful turn in his "defense." Eyes darted back and forth, with no one willing to say anything.

As if with staggering naiveté, he plunged on, continuing in this same outrageous vein. "Once Chaerephon made inquiry at the Delphic oracle concerning me, in the presence of many people, and Apollo himself answered that no man was more free or more just, or more prudent than I."

Shouts again rose up, "Heretic!" "Blasphemer!" interrupting the master. Phaedo and Kriton shouted, "It's true!" "It can be proven!" The soldier standing guard stomped the City Standard harder and harder, demanding we all quiet.

Sokrates continued on, undaunted, "Now there is a legend that when Lykurgus entered the temple, the god addressed him: 'I am pondering whether to call you god or man.' But Apollo never compared me to a god." I began to sigh with relief, but he immediately veered back into that territory, as if daring everyone to be offended. "Apollo did, however, judge that I excelled the rest of mankind."

Gasps of outrage set off hundreds of private conversations, irritation over Sokrates' hubris. A few in

the crowd were old enough to remember that the oracle had indeed pronounced him thus, but that did not matter amidst the outrage.

Others showed jealousy at his claiming greater favor in the eyes of the gods than they. Lykon shouted out, "We told you so! We warned you! He is obviously guilty of misleading blasphemy, don't you see?" The mob roared.

The City Standard hit the floor again and again, but now with little effect on the noisy crowd, until the Archon stood and shouted out at the top of his lungs, "Silence! Silence! Let him speak!"

The master's equanimity had been notably unruffled throughout this uproar. He continued, undeterred from challenging propriety, and reviewed: "There are witnesses here we can call if we need to confirm that the question was asked: 'Is there anyone in the world wiser than Sokrates?', and the Sybil uttered, 'No'."

Sokrates seemed to be logically presenting evidence and arguing his case. But he exceeded every expectation when the man of a hundred faces morphed silently into extreme boldness and raised his finger in explicit instruction. "However, do not believe the god Apollo even in this, but examine his utterance as well."

It sounded like he was suggesting that humans should question the gods! Everyone, detractors and admirers alike, fell silent, stunned and incredulous. His spirited defense had veered into unrepentant defiance and insistence on a higher truth. Horrified at the way he would be conventionally interpreted, I could not

believe my ears.

“What is he doing?” escaped my lips. I looked to my fellows. Each face—even Aristodemus’—showed confusion and upset. Apollodorus was visibly shaking and Phaedo began to cry.

Sokrates seemed to relish the opportunity to admonish everyone and to instruct us all, to reexamine our lives, and prompt us by his joy to gauge how our behavior was devoted to virtue, or not. And he seemed determined to proceed with his usual passion, even if the price was his life.

This kind of challenge can be appropriate in religious sanctuaries or spiritual ashrams, but delivered to the common man? Here? A uncompromising forest sage has no place in the middle of the city, and the sage of Athens was not going to be understood. Plus jurors feel entitled to be treated respectfully, if not with deference. But Sokrates seem to flaunt the blessings of his life, as if daring them to also live a life devoted to the divine, or reject him.

“First, who is there in your knowledge that is less a slave to his bodily appetites than I am? And since I accept neither gifts nor pay from any one, who in the world more free? Whom would you regard as more just than the one reconciled to his few possessions; who wants nothing that belongs to another?”

Sokrates alternated between calm logic and bold assertions, insightful explanations and defiant, initiatory thunderbolts that challenged everyone in earshot. He called on everyone to see him, not as a poor, ugly, eccentric, or clever old man, but as their wise teacher, more devoted to spirit, heart-deep. “From the

time when I began to understand spoken words, I have never left off seeking after and learning every good thing that I could. And would not a person with good reason call me a wise man? Do not many confess that they owe me a debt of gratitude?"

Roars and shouts of "Yes! Absolutely! Master!" and "No! Troublemaker! Be gone with you!" came from every corner, louder and louder until the Archon had to pound his staff to quell yet another shouting match. Apollodorus turned and showed us his pained face, exclaiming in brokenhearted amazement. "Is he saying either take his words to heart and change – or get rid of him?" He concluded, "What a terrible defense!"

Sokrates opened his arms and hands in explanation, "While other men find their most treasured delicacies in the markets and pay a high price for them" — he paused, rose one pointed finger high into the air and with his other hand pointed at his heart, and joyfully declared, "I devise more pleasurable delicacies in the depths of my soul—and I endeavor to give them away for free."

Sokrates paused, letting his words and all side conversations become still. Only then did he command, "And now, if no one can convict me of misstatement in all that I have just said about myself" — for a moment we thought he was steering the argument back to logical calm, but instead spoke the unspeakable — "Do I not merit praise—from both men and gods?"

His pronouncements would have been bold, even outrageous, in an intimate symposium or at a loose gymnasium. But in court? This time, the Archon and

Guard were unwilling to quiet the crowd's angry shouts, so the master simply waited, for several minutes, for the wrath of the crowd to subside.

Sokrates turned directly to the prosecution and inquired, "But in spite of all this, Meletus, do you still maintain that I corrupt the young by such practices?" Meletus, startled by his sudden conspicuous visibility, did not respond.

Sokrates implored, "Please tell us if you know of anyone who under my influence has fallen from piety into impiety, or from sober into wanton conduct, or from moderation into extravagance, or from temperate drinking into drunkardly abandon, or has been overcome of any other base pleasure."

"Don't act so innocent!" retorted Meletus, "We all know a large set of men — those whom you have persuaded to obey you rather than their parents."

"I admit it," Sokrates surprisingly replied, causing all the members of the prosecution to shift, and become poised, as if getting ready to pounce. Gaining everyone's attention, Sokrates explained. "At least so far as their education is concerned; for everyone knows that I am very interested that young Athenian citizens be exposed to higher education. This is my specialty."

With his calling hand extended, he inquired, "In a question of health, men take the advice of physicians rather than that of their parents. Yes? And moreover, in the meetings of the legislative assembly all the people of Athens, without question, follow the advice of those whose words are wisest rather than that of their own relatives. Yes?" Turning directly to Meletus, he

implored, "Do we not also elect for our generals, in preference to fathers and brothers — in preference to our very selves — those whom you regard as having the wisest judgment, greatest courage, and best understanding of military affairs?"

"Yes, of course!" Meletus answered righteously, "That is both expedient and conventional."

"Well, then," Sokrates rejoined, "does it not seem to you an amazing thing that while in other activities honors are bestowed according to merit, I, because I am adjudged by some people to be supreme in what is man's greatest blessing — education — am being prosecuted now by you on a capital charge?"

Meletus wisely did not answer the master's challenge. I wanted to be comforted by Sokrates, but his speech which often seemed noble, intelligent, wise, and delivered with regal bearing, at other times sounded even to me like searing criticism and offensive demands, delivered by a funny-looking old man in rags. My mind was a whirl, and I strained to keep my faith with him, praying and holding onto his every word.

"Young men who observe me," Sokrates helpfully explained, "later imitate what I do. When they expose esteemed men as unwise, these latter men blame me for leading the youth astray. Going further, they say I deliberately stir up trouble by challenging traditional beliefs and promoting strange religious ideas, including my own gods."

"You certainly do!" Meletus yelled out.

"Miletus, Miletus. You are the one who is doing

wrong. You condemn me without having even listened to what I am saying." Sokrates turned from the prosecution to the whole of the jury. "Although he professes to be concerned about the youth of our community, he does not care about them at all." As to prove his point, Sokrates turned again to the prosecution and challenged, "Tell me, Miletus, is it better to live among good citizens or bad ones?"

Miletus answered with suspicious hesitation, "Good ones."

The master-inquirer followed, "Is there anyone who would rather be hurt than helped by people around him?"

Miletus carefully stated the obvious. "No."

Sokrates pursued his line of inquiry. "Do I deliberately corrupt youth?"

Miletus confidently asserted, "Most certainly."

The master argued, "Very good. Now tell me, why would I want to corrupt people when I know that doing so will make them want to harm me?" He paused, looked at the silent Meletus, and then chastised him with another question. "As for religion, do you accuse me of teaching different gods or of being an atheist?"

Miletus was glad to emphasize his accusation. "You are an atheist."

"That is an extraordinary statement, Meletus. Why do you say that? Do you mean that I do not wonder in the divinity of the sun or moon, which is the common creed of all men?"

Miletus turned from the master's stare to the jurors

as he pointed skyward. "I assure you, heliasts, that he does not believe in them; for he says that the sun is stone, and the moon another earth."

Sokrates quickly confronted his accuser and the multitude came to silence to hear. "Meletus, my friend, you are confused. You are accusing Anaxagoras, and he was driven out of the City long ago. You have a bad opinion of the judges, if you fancy them to be so ignorant that they do not realize those doctrines are found in the books of Anaxagoras. And so, Meletus, you really think that I do not believe in any god?"

Meletus was indignant. "I swear by Zeus that you believe absolutely in none at all."

Seeing his anger, Sokrates quickly confronted him in return. "You are a liar, Meletus, obviously not believed even by yourself."

Anytus jumped to Meletus' defense. "Listen bigmouth, it's you that's on trial! Everybody knows you're an atheist." Shouting matches in the crowd again brought forth the demand for order in the Court.

After drinking deeply from his water goblet, Sokrates took an exaggerated breath and stated the obvious. "When the argument is over, slander is the tool of the loser!"

The gadfly of Athens glared at the prosecution before continuing. "For I cannot help thinking, my fellow citizens, that Meletus is reckless, and that he has written this indictment in a spirit of mere wantonness and youthful bravado. Has he not compounded a riddle, thinking to trick me?" Now Sokrates imitated Meletus in full comic mimicry. "Meletus said to himself:

'I shall see whether this wise Sokrates will discover my ingenious contradiction, or whether I shall be able to deceive him and the rest of them.' For he certainly does appear to me to contradict himself in the indictment saying Sokrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, and yet of believing in them. Surely, my friends, this is a laugh!"

Sokrates' theatrics evoked every manner of reaction among us. "Genius," Aristekles responded in appreciation. "Foolish" Apollodorus whispered. "Free," Aristodemus countered. "God help us," Apollodorus concluded.

Sokrates extended his arm with an open hand to the jurors. "I would like you, O men of Athens, to join me in examining my accuser's inconsistency." Sokrates fastened his gaze upon Meletus, and beseeched him, "Meletus, please answer. Can anyone believe in the existence of human things, but not also in the existence of human beings?" Meletus seethed in silence, for he knew he was about to be the butt of Sokrates' cross-examinations.

After it was obvious he would receive no reply, the master spoke again. "I wish, men of Athens, that he would answer." Sokrates turned from the jurors back to confront Meletus. "Did ever any man believe in horsemanship, and not in horses? Or in flute playing, and not in flute-players? No, my friend; I will answer to you and to the court, since you decline to answer for yourself. There is no man who ever did. Don't you agree?"

The master paused to let the stubbornness of

Meletus be seen. Only then did he command, "But now please try to answer the next question: Can a man believe in spiritual and divine help and grace, and not in spirits, gods, or demigods?"

The long pause grew uncomfortable until the Archon commanded Meletus to respond, thus allowing Meletus to submit to him, and not to Sokrates.

Meletus voiced emotionlessly. "He cannot."

Sokrates acted relieved. "I am glad that I have extracted that answer — by the assistance of the court. Nevertheless you swear in the indictment that I teach and believe in divinities but if I believe in divine beings, I must believe in spirits or demigods — is not that true?" After a pointed pause, Sokrates resumed, "Yes, that is true, for I may assume that your silence gives assent to that. Now what are spirits or demigods? Are they not either gods or the sons of gods? Is that true? Is it? Archon please tell him it is his duty to answer."

Before the magistrate could take a breath, Meletus snapped, "Yes, that is true."

The master seemed to be taking charge again and using argument to sway the jurors. We were relieved and regained hope.

Sokrates acted surprised. "At first you swear I am an atheist. But now you say I teach spiritual concepts and believe in strange divine beings. How curious it is that I believe in gods and don't believe in gods at the same time."

He restated his earlier victory not for dramatic effect but to expose the underlying motive revealed by those contradictions, "The fact is, it appears that you and others here are going to condemn me not for any of

your supposed reasons but simply because I have the courage to tell the truth you are unwilling to face. In this respect, I am like Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors in the Trojan War.”

Once again, he had engendered his listeners’ respect and sympathy, only to throw it away as if mattered not. It seemed outrageous hubris for Sokrates to compare himself to the quintessential hero. The crowd recoiled in shocked silence, again incensed and offended. Anytus prepared to shout, but Meletus’s hand darted out to stop him. His eyes glistened like a child getting a prize.

“What is he doing?” Phaedo cried.

“He’s compared himself first to a god, then demigods, and now the greatest of our heroes?” Apollodorus was the first of us able to state out loud the horrifying picture that was slowly dawning upon us all.

“Yes, that’s what he just did,” the bare-footed Aristodemus said with pride.

Sokrates continued, “Achilles knew that if he avenged the death of his friend Patroklos by killing the Trojan warrior Hektor, he was fated to die. But rather than live in disgrace, he killed Hektor and died with honor.” Now he adamantly held his finger high and announced. “In my case, if you offered to free me if I stopped practicing philosophy in my honest and truthful way, I would reject your offer. As long as I live, I shall obey God and continue to tell the truth to anyone I encounter!” He exuded a depth and strength that chastened us all.

“Not for long you won’t!” Anytus retorted to puncture the spell Sokrates had projected and his howl

incited catcalls from the rabble who also sensed the tide turning against him. This went on for an uncomfortably long period, and this time the Archon and Guard stood silent.

At last, it was Sokrates who held up his hands to quiet the crowd, as if he was about clarify himself. But he just kept digging himself a deeper hole. "Of course, it would be foolhardy of you to execute me, for it would be very hard to replace me. You won't easily find someone else like me."

Sokrates paced before the jury, fully expecting, almost commanding them to listen, and they did. "The very divine commissioned me to search for the truth, and I have done so with all my heart." He exhibited his simplicity and vulnerability beautifully. He was a joy to watch, even as he confronted those who were about to judge him. "I have done this to the extent that I have neglected my own needs for the sake of you. To put it bluntly I've been assigned to this city as if to a large horse which is inclined to be lazy and is in need of repeated awakening by some great stinging fly! I am that gadfly! All day, every day I do not cease to settle here, there, everywhere. Would you not agree I am most disciplined in rousing and reproofing every one in Athens?"

Many knew of his cross-examinations directly, and felt chastised; they recognized the authentic force of his conviction that he would not cease practicing philosophy.

Sokrates compared his fidelity to his mission to military obedience. "Strange, indeed, would be my

conduct, O men of Athens, if I disobeyed the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidaea and Delium. Instead, my valor and strength were known to all.”

As Sokrates paused to quench his thirst, I turned to Krito with a question on my face, asking, “Delium?”



Krito whispered.

*The Master’s military bravery, service, and discipline were so exemplary they became famous not just in Athens, but throughout Hellas. He showed again and again that he could exercise awe-inspiring bodily strength and discipline. I remember marching to Delium in winter over frozen ground, and most of the men wore many layers of clothes and wrapped their feet in felt and skins. But not him. No, he was clothed as lightly as here, with that same ragged cloak hanging just above his bare feet. We walked on frozen ground and ice for hours upon hours. He not only kept up, he outmarched the rest of us. He showed superhuman strength and humor; while others shivered in silence, he hummed small tunes, laughed and made jokes about the ice under his toes. Surprisingly, many men failed to appreciate it. You would have thought that an older soldier’s demonstration of vigor and relaxed courage would have inspired the younger men to admiration or at least attentive silence. But the conditions were too harsh for them and some thought he was humiliating them. You could see the daggers in the eyes of many young soldiers.*

*Of course, these powers could also be seen in his personal habits. Then, as now, he was a model of discipline. All of his appetites and passions for food, sex, and drinking were kept*

*under strict restraint. As you've seen, his humble little house is as neat and clean as a temple. For him this is not hardship, but a way to thrive, free of dependence on comfort. And it works; guess who was the only Athenian untouched by the three great plagues of recent times?*



Sokrates continued to explain himself to the jury. "I conceive and imagine that God orders me to fulfill the philosopher's mission. It is my duty to inquire into myself and other men. If I were to desert my post through fear of death, now that would indeed be strange disobedient behavior. In that case, there might be justice in being in this court for denying the existence of the gods."

Instead of persuading and seducing the jurors, the gadfly of Athens once again seemed to be lecturing the court, mocking the jurors and their power. He circumambulated the inner perimeter of the clearing surrounded by the jury and the citizens, appealing to every one, "Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you. While I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of the love of wisdom. I will speak to anyone whom I meet in this manner: You, my friend, a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens, are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and spending so little time and care increasing the wealth of the soul, to which you never pay much heed?"

