

SOCRATES AND ASPASIA

By

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## Chapter 1

The Old Man wasn't sure if he was living in the past, present or future. Maybe it was all three at once. But he knew, and more importantly felt, that it was yet another moment best described as 'now'. The Eternal Now in which he always had lived, was living, and, if the Spirit that inspired the creation of the gods and goddesses atop Mount Olympus was willing, would live forever. His life-tired yet still fire-infused eyes perused the room. They beheld images on the vases and sculptures of those gods and goddesses, and the likenesses of mortal men who thought themselves worthy of being gods and goddesses. In a world where, for most men, and women, life was about being a deity with power, or a slave to Fate administered by such 'high beings'.

The Old Man breathed in the Athenian Spring air though the squashed in nose that made him look more like a pig than a man. Then felt the wind coming in through the window on a drooping and fat face which was created more for a bulldog than the only earthly species privileged, or burdened, to walk on two legs. But through ears that were three times normal size, but ten times more open than any perfectly proportioned man, he allowed himself to hear, and absorb, the voice of the courtesan who was still more beautiful than any likeness of a goddess, and whose influence on mortals and perhaps even Fate itself rivaled that of Zeus himself, or even the Spirit that allowed mortals to believe in that personification of the Chief God.

Indeed, Socrates didn't know if the transition into a realm bigger and bolder than the one he had left after his work day had ended was due to the words Aspasia was giving voice to. Or to the musical accompaniment she played on the lyre while liberating them into the ethers. Or to the sight of her body, which over the last 20 years had become more beautiful, while his grew more homely.

"A unexamined life is not worth living," the most desired mistress in Athens sung to the feared, ridiculed and dangerous pug nosed, balding philosopher as the smooth skin of her washed, shaven legs lay upon Socrates' sun-blistered calves under his unwashed robe which was more rag than cloth. "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom," the most intelligent, and therefore the most discrete, woman in Athens said to her old lover with a smile that made him feel like a young man again. "And," she continued as both former lovers who had met in simpler and less complicated times heard the screams of three Theban slaves being beaten by a well armed and politically powerful demonic-possessed Golden Age Athenian master outside the window. "Ignorance is the source of all evil and bad behavior," she said, without musical accompaniment, the Silence giving weight to the wisdom or falsity of that speculation, depending on who dared to give it consideration and depth of inquiry.

Socrates reached for the dagger within his stone mason tool belt, then was pulled away from using it. "And a wise man or woman picks his or her battles carefully," the eternally-youthful female sage with long, brown and still thick hair reminded the prematurely old, balding, white haired philosopher. "And as for happiness," she reminded

him, with a sad smile, and downturned eyes, “as we both know,” she continued as Socrates took note of the latest stitchery on her fine garments that allowed her to maintain the appearance of being a rich, privileged and aristocratic courtesan in her private house of learning and culture. ““Happiness is not about seeking more but in...developing the capacity to enjoy less. We did discover that, together...so many years ago, my dear, brave and according to Aristophanes anyway, mentally defective Socrates. Like immortal truths such as...”

“..The only true wisdom is in knowing nothing,” Socrates said along with Aspasia, finally giving voice through his mouth to the third brain, and soul, which had evolved between him and her. He recalled the first day they met so many life experiences ago when he was young, handsome and cocky. Then let his mind recall how he fell instantly in love and lust with the most intelligent, insightful and therefore lovingly compassionate female philosopher in Athens. Or perhaps the world. In a world where, she had taught him about love in all of its expressions. Philo, love of comrades in search of Ultimate Truth and its application to the world as it is. Agape, love of Spirit that made such a Cause possible. And Eros, which came with most every affection of the flesh that the freedom of expression that permeated Athens allowed. Between an unmarried man and unmarried woman, and, now that things were different, a married man and a ‘mistress’ whose place it was to be ‘owned’ by powerful men who, ultimately, so far anyway, Aspasia was supposed to educate in the ways of love, intellect and enlightened political policies.

“Yes, the only true wisdom indeed is in knowing nothing, Aspasia,” Socrates said, turning away from his former lover, with whom he dared not have carnal relationships with now. He gazed into the empty sky that he wished so much to be filled by answers as to what to do about, for or even IN a world that still was more about anger, jealousy and greed than higher aspirations.

“You should write that down, my dear Socrates,” Aspasia said, laying her firm, gentle and electrifying fingers on Socrates’ shaking shoulders. “Instead of your students, Plato, Aristotle and Xenophen. So you’re not misquoted,” she continued, laying a sheet of papyrus on his lap. She then placed a pen in his sweat-soaked palm in between fingers made raw and blistered by making likenesses of the gods he didn’t believe in order to be able to eat, then taking revenge on himself for doing so afterwards.

“Go on...Write what you feel with your Mind rather than think with your brain,” Socrates heard through ears that perceived the echo of history, and the inevitable finality of his own mortality. “What is being channeled through you by that Spirit which is beyond and within the gods. The one God as you keep saying to everyone, even and especially, those with closed eyes, minds and hearts.”

Socrates contemplated the matter, pretended set about to put the first mark on the sheet, then gave the pen and paper back to Aspasia. He pushed himself onto his knarly feet, which had not worn shoes for as long as he could remember, strode over to a statue of a ‘Zeus the father’ which bore his name as the author, for which he was well paid by the

priests, as a father of three who needed food in their bellies more than bold, new philosophical ideals in their young, growing heads. “You write it down, Aspasia, please,” he said to Aspasia by way of necessity, harboring yet another secret from the woman he was determined to hold nothing back from. Then, something magical happened as he felt tragedy become mastered, chains of confinement turning into wings of liberation. “You have better hand writing than I do,” he continued with a chuckle that cracked his sunbaked lips, feeling the very human, and beyond godlike phenomenon of humor being channeled through him.

“And can take the blame for getting it wrong after I write down what you said,” Aspasia pointed out, apparently passing on, for the moment anyway, laughing or even smiling at Socrates’ hard earned and eternally relevant jokes. “Or let one of your MALE students take credit for it because Athenian women, or foreign Greeks like me, are only good for popping out babies and laughing at our husband’s jokes....Or admiring their pearls of practical wisdom like...”

Aspasia held herself back, took pen her hand, and motioned for Socrates to speak, as was their normal custom, habit and Passion. The Old Man, feeling like a young one, looked up to the still cloudless Athenian sky, discovering a truth that is real, and liberating, but hard.

“If you get a good wife, you will be happy,” he stated, enwrapped in the joy of discovery regarding the world as it could be, and, if Aspasia was less desirable for more powerful Athenians, for him could have been. “And If you get a bad wife.” he continued, contemplating the images, words and other sensory stimuli of the world as it is.

“Like Xanthrippe,” Aspasia offered, by necessity rather than choice as she slipped into a woolen robe in response to a cold wind from the North finding its way through the mountains and into a dwelling which emanated warmth for the emotionally wounded and fire for the intellectually adventurous. “Your wife. Who is afflicted by the disease of ignorance and cruelty, who is turning your sons, who you DO love, despite what you say, against you. Who you are not allowed to divorce by law or that curse of the intelligent class called Conscience,” she continued, gazing at and into Socrates.

“Yes, conscience,” the prematurely aged Philosopher said as he averted his eyes, and heart, from the eternally wise and beautiful courtesan.

“So, as you were about to say, and postulate. If you have a bad wife...” task-master Aspasia said to student Socrates, making him get back on the horse that had thrown him off, so many times. Again, she laid her palm on his shoulder, as if pulling him away from falling into the abyss of despondency, defeat and passivity yet one more time. “If you have a bad wife, You become a...”

Socrates face self observed his lips pursing into a wide smile, then feeling laughter coming from it. Then, his mind observed his brain direct his tongue to say...”If you have a bad wife, you become a philosopher.” Yes, indeed, it was one of those lines that

philosopher, peasant and passion-oppressing priests could all relate to. Not because it was so true in so many cases, but because it was delivered in a way that was so human. And humorous. “Bad spouses make for greatness in men.”

“Which works for women living with the wrong men also,” Socrates heard Aspasia say, from the world or the real rather than ideal. A place of pain that was more than the quota that any humanitarian motivated philosopher was required to endure. “Especially when they get...”

Upon looking upward, through a mirror, Socrates could see Aspasia reflecting on scars under her robe. Upon closer examination, those ‘old scars’ from ‘riding the wrong horses’ were fresh. No doubt administered by being ridden into despair, fear and humiliation by real men who sought the affections of the most desired mistress in Athens. And, to the best of Socrates’ knowledge, one man.

“Did the ‘great noble’ Lyceus do this to you!?” Socrates growled out with a voice that he noted was not very different than the cruel and ignorant swine that passed for 98% of humanity, even in Athens under the Golden times of the now deceased Pericles. “I swear I’ll...!” With his knarly yet still active stone mason fingers, he grabbed hold of the dagger he still retained from his younger years as a common soldier who demonstrated, so he was told anyway, uncommon valor in the service of his Athenian comrades. He stormed toward the door of Aspasia’s somehow always well kept, tastefully decorated schoolhouse for the mind and pleasure palace for the body to extract revenge on her very married ‘patron and protector’. His intentional visions of teaching the most powerful politician in Athens about the consequences of abuse of power with actions rather than words were stopped by a ‘wall’ that hit his chest. Upon looking up to see what had halted his progress, it was indeed Aspasia’s slender fingers connected to her very forceful palm, laid upon his pounding heart.

“No! Please,” the women least deserving of any beating from a powerful man, or love-scorned woman pleaded, and commanded.

“I saved many Athenian comrades and future leaders from Spartan spears in Peloponnesus,” Socrates reminded her, as he regained breath and another layer of determination. “And if I can’t save YOU...” he continued, pushing Aspasia aside, grabbing hold of the latch on the door.

“Please...No!” Aspasia pleaded, having lost the battle of physical strength with her philosophical sparing soul-mate. Unable to be empowered by anger, she resorted to reason, the only weapon available for the weak, and compassionate. “Lyceus is not as noble as Pericles was, but he’s more powerful. And, sometimes, can be convinced to do noble things for Athens and the world,” she pointed out to Socrates as he finally figured out how to unlatch the door, using his brain rather than pounding fist. “The speeches I write for him do help many now, and in the future. And he was elected to power by the masses, through democracy.”

Socrates could feel the presence of something bigger than himself taking him over, once again. During that transformation, which was happening a lot more than usual these days, he felt the strength leaving his body. So far, though, consciousness of where he was and who he was with still remained, unlike the numerous times he was told by his closest friends that his body sat on the street or a mountain path, motionless, while his mind was elsewhere. He felt the harsh taskmaster of reality in the form of Aspasia, taking the knife from his clenched fist. "Lysecis, after Pericles died, yes, under circumstances that only God is apparently is supposed to know, chose me above all other women to give him the kind of love his wife couldn't or won't provide for him. He was elected to his position by democracy," she reminded Socrates.