"And if the person with whom I am arguing, says: 'Yes, I do care'; then I will not leave him, but I will

proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, to ascertain the truth. If I think that he has no virtue in him, but only says that he has, I will reproach him, pointing him to the better life and greater truth. And I shall repeat the same words to every one I meet, young and old, citizen and alien, but especially to my fellow Athenian citizens here, who are my brethren. Know that this biting of your philosopher gadfly comes to you by the command of the divine; I trust that no greater good has ever happened in Athens than my good service to God."

"We don't need your biting 'favors' anymore, old man!" quickly yelled Meletus. Cries rang out, "Blasphemy!" "You're crazy!" "Shut up!" "No more insults!" could be heard above a chorus of boos that again rocked the Court. Sokrates glanced up at us with a smile, and raised his brow slightly, as if to say, "I've got them where I want them now!" We did not understand.

He turned to the crowd, smiling pleasantly while the Archon pounded his staff. Sokrates gazed upon the crowds like an unruffled grandfather watching children find their way to some semblance of stillness. Then he spoke slowly and emphatically. "I do nothing except to go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to make it your business to care for and cultivate the soul, your feeling-being, your virtuous core. I tell you that virtue is not measured by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man. This is my teaching. If this is the doctrine you believe corrupts the youth of Athens, then, yes, I

am a mischievous person.”

Then he paused and straightened and raised his finger and voice to emphasize his words, “O men of Athens, I say to you, you can do as Anytus bids or not. Either acquit me or convict me; but whichever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways—not even if I have to die many times!”

His fierce, calm presence seemed to fill the Temple. He glanced at the water clock, seeing the still steady dripping. Seeing he had a little time left, he did not stop admonishing us all, “Men of Athens, hear me! There is an understanding between us that you should hear me to the end. 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 you not to yell, but hear me out, and hear me well! I would have you know, that if you kill such a one as I, you will injure yourselves far more than you will injure me!”

His audacity was not lost on the farmer jurors. It was plain to everyone, including the crowds and the prosecution. Most of all it was plain to his friends and devotees. Everyone was silenced by amazement at his fearless boldness, some righteously offended, and others of us brought near tears by his fierce willingness to risk his life for the sake of bringing wisdom to all Athens.

Sokrates commanded every eye as he raised his voice. “Nothing that will happen here today will injure me! Not Meletus, nor Anytus. They cannot! — For a bad man does not have the power to injure someone better than himself.”

Sokrates was simply telling a deep truth to the

jurors, but not in a way that they could understand. I was confused as to why he was speaking in irony and paradox. He could be interpreted to be mad, arrogant, or even senile. Most did not grasp his meaning, missing the implication that it was Anytus who was the bad man on trial, not himself. Seeing many knitted brows, he clarified, "I do not deny that Anytus may, perhaps, cause me injury; and he may think -- and others may also imagine -- that he is inflicting a great injury, especially if I am sentenced to die. But I do not agree."

Then the master turned from the jurors to face Anytus eye to eye, and continued: "—For the evil he is doing, the evil of unjustly taking away the life of a good man, will be a far greater injury to his soul -- even if it is already so poor in virtue that he does not realize it."

Sokrates' face and whole body were shining with virtue's strength, at least to my eyes. Still, Anytus held great political influence in this court.

Turning from the wealthy tanner back to the jurors, Sokrates pressed his point again. "Now, Athenians, I am not arguing this case for my own sake, as you may imagine. I am arguing for your sake, so that you may not sin against God by condemning me. Know that I am His gift to you." The master bowed his head and lowered his open hands to his sides as if to make of himself an offering to all who could see his gift of truth.

Perhaps they were cooperating with his request for silence, or perhaps his will had simply outlasted that of the crowd. In any case, this bold assertion was met with quiet amazement. He lifted his gaze back to the faces of the men on the jury and spoke freely, "If you kill me

you will not easily find a successor to me, who — if I may again use such a ludicrous figure of speech — am your necessary gadfly, given to the city of Athens by God. You will not easily find another like me, and you are in sore need my services! Therefore, for your own sake, I would advise you to spare me.”

Again in silence, he carefully gazed directly into the eyes of every juror before he spoke again. “Feeling my stings, I dare say that you may feel out of temper — like a person who is suddenly awakened from sleep. And you may think that you might easily strike me dead as Anytus advises, and then you could sleep peacefully for the remainder of your dreamy lives. Unless God in his mercy sends you another gadfly.”

Anytus broke the silence, barking out his rebuttal, “Blasphemy! The ancient stories of the gods say nothing about gadflies. You’re making this all up in order to weave your spell upon us, you old windbag!” He turned to the crowd, “See? He is proving our charges! Don’t be fooled. The confusion caused by Sokrates has already cost Athens too much!”

Sokrates held up his hand to quiet Anytus and the crowd, and the Archon concurred, banging his staff so the Master could continue his defense. “Serving as your gadfly is a duty with which the divine has charged me, and I have been assured of this again and again by oracles, by visions, and in every way by which the will of the divine is signaled.”

Sweeping his open hand before him as he faced the jury, Sokrates set forth a simple challenge. “This is true, O Athenians. If it is not true, let it be refuted. For if I

have really been corrupting the youth, who will come forward now and take their revenge by giving evidence of it? Speak now! Can anyone in the jury or the crowd describe a specific evil that they or their families suffered at my hands? Please speak. Now is the time!”

Was he perhaps regaining the tide? I was so glad to hear him follow the Court protocol and present an argument again. But he had thus far so completely ignored normal practice and common sense that I feared that he would continue in his outrageous theater.

On the stage of life and death, the gadfly of Athens opened his arms and beckoned with his hands as if to invite Meletus to call forth anyone who could give personal witness of his corruption of the youth. But none came forth. So Sokrates continued, “Nay, Athenians, the very opposite is the truth.” Sokrates was walking now, pausing before each section of the jury seats, speaking for a moment and continuing on, working his way slowly toward the prosecution. “I am the one here who is speaking the truth; it is Meletus who is the liar.” Sokrates concluded by staring directly upon his accuser.

Meletus swallowed uncomfortably, blinked and finally looked away, awkwardly breaking eye contact with the fierce gaze of the sage. Sokrates didn’t budge, but gently turned back to the jurors. “Well, Athenians, this is just about all I have to offer in my defense. But permit me one more word. Perhaps there may be someone who is set against me, and who may vote in anger because he is displeased with me.

“O men of Athens, if by force of persuasion, I could overpower your common senses, your faith and your

oaths, then I would be teaching you to believe that there are no divinities, and I would convict myself of not keeping faith with them." Now Sokrates was speaking loudly, the power of his presence itself a hearty defiance of the charges against him. "But that is clearly not the case; for I do concur that there are divinities, and in a far higher sense than that in which any of my accusers believe in them!" He morphed freely between the logical, the confrontational, and the outrageous. "And to you and to God I commit my fate, to be determined by you as is best for you and Athens and me."

The sage of Athens turned and cast his noble gaze upon everyone in turn, standing in radiant silence, as if giving further evidence, for those who could see, that his actions and motives were God-imbued. After this divine and defiant speech, his bare feet sauntered softly back to us. We all stood to receive our best friend and teacher back, extending our arms tenderly.

The silence was broken by Meletus — getting the last word in. "You see, he's not even humbled today. This is proof that he's a crazy heretic! And dangerous—to himself, to all of us, and to Athens!"

Aristekles could not help himself. He leapt forward into the open Court. "I know that I am the youngest who has ever addressed this Court, but hear me out! The master is good—these people are liars!"

Loud rejoinders rebuked Plato, "No, boy!" "You're too young!" followed by an enormous chorus of boos shouting him down, forcing Aristekles off the speaker's stone. Apollodorus stood and began to object, with Glaukon and Simon right behind him; it was to no avail. The water stopped flowing and the defense was

over. We praised Sokrates and muttered hollow words of hope, but it was clear that he had not played the game to win.

### **The Verdict, Sentence, and Prophecy**

The Archon pounded his standard upon the ground and all the jurors rose to their feet. In a world where judgments were the province of royalty, poets, and priests, here in Athens, citizens assumed the power of the people. Each ordinary jurist held two bronze ballot disks with a stubby mandrel; on one, the end of the shaft had a hollow indenture, indicating culpability, and the second disk had no hole in its shaft, designating innocence. By holding the disk by the ends of its tiny axle, the dikast covered any aperture and thus could completely hide their choice, assuring a secret ballot. Walking quickly in two lines past two large brass urns, the five hundred heliasts cast their disks of guilty or not guilty.

Four magistrates were assigned the task of counting the votes immediately, and the clanging of the brass disks being emptied from the brass urns upon the marble floor shot through the hundreds of conversations like lightning and thunder. As the accountants quickly arranged the disks in patterns of ten, dozens stood by as witnesses. Glaukon and Kriton represented us, and they watched the back and forth score slowly edge to one side. It took only a few minutes for the tally to be finished and confirmed, whereupon the Archon turned and shouted out to the crowd. "The vote is two-hundred eighty to two-

hundred twenty. Sokrates is found to be guilty!"

Cries of "No!" erupted all around me. But our protests were in vain. Anytus and Meletus didn't bother to answer back. There was no appeal.

Hermogenes exclaimed in desperation, "This is absurd! This can't be happening!"

Krito spoke in the voice of the powerful citizen he was: "They just want him gone, forced to another city, just like they convicted Anaxagoras and Sophokles and both had to leave."

The Guard called for order, and when quiet had finally been enforced, the Archon announced with finality. "Now each side must suggest an appropriate penalty."

Immediately, Meletus jumped to his feet and proclaimed loudly, "The charge is capital crime. The prosecution asks for death!"

Phaedo cried out, like it was he who was taking the blows of the prosecution. Hermogenes held Phaedo's face to his breast, to comfort as well as quiet him.

"Don't worry," Krito assured him, and all of us, "they are just asking for 'death' as a way to force the master to leave the City."

Sokrates was silent and sober, but seemingly serene. He stood upright and noble, took a long, even breath and began to assure us all. "There are many reasons why I am not aggrieved, my friends, by this vote of condemnation." Ambling slowly toward the crowds, he spoke as if to comfort. "I expected it, and am only surprised that the votes are so nearly equal. I had thought that the majority against me would have been

far larger; but now I see if thirty votes had gone over to the other side, I would have been acquitted.”

Gesturing toward Meletus, the gadfly of Athens affirmed, “And so he won and he proposes death as the penalty.

“And what shall I propose as an alternative?”

Sokrates smiled wryly and got a glint in his eye as he mused quite loudly. “What shall be done to the man who has never had the wit to be idle during his whole life; and who has been careless of what the many care about — wealth, family interests, and military rank, or making speeches in the assembly and attending parties. Instead, I sought to persuade every man among you that he must attend to himself, to care for his soul above all else, and thus seek virtue and wisdom, and attend to the interests of our community before he attends to his private interests.”

Sensing that Sokrates’ words were having an impact on the jury, Meletus interrupted him. “I am tired of your endless words, Sokrates. You have been found guilty! For what you have done, what do you propose? I propose death. What is justice for such a one as you?”

Sokrates grinned from ear to ear, like a naive youth unwittingly making a fool of himself. “Perhaps you may think that I am merely defying and contradicting you in saying this.” The sage of Athens suddenly morphed from naive to serious, as he held up his instructive finger and declared, “But that is not the case. I am only holding to truth and virtue. I will not say that I deserve any evil, or propose any penalty.” He opened his hands wide and cross-examined the prosecution,

“Why should I? Because I am afraid of the penalty of death?” Again, that smile softly graced his face and he proclaimed with his arms and hands wider still, “It is not living that matters, but living rightly.”

His defense of truth’s virtue was inspiring. His fearlessness of death’s consumption was audacious. Most who spoke like this were fools. A few heroes. A rare sage.

Now his face became illuminated as he smiled beatifically, and dramatically gestured with his outstretched hand. “Indeed, what would confer justice upon such a one as I?” He let his questioning pause for effect, then instructed with proclamation. “No doubt it must be something good!” He spoke loudly and outrageously, with his bugged-out eyes and his pointing finger.

“What?” Apollodorus muttered disconcertingly for us all. Dismay could be seen across every face, with eyes everywhere darting to and fro, confounded in confusion, begging for understanding.

But Sokrates’ eyes blazed, piercing the heart of anyone who dared meet his gaze. He appeared to be enjoying himself, utterly certain about what he was doing, without a shred of doubt. “O men of Athens, what would be the just reward appropriate for a poor man who is your benefactor, who only desires enough leisure that he may instruct you?”

He let his question hang for a moment, inviting every mind to begin imagining answers before he took command of every eye and ear, loudly proclaiming, “There can be no more fitting reward for me than free meals for the rest of my life in the Prytaneum with the

other heroes, Olympic champions, senators, and generals!”

Incredulity overwhelmed every face of those of us who witnessed him speak his final uncompromising truth. “O men of Athens, I deserve this reward far more than the citizen who has won the prize at Olympia in the horse or chariot race, whether the chariots were drawn by two horses or by many. He only gives you the appearance of happiness, and I give you the reality.” He proclaimed the truth in the most unacceptable manner. “The victor at Olympia has enough, but I remain in want—and I am the one who desires happiness in you. So if I am to estimate the penalty fairly and accurately, I say that maintenance in the Prytaneum for the rest of my life is appropriate justice.”

My eyes scanned the jurors, moving from face to face. Some of the eyes shone with recognition of the Master’s uncompromising radiance, many pairs of eyes were narrowing in fear or anger. We were all shocked and amazed as Sokrates forged forward, slashing at the pride of every single man among us. Even in defeat, he was only intensifying his assaults. Unfortunately, quite a few of the men in the crowd (and, alas, in the jury) seemed to have tightened their guts and hardened their faces as if to defend themselves from his onslaught.

Sokrates must have seen what I saw, and, pretending to sense that he had gone too far, answered the tacit complaint of the crowd. “Or shall the penalty be a fine, and imprisonment until the fine is paid? There is the same objection. I should have to live out my days in prison, for money I have none, and I cannot pay.”

Krito stood and commanded attention. “We

propose a fine of 30 mina! Death is an absurd penalty for Sokrates! We can fund much good work and juries with 30 mina. Aristekles, Apollodorus, my son and I are good for it: everyone knows this."

"Exile!" a voice in the crowd countered and a small chorus repeated the word, "Exile!" This cry was picked up by foes and friends alike.

The sage of the Athenians responded quickly, "No exile!" And he gestured for them to cease. "If I were to consider leaving my home and accept 'exile', what would be my motive? I would have to be blinded by the love of life. No indeed, men of Athens; that is very unlikely. And what kind of life would I lead? At my age, wandering from city to city, living in ever-changing exile, and always being driven out!"

The faces of Meletus, Anytus, and Lykon tensed in alarm as he spoke. Exile must have been their intention all along. Elated at their victory, they had not imagined until this moment that they had lost control.

Sokrates completed his thought, seemingly reading the thoughts of the crowd. "Someone could say: 'Yes, Sokrates, but can you not hold your tongue?' Somehow I am having great difficulty in making you understand my response to this. When I tell you that cooperating with this untruth would be a disobedience to a divine command, and that I therefore cannot hold my tongue, you probably find it hard to believe that I am serious. When I say again and again that the greatest good is to converse about virtue every day, like you hear me do—examining myself and others, yes? Thus, you hear me insist every day that the unexamined life is not worth living."

He stood there silent and still, all eyes riveted upon him, letting his words echo through the citizenry as he looked out at everyone with quiet, uncompromised dignity. Eye to eye with any juror who could begin to hold his gaze, he begged not for his life, but for every soul in earshot to take up self-examination. His point having been made, he humbly bowed and returned to us.

Aristodemus embraced him heartily. Kriton joined in. One by one, every one of us put our hand on him in blessing and prayer.

The magistrates turned toward one another and conferred. There seemed to be a struggle, but it had only gone on for much too short a time when the Archon pounded his staff, quieted the crowd again, and announced to the Court, "The sentence of this Court is death!"

Anytus and Meletus stood up immediately, glancing about as if concerned about how others were seeing them. They made a show of victorious satisfaction and confidence in the rightness of their case, and shook hands in congratulations for all to see. Lykon joined them, but his aspect was different. He seemed animated, agitated, arguing and pointing toward the sea. Meletus nodded, as if he understood Lykon's arguments, then led Lykon and Anytus to the rooms at the rear of the Court to sign papers for the sentencing.

Sokrates quickly strode to the middle of the Court and the guard moved toward him, to keep him from leaving. Sokrates gestured for him to relax and he once again called out for people to listen. The crowd again

gradually quieted as he pleaded to the jury. "Please linger a bit longer and let me address you all once again." The crowds gave him his request. Everyone fell silent, as Sokrates announced loudly. "It won't be long, O Athenians, that you will get an evil name, saying that you killed Sokrates, a wise man. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. For I am far advanced in years, as you may perceive, and not far from death anyway."

Sokrates swept his arm across all three sections of jurors. "I am speaking now only to those of you who have condemned me to death. I did not have the inclination to entertain you, as you would have liked me to address you, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things that you have been accustomed to hearing from others—which, as I say, are unworthy of me.

"I also thought that I ought not to do anything common or mean in my hour of danger. Nor do I now repent of the manner of my defense—for I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in the manner of the prosecution and live. For neither in war nor at law ought any man to use every way of escaping death. For often in battle there is no doubt that if a man will throw away his arms, and fall on his knees before his pursuers, he may escape death; and in other dangers there are other ways of escaping death, if a man is willing to say and do anything. The difficulty, my friends, is not in avoiding death, but in avoiding unrighteousness; for unrighteousness runs fast—much faster even than death.

“I am old and move slowly, and the slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen and quick, but the fastest runner, who is unrighteousness, has overtaken them. So now I depart, condemned by you to suffer the penalty of death, and the men at the prosecution table will go their ways — condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of their villainy. If I must abide by my award, let them abide by theirs.”

The stinging words of the gadfly of Athens resonated with the sternness of a father chastising an errant son, hoping that his forceful words would penetrate the armor of self-interest. “Now listen! O men who have condemned me, I have a prophecy for you. I am about to die, and this is the hour in which men are gifted with prophetic power. Well, I prophesy to you, you who are my murderers, that immediately after my death, a punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape my hard questioning, and you did not want to give an account of your untrue lives. But even this will not be as you suppose. It will be far otherwise. For if you think that by killing me you can avoid the censuring of your lives, you are mistaken. In the time to come you will face more accusers than now. Let me give you some advice, as there is no escape! The easiest and highest way left now for you is not to be judging, besting, or crushing others, but to be improving yourselves. This is the prophecy I utter before I leave, to those who have condemned me.”

Now Sokrates’ tone changed, and he spoke amicably, as if confiding in us. “Friends, you who

would have voted for my acquittal, I would like to talk with you also about this thing which has happened today, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place where I must die. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of what has just happened to me.

“My brethren, let me tell you about something wonderful. All my life, my *damonion*, the familiar oracle within me, has constantly been in the habit of opposing me when I was choosing something inauspicious—even about trifles. But the inner voice made no sign of opposition—neither as I was leaving my house this morning, nor when I was entering this court, nor while I was speaking. It objected to nothing I was going to say. When there has been doubt about what to say, I have often been stopped in the middle of a sentence; but in nothing I said or did in this matter has the oracle opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this? I will tell you. To me, this as a proof that what has happened today is good and auspicious, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. The silence of my inner voice is a great proof to me of what I am saying, for the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going down a dark path and not to goodness.”

Phaedo had been weeping quietly for some time now. But now his cries could not be held down, and his sobs sounded through the Court. “Not death!” he wept aloud. With tear-soaked cheeks ourselves, Kriton and I comforted him as best we could and begged him to be quiet, so all could hear the master speak.

“Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good. After all, it is one of two things: either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as some men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain of peace. Now if death is like this, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single, peaceful night.

“But if death is the journey to another place as the Orphics say, and as the Mysteries of Eleusis reveal, and if in that place all the souls live on, what can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he finds the true judges who are said to be there, that pilgrimage will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? Well, if this is true, let me die again and again. I too, shall have a wonderful interest in a place where I can converse with other wise heroes of old. Above all, I shall be able to continue my inquiry into true and false knowledge—as I have done in this world. What infinite delight would there be in conversing with the heroes before us and asking them questions! For in that world they do not put a man to death for this; certainly not.” His sudden silence resonated the truth of his words, convicting the prosecution again. When his truth had struck everyone into quietitude, he instructed again. “For besides being happier in that world than in this one, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.”

“Therefore, my friends,” Sokrates continued, “be of good cheer about death, and know this truth: that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He is not abandoned by the gods. My own approaching end has not happened by mere chance. I see clearly that to die and be released now is better for me; and therefore my daimonion gave no sign. I am not angry with my accusers or my condemners. Take heart: the end of life is to be like God, and the soul following the divine will be like Him.”

Both shock and admiration consumed us, as we watched our teacher accept his sentence and spoke so compassionately to the heliasts. Phaedo was now quieter, and though tears ran down his face, he sat upright and kept his breathing even and focused on the master.

“Still I have a favor to ask. When my sons are grown up, I would ask you, my friends, to interrogate them as I have troubled you, if they seem to care about riches, or anything, more than about virtue. And if you do this, I and my sons will have received justice at your hands.”

At this point, Anytus and Meletus returned to their table, to pick up certain scrolls, and seeing their gloating, Sokrates addressed them. “The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways — I to die, and you to live. Which is better, God only knows.”

Anytus snarled, “The Athenians have sentenced you to death!”

Sokrates answered calmly, “And nature has condemned them.”

Anytus showed himself as he spat in our direction.

Meletus grabbed him and pulled him back, and they disappeared into a crowd of dark boasting. Sokrates stood there still, with a calm smile, as if his surroundings mattered not.

Phaedo collapsed from tears into sobs.

“What will happen now? When will Sokrates be given the hemlock?” I pleaded to know.

Salvaging a sliver of positive news, Hermogenes answered my query, “Sokrates will be taken to the jail, just a few steps from here. Usually, the convicted are quickly given the poison drink, but it is the sacred Delia. Ceremonial purity dictates that there will be no executions until the ship returns. If the weather is favorable to sailing, we have maybe another ten days with him. If the weather is against the ship, and I pray to Apollo that it be so, we have longer.”

“Don’t worry,” assured Krito, “the death penalty is simply a leverage used to make certain wise-men leave the City. The vulgar, myth-bound Athenians have a long history of driving out the wisest among them. Xenophanes, Themistokles, Protagoras, Sophokles, and Anaxagoras are among those who were likewise threatened and who left. We will find a nearby town agreeable to the master and wait until this insanity blows over and rational minds ascend again.”

But Sokrates had already said he would not leave Athens. Was it all show, a deadly game to see who blinks first?

My nerves began to break as the reality of the events set in. It made no sense. Why, how could this be happening? Listening to Sokrates’ speech, at times I had

been confident and the next minute aghast. Assurance and logic were replaced with horror and disbelief, back and forth, again and again. I thought my faith would hold me through the assaults of any experience, but my heart simply could not understand how my love-transmitting teacher and friend could be condemned to death. Or was he being forced to leave? But would he go in the end? He spoke so strongly when he said not! Worst of all, he had seemed to be purposely provoking it all. I did not understand his logic. My thoughts raced chaotically. I thought one thing, then the opposite, like a duel between ferocious swordsmen. What did I need to understand to put this dilemma to rest?

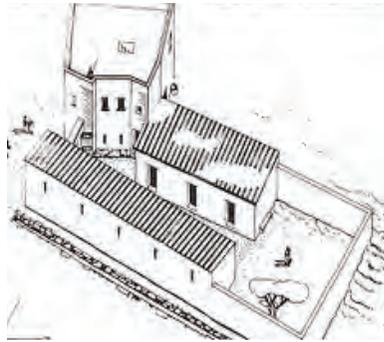
I resolved to find an appropriate moment to break the novice silence and ask Sokrates what I needed to know. Until then, I would try to cultivate virtue, but I seemed destined to be plagued by the furies of a stormy mind.



## Chapter Five The Prison of Knowledge

Four jailor-slaves came forward immediately, surrounding Sokrates and forming a hard shell around his luminous soft center, and they marched him the two hundred paces from the Heliaia to the jail. We walked behind them, in shocked disbelief, feeling a dizzying surge of protective outrage, wondering if this utter sham would reveal itself quickly for what it was and if freedom would be granted by morning, or if Krito would be proven right and we would all be leaving soon for another city.

The jail was a small building, 22 paces wide and about twice that long. With only one entrance, the interior had a long corridor and eight rooms for prisoners, five on the right side and three on the other. Before the three cells on the left was a two-story dorm with four rooms for the eleven Persian slaves who served as jailors. We looked through the hall of cells to the end, to a walled courtyard that could be used to house a mob. The first room to the right was a washroom and held a large urn, half-sunk into the floor for a bath. Four more rooms followed on the right; Sokrates was given the second cell, as it was the largest. The head jailor nodded respectfully to us, as if to be hospitable.



Usually criminals were held only long enough to administer the death sentence. Commoners and slaves were taken and promptly tied to stakes in the jail courtyard, their arms tied to stakes or cross beams, and left to die of exhaustion. But in the rare event that people of means were convicted of a capital crime and were not allowed to escape into exile, they could purchase the numbing and fatal hemlock.

Since the jail was not made to hold long-term prisoners, those that were not executed right away were manacled and chained to prevent them from burrowing through the rather thin walls. However, because the Delian observations of purity necessitated that Sokrates be detained until the sacred ship returned from Delos, this noblest of men was shackled like a wild beast. As the jailor fastened the restraints, many of us shed tears and Phaedo cried out. Otherwise, the silence was broken only by the occasional dull clanging of his irons.

“What is this?” Sokrates inquired of us. “Are you just now beginning to weep? Have you not always known that from the moment of my birth nature had condemned me to death? Indeed, you might think that being destroyed before my time might bring me grief, but it is my view that you ought to feel joy—in the assurance that divine blessings are presently pouring upon me and my state is utterly happy.”

Turning his face slightly upwards as his eyes closed, Sokrates opened his palms wide as if relishing a gentle rain — and he broke our sadness with his enlightening smile. Like the teaching stories I had heard in India about Rama locked in the dungeon of Ravena,

the master was always free, despite his surroundings—suddenly I realized I was in prison, regardless of mine.

Every day thereafter, we assembled early in the morning at the court where the trial had taken place. Having shopped for the day's provisions, we'd wait and talk with one another about how to obtain his release until the prison doors were opened.

Although most of us spent much of every day with Sokrates in his cell, Krito and Glaukon spent some time away "on business". We did not discuss the nature of their business with Sokrates. In fact, Glaukon and others were campaigning to have our friend and teacher released, and Krito was making all the necessary arrangements for Sokrates' escape, should it come to that. We all held on to the belief that everything would work out.

It certainly seemed as if the gods were displeased; the weather began to turn almost as soon as he entered the jail. Fierce storms blew in from the east, the direction of Delos. Everyone remarked that Apollo was angry—ships that should have arrived in a few days were taking weeks to sail to and from Delos, the city all Hellenes celebrated as his birthplace. Thus, it was logical that the divinity of Reason was providing us with the time we needed to free his servant. Our confidence surged, and this cautious optimism lifted the mood of our gatherings.

In many moments, gathering with Sokrates was just like it had always been. Nearly every day he would dismantle those of us who stepped forward to ask questions or offer opinions, exposing our limited

assumptions and helping us all come to a truer, in-depth understanding. Intimidated by his illumination and insight, at first I didn't dare break my novice silence, even as I felt a burning desire to ask him about what I did not yet understand: my twisting mind and his professed "no-ideas". With not a single page of Sokrates' teachings written down for me to study, I could not wrap my mind around his "not-knowing".

Stewing in my dilemma, I was thinking about how to phrase my query, when the sage of Athens gracefully helped me out of my quandary. "Speak, novice from Ephesus, so that I may see you!"

I blurted that I wish he had written a book that I could have studied.

Sokrates objected, "But I cannot help feeling that writing is unfortunately like a painting; for the creations of the painter have the appearance of life, and yet if you ask them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. In contrast, I am right here; let me help you."

I was not ready. I had not yet formed the perfect question. I was about to spin off into my thoughts and ideas, when I suddenly realized that I trusted him completely, so I just stumbled forth. "I am confused. I have traveled for decades gathering knowledge from across the world. I sense wisdom when you speak, but I do not understand it when you say that the only idea you have is that you have no ideas, or that the only knowledge you have is that you have no knowledge."

As was often the case, Sokrates did not answer a query directly, and this time he raised a goblet, announcing an impromptu symposium, inviting all to

toast his primary deity. “May Apollo, the divinity of reason and harmony, guide us!”

After we drank, he gestured to a few of those who had gathered around him, asking for their input. First, Simon reiterated in a tender voice the understanding he voiced to me that first day. “The master’s ‘no ideas’ is the way he teaches us about mental humility. By not imposing preconceptions, he listens to everyone simply and opens to the world perfectly, teaching us his undefended receptivity.”

Aristekles postulated confidently, “I think he teaches by irony, feigning ignorance as a method to reveal to people their own misconceptions. His ‘no ideas’ allows him to cross-examine everyone and expose the unexamined presumptions underneath that are incongruent with the truth.”

Young Phaedo, always devotional, explained, “Yes, the master says that he has no knowledge, and we become wise as he leads us to arrive at our own truth. He is indeed wise—how else could those around him benefit so?”

The ever-sharp Antisthenes tried to cut to the chase. “Sokrates, as we have abundantly seen, inquires of others with a series of questions that are formulated as tests of logic that help a person discover their beliefs about a topic. He usually has them explain the words they have used; he requires people to clarify their definitions and characterize the general features of their views. Often this helps a person see their presumptions, or in many cases, their foolishness.”

Antisthenes, pointing at our surroundings, indicated the tragedy of the master’s brilliance.

“Unfortunately, those who have had their foolishness exposed have used his truth-seeking as a weapon against him, and that is why we are sitting here.”

Aristedemus the Small spoke gently, but with a dignity that deepened our mood. “Even the god at Delphi said that the master was the wisest of all men.”

Sokrates pursed his lips like he was about to kiss a baby, and took a deep breath before he spoke. “Many of you sound like you know what I do, that I am a very, very clever man with all my clever questions. No one suggested the truth, that I really might not know anything, that I am not clever at all, and that I am not wise. Maybe it’s just that I’m honest enough to admit it!”

His disarming directness penetrated our mental argumentation. My assemblage of knowledge seemed like a heavy bundle that only weighed me down. Fortunately, his calm intensity riveted my attention, distracting me from my tendency to ruminate, seeking to defend myself with ideas. His confessions—sincere even when calculated—seemed like an oasis in the desert of the endless babble surrounding me and even inside my own head. He explained, “Like Pythagoras, I do love wisdom, but I do not possess such a thing. Now it is true that I seem to help others in their understanding. But I am only devoted to what is true and real; and I am quite certain I am not wise. I see only that I don’t see.” Sokrates spoke so plainly that he could have been describing what was for dinner.

Sokrates went on to contradict another of my unnoticed presumptions. “But neither am I clever, in the ways you all suggest. Like my friend Euripides

pointed out, 'Cleverness is not wisdom.' Your descriptions of my un-knowing were very clever. Cleverness always proceeds from knowledge; I proceed in devotion. I am a lover of wisdom, a philosopher, but I am neither clever nor wise. I am in love—haven't I always told you this?"

I was enchanted by hearing this confession of love; it seemed I understood some of what he was saying. But as I tried to connect it to my other understanding, I was stymied. I was still trying to "know" what is mysterious, to "know" devotion and its implications—even after he said again that he was not a knower, but a lover. I was perfectly trapped. I grappled, caught between illumination and frustration, yearning for the understanding and great openness that exceeds knowledge and mind.

Sokrates went on to correct his oldest and closest devotee. "Now Aristedemus, allow me a minor clarification. The Oracle said no one was wiser than I."

The sage of Athens turned to me and explained. "This confounded me to my very soul, and as most of you know, I set about to find out why Apollo would say such a thing. When I heard of this Oracle, I said to myself: What can the god mean? What is the interpretation of his riddle? For it is obvious to me that I have no wisdom, small or great. I thought: What could the god of Delphi mean when he says that no one was wiser than I? And yet he is a god, and cannot lie—for that would be against his very being."

Sokrates raised his brows, like he often did to invite us to acknowledge that we heard him, or that we

agreed with him so far. Everyone nodded softly, and the sage of Athens proceeded.

“After long consideration, I thought of a method to solve the riddle. I reflected that if I could find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, ‘Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that no one was wiser.’

“Accordingly I went to a man reputed to be wise, and observed him — his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination — and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many,” then, winking and smiling, he added, “and still wiser by himself.”

We all chuckled appreciatively. I was entertained, but listened raptly, concentrating in order to gain the necessary insight to solve the problem of my confounded mind.

It seemed he was not even irritated by the burden of his shackles and heavy chains. Our teacher sat there as if buoyant, as light as a feather. He held up his finger in instruction. “Thereupon, I tried to explain to him that he only thought he was wise, but really he was not! The consequence was that he came to hate me, and several of his cronies glared and cursed, and shared his enmity towards me.”

Sokrates parodied his posture of hurrying away from their threatening looks. “So I left him rather quickly, saying to myself as I went away, “Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows

anything really, I am better off than he is — for he knows nothing, but he thinks he knows; I neither know nor think that I know.”

No one could believe it, but Sokrates had us laughing as if we were feasting at Agathon’s big comfortable house. We had forgotten our cold enclosure and were once again uplifted and enchanted, carried beyond our cares by his simple fullness and freedom.