"Democracy run by men. And mostly ignorant men," the old hunchbacked stone mason replied to the statuesque courtesan. "And weak ones," he continued, allowing a mirror to catch his reflection and hold his consciousness captive, once again, experiencing the worse elements of self-examination. "Like me."

"Not here," Aspasia replied, laying her hand on his forehead like a Comrade. "Or here," she continued, her other hand on his heart as every positive element of what a woman could be for a man plagued with negativity. A woman who, because of her beauty, advanced intellect, ability to teach ignorant people 'on top' about what life is like on the bottom, and, of course, her being born and raised in a foreign country, as well as Fate, the ultimate factor which won out in any life equation with Greeks, could never have been his wife.

Socrates found himself contemplating 'Fate'. And, according to the citizenry of Athens, on the top and the bottom, the administrators of such. Indeed, the statues and paintings of the gods and goddesses adorning Aspasia's house which had provided lonely men with what they wanted and disempowered intelligent seeking women with what they needed spoke for themselves. The perfect faces, perfect bodies and perfectly all knowing eyes of those Mount Olympian residents who, it was said, on occasion took on human form in the valley below, were put into marble, stone, paint and fresco by imperfect men, and on occasion, when the men weren't looking, women. Those masters of art who immortalized and empowered the myths about the gods very much of course included Socrates himself, whose belief in a God beyond any image was growing stronger every day, pulling him away from people in the service somehow of humanity.

"So," the philosopher who, by necessity, was a stone mason as well, said to those deceptive images of imagined characters people thought they needed to make sense of the world and feel safe in it. He focused on his most recent works as a stone mason with special skills as a sculpture who specialized in making likenesses of three junior goddesses. Harsh goddesses, according to the assigned character requirements, who Socrates attempted to show as human, caring, and vulnerable. Medicine of reason and virtue would find its way, he hoped, into the minds and hearts of worshippers at the temple who gazed at and then looked into the statutes which said to anyone who was listening, 'leave this place and build your own temple, for God and gods' sake!'"

“I sculpted you to ‘go along with the system’, so I could eat,” Socrates said to statue by way of explanation and apology. “And, more tragically, so my sons who hate me and my wife who I hate wouldn’t starve. Images of the gods that...”

“...Some people find...attractive,” Aspasia pointed out, pulling Socrates out of a torture chamber which, yes, was to a great extent designed by his own hand rather than the dictates of ‘Fate’. “Harmless fantasies for children.”

“Who are still hiding from the Truth,” Socrates countered. “That we are not at the mercy of those gods. Or the priests who use those images and other tricks to make us obedient to them! Such as the wondrous theatrics of Mechanos who---”

“---I know,” Aspasia interjected, reading, inspiring and amplifying what was in Socrates’ mind, yet again. “Mechanos, who could create the battle for Troy in a theatre for entertainment so convincingly that even I thought I was there with Hercules, Paris and Helen. And in the Temple on Holy Days, make the wind sound like the voice of Zeus himself, smoke coming up from the back of the alters like it was the image of the goddess Athena, and water flowing up from the ducts with waves that morphed into the face of Neptune, all commanding people to sacrifice more to the gods, and give even more to the priests who, as translators, would keep the we mortals safe, happy and...”

“...Lifeless, passive, ignorant and therefore, cruel to ourselves and each other,” Socrates continued. He felt a wave of realization overcoming his life-tired chest as whiff of holy smoke from the temple on top of the hill found its way into the valley below, perhaps by Fate, and into his over-sized nostrils due to something more than mathematical coincidence. He glanced at his shadow on the wall made by the sunlight outside as ‘Apollo’s Light’ snuck out from behind the clouds. He sensed something interesting about how the two dimensional image on the wall drew him into a ‘reality’. A ‘reality’ as false as any Mechanos put on stage for entertainment or the temple steps so that he could get funded for making REAL inventions that provided the populous with mechanized irrigation systems, pullies to lift what slaves should never have to break their backs with, and mills to crush Nature’s plants into edible food for its most helpless, seemingly intelligent and most abusive species.

“We know from the Allegory of the cave,” Socrates said as he moved his fingers like hand puppets, the right hand converted into a character that had disagreements with that created by his left over matters that were as trivial as they were unimportant in the grand scheme of things. “It’s easier to live in illusion, believing like chained prisoners in shadows a campfire puts on the wall than to go out into the sunlight and see what is beyond the cave. And when we do...”

“...They will not let you back into the cave,” Aspasia voiced, using no doubt the full power of the third Mind, Brain and Soul which had evolved between her and Socrates. “Ridicule, persecute and kill you for trying to liberate them from their ignorance, and chains,” she continued, advancing her way towards Socrates as he reflected on the Importance of the Truth he had stumbled upon, or perhaps pushed his way to. “You DO

know that....” Aspasia said, her sparkling coral blue eyes looking straight into Socrates, common bloodshot brown ocular portholes.

“As you keep trying to keep the rich and powerful entertained, here in this schoolhouse for the soul and, when you had to, and perhaps wanted to, pleasure place for the lonely heart,” the raggedy clad, unwashed Philosopher Stone Mason commented, gazing yet again at the parlor Aspasia had built upon her arrival in Athens with the riches she had brought with her at the time. And was able to maintain with profits, or perhaps overly extended credit, a matter the Truth seeking Socrates, as a hard working commoner, was never able to find out about. Despite his continuous offers to help her out economically as bade to find out what was really happening with a foreign woman who would be in abject poverty and despair if she didn’t maintain the illusion of wealth, control and grace. “Yes, you keep the rich and powerful entertained here. Instead of telling them the Truth, as it is, as who you really are,” Socrates noted, and examined.

“Sugar coating around the pill,” Aspasia retorted averting her eyes, as she dance walked her way to the lute, giving its strings voice in the ethers with music, something that Socrates knew first hand had the power to affect the human spirit for better or worse. Music that can make people smarter or dumber. Stronger or weaker. Makes them more Alive or lure them into the lifeless experience of mere practical, passive ‘existence’, depending of course on the nature of the music and performer. “First make them laugh, then smile,” Aspasia pointed out, the new melody seeming to have a positive effect on Socrates’ mind-soul for reasons he could not determine or assess. “Then educate them. Like horses, you have to make them like you before they obey and respect you.”

“Which is why I was an infantrymen and not a cavalry officer,” Socrates said with upturned lips and breakthrough of humor that did indeed make Aspasia laugh, and not in the matter of politeness or kindness that she, by her profession, Calling and Life Mission, had to employ on so many occasion. “While you....”

“...Were able to sneak education, literacy and wisdom into a lot of men, and women, who were not allowed to get it. Around the backs of their masters and providers,” she pointed out, abruptly putting down the instrument, stopping the music which a later author sometime, perhaps other than Socrates’ various scribes, would say ‘sooth the savage breast . “ While YOU,” she said, her non-musical voice working with the harmony of a loud Penetrating Silence that blasted into Socrates’ ears. “Are...a mirror, that no one can look away from.”

Aspasia looked into Socrates’ eyes, then his soul. Their bodies found their way closer to each other. Agape and Philos seemed to, yet again, merge into Eros, in ways that brought back memories of a Golden Past for Socrates, in a present in which magic was needed more than ever to make sense of the world as it is, and convert it into what it could be. For this time and future times. It was then that Fate intervened. This time in the form of a knock on the door.

“Aspasia. I’m here for my our music and writing lessons,” a middle aged woman of high breeding and perhaps honest intentions said. Socrates thought he recognized her from one of the non-functional social functions his beautiful on the outside and ugly on the inside young wife had snuck her way into, dragging him along as her ‘crabby and eccentric Uncle’.

“And, I’m, like, here for my lesson in the Ectiquick of good love and happy, like ya know, dancing under the sheets,” most probably the daughter of said Matriarch in the making added. A young girl who had the misfortune of having too much given to her without the honor, pleasure and passion of earning it by hard struggle.

“Time for me to get back to what life has assigned me to do,” Aspasia said to Socrates as she pulled away from him, but with a warm, tender and loving in many ways smile. “And for you,” she said, retrieving Socrates’ stone mason apron, handing it to him as if she was a Maiden giving her most valued knight a sword with which he could conquer every demon in the world. Including the demons of lifelessness, ignorance and cruelty, and the ‘god’ was the most powerful and insidious, created by man and maintained by many devises The Dull Out demon. “Go, do what you have to do.”

“To maybe put some honest and truthful eyes into the statues of gods you know don’t exist? And build more temple walls hiding people from the True Light...” Socrates replied, envisioning someone putting it into print some day.

“Which they will outgrow, if you carve a few suggestions into those walls and eyes. Right? We work with the world we have, so we can create the one we all deserve,” the reply from the woman so skilled in the world as it is yet based in the ideal plane of the world as it could be.

“The one YOU deserve anyway,” the Truth seeking philosopher who served the world at large over any one person said, feeling the presence of ONLY Aspasia. With guilt still in his eyes, Socrates left, out the back door. The women outside knocked yet again. Aspasia finally let them in. Socrates hear glimpses of the conversation, which started from Aspasia’s patrons talking about people, who did what to who and what they were wearing at the time. Pulled upward by Aspasia about ideas and ideals, and finally settling into talk about events---political gossip which was not so innocent in present day Athens, even though it was, officially, the golden era of the City-State.

## Chapter 2

According to the standards of the barbarians living in caves, tents and thatched huts in the hills above Macedonia and even more isolated locations where the events of the day were never recordable for future days, it was a palace. According to the standards of post-Pericles Athens it was a shack where a common working man could come home to a common woman whose job it was to raise children in the hopes that the Golden Age could evolve into something both prosperous and civilized. A room in which eating, talking and cooking took place, which housed a wife who valued the former, a husband who strove for the latter, and three young boys who were caught in the middle of this constant struggle between ideologies.

Socrates dragged himself into the kitchen, timing his arrival to just after sunset. A time when the family usually ate supper. The 50 year old philosopher was not surprised that Xanthrippe, his well dressed trophy wife who had not yet seen twenty five Athenian winters, was finishing up the last course of the meal, a small cake into which nuts and figs were inserted during the baking process. As always, she was lounging on the most comfortable chair in the house like an aristocratic lady. Her three sons sat around her, the surface of the wooden table at their mid chest, picking up crumbs from the table and putting them into their mouths. The lads were as eager to see what their father would say as they were to fill their half-empty bellies.