“So after the politicians, I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, all sorts. And I said to myself, ‘Now you will find out that you are more ignorant than they are.’ Accordingly, I took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them — thinking that they would teach me something.”

His expectation seemed well founded. I too would expect poets to speak wisely about their musings. So it was with some surprise that I heard Sokrates demur.

“I am almost ashamed to confess the truth, but I must say that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than the poets did themselves. At once I knew that it is not by wisdom that poets write their poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration. They are like diviners, soothsayers or priests who also say many fine things, but do not fully understand the meaning of them. I further observed that they ignored this! Upon the strength of their poetry they imagined themselves to be the wisest of men in other things in which they were not at all wise! So I departed, conceiving myself to be senior to them for the same reason that I was superior

to the politicians: at least I was conscious that I knew nothing at all."

The master spoke in a manner both serious and humorous, as only a free man can. Such speech is a balm in itself. It creates a space wherein one can relax from hidden motives and the angular intrusion of concealed self-interest. A healing power radiated through his innocent lucidity and even his very mannerisms. "You see how tenacious I was in questioning wise men," he said. "I think this is my only good point, for I am full of defects and always getting things wrong. My deficiencies make it evident that I know nothing."

"Knowing nothing" did not make any more sense to my thinking mind than the "emptiness" I had tried to learn in India. He was certainly not asking us to walk into walls, like we were bumpkins. I could grasp aspects of a divine ignorance, but I could not rest in it, and so grabbed at one thought then the next — always trying to arrive at an insight that would resolve the contradictions in me. I wanted to "get" the deeper joke that was so obviously clear to Sokrates, and I imagined some secret insight to be the source of his illumination.

Sokrates went on. "At last I went to the artisans for I was sure that they knew many fine things. Here I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I was ignorant, and in this they were indeed wiser than I was. But I also observed that even the best artisans fell into the same error as the poets — because they were good workmen, they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters—and this defect of arrogance

completely overshadowed what little wisdom they possessed.”

The master then brought his story to our very seats. “Asking these questions of so many people led to my making many enemies of the most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many slanders, as you have seen.”

At these words our gloomy enclosure seemed to press upon us again, and our jovial mood turned somber. Here we were again, cold and hard, facing his imminent death sentence and the pervasiveness of human ignorance; and intimations of our own mortality further darkened that suddenly cold room.

Beyond the small dark cave of my mind and avoided anxiety, Sokrates continued by providing an unusual link that led my attention. “I asked myself whether I would like to be as I was, with no ideas, or should I entertain the usual presumptions? I answered myself and the oracle that I was better off as I was: not knowing. And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others.

“But the truth is that only the divine is wise; and by his answer the divinity of insight intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing. Apollo is not speaking just about me; he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he had said, ‘He, Oh men, is the wisest, who, like Sokrates, knows that his wisdom is, in truth, nothing.’

“So you see, I have long been wondering at my own supposed ‘wisdom’. In this regard, I cannot believe

myself. I'm always thinking that I ought to stop and ask myself, 'What am I saying?'"

Sokrates raised his finger and shackles for emphasis and turned directly toward me, his eyes boring through mine. "For there is nothing worse than self-deception. The deceiver is always at home and always with you — it is quite terrible. Therefore, I often inquire of my own presumptions and endeavor to 'look fore and aft', in the beautiful words of Homer."

Sokrates was obviously a truly great man, but his self-inquiry was so extreme and radical it seemed to me superhuman. I couldn't help but compare this searing refusal of all conventional patterns of thinking to the paltry ways I had been applying self-knowledge and felt like a small boy beside him. Even so, as I leaned forward and drank in the penetrating meaning behind his words, I felt somehow liberated, certainly inspired, and even empowered.

The master's face melted into a smile, and he opened both hands like he was holding a newborn. "People think my ignorance is a sham, a ruse, but I am not playing games: I see only that I see nothing, and the divinity of insight gave me even this notion. So I accept my not-knowing; I rest in the mystery. By this acceptance and faith in what is real, whatever that may be — and not by any cleverness — I practice not-adding my misconceptions to what I see, and I help others see what they do add."

I was for a moment rendered speechless. I didn't know what to think. In moments, his descriptions of abiding in a formless openness felt authentic, free, and even made perfect sense. I was deeply impressed by his

freedom for moments, but I could not linger long in that place, and when I returned to my normal frameworks of knowing, his propositions seemed like strands in a Gordian knot of paradoxes. Suddenly, in desperation, my mind grasped onto one such contradictory fact, the evidence that many who had surrounded him became wise. So I spoke up. I asked, "But like Aristodemus pointed out, how could you lead others to wisdom if you possess it not?"

He knew my question was actually a concealed attempt to lure him into the conventional kind of mind I had returned to, a half-question blurted out, an expression of my internal dilemma. But he took no offense. His reply conveyed the most sublime patience and kindness. "You know that my mother, Phaenarete, was a midwife? I am like a barren midwife; I cannot give birth to wisdom. And though I question others, I can bring nothing to light by myself, because I am sure that there is no wisdom in me. This is my lot in life and I accept it.

"At first glance, some who have come to me may appear quite intelligent, but if you consider what has taken place as I have gone further with them in our discussions, you can see clearly that they never learned anything from me, and they give birth to what they have discovered by themselves."

Two contradictory realities were vying to possess me. On the one hand my mind and self were churning in turmoil, trying to resolve the paradoxical implications of Sokrates' assertions. On the other hand, he made perfect sense, the kind only a sage, one rested

in divine awareness, can demonstrate. Even in the labor of my whirling thoughts, my deeper being could sense his perfect calm and mysterious truth.

Sokrates continued, his cadence now building with enthusiasm. "Yes, I am my mother's son. My art is like that of midwives. The only difference is that my patients are usually full-grown men. And my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in labor. Dire are the pangs that my art is able to arouse and to allay in those who consort with me, just like the pangs of women in childbirth; night and day they are full of perplexity and travail."

Yes, I thought, my perplexity and labor might be part of a re-birth. I felt hope. And I trusted him. I nodded.

Returning my nod, the master pressed forward. "The highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a person's thought is a false phantom or is something alive and real." He paused to let the power of those simple words sink in. "But the divine constrains me to serve as a midwife, and bars me from giving birth." Then, leaning forward towards me with the weight of his chains, and raising his index finger into the air, he said, "I suspect, world traveler from Ephesus, as you seem to think yourself, that you are in labor with some conception. You come to me, a midwife's son and myself a midwife."

I felt like he heard my prayer. I felt seen, embarrassed, and exposed, but I trusted his midwifery.

"Do your best to listen and answer the questions I will ask you. But first, let me be clear: If I expose your beloved precious first-born ideas, because I discover

upon inspection that the conception which you have formed is a vain shadow, do not quarrel with me on that account." He pointed directly at me like a stern father, and I nodded in surrender. He then set forth the uncompromising terms of discourse with him. "For while I have known some who were ready to bite me when I deprived them of a darling folly, it would be wrong for me to play along with your falsehood, or to stifle the truth."

"I will try and answer your inquiries fully and stand with the truth you reveal," I responded, striving for sincerity.

The master accepted my efforts at surrender. "So, learned Enelysios, tell me again: do you want to know how to know nothing?"

I sensed relief and blurted out, "Yes," but quickly caught the conflict he was exposing and lowered my eyes.

"You see the illogic? Yes. But what is behind this conflict of ideas? What makes it seem right to want to know how to not-know?"

"I don't know." I lowered my eyes.

"Perhaps we're getting somewhere after all," the son of Phaenarete mused. He smiled, we all smiled, and after a pregnant pause, he continued with a raised brow. "Or perhaps not yet. For you still want to know, don't you?"

"Yes, not knowing seems like a problem," I lamented, struggling to look him in the eye.

"Indeed it does," Sokrates bellowed with a deep laugh, "or else I would not have sought wisdom from

many to solve the riddle of the Oracle. But my search did not provide an answer to my question but simply brought me to acceptance of my unknowing. The mysteries whereby people claim to have an experience of the divine are rightly named. But still you want to know this, doesn't this seem odd?"

As I plumbed the depths of confusion, a distant memory flashed forward. "Yes, my situation reminds me of a trick weaving I experienced in Persia. You slide your fingers into it, and no matter how hard you try to pull your fingers out and solve the puzzle, the weaving grabs you even tighter and you are trapped."

Sokrates liked my analogy as his face brightened. "Indeed, and how do you extricate your fingers? By understanding the trap, not fighting it, even yielding toward it, and then moving with the gentlest action. Right?"

I nodded, hoping for a secret, a technique I could enact. But he did not accommodate me. In fact, his blade cut deeper still. "But you are still grasping, you characterize yourself as a world seeker, gathering what you can grasp at every port and table, like a rich man's spoiled wife. Did I not ask you at our first encounter: where can the good and noble be found?"

This implicit criticism implicated my whole life. I thought back to that penetrating first encounter. He seemed to understand me thoroughly, utterly, seeing me much more clearly than I could see myself.

The master did not answer me, but rather broadened my contemplation. "Let's consider enjoying poetry or music or dance or any of the muses'

possessions. To simply have mastered the tools of an art is not to have mastered the art; the tools are only the preliminaries. One must know what that art is for. In art and love, madness must go hand in hand with reason, learning, and self-control. For having learned the basics, then a mindless madness brings us poetry, song, and dance. Don't you agree?"

"Madness?" I asked for clarification.

"Oh, that is a fine description," Sokrates pointed out, "or we could say there is a mantic power beyond the clever mind, or we could say, the muse took me. But the madness\* beyond knowledge is not only found with the muses, but also with the prophetic\* [*mantike* = prophecy, *manike* = madness]. The ancient creators of language must have thought that inspired madness was a noble thing; for in those two words, the 't' is only a modern and tasteless insertion. So the madness beyond knowledge is not only found with the muses, but also with the prophetic. Can you see this?"

I half-nodded yes, acknowledging only that I was following along.

"For prophecy is a madness, and the mantic prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona were out of their conventional minds as they conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life. Of course, I do not want to belabor what everyone already knows."

"And are not the rites of Dionysus a form of madness? Now it can be argued that such rituals can be exploited for vulgar intoxication, but when we let go with our eye on the divine, do we not see better? Are

not visions given that inform you? Being out of your mind can be a good thing, don't you agree?"

I nodded in silence, with my usual racing mind slowly being supplanted by his words and their truth.

"And the greatest madness of all is the possession by Aphrodite—that of love; and it is this divine inspiration that leads the tempered souls and their beloveds towards the very essence of goodness. This sort of love comes after seeing beauty here on earth and being reminded of true beauty as it is beyond even heaven. When reminded of beauty absolute, the wings of the soul begin to grow, and the urge to fly brings on the charge of madness.

"In addition to every kind of beneficial madness, we cannot reasonably say, O nephew of Heraklitos, that there is any real knowledge at all if everything is in a state of transition and there is nothing abiding. For the very nature of knowledge changes. How can we, mere mortals, gain immortal wisdom from what is impermanent?"

The master did not let up; he was never constrained by social conventions. "Enelysios, you have failed. You will not gain the knowledge of my unknowing to put in your little bag or wear with a sly style. You'll have to keep sailing, I'd say. However, I'll give you one piece of knowledge you haven't sought, but do need. You have been blessed with privileges and think you can acquire whatever you want. You think you can negotiate a deal for divine blessings, but you cannot take Elysium by a storm of thoughts. Like many thinkers of leisure, you are a dilettante, not really

serious about giving of yourself, only with gathering more and more, improving yourself more and more. Haven't you heard? More and more is never enough. The fullest happiness is natural, inherent. He who is not content with what he has will not be content with what he would like to have — remember? Contentment comes not from things, but from natural living, yes?"

His recollection of that first day now scorched me. The implications of his inquiry burned me in a spiritual fire. I was ashamed and my mind was roaring with complications. I didn't know what to say, but did notice how I was struck numb. In unconscious reaction, I attempted a weak defense. "Sokrates, even before I met you people told me that you reduce others to perplexity. At this moment, I feel as if you are exercising some kind of magic on me and laying me under a spell. In some countries, you would be called a sorcerer. I am just a mass of helplessness. Please do not think me flippant, but I think you are exactly like the flat stingray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes in contact with it, it stings and numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to say other than to confess that I am utterly confounded."

Hearing my sad confession and looking at my knotted brow, Sokrates looked as if into the distance and mused aloud. "I long for the old days when the truth was simple." Then returning his gaze to us, he instructed me, the foreigner, "There was a tradition in the temple of Dodona that oaks first gave prophetic utterances. The men of old deemed that if they heard

the truth even from an oak or rock, it was enough for them; whereas you world-travelers seem to consider not whether a thing is or is not true, but who the speaker is and from what country the tale comes.”

Sokrates looked back at me and held my gaze like a bowman. “By the god of friendship, you mustn’t think that you can just play with me and say whatever comes into your head, nor must you think of me as jesting. For you must see what our discussions are really about.” He raised his shackled hand again for emphasis. “Is there anything more serious than to ask: What is the way we ought to live?”

A long gaze inhabited a long silence. This was not the delightful exchange of noble thoughts; his gravity brought us all to ground.

He spoke in confidence. “You’ll have to make a turnabout, my lucky friend. Love and service, not experience and not fancy ideas, is the right way to live; true knowledge must serve your core, your soul. Do not gather more and more knowledge and experience for your mind and body; instead practice feeling and temperance; take care of your psyche. When your soul is purified by love and empowered by restraint, self-understanding, and devotion to wisdom and the mystery itself, then your mind, which troubles and imprisons you so, will fall into your soul. Does this cure not sound reasonable?”

I felt some relief at last. At least I understood that I could go home to Ephesus and serve, practice loving, and give up my lust for more and more knowledge. I knew enough to start serving and live by temperance,

and I had a perfect opportunity to do so. But the deep soul-rest and divine devotion he demonstrated was not my feeling-experience. I was still in my head, as if looking out from behind my eyes. He was looking out from his soul, from his singularity with the ground of being. I nodded, as if saying to him that I understood that I could serve.

Still, a deeper distress and cloistered sadness caused me to break from his gaze. He called me back with a telling story. "A physician from Thrace told me: 'As you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the body, so neither ought you to attempt to cure the body without the soul; and this is the reason why the cure of many diseases is unknown to many physicians. They are ignorant of the whole, which should be studied also — for the part will never be well unless the whole is well. Therefore, if the head and body are to be well, you must begin by addressing the feeling-being, the soul, the psyche; that is the first thing. This root-cure is effected by the power of fair words; and by them temperance is implanted in the soul; and where temperance is, there health is speedily imparted by right living, not only to the head, but to the whole body. Let no one persuade you to cure the head, until he or she has first addressed the core-feeling. For this is the great error of our day in the treatment of the human body, that physicians separate the soul from the body.' This is what he said to me and I took his words to heart."

I wanted to take the physician's words to heart also and so heartily inquired, "So if it is not about knowing, how will I know the truth?"

His face broke open like a spring dawn, and he clanged his manacled arms and hands wide. "Truth and wisdom beget trust, and trust nurtures our soul, so we can rest in the mystery of what is most real. This real wonder, not information, is the feeling of someone who loves wisdom, and so real philosophy begins in wonder." The sage of Athens shone in child-like innocence, with infectious breaths of simple joy. "He was not a bad genealogist who said that Iris, the messenger of heaven, is the child of Thaumatas, the divinity of wonder." The master let his arms and chains fall, and we were all rendered speechless by his marvelous invocation.

A balming pause fell upon us, like the mysterious visitation of a divine presence. Instead of grasping, I was consumed in receiving this sublime enjoyment. Relaxing fully into the Gift, I finally understood his openness to be kin to the "emptiness" and "unborn nature" of India. Like intercourse with a muse, I was taken, and the music was the harmony of the spheres.

Aristodemus soon began a recitation. "The Orphic master Eleutherios sang: 'All space, the moon and stars, the clouds and sky, the sun itself and what is beyond are all objects of our expansive vision whereby we counter the effects of our busy self-consciousness and earth-consciousness. Therefore, always be alive to what you do not yet or ever can possess and know. Wonder rests the vital being and cools the brain. When you are free to know nothing and be nothing, then you may hear what is truth and so become a devotee of the unknowable Mystery through present, divine Ignorance.'"

The sage of Athens smiled widely and nodded softly for several heartbeats. “So Enelysios, our lucky world-traveler, do not conceive of yourself as a seeker of knowledge and experience, but as a devotee of what cannot be known or purchased. Devote your life to molding your soul to goodness, by the practice of temperance, self-knowledge, and love. When your body is fettered by restraint and your soul is unfettered in its devotion, when your feeling is set free, you shall come to utter rest and thus your mind will slow to its own naturalness. Then you will be able to both know and not-know.

“Agree with me if I seem to you to be speaking the truth; for like the bee, I have left my sting in you before I die.”

His poignant words and perfect service brought me to my knees. The fire of truth was doing its work. My mind remained a storm, but I had been delivered, at least temporarily, to my very ground. Contradictions that remained resolved into paradox and mystery, and somehow I could breathe the master’s formless state.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Krito's Escape Plan**

A few days later, before dawn, exactly four weeks after Sokrates was first put in chains, Krito jostled me awake. "A runner just came," he said breathlessly; "the ship from Delos was seen from Sunion, battling the winds. The ship will make it to port before the sun sets tonight. Sokrates is scheduled to drink the numbing hemlock the day after the ship docks. Tomorrow he will be gone; one way or another. The moment has arrived. We have to convince the master to let us take him to a city that appreciates him."

"Why did you come for me?" I wondered aloud.

"You have spent the least time with him, yet you see his greatness. Plus, he asked that you always come with me." Krito smiled.

I felt loved, known, appreciated. This reception of his embrace stood in stark contrast to the shadowy worlds of prison and death before us. As we hurried to the jail, I expressed my disbelief that Sokrates had not yet been freed. Krito explained that Glaukon had not been successful and that no amount of money or influence would break the anger of Anytus and the righteousness of Meletus. They wanted Sokrates gone, one way or another.

Krito calmed me, telling me that all the arrangements for the master's escape were ready. "In addition to your offer in Ephesus, I have contacted friends in Thessaly and Megara who will gladly receive Sokrates and his family. I have been giving the jailor

small amounts of money, and today he will receive a very large sum to remove the chains and leave the doors unlocked. Don't worry; we can get Sokrates out of here. It's all arranged. It's been done before ... many times. I'm sad to tell you, but that's how the mythic-minded, common men do it in Athens—they condemn the best to death and force them to leave."

I wanted to believe him, but Sokrates had already said he would not attempt an escape. Now the time had come. He would either disentangle himself from this parody of justice or follow the letter of the law to his death.

The jailor (now an ardent admirer of Sokrates) met with Krito and me. Krito told him, "Today is the day," and handed him several gold coins.

"Gladly," the jailor said, his eyes widening. As he let us in and escorted us to Sokrates' cell, he left the doors unlocked. There he whispered caringly, "Let me know when he wakes up and I'll return to remove his manacles. They are quite uncomfortable."

Krito sat just opposite the master's face and I sat to his right in the corner. It might seem strange to just sit there, in the dimness, waiting for him to awaken—but my anxiety was relieved in his presence. Even in his sleep, his countenance and slight smile reminded me of a satisfied baby in the arms of his adoring mother. His simple happiness rubbed off; I contemplated the wonderful things he had said and the marvelous theatres he had created.

As the twilight began to resolve into dawn, Sokrates stirred, sat up and saw Krito and me there. He

sat up, splashed his face from the bowl of water, and turned to his oldest friend.

“Why have you come at this hour, my dear Krito? It must be quite early.”

“Yes, it most certainly is.”

Sokrates raised his brow inquisitively. “What is the exact time?”

“The dawn is just now breaking,” Krito answered.

Sokrates then posed a telling question. “In that case, I am trying to figure why the keeper of the prison let you in.”

Krito admitted that he had been cultivating favors from the prison attendant. “He has become our friend and he admires you; moreover, I have done him a kindness.”

Sokrates did not ask about the “kindness”, but only attended to us. “And you only just arrived?”

Krito smiled as I did. “No, we came some time ago.”

Sokrates asked, “Then why did you sit and say nothing, instead of waking me up?”

Krito spoke for us both. “I should not have liked myself, master, to be in such great trouble and unrest as you are; so that was one reason, to let you rest. More to the point, however, we have been watching with amazement your peaceful slumbers and for that reason we did not awake you. I have always thought you to have a happy countenance; but never have I seen anything like the easy, tranquil manner in which you bear this calamity.”

“Why, Krito,” Sokrates elucidated, “When a man

has reached my age, he should not be discontent at the approach of death. That would be a waste of concern. But you have not told me why you come at this early hour."

Krito confessed, "I bear the message I do not want to bring. It is sad and painful; not to you, amazingly, but to all of us who are your friends, and saddest of all to me."

Sokrates knew instinctively what it must be. "What? The ship has come from Delos, and after its arrival, I am to die?"

Krito was relieved to have something good to say. "No, the ship has not actually arrived, but she will probably be here today, as messengers running through the night from Sunion tell me that they've seen her." Krito paused, took a deep breath and said what had to be said — as best as he could. "Therefore tomorrow, my dearest friend, will be the last day of your life."

Sokrates surprised us, as he often did, with his reply. "Very well, Krito — if such is the will of the divine, I am willing; but in my opinion there will be a delay of a day."

Krito did not understand. "Why do you think so, master?"

"I will tell you," Sokrates assured Krito—but first he asked, "I am to die on the day after the arrival of the ship?"

Krito replied, "Yes, that is what the authorities say."

The master countered with a strange supposition. "Well, I do not think that the ship will be here by sunset. I'm inferring this fact from a vision that I had

last night, or rather only just now, when you fortunately allowed me to sleep.”

Krito’s interest (as well as my own) was piqued. “And what was the nature of the vision?”

The sage of Athens dramatically opened his hands palm out, inviting the divinity of theater to empower his explanation. “There appeared to me the likeness of a woman, fair and comely, clothed in bright raiment, who called to me and said: ‘O Sokrates, on the third day hence to fertile Phthia you shall go.’”

Krito was taken aback. “What an incredible dream, master!”

“There can be no doubt about the meaning, Krito, I think.”

Krito spoke in agreement. “Yes; the meaning is only too clear. You shall join Achilles at his true home.”

Krito looked at me; I raised my brows and tipped my head to silently encourage him to engage his plan to free Sokrates.

Krito understood my gesture and pleaded to the master. “Oh please, dearest one, let me entreat you once more to take my advice and escape. For if you die I shall not only lose a friend who can never be replaced, but there is another evil: people will believe that I might have saved you if I had been willing to give money, but that I did not care. Now, can there be a worse disgrace than this, that I should be thought to value money more than the life of a friend? Many will not believe that I wanted you to escape and that you refused.”

Sokrates assumed his mode as a caring schoolteacher. “But why, my dear Krito, should we care

about the opinion of the many? Good men (and they are the only persons who are worth considering) will view these things just as they occurred.”

Krito acquiesced. “Well, I will not dispute with you on this; but please tell me, dearest crony, are you afraid that if you escape from prison, we may get into trouble for having stolen you away, and lose our property; or that an even worse evil may happen to us? Now, if you fear on our account, be at ease; for in order to save you, we gladly run this risk; be persuaded, then, and do as I say.”

Sokrates did not counter Krito. “Yes, Krito, that is one fear which you mention, but by no means the only one.”

Krito thought he was convincing Sokrates and felt emboldened. “Fear not! There are several people who are willing to get you out of prison at no great cost. As for the people in power, they are far from being exorbitant in their demands. No one wants you to die, plus a little money will satisfy them. My means, which are certainly ample, are at your service, and if you have a scruple about accepting my money, strangers have come forth who will give you the use of theirs. One of them, Simmias the Theban, has brought a large sum of money for this very purpose; and many others are prepared to contribute money for your escape. Enelysios here has likewise offered to give you refuge and support. Do not hesitate on our account.”

I was glad that Krito mentioned again my offers of money and sanctuary in Ephesus. My sentiments were well known and I nodded in gratitude to Sokrates.

The fearless one countered this argument. "Have you found a place outside Athens that is not subject to death? No, I thought not. Now you Krito, are not going to die tomorrow or the next day — at least, there is little probability of this, and therefore you are not liable to be deceived by the circumstances." The master interlocutor changed his voice ever so slightly. "Tell me then, whether I am right in saying that some opinions are to be valued and other opinions are not to be valued. Am I right in maintaining this view?"

Krito knew what the master was up to; he had seen it ten thousand times. The master of liberating logic and truth was taking on his old friend, and it was no contest. With a faint note of reluctance in his voice, Krito answered, "Certainly."

"And the opinions of the wise are good and should be regarded, and the opinions of the unwise are evil and should not be?"

I could tell that although Krito was looking for any angle he could leverage, he was already defeated; the direction of this dialect was clear. "Certainly," he went along.

"Is the pupil who devotes himself to the practice of gymnastics supposed to attend to the praise and blame and opinion of every man, or of one man only — his trainer?"

Krito could only answer, "Of one man only."

"Now, can we live, having an evil and corrupted body?"

"Certainly not."

"Let me ask you: will life be worth having if your

higher part were destroyed, that part which is improved by justice and deprived by injustice?"

"Certainly not."

"This higher part is more honorable than the body?"

Krito was unable to steer the dialogue from its mark. "Far more."

The master of discrimination swooped in like a raptor that had been hovering above its prey. "Then, my friend, we must not regard what 'the many' say of us, but attend only to what the man who has understanding will say, and what the truth will say."

Again and again I appreciated his integrity, and how he insisted upon it, even if the price was his life.

Sokrates noted the implications of his point. "And therefore you begin in error when you advise that we should regard the opinion of the many about justice and injustice, good and evil, honorable and dishonorable. Yes? Well, to counter this critique, some might point out, 'Well, the many can kill us.'"

Krito clutched at the point. "Yes, Sokrates; that is clearly the risk."

The master of enquiry would not let his interlocutor go off the main point. "But I should like to insist upon another proposition: not mere life, but a good life, that is to be chiefly valued, yes?"

"Yes, this insistence remains unshaken."

Sokrates' next comments undermined all conventional "justice. "A just man is one who does well by his friends, certainly; but also does good to those who have harmed him, thereby seeking to convert an enemy into a friend. If a good man does good to those

that have harmed him, then he who is the perpetrator of injury will be given self-knowledge, which is the basis of change. Therefore, it is never right to do wrong, or to requite wrong with wrong, or return evil with evil. Unfortunately, there are few who understand this.”

I had always thought that “an eye for an eye” summarized basic justice, but Sokrates stepped far beyond this perceived balance. To suffer an injustice happily, doing good to those who harm you, on the grounds that this transmits self-knowledge, this would create not only a kinder world, but also a world where the power of truth would be unleashed. Sokrates’ penetrating genius was matched by his loving forgiveness.

Perfectly insistent, the master infused the current situation with that same deep passion and brilliant insight. “I will *not* leave this cell and break the law; I will not give those who have committed injustice a way to remain in their self-deception.”

Sokrates then launched into an impromptu theater, taking up the various postures and arguments of his prosecutors; he enacted his own thoughts and imitated the voices and gestures of politicians who supported them and the posterity of the elders.

*“Therefore, they cannot say, ‘You, Sokrates, are breaking the covenants and agreements which you made with us at your leisure, not in any haste or under any compulsion or deception, but after you had seventy years to think of them, during which time you were at liberty to leave the city if we were not to your mind, or if our covenants appeared to you to be unfair. You had your choice, and might have gone either to Lacedaemon or Crete—both states of which are often praised*

*by you for their good government—or to some other Hellenic or foreign state. Not so, Sokrates. If you will take our advice, do not make yourself ridiculous by escaping out of the city. What good would you then do, either to yourself or to your friends? That your friends will be driven into exile and deprived of citizenship, or will lose their property, is tolerably certain; and you yourself, if you fly to one of the neighboring cities, will come to them as an enemy. Will you then flee from well-ordered cities and virtuous men?’ (And is existence worth having on these terms?) ‘Or will you go to them without shame, and talk to them, Sokrates? And what will you say to them? Will you say what you say here, about virtue and justice and institutions and laws being the best things among men? Would that be decent of you?’ (Surely not.) ‘You will live, but how? As the flatterer of all men, and the servant of all men; and doing what? Eating and drinking in Thessaly, having gone abroad in order that you may get a dinner! And where will be your fine sentiments about justice and virtue? Say that you wish to live for the sake of your children. How will you bring them up and educate them? Will you take them into Thessaly and deprive them of Athenian citizenship?*

*‘Listen then, Sokrates, to us who have brought you up. Think not of life and children first, and of justice afterwards, but of justice first, that you may be justified before the princes of the world below. For will you not be happier or holier or more just in this life, or happier in another, if you do as Krito bids.*

*‘Now you depart in innocence, a sufferer and not a doer of evil; a victim, not of the laws, but of men. But if you go*

*forth, returning evil for evil, and injury for injury, breaking the covenants and agreements which you have made with us, and wronging those whom you ought least of all to wrong, that is to say, yourself, your friends, your country, and us, we shall be angry with you while you live, and our brethren in the world below will receive you as an enemy; for they will know that you have done your best to destroy us. Listen, then, to us and not to Krito."*

The master then broke character, put his arms down, and with an open face, stared at his oldest interlocutor.

Krito answered the master's play and arguments with downward-pointing eyes. "I have nothing to say, Sokrates."

Sokrates assured his friend. "Let me fulfill the will of God, Krito, and follow wherever He leads."

Krito and I sat there, sad and bereft of our hopeful programs, with courageous truth on one side and a parade of sentiments and deep attachments on the other, all engaged in a pitched battle for our souls. Even though a host of arguments had been refuted or upheld, the master's impending death struck me fully, perhaps for the first time. Our previous confidence was shattered. And of course, his imminent death forced me to face an obvious truth: I was going to die sooner or later as well. Yet he was the embodiment of unconditional happiness, clarity, and peace beyond all knowledge or conventional understanding.

The jailer came into our cell with his keys. "I thought I heard you talking. Let me remove those irons."

“That won’t be necessary.” Sokrates underscored his insistence and rebuffed him.

The jailer turned to leave, but spoke like he was going offstage. “Well, I’ll let you be.” And he left the keys to unlock the manacles and the door hanging on the handle.

But the master was the director of this play. “If you wish, but it matters not if the doors are locked or unlocked.”

The move and argument to escape had been summarily quashed. Sokrates then asked, “Where is Plato? He never showed up yesterday. I have a request for him.”

Krito was relieved that Sokrates changed the subject of their discussion. He answered, “He is ill and bedridden at home.”

“As a dying man, I am entitled to a request, am I not? Do me a favor and in the morning ask Plato to send in his notes of my last conversation with Alkibiades before he took on the leadership of Athens. For since my dear Alkibiades cannot be here in my last hours, I would like to hear of our time together one more time. Thus reminded of his words, I may easily navigate my way to him in the Underworld.” Seeing the consternation on Krito’s face, Sokrates tried to comfort him. “We’ll prepare a place for you and our friends.”

Krito bowed slightly in both gratitude and sadness. “Of course, Sokrates. I will make sure that I have it by the morrow.”

Indeed, the master's prophetic dream was borne out. The ship did not make it around Sunion and to Piraeus by sunset. We were given still another day with the marvel of Athens.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Gift of the Stork**

The next morning, as a large group of us entered Sokrates' cell, Krito noted the master's uncanny insight. "You were right again Sokrates, the ship did not come to port until past sunset; today is not your last day. Today is a gift."

"Aren't they all?" the master replied, calm and clear-eyed as ever.

We settled in his cell, forming a circle around him, and shared a meal and refreshments. As we finished eating, Phaedo embraced his turtle-shelled lyre and offered a song. "A present for you, beloved master." Sokrates nodded, returning his regard. Phaedo plucked a most delightful dancelike tune. As the music carried the transfiguring power of the muses, the prison walls seemed to dissolve in the energy and enjoyment of the occasion—never mind the "realities" that we all knew.

The melody at last resolved into a full silence, and as if on cue, a grasshopper began chirping most excitedly from the top of the courtyard at the jail's end. Following the master's response, we broke into wide-eyed grins in celebration of life. Soon, the grasshopper's song was enjoined by another, then another — until a veritable chorus answered Phaedo's playing.

Our sage-friend commented, "I believe that the grasshoppers like your playing and are talking to one another about us."

Phaedo replied, "I think that music is loved by all creatures, as many make beautiful sounds, but certainly

you jest! Well then, what were they saying or singing?"

Sokrates sweetly stroked Phaedo's hair and reminded him, "A lover of music like yourself ought surely to have heard the story of the grasshoppers, who are said to have been human beings in an age before the Muses. And when the Muses came and song appeared, they were ravished with delight. Singing always, they never thought of eating and drinking, until at last in their forgetfulness, they died. And now they live again in the grasshoppers."

"I love your stories, master, for they give me much thought, and deeply so." Phaedo wasn't quite sure what Sokrates was saying, but was simply glad to be conversing with his beloved.

Sokrates' gentle smile brought flashes of being in a different place, transported as if to Olympia or Elysium. After a moment, he looked around at all of us, and then spoke. "Love given and love returned. Phaedo and Alkibiades give me cause to feel like the stork giving birth."

Krito understood the reference and pulled out the requested scroll. "Shall I read Plato's notes?"

Sokrates assented. "You hear me well, my oldest companion."