Socrates addressed each of the boys with his eyes as he laid down his masonry tools on the nail pounded into the main pillar holding up the miraculously still-non-leaking roof. But before the old man could give voice to the young boys he had blessed or cursed with being born, the woman who sheltered those still unformed souls for 9 months in the womb spoke for her husband.

“You’re father’s late for dinner, again, boys,” she informed the lads just as the eldest was about to continue a conversation of value and worth with the man who he was told was his father. “Because he was ‘trying to make the world a wiser and kinder place,’” Xanthrippe continued through lips that were as beautiful as any goddess. She stood up on her feet. Then she worked her way to the stove on one leg that gave her pain whenever she used it, and another hindlimb that inflicted pain on every male in the household with kicks that were intentional, and ‘accidental.’ No one, including her, knew of course wthe reason for that weapon being employed as a mean of dealing with personal frustration. “But don’t blame your father for coming home empty, again,” she said as Socrates got up to help himself to the reconstituted vegetable and fish stew which still lay in the cooking pot on the stove, dipping a firm slither of unleavened bread into it as an eating utensil. “He has spent all day transforming the world for future generations, seeing how colorfully he can appear dressed as a beggar, to embarrass himself and us,” the young working class woman who had somehow yet another noble woman’s dress continued to her raggedy clad husband. “Ignoring of course, this generation of his own---“

Socrates answered Xanthrippe’s accusations this time with his fist. As it pounded a small bag of coins onto the table, frightening the boys, and scaring himself as he self observed

himself becoming...someone else. After a deep breath which relieved some of the tightness that had found its way into his chest, he related and confessed, "We note our place with drachmas (coins), to measure what we lost," averting his eyes, hoping that someone was listening.

Xanthrippe of course counted the coins Socrates had earned as a stone mason that day making false images of imaginary gods and thick walls for those already isolated from reality by expensive walls that day. She recalculated the amount twice, biting into them with her painful teeth to confirm if they were real as well. "It could have been more if you spent more time working with this," she said of his masonry tool belt, "More than wasting time thinking you are working with this," she continued, pushing her open palm against Socrates' aching and sweaty forehead. Again and again, she pushed him towards a wall, laughing with each stride Socrates accepted going backwards. Made more painful as he watched his eldest son look at his father with shame. The middle boy smiling sadistically with delight along with his mother's ridiculing laughter. And the youngest, stealing the cake his mother had put down, his eyes as dead as Xanthrippe's soul was cruel.

Socrates had tried to explain why a man so brave as himself now, and a decorated soldier in his past, was being pushed around by a woman on more than one occasion to his sons. "Yes, Xanthrope is ignorant, therefore has become cruel," he told himself, and tried so many times to tell his sons, particularly when they themselves were the victim of the demons that possessed her soul and inflicted vengeance upon their raw and tender flesh. "The strong attack the weak, the strongest deflect their excesses of anger, jealousy and greed," he continued to ponder. Yet was unable to give voice to this as he tried again and again to merely fill his plate with food that his hard labour had paid for, only to have each scoop be tossed onto the floor by Xanthrippe's left arm. "But if art is really three dimensions away from reality, why is reality only enduring and redeemable with art in the mix," he postulated, trying to change the subject which Xanthrippe so much wanted to engage him in.

"Come on. Fight back!" the wife a generation younger than Socrates begged and pleaded with an angry voice again and again. Such was accompanied by a prematurely arthritic body which was weak as well, breakable and painful beyond measure if it ever met the resistance of a clenched fist, a hard wall, or an even harder floor if she lost her balance and fell onto it.

"Ignorance is the source of all cruelty and pain," Socrates finally declared to his three sons between assaults by Xanthrippe and still more attempts to feed his growling and painfully empty stomach.

"See, your father is weak as well as ignorant," Xanthrippe declared as she finally let Socrates have a bite of the last scoopful of fish stew in the pot, which had been burnt to a crisp on the bottom. "And the noble Socrates is not caring as well," she informed the lads. "Look at him, filling his stomach while he lets yours go hungry."

“It is my responsibility to pay for this food,” he informed Xanthrippe, calmly. “Yours to cook and feed it to my sons,” the voluntarily working class philosopher said to the wannabe noble lady. “And,” he continued, his emotions finally finding firm footing in his mind and brain. “And as for caring, is there not such a thing as conscience without caring which can overcome us?” he proposed, in a whisper to Xanthrippe which, he hoped, the boys would not hear.

“What you just heard, boys, was philosophical babble that doesn’t make ANY money,” Xanthrippe countered with a condescending roll of her expensively sculpted eyebrows. “A truth originating so high in the imaginary clouds that it pisses down rain that makes crops hunger even more for water,” Socrates’ wife said with her clever tongue which, after the first year of marriage, stopped being connected to a wise mind or a caring heart, for reasons that still baffled him. “But there are many practical truths, boys, that seem dishonest, but which will make you strong men.” The lads nodded in agreement, the eldest first out of fear of the speaker, the middle one out of conditioning, and the youngest because it seemed like such were the rules of the game he enjoyed playing.

“But, is it not so that only honest truths shall set you free, as wise and effective men?” Socrates challenged each of the boys, Xanthrippe and finally himself, putting down his bowl of burnt and perhaps intentionally tainted dinner, ignoring every sense below his neck so that he could be moved by the Motions between his ears. “And is it not a sacred duty to teach people on the streets and everywhere else how to learn what they need to know?” he continued with an upright back and open palms, inviting responses from every member of his domestic congregation, and perhaps progeny. “Our duty to and from God? The one God that is BEYOND attributes, gender or form of any of the gods. The Spirit that is within all of us.”

Socrates could feel that Spirit come into the room, working its way slowly into his eldest son, the middle lad, and finally the most recent arrival to the material realm. It, rather than He or She, even seemed to find It’s way into Xanthrippe. The demon which possessed her seemed to take flight into the ethers. Her eyes turned from deep black to bright blue, the green. She took in a deep breath, as Socrates imbibed another bite of the supper scraped from the bottom of the pan which she no doubt had specially prepared for him, or ‘accidentally’ allowed to become charcoal black and potentially toxic.

“Your father does have a point,” she admitted to the lads, as he set to cooking more stew, using whatever rancid vegetable, soggy berry and rock hard root scraps were about to be discarded, but seeking to make it palatable to his, admittedly, sweet rather than sour addicted palate. He reached for the special ingredients Xanthrippe only used when going out to entertain noble women in a jar high enough for her to reach but out of range of the boys, and, when he returned home with a broken, hunched back her husband. “But he neglects the one commandment which will allow you to both live and survive in the REAL world,” she said as she closed the lid of the jar containing special sweet spices onto Socrates hand. “Give the people not what they need to know but what they want to know,” she said with a smile as Socrates retrieved his aching hand from the jar lid, just

before it cut off his crushed fingers. “And they don’t want to know anything about God, or Truth, boys who will become men, and man who is a disgrace to any real man.”

“So we should lie to others?” Socrates blasted back.

“Lying to them? Lying to the people is something ALL of the people in the real world do, to each other and themselves,” ‘Priestess’ Xanthrippa declared in the manner of a calm, collected and all knowing and well paid temple Seer, or perhaps one of the goddesses themselves. “Is it not more profitable to take rather than give?” she challenged Socrates using his own diction and tool of reason. “Like the popular and well paid philosophers who are smart rather than ‘wise’ are doing? To deceive rather than inform? To be number one instead of number nothing like you want us to be? Hmm?”

“I’m doing what I can...and must!” Socrates fired out of his mouth, hating the sound of his voice almost as much as the bad predicaments all of his noble intentions to do good had shackled him into.

“As am I, doing what I can, and must!” Xanthrippa replied with a voice barely above a hushed whisper but one which was fueled by a more powerful fire. “Family comes first, second and last,” she declared as gospel. A gospel which, rightly or wrongly, all cultures of compassion embraced. That is, common un-evolved cultures which valued selective, only for a few, rather than universal, global compassion. “Boys. Bed...in your room,” the low born gold digger woman who sought nobility declared in the manner of a harsh task master and a protective mother hen. “Me in bed,” she continued, standing up on her two beautiful legs, which seemed like that of a goddess with eternally perfect health when sitting or standing comfortable. “And you,” she gently blasted into Socrates’ bloodshot and beyond exhausted eyes. “Somewhere else,” she declared as an injured fawn with her left face and a vicious wolf with her right, throwing Socrates the smelliest blanket available. “Under the stars with the wild animals, or your favorite animal, who you seem to love more than us.”

The eldest boy seemed to get what Xanthrippa meant by ‘favorite animal’. The youngest was curious about the reference, led to the other room by the middle lad. “The goat,” the middle lad explained to his younger brother. But the main question at hand, in the ideal and material plane, was whether ‘your favorite animal’ came out of Xanthrippa’s mouth to fish out Socrates’ most dangerous secret. Or if she had already had him on the hook and was ready to reel him in for a feast in which the Old Man would be relieved of his life, livelihood, freedom, or place in history. In any case, Socrates took hold of the blanket, opened the door, and felt the cool breeze outside transform into a biting cold wind. But there was still one animal left to contend with. A dog, who had found its way into Socrates’ heart, as well as that of his sons and even his wife. A mutt who was required to stay outside at night in the shed which, if you used your imagination, could be called a small barn. Who wanted some scraps from the table, but more so, petting from the people who ate at it. Particularly the ‘bread earner’ who, right now, wanted no part of the family.

Usually, Socrates would feed the dog's body with the lion's share of his supper, which he did. But when the canine sought to be fed in the heart, asked for with a rub of his neck onto Socrates' shaking, sun-baked and prematurely arthritic yet still strong calf, the Old Man self observed himself push then kick the dog away from him.

Confounded, the hound pulled back. Then, out of remorse Socrates throw the dog some more bread, adding to it the delicacies from Xanthrippes' secret stash allowed for herself and her special noble lady friends only. Carefully, Socrates approached the dog, who guarded himself from the abruptly cruel man who had always been kind to him, giving him the warning growl which maybe would turn into the first bark or bite. "I'm sorry," Socrates whispered to the hound in a soft voice that had become hoarse and painful to emit. "I...didn't mean to take out her ignorance and my hatred for all of this 'domestic family bliss' that I don't want to be any part of anymore by hurting you."

The dog kept its distance as Socrates as he fed him, as scared of the demons inside of the Old Man as the Philosopher was fearful of what he had become, or could devolve into. "I know...I hate me too. But still..."