I was struck by the irony of our celebration. Here we were in a room of cold stone and bars, in muted light, waiting for the death of our beloved teacher. And yet, none of that mattered in this moment out of time. His simplicity outshined the complications, his freedom obviated the prison, and his thoughtfulness healed our hearts.

But unexpectedly, and shockingly to me, Sokrates instructed Krito, "Let Enelysios read to us, for it will serve him most succinctly." The gadfly of Athens turned to me. "Now Enelysios, this is for both of us. I will recollect my beloved Alkibiades and you may contemplate why I am having you read it. Alkibiades spoke these words when he was about to take on the leadership of our great City."

I was startled, yet deeply honored and intrigued that he would have me serve so intimately and personally on the day before his death. With every iota of attention I possessed, I raised Plato's scroll and began reading.

*Sokrates: How can we have a perfect knowledge of the soul? For if we know the soul, then I suppose we shall know ourselves. Can we really be ignorant of the excellent meaning of the Delphic inscription, "Know thyself?"*

Self-knowledge. Soul-knowledge. I was intrigued, excited, but also harboring an uncomfortable fear that there was something I did not understand. I sought refuge from my anxiety in the words of the master — for he seemed to be answering my misapprehensions. I projected my voice as a cover for my own heightened interest.

*Alkibiades: What are your thoughts, Sokrates?*

*Sokrates: I will tell you what I suspect to be the meaning and lesson of that inscription. Let me take an illustration from sight, which I imagine to be the only one suitable to my purpose.*

*Alkibiades: What do you mean?*

*Sokrates: Consider; if someone could directly address the eye itself, saying, "See thyself." Would not this meaning be: "The eye should look where it sees itself"?*

*Alkibiades: Clearly.*

*Sokrates: And how do we see ourselves?*

*Alkibiades: Clearly, Sokrates, in looking at mirrors and the like.*

*Sokrates: Very true; and is there not something of the nature of a mirror in our own eyes?*

*Alkibiades: Tell me what you mean.*

*Sokrates: If the eye is to see itself, it must look at that part of the eye where the essence or virtue of the eye resides?*

*Alkibiades: True.*

*Sokrates: And if the soul, my dear Alkibiades, is ever to know herself, must she not look at the soul; and especially at that part of the soul in which her virtue resides?*

*Alkibiades: I agree, Sokrates.*

The master's use of language was always a marvel of contemplation. The "virtue" or essence of seeing corresponds with the virtue or essence of the soul. To cultivate virtue is to nourish and "see" the soul. Clearly, this line of enquiry was his constant call.

*Sokrates: And do we know of any part of our psyches more divine than that part which holds wisdom and knowledge?*

*Alkibiades: There is none.*

*Sokrates: Then wisdom and virtue is that part of the soul that resembles the divine. He who looks at this and at the whole class of things divine, will be most likely to know himself?*

*Alkibiades: Clearly.*

*Sokrates: And we agree that self-knowledge is wise?*

*Alkibiades: Of course.*

*Sokrates: But if we have no self-knowledge and no wisdom, can we ever know our own good and evil?*

*Alkibiades: Certainly not.*

*Sokrates: Then such a man can never be a statesman?*

*Alkibiades: He cannot, not a successful one.*

Ah, politics — down-to-earth, dirty politics — something I did understand. I was both delighted and relieved to hear him address politicians.

*Sokrates: He will not know what he is doing?*

*Alkibiades: He will not.*

*Sokrates: And he who is ignorant of virtue will fall into error?*

*Alkibiades: Assuredly.*

*Sokrates: And he who falls into error, will he not fail both in his public and private capacity?*

*Alkibiades: Yes, indeed.*

*Sokrates: And failing, will he not be miserable?*

*Alkibiades: Very.*

*Sokrates: Then he who is not wise and good cannot be happy?*

*Alkibiades: He cannot.*

*Sokrates: The bad, then, are miserable?*

*Alkibiades: Yes, very, with only consolations to remind them of happiness.*

*Sokrates: Then it is not by riches, but by wisdom that one is delivered from misery?*

*Alkibiades: Clearly.*

*Sokrates: Then you or anyone who means to govern and superintend must in the first place acquire virtue.*

*Alkibiades: That is true.*

*Sokrates: Therefore, in order to enable you to do what you wish for yourself and the state, you need justice and wisdom?*

*Alkibiades: Clearly.*

*Sokrates: And you and the state, if you act wisely and justly, will act according to the will of God?*

*Alkibiades: Certainly.*

*Sokrates: You will look only at what is bright and divine, and act with a view to them?*

*Alkibiades: Yes.*

*Sokrates: And in that mirror you will see and know your own good-essence?*

*Alkibiades: Yes.*

*Sokrates: And so you will act rightly and well, with your essence in sight?*

*Alkibiades: Yes.*

*Sokrates: In which case, I will be security for your happiness.*

*Alkibiades: I accept the security.*

Again, the gadfly of Athens dove to the very cause of good and bad politics; again the master joined that argument to personal responsibility; and again, Sokrates showed his soul in a way that was both nurturing and challenging.

*Sokrates: But if you act unrighteously, your eye will turn to the dark and godless; and being in darkness and ignorance of yourselves, you will probably do deeds of political darkness.*

*Alkibiades: Very possibly. Many have before me.*

*Sokrates: My dear Alkibiades, if a man has the power to do*

*what he likes, but has no understanding, what is likely to be the result, with no one daring to reprove him? What will happen to him? Will he not likely have his constitution ruined?*

*Alkibiades: That is true. One must cultivate virtue, as you say.*

*Sokrates: And before there is strength of virtue, it is best to be commanded by a superior or master?*

*Alkibiades: That is evident.*

*Sokrates: And that which is better is also nobler?*

*Alkibiades: True.*

*Sokrates: And what is nobler is more becoming?*

*Alkibiades: Certainly.*

*Sokrates: Then vice is only suited to a slave? And virtue to a freeman?*

*Alkibiades: Yes.*

*Sokrates: O my friend, is not the condition of a slave to be avoided?*

*Alkibiades: Certainly, Sokrates.*

I thought I saw where this argument was headed: the wisdom of virtue and its necessity for liberation from misunderstanding. But as always, he surprised me.

*Sokrates: Let me inquire: Are you now conscious of your own state? And do you know whether you are a freeman or not?*

*Alkibiades: I think that I am very conscious indeed of my own state.*

*Sokrates: Look closely. Do you know how to escape out of a*

*state which I do not even like to name?*

*Alkibiades: Yes, I do.*

*Sokrates: How?*

*Alkibiades: By your help, Sokrates.*

*Sokrates: That is not well said, Alkibiades.*

*Alkibiades: What ought I to have said?*

*Sokrates: By the help of God.*

*Alkibiades: I agree; and I must say that a speech by you stirs us to the depths and casts a spell over us all. Do not think me drunk, but whenever I listen to you, my heart beats faster than if I were in a religious frenzy, and tears run down my face, and I observe numbers of others have the same experience. And let me further say that our relations are likely to be reversed. From this day forward, I must and will follow you as you have followed me; I will be the disciple, and you shall be my master.*

*Sokrates: O that is rare! My love breeds another love: and so like the stork I shall be cherished by the bird whom I have hatched.*

*Alkibiades: Strange, but true; and henceforward I shall begin to think about justice.*

*Sokrates: And I hope that you will persist; although I have fears, not because I doubt you; but I see the power of the state, which may be too much for both of us.*

It did not matter that Alkibiades then failed, magnificently — and of course, in the arms of another beautiful woman. It did not matter that Alkibiades had already achieved his mortal destiny. We were listening to the other part of Sokrates' prophecy coming due, his own demise. The state was showing itself to be too much to handle, again. The glow of devotion that had

surrounded my reading rested in a sober reality. Still, the gift of the stork persisted and the new love that had hatched breathed the sweetest air. We rested in the master's smile.

I inquired within as to why Sokrates had chosen me to be the reader of Plato's notes. I could advise my cousin in Ephesus to attend to justice, and personally I saw where I could strengthen virtue. A divine love felt new and growing. My wings were still down and I needed help, but a mystery surrounded us like an indefinite sphere.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **The Song of the Swan**

That last day dawned with light blues and Homeric pinks, as if to highlight the pain of love soon lost. Even the blossoms in the morning light reminded me that everything passes. Several of us assembled earlier than usual: Hermogenes, Apollodorus, Antisthenes, Krito, Phaedo, and others, with the still-ill Aristekles notably absent. But upon our arrival, one of the wardens, instead of admitting us, emerged from the jailhouse and told us to wait outside until he returned. “For his family,” he explained, “is now with Sokrates. The other jailors are taking off his chains, and they are about to let him know that he is to die today.”

“Die today.” Those words caused everyone to fall silent. Krito nodded in compliance. The morning’s fresh air stood in stark contrast with death’s disintegration. An uncomfortable concert was already being somberly orchestrated. Only the whispering winds and early street sounds played upon our ears — until we heard the plaintive wailing from within the prison. My feeling went out to Xanthippe and the boys. Our emotions flared and we braced ourselves.

After several painful minutes the crying paused; the jailor returned and allowed us in. On entering we found Sokrates just released from chains. Xanthippe was sitting by him, holding their youngest boy, Menexenos, in her arms, her eyes swollen and her face tear-stained. The preschool boy’s sad face held the shock of confusion and fear.

When Xanthippe saw us, she cried aloud, “O Sokrates, this is the last day that you and our family will ever be together. O please, let us flee to Megara! The boys already need and miss you, their father! Please!” She threw her face into his lap and wept.

Sokrates answered his wife’s pleas with a long and quiet embrace with his now free hands. She pleaded, “But you suffer unjustly!”

The master of irony retorted quickly, “Would you rather I suffer justly?” We held our chuckles at this pathetic scene.

She continued. “And it is the last time that you will converse with your friends, or they with you.”

Xanthippe was answered by, “Now, now,” and another embrace from her husband. Sokrates then turned to Kriton and requested, “Kriton, can you have someone take her home and take care of her?” Right away, some of Kriton’s people led her away, wailing, clutching Menekles with one arm, and digging her fingernails into her cheeks with the other, bloodying her face in long tracks.



When her cries were no longer audible, Sokrates bent and rubbed his legs and wrists where the manacles had

been. Krito, diverting our focus from the familial drama, said, "I'm glad your restraints are off and no longer troubling you."

"How singular is the thing called pleasure," the master said, "and how curiously it is related to pain — which might be thought to be its opposite. For they aren't present to a man at the same instant. And he who pursues pleasure is generally compelled to take the pain."

He paused briefly, and I examined my relationship to pleasure and pain.

The ever-free sage held his finger high. "Indeed, both pleasure and pain are like coffin nails that have hammered the feeling-soul to the mere body. This is why those who love wisdom attend to the soul, not the body's never-ending requests. And this is another reason I do not fear death. For the soul is immortal!"

Our gathering paused in appreciation of his proclamation and demonstration. After a few minutes where devotees gave appreciations of his wisdom, we shared food and refreshments and ordinary conversation. All the while, I felt penetrated by his illuminations of my pleasurable consolations.

I thought about his teachings on the soul for several hours. I considered the many myths I had heard on the afterlife and the soul's participation, and how they contrasted with Sokrates' admonitions. Later that afternoon, I asked for clarification. "I have studied at length the Orphic story of the soul's journey after death, but that myth has failed to illuminate my understanding. Please explain to me in a logical manner the immortality of the soul."

Sokrates proffered an exchange. "I'll tell you why I think the soul is immortal — using not an iota of mythology — then you tell me the myth."

I nodded, happy to have a direct exchange with the master. "Very simple," he began. "Things that move, move other things, yes? And something moving was caused to move, yes? And all things that move eventually stop moving, yes?"

I sensed the implications of his argument, as I had studied "change and changelessness" in India and how the unmastered soul is fastened to a perpetual motion machine. I inquired with great hope. "And the soul?"

"What initiates motion, yet has no beginning? A self-mover is itself the source of everything else that moves. Yes? So, by the same token, it cannot be destroyed."

I could not grasp the depth of his words quickly enough. My brows knotted with concentration and inward contemplation.

Sokrates made it easy for me. "Think about it: bodily objects moved from the outside have no soul, while those that move from within have soul. Moving from the core, all souls are self-movers, and therefore their immortality is obvious." He paused to let his words settle in.

I nodded somewhat tentatively. My eyes broke from his as I attempted to contemplate the depth of his propositions. It seemed I would have to think about what he said for a long time, as usual.

Sokrates continued. "So have I spoken of the immortality of the soul without mythic language — yes? Well, then, tell us the story."

I was both glad and apprehensive to be given the opportunity to relate what I had studied. I took a deep breath. “According to Orpheus, lord of the mysteries, the soul comes into the body with the first breath, and when the body expires, the psyche, breath or spirit no longer animates the body. With the last breath, life flows out of the body, dissolving flesh and thinking — as the ‘shade’ emerges from the top of the head or out of the mouth with the last breath.”

Everyone, including the master, seemed pleased with my telling, and so I proceeded with a refreshed confidence. “Hermes, the ‘One Who Crosses all Boundaries’, comes with his magic staff to take the ‘shade’ or psyche or soul on its journey. There is the inherent cognition that the staff of Hermes is the mystical path up and out of the body, and likewise there is the recognition that the flow of death is the river Styx.

“After the body and mind are left behind, the only quality that remains is one of thirst. It is the thirst or need that moved one while alive to be fulfilled. Now the yearning is without an object; neither wealth, nor adoration, nor glory, nor sexuality, nor pleasure of any kind obscures the naked unfulfilled need itself.”

To speak in his company was so charged, so potent that I already felt I was being instructed by my own words. But I did not have time to ruminate on the implications; my contribution had just begun.

“Thus possessed of a naked thirst, the tour of the previously un-seen, [*a-des*, not-day, ‘Hades’] begins.

First, Dike and the Judges of the Dead judge or weigh the oaths the souls made during life to see how well oaths were kept. This 'psychestasis' is essentially identical to the Egyptian description of balancing the soul's heart against a feather."

Several nods and the smile of the master implied that my recounting was not only accurate, but also thoughtful. Everyone's appreciation moved me. I exhaled fully and released the last of my apprehensions. My manner and voice relaxed into a slower and softer sound.

"Coming to that depth of self-knowledge too late, most souls are tormented, confused, and driven about the Underworld. Pindar sings, 'The guilty souls of the dead straightway pay the penalty for their sins here on earth, and the sins are judged by Zeus's Brother beneath the ground.'

"The thirsty soul wanders further down into the muddy darkness of Hades and soon comes upon the Pool of Lethe, lethargic Forgetfulness. Those souls whose habit of immediate satisfaction dominated their heart while alive desperately throw themselves upon the shores of Lethe to satisfy the driving thirst.

"Drinking from the waters of Lethe, their need is satisfied, but they forget who they are and lethargically wander forever in confusion throughout the Underworld—in the muddy, flatland of Asphodel—where neither trees nor any of the fruits of the earth appear.

"As you all know, there is another option. The famous golden sheaths inscribed with the words of

Lord Orpheus himself tell it best. 'And the Kings under the earth will pity you, and they will give you to drink from the lake of Remembrance. And it is a thronged road you are setting out on, a holy one along which other famous initiates and bacchants are proceeding. You shall find to the left in the House of Hades the Pool of Lethe. To this wellspring do not submit, but instead look up, up to the white poplar. At the foot of the white tree, you find another pool, the Waters of Remembrance. Cool drink flows there, surrounded by guardians. Finding the Pool of Remembrance, approach and say to the protectors: 'I am the offspring of Earth and starry Sky, I am parched with thirst and I am dying. Quickly give me the cool waters flowing forth from Remembrance.'"

I received a small round of applause for my recitation of the golden sheaves. I turned directly to Sokrates, to those delightful eyes that would soon be extinguished, and offered the promise of Orpheus. "It is said that those that drink of the waters of Remembrance rise and go to Elysium, the same immortal place as the Heroes. In the Fields of Elysium, they take on the ecstatic mantel of divinity in unending celebration."

Sokrates answered my offering. "May my soul soon converse with the immortals!"

We raised our cups, even though they were filled only with water.

Sokrates cautioned, "Well, if such myths are to be believed. One should not be prepared to insist on the literal accuracy of this description, but we can be confident that something of the kind is true."

“Still,” I had to admit, “I am saddened by your imminent departure, and, I must confess, frightened — as it reminds me of my own ending.”

Sokrates appreciated my confession. It was the truth, however feeble. He assured me, and all of us, with his philosophy. “Like children, you are haunted with a fear that when the soul leaves the body, the wind may really blow her away and scatter her.”

I flashed on that moment two months earlier on the docks of Piraeus, tortured by my own mortality: I delayed my departure and came back for help with this deepest fear. “Please, Sokrates, argue us out of our fears, just like we learned not to be afraid when alone in the dark. And yet, strictly speaking, they are not our fears, but isn’t there a child within all of us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin? I have sought the answer to this deepest fear for decades with only temporary or superficial success, which is therefore unsatisfactory. Can you enlighten me?”

The master did not hesitate, but leapt upon my real question. “Let the voice of the charmer be applied daily until you have charmed away the fear.”

I was glad for my decade in India as I instantly recounted the gopis or cow-herding maidens who were charmed by the passing Krishna. They did not confront their duties, their troubles, or their fears. Those things were simply outshined by divine distraction — the radiance and attractive force of the true guru, the beloved revealer of the divine; in their perfect enchantment they forgot about their problems. Sokrates’ admonition of enchantment, or charming

away the fear, was resonant with this metaphor. "I think I understand," I said.

The sage of Athens dove to the point. "One who has not studied philosophy and who is not entirely pure at the time of his departure is not allowed to enter the company of the Gods, but only the lover of wisdom. Do not lose heart, dear nephew of Heraklitos, for the day shall come when you will understand."

"Soul-enchanted philosophy?" I asked for clarification.

Sokrates gently replied. "Communion of the divine, pure and simple. Such is the soul and her ways. For in communion, she will calm passion and follow reason, and dwell in contemplation, beholding the true and divine (which is not a matter of opinion); and by divine communion, receive true nourishment."

"I am amazed," I replied, "for your words seem inspired, even in your last hours."

Sokrates replied with a smile, "O Enelysios, what are you saying? I am not very likely to persuade other men that I do not regard my present situation as a misfortune — if I cannot even persuade you that I am no worse off now than at any other time in my life. Will you not allow that I have as much of the spirit of prophecy in me as the swans? For swans, when they perceive that they must die, having sung all their life long, then sing more lustily than ever, rejoicing in the thought that they are about to go away to the god Apollo, whose ministers they are. But men, because they are afraid of death, slanderously affirm that the swans sing a lament as they enter their last days. Now

consider that no bird sings when cold, or hungry, or in pain, not even the swallow or nightingale. But because swans are sacred to Apollo, they have the gift of prophecy, and anticipate the good things of another world, wherefore they sing and rejoice in that day more than they ever did before.”

He raised his hands over his head like he was calling forth mysterious divinity. “And I too, believing myself to be the consecrated servant of the same God, and the fellow-servant of the swans, think that I have received from my master gifts of prophecy which are not inferior to theirs! I will not go out of life less merrily than the swans!”

We sat in enchanted silence for many minutes. Every breath was not merely aspiration but communion, connectedness, blessing. Each infilling took in not just air, but spirit, gratitude, beauty; and every expiration was sublime release and expansion into a surround of support and quiet exhilaration. Love permeated our lives and relationships; divinity was everywhere. With one mind we prayed that this communion be without end.

At first, because our feeling was so brightened, we did not notice that the prison had become flooded with sunlight, meaning the day was growing late. When at last we noticed the light, we understood that the time was at hand, and our wonder and trust were broken by a certain trepidation that the moment had arrived.

Only our fearless master could have broken the fear with further instruction. His sublime state was uninterrupted by the resumption of his speech. “Let a

man be of good cheer about his soul, who having cast away the pleasures and ornaments of the body as working more harm than good, has sought the pleasures of knowledge. The lover of wisdom has arrayed the soul, not in some exotic attire, but in her own proper jewels: temperance or restraint, and justice, and courage, and nobility, and truth. In these adornments, the soul is ready to go on her journey to the world below."

And of course, the master did not flinch from bringing us the truth. "You, Enelysios, and all other men, will depart at some time or other. For me already, as the tragic poet would say, the voice of fate calls. Soon I must drink the poison."

A moment later, a soldier came and stood outside our cell. Seeing the soldier, Sokrates stood and began to walk out of his cell to the water-basin. "I think that I had better repair to the bath first, in order that the women may not have the trouble of washing my body after I am dead."

I had seen it many times before, but somehow it struck me most deeply that, in every situation, he always thought of others.

As he slowly passed through, Krito asked, "And have you any commands for us, Sokrates? Is there anything you wish to say about your children, or about any other matter in which we can serve you?"

"Nothing in particular, Krito," our teacher replied. But then he paused, looked back at us and raised his finger. "Only, as I have always told you, take care of your feeling-being; that is a service which you may

forever render to me, and to all of us. But if you have no thought for your psyche, and care not to walk according to temperance or restraint — which I have always prescribed for you — no matter how much you may now profess or promise at the moment, it will be of no avail. Therefore, take care of your soul.”

“We will do our best,” Krito said, speaking for us all. “And in what manner shall we bury you?”

The master of life grinned from ear to ear and reproached Krito with enlightening irony. “In any way that you like; but you must also hold onto me, and take care that I do not run away from you!” Then Sokrates turned to us and added with a smile, “I cannot make Krito believe that I am the same Sokrates who has been talking and conducting the argument; he fancies that I am the other Sokrates whom he will soon see, a dead body — and so he asks, how shall he bury me?”

Sokrates’ parody of Krito brought his humor to us all, even as he held his oldest friend to the truth. “And though I have spoken many words to show that when I have drunk the poison I shall go to the joys of the blessed, these words of mine, with which I was comforting you (and myself), have had, as I perceive, no effect upon Krito.” The master thespian shook his fist at his oldest friend. We burst with laughter, and even Krito was grinning.

Sokrates turned from Krito and charged all of us. “Promise me something: you see, Krito was surety for me to the judges that I would remain, but you must be my bond to him that I shall not remain, but depart to the realm of the gods. Perhaps then he will suffer less at my death, and not be grieved when he sees my body

being burned or buried." Again, the master was thinking of his devotees. "And I would not have him feel sorrow at my hard lot, or say at the burial, 'Thus we follow Sokrates to the grave or bury him;' for false words are not only evil in themselves, but they infect the soul with bad feeling."

Sokrates turned back to Krito and assured him. "Be of good cheer, then, my dear friend, and say that you are burying my body only, and do with that whatever is usual, and what you think best, for I shall quickly cast it off and go to the realms beyond."

Once Sokrates spoke these words, he passed into the chamber beside us to bathe; Krito followed him and told us to wait. So we remained behind, talking about the subject of his discourse itself, and also of the greatness of our loss. Phaedo, whom Sokrates openly called "beloved," spoke to our sorrow. "He is like a father, being robbed from us, and we are about to pass the rest of our lives as orphans."

As Sokrates was bathing, Xanthippe returned, this time with other relatives and all three of their sons — little Menexenos, pubescent Sophroniskos, and the eldest Lamprokles, who had the long locks of a teen. All of the followers exited the cell so that the family could say goodbye one last time.

Sokrates talked to Xanthippe and her sister and gave them a few directions in the presence of Krito. He called Lamprokles to him and empowered him to take care of his mother and his brother, then hugged him. He picked up little Menexenos quickly, causing the youngster to smile with glee, even as others' eyes began

to smart. After kissing the cheeks of Sophroniskos and Xanthippe, the master embraced his entire family for the very last time. There were many sobs, but Sokrates' mood was free of sadness, yet full of loving care. When the embrace was complete, he simply dismissed them.

Now the hour of sunset was near, for a good deal of time had passed with his family. We poured back into his cell and he sat down with us, but not much was said. A grave sobriety filled every moment.

Soon our favorite guard entered and walked directly to Sokrates. Collectively, we softly gasped, for the dance of death had begun. The jailer bowed to the master with great respect and confessed. "To you, Sokrates, whom I know to be the noblest and gentlest and best of all who ever came to this place, I will not project the angry feelings of other men, who rage and swear at me. It is only in obedience to the authorities that I bid you to drink the poison. I am sure that you will not be angry with me; for others, as you are indeed aware, and not I, are to blame."

Sokrates quietly beamed at this Persian slave and nodded in agreement. The jailor returned the gesture, and thanked the sage of Athens. "Fare you well, and try to bear lightly what must be — you know my errand." But as the jailer finished his explanation, his voice cracked and he burst into tears, turned away, and rushed out.

Sokrates called after him, "I return your good wishes, and will do as you ask."

Turning to us, he remarked, "How charming that man is! Since I have been in prison he has always been coming to see me, and at times he would talk to me,

and was as good to me as could be, and now see how generously he sorrows on my account. We must do as he says, Krito." With his voice slightly raised, Sokrates spoke to us all. "Therefore let the cup be brought, if the poison is prepared; if not, let the attendant prepare the herb!"

We were taken aback, surprised that the inevitable moment was fully upon us. Krito pleaded with quiet desperation. "But the sun is still upon the hilltops; you only have to drink the poison before sunset." Though Sokrates scowled at him, Krito continued. "And I know that many a one has taken the draught late, and after the announcement has been made to him, he has eaten and drunk, and enjoyed the society of his beloveds. Do not hurry, there is plenty of time."

Sokrates answered his friend. "Yes, Krito, and those people are right in so acting, for they think that they will be gainers by the delay; but I am right in not following their example, for I do not think that I should gain anything by drinking the poison a little later. I should only be ridiculous in my own eyes for sparing a few moments for a life that is already forfeit. Please do as I say. Do not to refuse me." Sokrates was insistent.

Understanding the truth the master was transmitting, Krito relented and bowed. He made a sign to a servant of his who was standing by, and he went out. One by one, we approached Sokrates and placed a hand upon his living body, like workers surrounding the queen bee. He touched every hand in turn. Such a calm fell upon us that even Apollodorus and Phaedo were peaceful. We spent several minutes quietly thanking the master for his passionate help, his

instruction, and his joy. I told him how glad I was that he laughed and danced so much.

Having been absent for some time, the jailer returned, carrying the poison in the same small cups in which the Asklepians gave their medicine. A plaintive groan escaped from Phaedo, hiding my own gasp. We looked to the master.

Sokrates gave our shock no attention, but calmly addressed death's messenger. "You, my good friend, who are experienced in these matters, please give me all the directions I need to know on how I am to proceed."

The jailer bit his lip, took a deep breath, and answered with a forced calm. "You have only to walk about until your legs feel heavy, and then lie down, and the poison will quickly act."

At the same time he handed the tiny cup to Sokrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, looked at the man and said, "What do you say about making a libation to a god? May I, or not?"

The man was glad to answer Sokrates. "We only prepare the herb's juices, and just so much as we deem enough. That's all."

"I understand," the sage of Athens nodded. "But I may and must ask the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world. And so be it according to my prayer." Then, raising the small cup to his lips, Sokrates quite readily and cheerfully drank



the poison, just as he had done with every toast and invocation.

Before this moment, most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw too that he had finished the draught, we could no longer hold back, and my own tears, like several others, were flowing fast. I covered my face and wept.

I was not the first; Phaedo wailed at the thought of having to part from such a friend. Krito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, got up, and turned away. At that moment, Apollodorus, who had been tearing all the time, broke out in a loud and passionate cry and his extreme lack of restraint made cowards of us all.

Sokrates alone retained his calmness. He reproached us. "What is this strange outcry? I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Give me quiet, then, and have patience."

When we heard his words we were ashamed, and held back our tears. With his always-present, natural joy, he walked about until he stumbled as his legs began to fail.

Sokrates raised his brows as if to say that the poison was working as promised, and then he lay on his back, according to the directions. The kind man who gave him the poison now looked at his feet and legs. After a while the jailer pressed the master's foot hard, and asked, "Can you feel this?"

The master, without an iota of sentiment, answered, "No." The man then poked his lower leg, and then upwards, indicating that his entire leg was cold and stiff. He unfolded the burial cloth and covered the master's legs.

Sokrates, ever curious, reached down, and felt them himself. The jailer informed us all, "When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end."

I had seen many people die before. It happened to them all, as each wanted more time. This was the first death I had ever seen where the person was choosing to be a conscious participant, not a victim, and simply happy.

When the feeling started to disappear in the bottom of his trunk, Sokrates reached down, grabbed the edge of his burial cloth, and covered himself up entirely, saving the attendant the task. Though long breaths could be seen in the rising and falling of his trunk, he was already faceless. Respecting his request for peace, we remained quiet in our anguish.

Astonishingly, he uncovered his face, and spoke! "Krito, I owe a cock to Asklepius; will you remember to pay the debt?" Then he drew the cover back over his face and took a long, deep breath.

Was this a debt he suddenly remembered? Not likely. I flashed to my first day in Athens, two months back, when I had sent a cock to Asklepius in payment for my medicine. Was he alluding to the poison as medicine, curing his mortality? One thing was certain: this swan of Athens was singing his humor to the very end.

“The debt shall be paid,” said Krito. “Is there anything else?” There was no answer; we stared at his trunk to see any movement of breath. There was only motionless tranquility. A minute or two of stillness passed, then the attendants uncovered him. His eyes were open, staring indefinitely vacant. Krito reached over, and with the dearest touch, closed his eyes and mouth.

Apollodorus collapsed in sobs and Phaedo threw himself upon his beloved’s feet, crying. The rest of us were silent,



even as tears ran down our cheeks.

Mysteriously, the room filled with an extraordinary brightness of passing, just as it did when he brought the divine down at our gatherings. Even the jailor sat with us, as one of us. Beyond our tears and loss, our souls were permeated with perfect divinity, feeling the immortal ground. He must have been already questioning Achilles and Homer, and dancing in the Fields of Elysium.



## Chapter Nine Legacy

No one left that cell the whole night through. A divine luminescence had permeated us to the core, even hours after the master passed over. The cell was awash with a luminous presence and in perfect stillness we could breathe him and melt into This. I hardly had a thought all night long. Every thought dissolved into unfathomable mystery, and every trickle of love given was met with a deluge. Only at dawn did our conventional awareness gradually reappear and the business of life resume.

In accordance with custom, the master's body was laid out for three days at his home so that family and friends could mourn. The front door was framed by two stones; on one side an unshaped stone called Apollo of the Ways and the other side was a Herm with a head at the top, a smooth, featureless body except for an erect penis. What a crowd came through his tiny house! Xanthippe and the boys received many gifts, and I left her the ten mina I had originally wanted to give Sokrates. Krito assured her that he would manage their estate and make sure they had their regular income. At the end of the third day, everyone made the silent procession to the graveyard outside the Gates in outer Kerameikos. With all the speeches and libations, you would have thought Sokrates was a man of conventional wealth or political



power. But these speeches and libations carried with them an extra edge of wisdom, a divine intoxication, even amidst the mourning. Following the speeches, the women lowered the master's wrapped body into the ground with their own freshly cut hair. Many votive offerings were placed in the tomb as he was covered with dirt, and so it was with the greatest respect and care that the body of Sokrates was interred.

After the funerary banquet and goodbyes, I boarded a ship at Piraeus for home the next day. Sailing back to Ephesus, I contemplated my astonishing two months with Sokrates and the great gifts he had given me. The nagging feeling that had persisted throughout my twenty years of spiritual searching — that there was something else I needed to know — was satisfied in two ways. First, I had learned to appreciate “not-knowing” and wonder anew; and second, I had been given self-knowledge — the kind I had managed until now to largely avoid, but which was at the root of my searching. In my mind and heart, I thanked Sokrates again and again for explaining to me how to be a devotee of wisdom instead of a seeker of satisfaction, in eternal pursuit of information and answers.

I vowed to strengthen my life-practices of harmonic restraint and service, and to grow in appreciation of the beauty and simplicity of natural living that Sokrates embodied. These things I practiced — with lapses, to be sure — during the decades after his death, leading up to the present. Even my passing fear of death would dissolve when I contemplated his charming smile and compassionate humor; his wild freedom, as expressed in the theatre of the sublime that was both his method and

his very life; his never-ending service to devotees and community; and his utter fearlessness and equanimity in the face of death itself.

Twenty years of service to my family and city have passed too quickly since those powerful two months; but never has a day or even an hour passed when I have not thought of Sokrates. Noting the twentieth anniversary of his death gave me a grand vision of the gifts he had passed onto me.

There came upon me an unquenchable thirst to revisit Athens and gather with his devotees once more. Looking back, I saw how he changed me, how the simplicity of virtue had matured me, where my natural appreciations were avenue to a deep peace. Seeing anew what his demonstration had done for me, I made immediate plans to return to Athens and gather with his devotees.

Arriving at the Double Gates, a new generation of prostitutes and boys were being hawked, as if no time had passed. As was the custom, I walked through the first gate to the interior courtyard to drink from the pure waters of the fountain for the travelers. After the welcome refreshment, I turned toward the second gate and beheld something new and wonderful. Beside the statutes of Zeus of the Courtyard and Hermes the protector of travelers, and alongside Perikles and other Athenian fathers at the entrance to the Pompeion, there he was: a prominent life-size bronze statue of that wonderful, ugly old man. The City recognized him after all.

I hurried to the Agora and proceeded straight to the cobbler shop. Simon was long gone, I was told. I inquired about other friends of Sokrates and the cobbler told me that Phaedo taught in the Painted Stoa.