Socrates heard snoring come from the other rooms of his humble abode. Upon sneaking the door open to his family's sleeping quarters, and normally his, he was seized by a different agenda than to treat himself to a night of solitude sleeping under the stars, with the family goat or the dog.

The smell of undigested and nearly vomited mush stew and hard bread worked its way up Socrates' throat, but it was the aroma of innocence which he felt as he eyed his three sons. All were deeply asleep in the crammed room illuminated by moonlight which contained straw cots for the two eldest and a crib in transition to becoming a bed for the youngest. The former were snoring, deep in the dream state, or perhaps they were pretending to be away from the realm of the 'awake'. The Old Philosopher's youngest, and if he had anything to do about it, last offspring with Xantrippe, lay on his side, his eyes half open, a smile on his face for reasons only that 'special' lad who had yet to speak understandable words knew.

"I know...I'm responsible for you," Socrates whispered to that young boy who he hoped would not grow into an embittered older one, even it if was at the cost of him remaining 'slow' in the head. "And will remain so. But...conscience without caring seems to be operative, as I self observe myself."

The boy's lips turned even more upward, as he said something in a language of his own that Socrates allowed himself to believe meant 'continue, please, father and friend.'

"But," the Old dangerously wise man said to the young happily simple boy, finding himself somehow reconnected with the mind-soul inside of him that needed to give birth to another truthful fact that defied formulated logic. "Is it not possible that resentment for all of this 'family life' can turn into hatred? Hatred, then indifference. Then hatred of me? Which is perhaps based in hatred of..."

Suddenly Socrates stopped trying to make his investigation connect to the people it was being addressed to. “Yes!” the man who allowed himself to be inoculated with the diseases of ignorance and cruelty carried by so many fellow mortals so that he could become the cure declared, allowing himself to be taken away from reality so that he could experience and know the Real. “Hatred, then indifference to... Someone else. Someone else who.”

“Someone else from the fun world we like or the real world we have to live in?” Socrates heard from the young boy, his first words, appended by a curious smile begging for a real answer.

“Someone else who you don’t need to be concerned about,” the father said to the son in an assuring way. “And will never have to,” he pledged as he kissed the boy on the cheek, put the blanket over his thin, battered yet still beautiful shoulders and left the room.

Socrates allowed his feet to take him into the third room of the one man shack which had been converted into a house after he decided to get married for the second time. There, sound asleep, an ugly expressionless look on her otherwise beautiful wrinkle-less face, lay Xanthrippe. “Yes,” he said to the God who he, by necessity, allowed himself to give human attributes to so that he would feel less alone in the world that Spirit had created. “There lies someone who I once loved,” he whispered to himself, envisioning how Xanthrope looked and felt during the first and only happy month of his marriage to her in a city-state which did not allow divorce. “A young soul who I was once empowered by rather than broken down by, as you know. Someone who was once healthy in body, mind and spirit and someone who, yes, you know, or SHOULD know, is suffering in more ways than she knows.”

Socrates awaited some kind of response from Spirit but, as always, it answered through ‘mysterious silence’. A wall he was determined to break through, using, yes, the most powerful tools conferred to him by Nature or that Deity who, for some reason, allowed all but a select few of Its creation to believe in fabricated gods, or nothing at all. “And, is it not so?” Socrates said to ‘God’ pointing his index finger towards the heavens in the manner of a teacher, friend and distributor of truth as he looked down upon the slumbering Xanthrippe in the bed he once voluntarily shared with her. Whose still beautiful body was afflicted by incurable painful and crippling diseases of the flesh underneath, who continuously heard voices of demons who convinced her to inflict harm on the innocent, weak, intelligent or caring. “And is it not so, I say again,” Socrates asserted to Entity which, forever reason, was still hiding It’s real identity and agenda from It’s seemingly favorite two legged creation. “That if I am brave and bold enough, I should be an instrument I ending that suffering, by...” Socrates withdrew his knife from the strap on his belt, edging it towards Xanthrippe’s throat, his hand shaking in the process.

Ironically, the slumbering Xanthrippe edges her neck closer to the blade, as if begging for final delivery from her life in the land of the sleeping or awake. Daring Socrates, with

half open eyes that were as blind to seeing his flesh as her materialistic, status seeking mind was unable to now see his soul, to follow through with that dare to be assertively selfish, like the rest of the 'mortals' on earth who he set himself above in his 'delusionary arrogance'.

"But, no," Socrates said, reaching a decision based in something inside of himself that he could not identify. Common sense for having to explain blood on his hands to the authorities. Cowardice if he was not swift enough with the blade.

The Old Man, with assuredness, inserted his knife back into its sheath and noted a leaf from a familiar looking plant being blown to the window, and into his hand. "Hemlock," he said as he smelled it. "Which I was saving for myself. For, the dream I had when the swallow of his will end my own misery and the disturbance I am making in the potentially-great but underachieving youth of this town, country and world". He looked up to sky, thinking it was a less cluttered place for the Deity above and within all Deities to dwell or hide out in.

"Unless you end her suffering and ours," he suggested to the Force that did what no man or woman could do, or was allowed to do. "Are you not the highest form of Wisdom and Intellect and therefore effective compassion?" the mortal who dared to challenge Fate challenged its creator, not caring what punishment would befall him for telling the truth, as best as he knew it. "Can you not stop her breathing? Send this woman who needs me to feed her to someplace where she can be fed by someone else? Or with the rich suitors I tried to get her run away with? Or perhaps you can send her to a place of... perhaps healing for her ignorance rather than punishment for her cruelty? Are you not the Purpose or Reason behind all things and rewarder of Virtue? And are you not....fucking listening? Please!"

God finally answered Socrates, the latter realizing that his whispers had become speaking, then loud rants.

"Shut up!" Xanthrippe growled out while still in what was still slumber, perhaps, to maybe both challenging mortal and pre-existing Deity, "Shut up already, you old, has been philosophical loser! And get out so I can get some sleep!" she commanded, leaving no doubt as to who the anger in her soul, fueled by fear, and cruelty, created by ignorance, was directed against most. "Just get out here!" she commanded as she turned around, rolling on her side.

"Wishing above all things that I could," Socrates said in a Greek dialect spoken by those who thought with their Souls rather than reacted with their lower emotions.

Xanthrippe gave him the finger, then dismissed him out the door with a curse from her low born background that would offend even the most hardened and well travelled sailor. Socrates held back his fist, hiding it as he slithered out the door, his face made beet red by anger at Xanthrippe, himself and the Deity that allowed him to find and love her.

## CHAPTER 3

“The more compassionate we are, the wiser and more insightful we become,” came out from a warm female voice amidst cold air illuminated by a full moon above. “Unless we have the miscalculated fortune to...” the rest of Aspasia’s words went unspoken as she slipped on a moss covered rock, nearly falling down a steep ravine near man who remained stationary in a contemplative pose as stagnant as a statute.

She was saved from that perhaps intentional or perhaps unintentional accident by a pair of strong arms, which, unlike hers, were neither shaking from fear nor cold. He offered her the lion’s share of his blanket, but she refused most of it, covering only the most recent scars delivered onto her legs. Some by the unapproved trek into the woods to find Socrates, solitude or both. The rest by Lysecis, her keeper, protector, student, patient and, most importantly when he wasn’t drunk with power or wine, generous patron.

“No pain, no gain,” Socrates offered by way of explanation for the dilemma’s circulating between Aspasia’s perfectly shaped sculpted ears, portholes which heard what so many Athenians both said, and really meant. “Buy is it not easier if we detach from the pain and more effective?” he offered with a seemingly all knowing smile along with another fold of the blanket, then his cloak.

“I don’t know,” Aspasia said as she accepted the warmth of Socrates’ blanket, cloak then, finally, his outstretched arm, which had fresh bruises on them from no doubt his mistake in matrimony. Yet, he seemed wiser than normal on this night. As if his voice was indeed a channel for Spirit. An opportunity and speculation Aspasia advanced one more step with by asking Spirit to tell her what she should know and do. Much like the seekers who went to the Oracles at Delphi to ask them to channel advise from the gods as to what we should and must do as mortals in the service of those atop and below Mount Olympus. Of course, those who really examined the simple answers they got from complex questions finally realized that the Oracles were no more than un-marryable yet still attractive women whose consciousness were possessed by mind altering mushrooms. And, to be fair, Socrates eating habits and desire to be free of the shackles of the world could have converted him into being another kind of self-deluded Oracle.

“How could Socrates know what Aspasia was thinking, feeling and destined for?” Aspasia asked herself as she accepted his arm over her shoulder to assure her spirit, and his blanket over her body very much apart from the rest of his torso. “He can barely keep himself out of trouble, and he’s going to rescue me from the ignorant, superstitious commoners and insecure, secret-holding aristocrats who seek to have me banished, burnt or branded as a demoness,” she pondered as he offered, and she accepted, dried flounder, berries and broken wheat wafers from the leather bag strapped to his thin waist under his toga. “But, our eyes can better see where others are about to stumble and fall into the abyss before we can see our own feet make such miscalculations,” she observed herself concluding.

“But, does wisdom make us more courageous or less so?” Socrates continued, this time playing the teacher rather than the student, removing his arm away from her shoulders. “And do we not get ten measures of creative insight for every one measure of virtue and compassion we give to others?” he declared with eyes gazing into and beyond the stars above, working somehow with whatever or whoever was out there. Someone or something that Aspasia could theorize but never feel, or confirm, as someone gifted with intense unrelenting doubt rather than reason tempered faith.

“Again, you ask so many questions. And give so few answers,” she replied in answer to the stare from Socrates’ that she could see, and the Silence in the woods which she could hear. Then just as she was about to formulate the next question for this, theoretically anyway, stone mason Oracle, he spoke again. This time taking her slender blemish free hands into his knarled, blister covered paws.

“Yes, I know,”...But maybe with you leaving your duties to come here and if I violate the law against divorce and leave mine...” he offered. “Perhaps the Fates can be reasoned out of--”

“---What is to happen eventually to both of us?” Aspasia challenged. “As we know, there is no such thing as freedom, as least for those with thinking minds and consciences. Just opportunities to choose responsibilities and duties.”

“And are those duties not something served best if we don’t know their specifics, rather than if we do?” Socrates offered, with an infectious joy of discovery that she needed so badly tonight, of all other nights for the new, mostly unidentified, ills which she felt creeping in upon her. “And by actively knowing that we don’t know, do we better serve those Higher Duties?” he continued, becoming deadly serious, and aloof, averting his eyes. And, more importantly, about to allow himself to be pulled into an abyss where he would become a lifeless slave of Spirit, aka God, rather than one of Its/His/Her most effective instruments. “And is not a Higher Duty, the seeking of it anyway, the way to—”

Just as Socrates was about to slip on a moss covered rock inside his head, and crash into a black hole of more self-imposed unnecessary misery, Aspasia pulled his shaking cheeks in to her lips and kissed him.

“Yes,” Socrates said, with his mouth, after apparently, hopefully anyway, feeling what Aspasia was trying to tell her with her non-verbal lips.

“And is not a Higher Duty for us all...that wondrous thing beyond and within logic and reason called love?” Aspasia replied, feeling the gift she had just given Socrates returned to her three fold.

“Yes,” the Old Man said to the, by appearances anyway, young woman as he held her hand with a gentle, yet cautious embrace. “Which comes in three expressions. Eros, love of body. Pillos, love as comrades. Agape, love as Spirit. And maybe a fourth which, well...”

Impatient for relief for her mind and reconnection of her Soul, Aspasia hugged Socrates in a warm embrace that conveyed all three expressions of love. Ignoring the instinct that told her not to. A courageous thing to risk, as she could lose it all by such a gesture. But somehow she gained it all back, as there was no one in the world that she created by transforming the one she was inflicted with except her, Socrates and Spirit. Or so she thought.

## Chapter 4

“He’s harmless,” the creator of so many dramas and comedies assured the observer regarding Socrates from behind a clump of heavily leaved trees which allowed ample view of the Old Man and his Old Flame. “As I portrayed him in ‘Clouds’,” Aristophanes, the playwright who many envisioned as a living god, and a man who in his happiest moments believed them, said. “That stone mason philosopher is a deluded old man who keeps people’s minds entertained,” he assured the well-armoured, well-armed, and well-connected paranoid, anger-possessed demon next to him.

“Just like you’re a playwright whose plays do nothing except make people laugh,” General Lysecis mused, gazing at Aristophanes, expecting and getting him to admire his wit as a man and humor as a subservient woman. “Who knows that what an artist writes does not get put on any stage unless...certain non-artists approve first,” he continued, staring into the most terrified portion of Aristophanes’ soul, shooting into its bulls-eye. He then turned away to look at Socrates and Aspasia once the arrows had hit their mark.

“But as I read in your eyes,” the golden boy playwright of the hour, day and year in golden age of Athens replied after pulling the General’s arrows out of his most vulnerable parts, as the moon shone on both sides of Lysecis’ face, each displaying a different emotion and agenda. contorted and conflicted “This is about more than art imitating life, or life imitating art, or art being three dimensions away from...” The writer of plays which influenced people in ways that law makers could never do pressed on. “What’s going on between you and Socrates, and Aspasia?” Aristophanes inquired, as a fellow man in search of the perfect woman rather than an artist seeking to rule men’s thoughts while politicians controlled their bodies.

Lysecis took on the challenge, with a deep breath, an arched back and a slow turn to the upstart playwright who dared to think that the pen was mightier than the sword. Using the weapon of art against the courageous and beloved artist. “Is it not so that he who asks too many questions gets too many answers?” the General-Politician whose present power rivaled that of Pericles himself when he was alive pointed out, in the manner of Socrates himself during his calmest and most confident moments. Being sure that his point was made, Lysecis put his blister-free hands, clean hands, with remnants of fresh blood under his polished and manicured fingernails, upon the handle of his sword, pulling it out just enough so that the moonlight was brightly reflected on its blade. Allowing Aristophanes to see, sense and envision his own neck, wrists or eyes being severed from his torso by its sharp blade.

## Chapter 5

A wise ruler of Athens, perhaps Pericles, perhaps others who history couldn't and shouldn't record, decided that it was in the best interest of the commoners, and perhaps the aristocracy, to allow people to speak their minds. Such was, of course an arrangement that allowed Socrates to be heard, but tragically, paved the way for others to be obeyed, worshipped, deified and, unlike Socrates, actually paid for services.

One of the most popular and therefore rich 'physicians for the mind and collective human soul' shared his insights from a platform of polished pine boards which glistened under the noonday sun, forcing anyone whose stare passed it to take notice of it. And of course the speaker, whose long brown hair was groomed in the manner of a king, and whose gold trimmed toga and matching cloak made him seem like a god, his amply but not overly muscled physique making him the envy of any man and an erotic turn on to any woman who wanted to be with a real man. "It has been proven again and again, that thine open ears, thine trusting hearts, and thine kind, voluntary offerings to me, and the gods who have inspired me, will come back to thee...three times over," he pledged with a voice a smooth as a mountain lake on a windless day, and a musicality in his speech that could pull most any overworked mind into effortless contentment. The young, perfectly proportioned, blemish-free dancers behind him echoed 'three times over, three times over' with a soothing melody that was contagious. "And whoever has wealth is blessed by the gods, has earned that wealth, and deserves more wealth! And as we know, effortless success is the best kind!" the 'New Minister of Profit' who was too cool and collected to sweat said to the assembly in front of him, focusing his attention on the aristocratic who figured out or fell into, after the womb or the right wedding proposal, the ability to convert minimal work into maximal worldly profit. "And will get MORE wealth!" the speaker proclaimed without an ounce of doubt in his voice.

Of course, a man without any demonstrated or felt self doubt HAS to be right. So, of course, when the collection plate went around the aristocrats, as well as the plain or raggedy clad peasants behind them, the baskets overflowed with coins, jewels and, in the case of the commoners, homemade family heirlooms as well as pledges to donate the services of their first and second born to the speaker and his Holy Mission to make everyone in Athens happy and rich.

The second speaker in the public square spoke in the dialect of the people, rather than that of the aristocrats, priests or, 'fake liberals', as he called anyone more educated and smarter than he was. The assembly in front of his unvarnished, and very portable, stage wore functional woolen clothing on their torsos rather than silk, blisters on their hard working hands, and a sheet of repressed anger over their bitter hearts at having to earn their best days' pay by the degree of genuflecting they did, and telling their bosses that, yes, there is mastery in servitude and giving. "Better to be clever than wise," claimed the musically unaccompanied middle aged philosopher while wearing a clean, perfectly fitting white toga with gold trimmed cloak, his hair combed back and secured into place by oil to cover a bald spot that he kept hidden as well by never turning his back on his fellow rebels against the aristocracy. "Might is stronger than Right," he pledged with a

fist raised to the air. “Act like a confident asshole, be treated like a worshipped saint. And yes it is cool to be cruel. And cooler to join us, the cool class. Membership drive is on now! If you losers dare to become winners! Anything you can afford, or invest. Which I will invest wisely for you, as I did for me. As you can see!” he continued, opening up his cloak, displaying a belt filled with coin, jewels and gold plated blades over his over-fed gut. “My assistants will take anything you have and turn it into gold. And why, how can we do this? Because we are Athenians! Who will be Great Again! Like we were in the good old days! Richer than Sparta, Thebes or anyone else!”

The working class king’s assistants, each one of them classy-dressed whores who looked like Aspasia in her younger days, circulated around the crowd with their empty baskets. They quickly became filled with jewelry, money and literally the shirt off the mark’s back as soon as the working girls stroked the arm of the hard working embittered man of every station, and a few women, in the congregation, asking their name, then appending it with a prefix of ‘soon Lord’, ‘soon Mistress’, or ‘soon slave OWNER rather than unpaid servant’.

Next in line for the visitor to the show sanctioned by the city council, as it brought Athenians to the market where they would buy taxable goods, and non-Athenians to the city so they could be charged triple the rate natives of the city paid for goods was a conservatively clad philosopher in an unadorned robe in the drabest hue of brown possible. His plain, brown eyes made him indeed seem more like a monk than a priest, but still, he spoke an authority only possible by someone who had been appointed by the gods, or the creators of those deities.

“To get something from the gods, you have to give something,” he said to the mixed crowd in front of him standing on a plain box in front of a statue of Zeus, The stare of the speaker for that god who ruled the rest of the gods shifted from one parishioner to another as if the sermon was directed to him or her directly, irrespective of wealth, position or attractive physical attributes. “And when I speak of giving something to the gods, I speak not of wealth. Not of making your children unwilling gifts. Not handing over your precious and innocent animals either,” he bellowed out, to a confused and confounded crowd of commoners and aristocrats alike. “No. You must sacrifice your vitality,” he declared with the certainty of a man who lived for and within the confines of Faith . “Stop laughing. Stop singing. Stop being expressive, so you can be...obedient,” he informed the congregation in a calm, assuring and assertive voice.

Again the people in crowd looked at each other, confused. “And then and only then...” the Monk-Philosopher who belonged to no class of Priests, officially anyway said, raising voice and hand to the sky. “The rain will fall on your dry fields, by Zeus! And the rivers will recede from your flooded shores, by Athena, the patron goddess of our fair city! Become dull, lifeless, boring and procedures...like this song...” With that, the speaker took in a sobering breath, and released from his mouth a song which was more like a drone. A hypnotic drone which put the assembly to sleep. Or, more dangerously, into intellectual and spiritual slumber. Then passivity. It was accompanied by words, which when translated into a language the fear-oriented mind always obeyed meant ‘Obedience

is righteous. Expression is evil. The gods created you to be contented in expressionless obedience. You will get your reward, which is contented survival. Who can ask for anything more or question such a gift that no animal in the forest has been given? But if you do, you will be severely punished!”

The Monk-Philosopher didn't collect any money for his Cause, but his crowd of bowed 'fellow servants' grew faster than the other two philosophers. Perhaps this Monk was a victim to this Dull Out Disease, or maybe one of its creators. In any case, the next philosopher on the square was concerned with more immediate matters.

Socrates' anger at the fellow practitioners of the Philosophy Craft was equaled only by the pity he felt for their followers, who were afflicted with laziness of Soul to a point that they had no soul's left, not that they could connect to anyway. But, to win the hearts and minds of others, or rather to empower them, was a competition of sorts. And as Socrates knew, an innovative idea which was not expressed in writing or speech was as worthless as teats on a bull, and painful for the bearer of that idea. And as he was a reluctant writer, for reasons no one would be told, he was forced by the necessity of Truth and the contagious joy of discovery to be a speaker. A speaker who, for a variety of reasons, believed that content was not only more important than presentation, but the only component worth giving any consideration to.

The monetary-poor, Vision rich defiantly barefoot Philosopher in a dirty robe stinking of fresh sweat produced by intense struggle of the mind, body and spirit that was more rags than cloth assessed the crowd of people in front of him. He adjusted his feet on a half broken wooden crate which he used as a platform, ignoring the splinters that penetrated his blistered but still naked soles. He was half way through his lecture, improvising on the lesson plan he had planned all day with ideas that he acquired on the spot which sometimes contradicted and sometimes complimented the original ideas he had formulated, dedicating himself to giving voice to only that what he felt was Truthful, Right and Useful. And, he hoped, understandable.