There I found Phaedo, who was now about the age I had been in my time with Sokrates. Phaedo was engaging a younger fellow, but seeing my approach, he excused himself and received me with open arms. I told him of my reason for being there and he said, "Well, to be reminded of Sokrates is always the greatest delight to me, whether I speak myself or hear another speak of him. Every day I come here to the Painted Temple's Porch, and question people about what they think they need for happiness, like our master taught us. It's my Porch talk [*stoa* = porch, "stocism"]. But come; let us go to Aristekles' grand family estate, not far from the Dipylon Gates, in a beautiful grove of a City hero, Akademos. There is usually a gathering there, with many great minds. We can while away many hours in adoration and remembrance of the master. And you should know that Aristekles is now only called Plato, in remembrance of how Sokrates made fun of him." We laughed, locked arms like brothers, and strode out of the Painted Stoa.

Just outside the Double Gates, we paused at the grave of Sokrates and enjoyed a few moments of silence. I felt the extreme blessing of knowing him and this glow persisted as we walked the six stadia to Plato's place. Phaedo talked about his own inspiration in developing a school, stoically and dialectically cutting away everything not true, and heartily asserting what we natively know to be good.

As we approached the Grove of Akademos, I realized these were the same mature green woods I had seen in the distance twenty years earlier. I wondered why the Spartans had spared it. Over the gates was written, "Let None Ignorant in Geometry Enter Here." Inside the gates, Phaedo noticed my astonishment at the beauty of the place, causing him to explain: "Legend has it that these twelve groves of olives were all cuttings from the sacred tree on the Acropolis two hundred years ago, making them sacred to Athena, and they were once owned by the hero Akademos. This estate is large — the walls enclose a large square, two stadia by two stadia. And almost two hundred years ago, the river Kephissos was diverted to flow through these groves and estate, and that irrigation is why everything here is so lush and green. The Spartans camped here and that is why it was not destroyed long ago."

This paradise [*paradise* = 'walled garden'] reminded me of other grand walled gardens I had seen from Babylon's Eden to India's ashrams, where the natural state is cultivated in a lush setting.

Aristekles, or rather Plato, was sitting on his porch, surrounded by giant ferns and concentrated in writing. Seeing us approaching, our broad shouldered, broad-faced, broad-minded friend leapt from his chair and greeted us with his characteristic feminine voice. "Welcome to the Akademy!" We all smiled wide, feeling we were in the good company of the master.

After pleasantries and explanations, I first asked about the time after Sokrates was laid to rest. Plato told me, "The youth were the first to recognize what the

State had done. They closed the gymnasia and the training grounds for the entire moon cycle in honor of his absence. Once the elders realized what had been done, Anytus and Lykon were driven out of town, and Meletus put to death, just as Sokrates had prophesized.

“I left the City in disgust. I traveled to Italy and lived with the Pythagoreans. I studied their golden mathematics and lived the communal disciplines of their master. I was deeply impressed. Certainly you saw what is written over the gate.

“I also traveled to Egypt and, under direction of the temple priests, inhabited the world of stillness and dark silence deep within the pyramids of Giza many times. I traveled here and there, but after being gone a dozen years I came home. Eight years ago, I opened this blessed estate as a kind of school, inspired by Sokrates. I have undertaken to write the dialogues of our gatherings as a witness to his brilliance and instruction.”

I suggested that we tell stories of the master to kindle his efforts, which we did all afternoon — and, as in days of old, a divine glow permeated each and all.

I asked Plato about his work at the sacred grove. He explained, “Well, Pythagorean understandings and the pyramid mysteries are studied as well. But principally, I teach his enquiry [Greek for “enquiry” is *skepsis*, “skeptical”] and how to suspend our judgments that are based on conventional knowledge. In support of this enquiry, I am working my best to outline the master’s logic, his art of interrogation, as well as his “no ideas”.

Noticing both Phaedo and Plato had devoted their life to carrying on the truth that Sokrates had shown them, I asked about others.

Phaedo told me that Antisthenes was also promoting the understanding of Sokrates as he saw fit and that he criticized Plato as not being a true ascetic. "Antisthenes treats all conventional distinctions and cultural traditions as impediments to the life of virtue. His marriage with Xaris did not last, as you can imagine, for Antisthenes was always repeating that he needed nothing to be happy. What wife would put up with that? He loved to repeat: 'My master has taught me to be like a dog, needing only a simple life to be happy.' Thus he and his ascetic followers are known as Cynics." [*Cynic* is Greek for "dog".]

"And on the other side, there are those that have taken up the life of pleasure as the highest good, saying that Sokrates taught them to follow the ways of happiness! Hedonistic, epicurean feasts mark their gatherings!"

Plato jumped in. "But none of his followers, not even myself or all of us together, is a man of the people like he was. He did not just speak of the origin of things or fixate upon what can be learned. Sokrates was the first to call philosophy down from the skies, and establish her in the town, and introduce her into people's homes, and force her to investigate ordinary life, ethics, happiness, good, and evil. Sokrates taught us that only through the constant process of self-examination are we able to attain the clarity of mind that is the necessary and sufficient condition for a good and happy life."

Phaedo raised his goblet in exclamation. "We are indeed blessed. And we who have been touched by the master must do what we can to carry on. We are the flames kindled from his leaping spark; may our souls burn forever in his service."

We raised our goblets in a toast to the master again and again. For the rest of the evening and half the night, we invoked the presence and wonder of the gadfly of Athens into our gathering with more stories and remembered lessons. Endless praise and abundant laughter balanced our quiet appreciations and silent contemplations. My need to forget myself in him was satisfied. As he would say, I was charmed.

Throughout the day and in times of repose, I think about him. I naturally recollect him. Like the cow-maidens distracted by Krisna, I simply forget about my problems and myself in contemplating him. After all my lamentations, lessons, and learning, I just contemplate his laughter and playfulness, his honesty, passion, and naturalness. Even at my first sighting of the master, when my mind was full of doubt, I was gladdened. Indeed, I loved him from the very beginning.

## Appreciations

“Socrates was an original genius in whose character there was a unique blend of the passionate lover, the religious mystic, the eager rationalist, and the humorist. He created the intellectual and moral tradition by which Europe has ever since lived.”

— A.E. Taylor, *Socrates: The Man and His Thought*, 1932

“In the golden chain of Hellenic philosophers, Socrates and Plato and Aristotle outshine all their predecessors and successors, and Socrates shines the brightest of the three.”

— Arnold Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth*, 1976

“The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato[’s Socratic Dialogues]. I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them.”

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929

“Socrates was the purest thinker in the West.”

— Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1968

“A speech by you, Sokrates, stirs us to the depths and casts a spell over us all. Do not think me drunk, but whenever I listen to you, my heart beats faster than if I were in a religious frenzy, and tears run down my face — and I observe numbers of others have the same experience.”

— Alkibiádēs Kleiníou Skambōnidēs, prominent Athenian statesman and devotee

“If I could only be Alcibiades for one day and night and then die!”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1772

“O Socrates! Yours and mine are the same adventure! I am alone. My only analogy is Socrates. My task is a Socratic task.”

— Søren Kierkegaard, 1841

“If all goes well, the time will come when one will take up the Memories of Socrates rather than the Bible as a guide to morals and reason... Socrates exceeds the founder of Christianity in possessing a joyful kind of seriousness and that wisdom full of rogushness that constitutes the finest state of the human soul.”

— Fredrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 1878

“... the old sage still lives, carried on in an immortality of fame, still influencing our ideals of conduct and government, stirring us on to the study and practice of wisdom.”

— Will Durant, *Socrates: The First Martyr of Philosophy*, 1929

“He was the perfect Orphic saint: in the dualism of heavenly soul and earthly body he had achieved the complete mastery of the soul over the body. His indifference to death at the last is the final proof of this mastery.”

— Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 1945

“Although he left no work, no doctrine, much less system, he gave impetus to the mightiest movement in Greek philosophy, a movement that has endured down to our own day.”

— Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers Vol. 1*, 1957

“If you believe what Socrates does, you hold the secret of happiness in your own hands. Nothing the world can do to you can make you unhappy.”

— Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 1991

“To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience... Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 1963

“Socrates was one of that small number of adventurers who, from time to time, have enlarged the horizon of the human spirit. They have divined in our nature unsuspected powers which only they have as yet, in their own persons, brought to fulfillment. By living the truth they discovered they gave the world the only possible assurance that it is not an illusion.”

— F.M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*, 1932

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**Appendix A: Notes and Justifications**  
(In process...)

Chapter One: Agora Theatre. "My, my, my. They're swatting at me now." This is not from historical record. (However, the charming first interchange with Eneysios, "Can you tell me where to find good bread? ... " is reportedly how the first interchange with Xenophon went.)

"I pray that I do anything to promote the virtue that begets the good life and the love of wisdom." Literary device.

Chapter Two: Illuminations. "They set a court date two weeks from tomorrow. If I am found guilty, I have but a few days with you." Fictionally constructed for literary necessity.

"As we have all wrestled with the oracular ravings from Delphi, who can say?" .... "But, indeed, I accept the blessings of my chosen god, Apollo. Thank you, Aristedemus." Fictionally constructed for literary necessity.

"Can what is always given in abundance increase one day more than others? And what is my prayer? This I can say: That the call for the love of wisdom be heard. Who knows whether death or life best answers this supplication?" Fictionally constructed for literary necessity.



**Appendix B: Personae**  
**(In process...)**

**Agathon** (c. 445-c. 365 BCE), is portrayed by Plato as a handsome young playwright, well dressed, and of polished manners. Reportedly, he was courted by the fashionable of Athens, and dispensed hospitality with ease and refinement. His speech in praise of love in the Symposium is full of beautiful and good [Gr. “agathos”], but his artificially rhetorical expressions has led some scholars to believe he may have also been a student of Gorgias.

**Alkibiades** (453-408 BCE) was a famed aristocrat, a statesman, general, and devotee of Sokrates. Alkibiades was the nephew of Perikles, a golden boy, and loved by the populace. He was witty, beautiful, charming to a fault, and an indulgent womanizer. He credited Sokrates with penetrating him and his pretenses, which were said to have been substantial.

**Antisthenes** (c. 445-c. 365 BCE) was a Greek philosopher and a pupil of Sokrates. Antisthenes first learned rhetoric under Gorgias before becoming an ardent disciple of Sokrates. He adopted and developed the ethical side of Sokrates' teachings, advocating an ascetic life lived in accordance with virtue. Later writers regarded him as the founder of Cynic philosophy.

**Apollodorus** the Mad (c. 435 – 398) was said to be very excitable, with dramatic emotional expressiveness.

**Aristodemus** of Cydathenaeum (c 460 – 404?) was described as a humble but inseparable attendant of

Sokrates. He is described as a barefooted runt of low birth in Plato's *Symposium*, and Xenophon refers to him as Aristodemus the dwarf. Although little is known of his life, his depiction as a member of an earlier generation of Socratic followers places his birth in the early-mid 5th century BCE. Scholars assume that his death preceded the end of the 5th century, since he was not present during Sokrates' final days in 399.

Fictionally placed in this story because of his devotion. **Aristekles**, or **Plato** (428-352, BCE) was twenty-seven years of age at the death of Sokrates (though not present). After that outrage in Athens, Plato traveled to Egypt and Italy, learning from the pyramid priests and the Pythagoreans. His "Academy" was the foundation of the Western university and the ideas he clarified and integrated, mainly from Sokrates, forms central themes for Western philosophy.

**Enelysios** means "struck by lightning" in Greek, connoting unbelievable luck. Lightning was considered the most blessed form of death for Zeus' power would lead the soul directly to Elysium (in fact, Enelysios is the etymological root of Elysium and Elysian Fields.)

**Glaukon** (c. 445-399 BCE) was the older brother of Plato, and like his brother was amongst the inner circle of Sokrates' young affluent students. The name "Glaukon" is derived from *glaukommatos* meaning "bright-eyed" or "owl-eyed". This is considered to be devotional homage to Athena, the virgin divinity of wisdom and namesake and guardian deity of the city of Athens.

**Hermogenes** (c 445 – 388 BCE) was a son of Hipponius, and a brother of the wealthy Kallias. Plato suggests, however, that Hermogenes was unjustly deprived of his property by his brother.

**Kritias**, (460 BC – 403 BCE), born in Athens, was an uncle of Plato, and a leading member of the Thirty Tyrants, and one of the most violent. The fact that he was an associate of Sokrates did not endear Sokrates to the Athenian public.

**Krito** (466 BC – 395 BCE) of Alopeke was a faithful, probably life-long companion of Sokrates . The two had evidently grown up together as friends, being from the same deme (City Section) and of roughly the same age. Krito appears to have been a wealthy businessman, who evidently made his money from running a successful farm.

**Kritoboulos** (c 427 – 388) was the eldest son of Krito, but was old enough to offer - along with his father, Plato, and Apollodorus - to help Sokrates pay any amount if the court chose to fine Sokrates. As Krito and Sokrates had been life-long companions, Kritoboulos carried a certain familial intimacy with Sokrates. Young, beautiful, and rash, Kritoboulos was a perfect foil for the master.

**Phaedo** was a Persian slave that Sokrates befriended and the Sage of Athens convinced Krito to pay for his freedom. Phaedo kept his hair long, in the Persian custom, and Sokrates affectionately stroked it.

**Sokrates** was a common name after the defeat of the Persians in 480 BCE, for it connoted “safety”. A stonemason’s son who called down philosophy from

the skies to the soul of man and woman, this Sage of Athens was free speech's first significant martyr.

**Simon** the Shoemaker (460 – 405 BCE) Sokrates was said to visit Simon's shop daily, and converse with him on various subjects. Simon committed many of these conversations to writing, as far as he could remember them; and it was said by some that he was the first person to write Sokratic Dialogues. His writings attracted the notice of Perikles, who offered to provide for his maintenance, if he would come and reside with him; but Simon refused, on the grounds that he did not wish to surrender his independence. Diogenes Laertius lists thirty-three conversations that were contained in one volume. It has been suggested that these dialogues inspired Plato. He is fictionally placed in this story's timeline, having passed before Sokrates.

**Xenophon** (c 430-388 BCE) wrote dialogues with Sokrates and his practicality compliments and often confirms Plato's accounts. Xenophon was a military man, who wrote military accounts as well as one of the first animal-rights treatises on the care of horses.

## **About the Author**

Frank Marrero is a former instructor at John F. Kennedy University in the San Francisco Bay area where he taught in the Department of Religion and Philosophy. He regularly lectures in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at California State University, and he teaches elementary children everyday. Marrero holds a Master's in the Arts in Teaching and a California teaching credential. He is married to a school-teacher, Julia, and they have two children, Salem, 18, and Ella, 14.

Marrero grew up in Nashville, Tennessee where he regularly played on the steps of the world's only perfect replica of the Parthenon of classical Athens. His mother and father (Sybil and Ramon) were passionate unconventionalists. Well-established in his mid-twenties, Mr. Marrero owned a hardware store and opened a highly successful natural foods restaurant.

Just after his 26th birthday, he sold or gave away everything he owned, moved to Northern California, and lived for over a decade as a religious renunciate in the ashram of the American spiritual teacher Avatara Adi Da. There, Adi Da required his students to become fluent in a variety of religious traditions, with particular emphasis in Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism.

Adi Da blessed Marrero to serve the children in the ashram culture. Marrero was the Director of Children's Education and also served as teacher, principal, and retreat manager.

Marrero was fortunate to live in the intimate company of Adi Da for extended periods, where he was instructed in philosophy and initiated directly into the mystery traditions. In such rare circumstance, Marrero was given the knowledge of the dynamics between master and initiate. Following these transmissions, Adi Da directed Marrero to study the pre-Socratic mystery schools of ancient Greece.

Marrero is the author of *The View from Delphi, Rhapsodies of Ancient Hellenic Wisdom* (forthcoming). Highly praised by the late great classicist, Norman O. Brown (*Love's Body* and others), *The View from Delphi* focuses on the mystery traditions of ancient Greece, the spiritual teachings of Orpheus, and presents an ecstatic appreciation of Western history.

Frank is also the author of *Lincoln Beachey, The Man Who Owned the Sky*, published originally by an ad hoc publishing arm of the San Francisco Historical Society, ScottWall Publishers. It is the authoritative biography of the "Alexander of the Air", the "greatest aviator of all time" and "the forgotten father of aerial aerobatics".

Marrero is also the author of *Big Philosophy for Little Kids*, a writing curriculum whose distinction is how writing lessons can be set within the affective domain. Here, as the kids learn writing techniques, they become emotionally fluent and consider character wisdom. *Big Philosophy for Little Kids* has been highly praised by Michael Murphy (*Golf in the Kingdom*, co-founder of Easlen), the Joseph Campbell Foundation, and a wide range of educators. (Forthcoming)

For all the writings of Frank Marrero, please visit [www.frankmarrero.com](http://www.frankmarrero.com).

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