“Yes...to be Alive, in body, mind but more importantly in Spirit,” Socrates said to the mixed crowd of souls he felt to be less Vital than they could be, focusing on the answer for all of them lingering in the sky rather than to personally save a few of them with a specially meant smile. “And what is the Work we must do for this most blessed curse, burden and gift, I ask you and me?” he asked, turning around to see their faces. Noting that there were less of them now, but still enough to be talked to and with. “Is it not our most sacred duty and Passion to know then truth?” he challenged them one on one, to the best of his ability anyway. As the remaining third of the original gathering seemed to want to stay, or perhaps no where special to go. In any case, he continued half turning his head from them, creating a reflective surface between himself and the blurred image of the buildings of the city and stages of the other philosophers around him. “To be a mirror that shows us that if we dive into ourselves deep enough, brave enough and insightfully enough...Yes...the view is not so bad...And beyond both good and bad! Which is...a Silent Bliss beyond the fanfare of happiness which is...” Turning around, in theatrical style for a very personal moment with the crowd, Socrates' face was drawn to

one of them. The only one left, clad in a commoner's torn Theban robe in an Athenian town, thus making him internally and externally an outcast of sorts, much like Aspasia as a foreign born soul still was. A lad with mismatched leather sandals and shaggy yet symmetrically cut hair no more than 10 years out of experience outside of the womb. With the most focused, intense and dedicated of eyes he had seen in another in a long time.

As always when confronted, challenged and gifted with a one on one discourse with someone, wondered about whether this boy with Ancient eyes had come from and where he was going. If an orphan, he seemed to be comfortable belonging to the family of Truth seekers rather than those who grabbed hold of easy and comfortable answers. Or perhaps a slave boy, whose errant master was away, or recovering from a drunk, after beating the lad in his dirt-covered and perhaps bloody forehead,. Or an insightful child who had the bad fortune of being born to non-thinking parents he had outgrown as authority figures on anything that mattered.

Socrates asked the boy to tell him his name, sharing particulars about his own life so that the tight-lipped lad would relate something about his past and present, so that Socrates could perhaps offer him a better future one way or another. But the boy refused to give voice to anything.

“What I just said, an offering to you,” Socrates finally said to the lad, with a humble bow, thinking him a mute. Or, worse, a talkative soul who gave voice to something that scared or offended the wrong person who had a yearning for a human tongue in his stew. “An offering.”

Upon rising up to raise his eye to the boy's face, Socrates found himself seeing, then smelling, a small loaf of bread. “An offering?” Socrates said of the payment for his services, or masochistic tenacity.

The young boy nodded ‘yes’ with his head, revealing that indeed there was a blood stain on his forehead, that the Old Man accept his gift, placing it into Socrates' hand.

“Thank you....But...wisdom not shared is an empty accomplishment,” Socrates said to the lad as he felt the bread, smelling it to be not all that rancid or moldy. With that, Socrates broke the bread in half. He gave the bigger piece to the child, but the boy placed both chunks back into that the Old and hungry Man's hand keep the bread. Socrates took a bite from it. “Delicious,” Socrates said, pretending to like his least favorite mixture of what seemed to be wheat, barley and rye, with an odd taste he couldn't identify, though it did seem to be wanted desperately by his growling empty stomach, which he had neglected to feed for at least a day. “Thank you, my boy. My fellow seeker and server of Truth. But you need it more than I do. So you can tell future generations that...”

The boy shook his head ‘no’, motioning for Socrates to eat more of the bread. “Yes,” Socrates conceded. “In old age as well as young age, a healthy body makes

possible a healthy mind,” he continued, doing his best to pretend that the off tasting bread was barley, red berry, fig and wild wheat ‘cake’. It was a dish he prepared during the golden days at Aspasia’s house not only to demonstrate the equality of men and women in the kitchen, but because Aspasia’s enormous talents as a philosopher, musician and teacher of love were not matched by her culinary skills. “But, a young mind must also be fed by a strong and healthy body,” he said of the boy whose robes were three sizes too big for his most probably emaciated body underneath it.

Socrates’ words, yet again, went into the ethers, as the boy had slithered away. Or perhaps was called or dragged away. He thought of looking for him, and reasoning or forcing the lad’s masters to give him his well deserved freedom, but the young boy who assured the old man that there indeed was a future in moral nobility for the next generation was no where to be seen, heard or smelt. There were others who were though.

“And a strong mind fed by a strong body can’t let shit be sold as shinola,” Socrates said as he noted the other three philosophers around him, acquiring money, prestige and, more dangerously in a democracy, popularity. Feeding his body with more of the boy’s bread, the stone mason philosopher who had aged faster than he realized forced his knarly legs to march with an assertive and even stride to the ‘musical’ middle aged ‘Minister of Profit’ who passed himself off so easily as a young man of godlike wonderment.

“Give to us and the and the gods will give back to you, ten-fold,” the back-up singers gave voice to in such a convincing manner while their leader boasted about the worth of effortless success only achieved by people who were smart enough to join his group, with an ‘affordable’ donation which was necessary for the Cause of course.

Socrates, the only man within hearing distance of the speaker whose feet were not swaying with the music, or bopping his head in a ‘yes’ version to every intentional and non-intentional falsehood coming out of the Minister of Profit’s lyrical lips, took in a deep breath. He felt, contemplated then formulated a counter argument to the charlaton’s claims, then took in another breath, recalling some of Aspasia’s thought inducing rather than mind numbing musical compositions.

But when Socrates prepared to breath fire and warmth from his lips, as a dragon, the notes were out of tune. And the words were...slurred, running into each other, inverted in attempt to utter a comprehensible sentence. Indeed, he sounded like a drunk, or worse, a lazy and deluded thinker. But there was a warped musicality in what came out of Socrates’ mouth as he felt light headed, his vision and hearing both blurred, with a repeating simplistic ‘melody’ coming out of his drooling lops that he could not stop. A melody which the Minister on stage imitated and mocked, with lyrics that were understandable. Lyrics that, as Socrates heard through a warped each, said that he was a deluded old man, doing the worst that he can, to imaginary fans. The real fans of the Minister sang along, dancing to the new tune, as, of course, his collectors filled more baskets with contributions to the Cause, and more shoppers, merchants and slave moving supervisors passed by, decided to visit the show rather than tending to business.

“Music is supposed to make people smarter. Wiser. Stronger,” Socrates thought, and tried to say. But whatever came out of his mouth made him sound even more like the source of ridicule which Aristophanes so colorfully portrayed in his plays. A fool. A village idiot whose purpose was to provide laughter to people at his own expense, with no other purpose at all. Who was entertainment for the Minister and his new followers, who quickly tired of him and throw him away to philosopher 2’s stage, landing the Old Man on his back, .

Feeling his brain getting better connected to his mouth after the fall, Socrates pushed himself up on his feet. “It is cool to be cruel,” the merchant peddling force and aggression as the means to a fulfilled life asserted to the crowd. “To be clever is better than being smart, as even the idiots in still lingering in crowd will one day completely understand. Am I right or am I right?” the asshole who knew how to be treated like a saint said to his new followers.

“Bbbuutt,,” Socrates interjected, forcing himself up onto his feet, just as the crowd was about to vote the speaker into a higher position of power and influence. “...Virtue and Goodness are necessary for Wisdom which is necessary for ...for...for....Creativiteeeee....And Art.”

“Uncool art,” the ‘common man’s king’ on stage countered. “That no one will buy, from you who is so ‘wise’ that he has everyone else do his writing for him,” he assured Socrates with a clever lilt in his voice. “Will we?” he asked the crowd, so as to settle the argument the democratic way before Socrates could answer with his mouth.

The crowd agreed, throwing rotten tomatoes and hurtful insults at Socrates. Both hurt when the hit their mark, more than the usually defiant Revolutionary of the Mind imagined possible. He stumbled his way to Philosopher III, the Prophet of Dull Out non-Expression disease cursing along the way.

“What the fffffuck...Issss gggoing on, Dammittt...And I’m...” Socrates felt the cracks of his butt-cheeks, feeling smelly squishy brown material, then felt water trickling down the inner thigh of his leg. “Fucking shitting and pissing in---”

“A world where the gods are offended by that kind of language,” the ‘restraint is the only way to be right with the gods’ priest said in a stern, judgmental voice.

“I’m being fucking expressive!” Socrates shot back, defending his right to be Alive.

“For which you shall be punished,” the Priest of the new Dull Out Disease cult said. “Offending the gods with your tongue, and our noses with your ‘expressive’ behind.”

The lone Monk who had elevated himself to becoming an emerging cult-owning Priest turned his back on Socrates, asking his followers to do the same.

“As all of our noses detect. Your detritus and urinary, excrement,” he continued.

Socrates tried to walk away, but could only hobble, then fall on the ground, throwing up putrid bile. He sensed he was being watched by someone in the nightmare that overtook him. ‘But, no’ Socrates said to himself. “The eyes looking at me are in my imagination. And, at least, I can think without stuttering...Or...ccccaaannn I ttthinkk witttthout.” Anger overtook Socrates as he refused the help of anyone who would help him off the ground, or the street. Every helper who came along was considered an enemy by the once decorated warrior who was not dedicated to Pacifism, Reason and Compassion as the most powerful and only reliable tools at man or womankind’s disposal. Still Socrates could feel that something was very, very wrong. Or, maybe it was his time to go. Time for the mind to give up the ghost before the body did. As happened to so many who outlived their purpose in war, or peace.

The boy who had just become Socrates’ favorite student watched as the Old Man struggled to remain in the land of the sane, and functional from the safety and security of a narrow alley between a pleasure palace for married men and a stable which had below it a tunnel that enabled some of those men to sneak away from their mistresses when their wives or political opponent located them. He felt a coin being placed in his outstretched hand. “For your delivery of specially baked bread, my boy,” Lycysis said to him with a congratulatory smile.

“And my silence for what the special ingredient in it is?” the mute, foreign, street urchin boy replied to the General in a crisp, arrogant upper class Athenian accent.

Lycysis’ lips turned inward into an angry frown as he reached into his purse to place another coin in the upstart lad’s outstretched palm. Aristophanes, behind the General’s back of course, smiled with delight pleased with the boy’s performance as a pauper or perhaps his courage as a young political climber not afraid to challenge an established political figure at the top of the ladder. Or perhaps because the lad had found a chink in Lycysis’ armour which the playwright could use one day to his own advantage, or perhaps put into one of his plays.

The ‘philosophy’ boy help out for more money, until Lycysis had emptied almost emptied his purse. Satisfied with his earnings for the day, the boy wiped off the goat blood ‘scar’ on his forehead, combed his hair, threw away his Theban peasant robe, and proceeded to go back to his life as the spoiled brat of an overpaid Athenian father who perhaps he would hire as his personal servant one day. Or such is what Aristophanes was thinking, as a permutation to what would happen in real life, or perhaps a plot line he could use today.

“And as for you,” Lycysis said, interrupting Aristophanes’ artistic and political speculations, as he turned around, catching the playwright just before he quickly wiped the smart assed smile from his face. “You have already been paid, and if you don’t deliver on the play you will write based on what you and everyone else just saw.”

Lycesis motioned the cutting of Aristophanes' throat, balls, then hands with his dagger. The playwright bowed in submission, realizing yet again who was the real director and producer of this real life drama. Satisfied with having put Aristophanes in his place, Lycesis turned to Socrates. "And in the meantime ...for disrupting my happiness with Aspasia," Aristophanes heard, from a very personal, painful and secretive place in the General. "And for denying MY progeny theirs..."

"You mean Athens' youth, my Lord?" Aristophanes dared to ask, caging as much of his intentions into the mannerisms of a fictional servant whose only wish was to be of service to his master. "The next generation of what, and who?"

"Whoever I say it is," Lycesis replied, finalizing the conversation with a downward deflection of his voice. Then with a wave of his finger, he motioned for soldiers behind him to leave the hidden alleyway, then exit into the entrance to the tunnel connecting the stable and the pleasure palace.

Aristophanes watched the Old Philosopher being carted away by the General's soldiers, wondering when that day would come for him. Bread slipped out of Socrates' pocket as he struggled to run into the woods. A single woman in a fur lined yellow cape ran in to rescue Socrates from his captors, calling his name just as the cart was out of sight. There was anger in her voice. That of a woman who was angry at everything, most particularly herself for her own afflictions and failings. Upon turning around, Aristophanes noted that it was not Xanthippe with an 'I told you so' or 'better keep that old coot locked up for good this time, or kill him so I can move on with MY life. No, it was Aspasia. She contemplated something solemn and final, then knelt to the ground, as if in prayer. Awaiting her when her knees hit the ground was a portion of the drugged bread Socrates had eaten. She secretly pocketed it, looked up to the sky as if to give thanks, then moved on.

## Chapter 6

The sky had fallen, then turned into walls. Such is what Socrates felt when he awoke from a nightmare of hallucinations from which he was unable to wake up until it ran its course. “What is this place?” he said as he saw a wall of what seemed like petrified wood and mortar on the roof above him, and solid roofs on every side of him, one of which had a highly placed single, small window with metal bars securely pounded into it.

“Do something to upset the laws the gods have handed down to the politicians in this ‘golden age’ town that’s more about having gold than golden legacies,” Socrates heard in a Cretan dialect from what seemed to be a real this time emerging from the shadows, who approached him at a slow walk which echoed with each step. “Do, say or maybe even think what is inappropriate and you can be exiled, executed, forced to give back what they say you stole, and if you can’t give back what you stole, you get sold into slavery,” the apparently real man continued, his straggly beard having grown down to his chest, his robe a mixture of several garments sewn or tied together, his thin arms caked with straw and dirt, his face pale white as the snow, but his eyes, somehow Alive, and caring. “OR...this new experiment,” he noted. Confinement”. The man disappeared into the shadows of the chamber, emerging from the blackness with a bountiful plate of bread, olives, goat cheese, berries, turnips and, yes, real beef, not fish or goat meat seasoned to taste like such. He placed it at Socrates feet. “With food for your belly and a roof over your head. They keep us here until we...”

“Stop becoming a danger to ourselves and others?” Socrates said to his fellow prisoner. “I’m Socrates,” he said, extending his hand out to him. “Whose hand is not contagious with madness,” he continued, noting that his offer was refused.

“Or maybe it is,” the prisoner said, after a pensive delay with an adventurous sparkle in his eyes, accepting the handshake. “They used to call me Ionisis. But now, I suppose, they call me...whatever they want to I suppose, out there. But, I have to keep my company fed so they don’t slip away like---.”

Socrates could hear Ionisis’ stomach growling, and noted the sadness in his eyes, which released tears down an overly wrinkled cheeks, absorbing themselves into a beard that was more tangles than tufts. He quickly gave the plate of food to Ionisis. “Please take it!” he said.

“And I should do this because?” Ionisis replied.

“The last time I accepted a meal that wasn’t rightfully mine, I seemed to pay for it,” Socrates noted with a chuckle. “A joke that loses everything in translation, Ionisis,” he said to his apparently foreign born roommate with a grin of realization, putting the food down.

“Yes, indeed,” Ionisis replied. “As it is indeed so that True Bliss is not getting more than what we have but learning how to be happy with what we have,” he said, taking a small

bite of the food, then pushing it back to Socrates. “Like you said. And as I recall reading somewhere by someone who wrote it down...”

“After a wise...woman...told it me,” Socrates replied, taking another small nibble of the apparently generous portion of food left for Ionisis, or himself, pushing it back to his fellow diner in a volley which seemed to be continuing on its own now. “A woman who--“

“-----Was responsible for your being here....in this Palace?” Ionisis inquired.

“With better cooking than my wife does, or I can do...And to be honest, But...way above the best cooking from the woman who---”

“--- You wish could be your wife? And could be if divorce was Legal or you took matters into your own hands and...”

“----She would not be satisfied with such an earthly position,” Socrates speculated on the basis of the firmest of real world data that defied heavenly logic as he did his best to eat the smallest portion of smoke-dried beef that his hands could pick up graciously, then pushed it away his interest in food yet again disappearing despite his body’s need for it.. “But...” he said as he pushed himself up on his, apparently, still not whipped or slashed feet.

Socrates did his best to work the bars. Upon doing so, he heard laughter from many people outside at a far distance away.

“What is that laughter?” he inquired.

“A new comedy, by Aristophanes,” Ionisis informed his newest friend, or perhaps temporary still living companion in madness.

“Who made himself sound like a comedic genius by portraying me as an idiot in ‘Clouds’,” Socrates grumbled. “An illiterate, deluded fool, he claims with so many colorful falsehoods.”

“And in his new production, I just heard last night from that window, is doing the same with a woman philosopher,” Ionisis said, covering over the still filled plate, so its surprisingly generous portions of mouth watering food , along with perhaps mind altering herbs within them, could be shared at a later date . “A foreign courtesan. An upper class Hetaira from the lower class city of Miletus? Named in the play, as I recall....”.

“Aspasia?” Socrates gasped. “If it is, I’ll!!!! I’ve got to get out of here,” he grunted as he pulled on the metal bars with every ounce of the strength he could muster from his body, mind and spirit..

“Not so easy to get out that way,” Ionisis offered. As he rose to his feet. “But easier this way.” He walked to the North wall and drew a picture of a door on it, then a ship within it, then a mountain to which the ship was sailing. “You see, I just draw a door to go to Thebes. All I have to do to enter it is to close my eyes, imagine the mountain breezes, and I am there...Or.” Ionosis froze in mid imagination, emerging back into reality as a woman, and an interesting one to most men at that. “If I want to sail to the Island of Lesbos, to become a woman,” he said with a rise in pitch in the voice, elevating to softness in tone, and a lilt in his step where his feet floated rather than walked on the cell floor. “So I can experience the special kind of love that only women can share...I am there. And...should I chose to go to Delphi and ask the Oracles for the gods to sing to me like they sing to them...I...become the music.” Ionosis broke out into song with nonsense lyrics which begged the listener to understand them, or imagine they have a poetic meaning so beautiful that it disqualified any definition in ‘real’ words.

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In the meantime, watches on, accompanied by a large mouse which, upon approaching closer, became a medium sized rat who sought to become his next dining companion.

“If we can master illusion, is it possible to transform reality?” Socrates inquired of the rat, offering it dog’s sized bites to see if something in the pleasure-providing food that would allow the frustrated rodent to think he was a contented canine. “As what we perceive as reality is the least false illusion we encounter? Or...maybe...life just...is. And our thinking we can know anything is...illusion. What do you say to that?”

The rat gave no answer.

“And you?” Socrates asked of Whatever or Whoever was above the ceiling, talkable to of course once one disregarded human language, or perhaps a human body.

## Chapter 7

A storm overcame Athens bringing with it swirling winds that blew up the dry dust from the ground, and then a flood of rain that fed the thirsty earth under it, along with the water hungry olive trees and wheat stalks. The walls of Aspasia's house stood up very well against the storm, thanks to perhaps the blessings of the gods or maybe her asking a favor of the one God Socrates had speculated existed for some kind of benevolent Purpose. But something not so benevolent was what was not on the walls or and the tables.

Aspasia's guest that morning took note of the bookless shelves, the opened chests emptied of jewels, the walls void of anything artistic, the lack of paintings on the walls, the shattered pieces of wood and string that had once been well crafted musical instruments, as well as the damage done to the door by whoever had made off with whatever was valuable monetarily or, more painfully, intellectually and artistically. But the white haired, balding yet still well muscled Doctor was as inept at reconstructing things made of wood and metal as Socrates was wise in choosing a wife. According to his calling, passion and Purpose, he tended to the wounds on Aspasia's head, arms and thankfully still breast-bearing chest left by a party she refused to name.

But the Doctor seemed more concerned with what she was staring at while he stitched up her wounds. "Yes, if you ask me, there really was something in the bread that you so wisely stole from the ground that turned Socrates into someone else," he stated with ultimate certainty, something he seldom did as a physician. A conclusion he reaches upon smelling what was left of the loaf of bread, and her description of the behavior of the usually stoic, pathologically IN CONTROL of his emotion Socrates after he ate it. "I don't know exactly what it was in that bread, but I can bring it back to my clinic and do some more tests to find out what it is."

"The most important question is WHO put something into it," Aspasia grunted out, her anger over-riding the pain of the stitches being carved into her skin by the hooded assailants most probably sent by Lycisis, or the fear of being scarred by the wounds or their repair. "Yes, the question here, good physician, is WHO put something into this bread," she said her stare held hostage by the crumbs she had stolen from the ground that she held onto after the attack.

"The key to the who behind this is the WHAT was put into the bread," he replied, inserting a thread into Aspasia's forehead just below her, for now anyway, un-scalped hairline. "I can do some more tests with my alchemists colleagues, but I suspect that it is---"

"--Ibogaine? Psilocybum? Ayahuasea?" Aspasia speculated.

"So," the old physician with the gentle heart and tired, blood shot eyes said with an element of surprise, but not shock. "You DO know as much about medicine as you know about music, etiquette, philosophy and---"

“The kind of sex a man wants...And the love a woman deserves?” Aspasia said, loosening the top of the pins on her dress, slowly working her way to the second in line. She then edged her legs towards the groin, but before she could stroke his thigh, he pulled away, put in the last stitch in her forehead, and headed towards his medical bag, ducking so as to not be seen through any of cracks in the blankets covering the windows.

“We are living in dangerous times, my dear Aspasia,” the Doctor said by way of explanation, averting his eyes from Aspasia, and his true feelings from his Soul.

“Especially for doctors who treat women who are supposed to be hurting, my dearest Hippocrates. And who keep what happens between us, confidential,” Aspasia replied, feeling all too intensely the loneliness in the, for the RIGHT reasons this time, popular doctor’s soul.

“Yes, hiding what we do for others and don’t do for ourselves from the world,” the Priest of Healing whose vows were more sacred and firm than any Clergy at the Temple, or Officer in the Army. “The way we healers of the soul have to operate to be true healers, as you know as a healer yourself. But in the meantime, I am honored to ease at least some of your pain.”

Aspasia pulled a coin from her lighter than ever purse, holding it up. “For which I will pay you.”

“Not like that either,” Hippocrates stated, compassionately and firmly.

Aspasia ran her finger down his chest gently stroking the sweat-soaked coat of hair on it. Insisting that he take the medicine he so badly needed, for his own health and, as she speculated, his effectiveness as a physician for the long line of patients he would be treating the rest of the day or into the night.

“Or like that either, please,” he insisted.

“Hmm,” Aspasia said, pulling back her arm, and desire to please rather than serve. “A doctor who doesn’t collect fees? Why is this so?” she continued, sitting on a chair, feeling the wounds on her back that were now, thanks to his skill as a surgeon and herbalists, mildly aching rather than excruciatingly painful.

“The gods gives us the gift to be able to heal,” the physician of the body related to the healer of the soul. “And that gift goes away if we collect money or other special favors for it.”

“And, as a man of Science...you don’t collect fees for Service?” she inquired, noting even more bottles and jars of elixirs in his overstuffed bag than she had seen in previous times when she had called on him to service others.

“Because I am in the service of the public to serve its needs, and the public services me for my needs,” Hippocrates explained as he closed the lid on his bag. “They honor me by giving me freshly baked bread, as long as I rotate bakeries I go to...Or, if they don’t,” he continued, vulnerability taking over the left side of his face, temporarily allowing overconfidence to overcome his right. “Well...as we both know, people of advanced vision are not crucified by the blind as long as we provide those ‘people’ with technical services they need, or keep them entertained. Such is the world of needs and wants as we hope and pray that we are successful magicians and emotionally appealing entertainers.”

“And your wants?” she challenged, open for any answer the elusive and very private physician who everyone talked with but never really knew. “And the want and need of others to give something to you?”

On the way out the door, Hippocrates made a stop at the mirror. A cracked surface now, but still one which allowed and required him to self-examine himself. Aspasia could see his eyes determined to come up with a truthful answer this time, big T.

“In a well-lived life, are not needs and wants the same thing?” he finally voiced to himself. “I remember someone (her) saying that,” he continued, turning his challenges and attention to Aspasia through the reflection in the mirror.

“I don’t remember saying that,” Aspasia noted, digging as hard as she could into a vault of good, bad and yet to be labeled memories in her past, in which pain and pleasure often merged into the same life-challenging experience.

“Please do remember,” Hippocrates said, turning to her. “Doctor’s final orders,” he delivered straight into her blank stare. As the father and mother she had left behind in her home city, the first and last oracles she could rely on for truthful answers of authority who the rebel-revolutionary yearned to bring back from the grave.

Aspasia’s body shook when Hippocrates closed the door behind him. She felt alone in the house which now felt like a prison, wishing she could be with the only other prisoner who could hold the key to his own liberation, hers, and perhaps everyone else’s.

## Chapter 8

How other guests in the ‘confinement for the benefit of the different’ found their way to Socrates’ ‘suite’, he didn’t not know. The why’s of it made more sense. Socrates found himself sitting at the head of a circle with Ionisis to his left, fellow prisoners to his right and three guards who were interspersed with the latter. But, as always when amongst more than one other seeker of Truth or some kind of explanation to make reality bearable, Socrates occupied himself by arranging dried biscuits brought to the gathering sanctioned only by the SECOND or THIRD in command of the facility by placing the relatively edible (and hopefully not medication infused) wafers into a pyramid.

Just as the top layers were being constructed, Ionisis challenged Socrates with, ‘So you say that an unexamined life is not worth living, but does an examined life give you the best answers?’

“The right ones,” the lunatic philosopher replied, leaving it to each listener to interpret the answer that made the most sense to him. “An examined life gives us the right answers.”

“To questions like why we’re locked up in here?” lunatic number one, a man with flaming red hair as vibrant and firey as any volcanic eruption from near Mount Olympus asked, with a voice reeking of sanity and clear perspective.

“And why the ‘respectable and smart lunatics’ are out there on the other side of these walls?” added another fellow resident in the ‘hospital for the mentally and socially defective’ challenged, with a healthy dose of righteous indignation, his arms and hunched back bearing whip marks from previous ways of having been dealt with by ‘civilized’ authorities.

“Citizens who decided that we are insane, defective and dangerous,” a third resident, an young man with a mane of brown curly hair that was becoming prematurely white offered with the resolve of a smart man surrounded by idiots

“By popular vote, so does that not make it right, and just?” one of the guards, a lower ranked muscular middle aged man with deranged eyes that he no doubt to be able to hide from his superiors added. “I thought it would be better than a king or queen deciding what is right, and just. What kind of political system is right, and just?” he continued more as a physician who volunteered for service to the dangerously ‘different’ than someone who was responsible for silencing their voices.

“That all depends on who is on the top, and who is on the bottom,” Socrates offered, but did not push. The ‘Universe’, as he called it, rewarded his tenacious and humble answer with a flash of insight. “Or!” he exclaimed, going into a trance (flashing on something, goes into a trance, inviting others along for the ride of course. “Another way of looking at it...” Having been aware that showing was a far better means of teaching than telling, the Old Philosopher flung his wrist across the well constructed pyramid of wafer, and

places them in a circle. “Another way of constructing social power, and relating to each other, each connected to each other, giving according to one’s abilities, taking according to one’s needs, and everyone somehow needed, and therefore eventually, wanted,” he proclaimed.

“With, like Socrates said earlier, a Philosopher King on top,” the red haired resident of the grey bar hotel noted.

“Who is wiser than smarter, compassionate rather than cunning,” added the hunch backed ‘student’ who had received so many lashes from inappropriate previous ‘teachers’ on the ‘outside’. “A teacher who wants to keep learning, someone who knows that what goes around always comes back around...and someone----“

“---Who knows that anyone who wants to be or thinks he is solely qualified to be philosopher king shouldn’t be trusted with the job,” the ‘physician-guard’ offered. “Right?” he asked, turning to Socrates, delivering the challenge and warning straight back into the Old Philosopher’s soul. Something that happened all too rarely to and FOR Socrates.

Feeling corrected, and cured of a fast growing pathological weed that would overtake him if it had not been cut off at the root, Socrates put his hand up to his chin, feeling himself elevated to a seeker of wisdom rather than recipient of power. “What do we see, perceive and feel when looking at this new arrangement of this bread that feeds our stomach or breaks our teeth?”

“As you said, a circle,” Ionisis jumped in and said, agreeing with Socrates so eagerly that it disappointed the old man who wanted this somewhat younger one to build onto rather than merely acquire what Truths Socrates had found. “No one on top, no one on the bottom. Everyone necessary, and connected to everyone else.”

“And everyone sharing this meal of life equally. The pain, pleasure and experience,” Socrates replied, after which he gave the biscuits to his ‘students’ and, to the extent of their abilities, challengers, all of which still refused to tell the Old Philosopher how they acquired escape from their own ‘suites’ and entry into his. They further irritated Socrates in his attempt to unite them through sharing food everyone had brought to the pot luck gathering by refusing to eat the wafers Socrates had saved for the occasion. Instead, they offered real bread, dried pork, cakes and homemade jewelry to the Old Philosopher, unaware of course that Socrates hates such excesses.

“No...please,” Socrates insisted, as uncomfortable with being the recipient of gifts from those who had little, all laid at his feet, which included a pair of very comfortable sandals that the always barefoot philosopher did not want to wear. “Keep these for yourselves. Or, give these to Ionisis, my, my...”

“...Agent,” Ionisis interjected, giving definition to the thought in Socrates’ mind. “Who arranged for all of you to be snuck into this cell. Who have to be back where you are

supposed to be, very...soon,” Socrates’ new caretaker, friend and fellow outcast from ‘real life’ noted, looking at the remainder of sand from an hour glass fall into the bottom chamber.

“Unfortunately, yes,” the ‘private’ physician guard noted, nodding to his two fellow guardians, motioning for them to get up.

“Same time, same place tomorrow,” Ionisis said to the congregation as it became to disperse. “The Professor is at your service,” he said of an honored but somewhat embarrassed Socrates. One of guards led three prisoners into the shadows, the other guard being led by the other prisoners into the shadows, each disappearing into a tunnel or door that Ionesis would not let Socrates

Socrates gazed at the bounty in front of him he has in front of him. “As are you in my...service,” he said to himself. “Allowing me to fulfill my Purpose...and ultimate Goal.”

“To be paid for being a philosopher,” the Old Philosopher heard echoing in from the door to his cell, from a Warden he feared, hated and pitied most. How and why Xanthrippe was allowed entry into the prison, and Socrates’ cell, was known by the Head Jailer, a man with cold, impersonal eyes which he held upward, except when he bowed to Xanthrippe, allowing her entry. Perhaps because of the new dress she was wearing, costing or looking like it cost more than even Aspasia wore in her most well funded days when Pericles was her patron. Or perhaps because the way Socrates’ wife carried herself now, three levels above her social station in attitude, five lower with regard to education, grace and class.

Once allowed entry into the cell, Aspasia strolled around it as if she owned it, humming one of the tunes Aspasia composed and immortalized, but with a voice that made the notes feel lifeless and demonic both at the same time. Xanthrippe wielding her bad leg with a delay that was more like a dance than a biological impediment, making Socrates think that maybe her physical maladies were indeed all based in problems between her ears. A hypothesis which, even if true, would make her bodily conditions even more pitiable, and incurable. In keeping with the ‘dance’, Xanthrippe pushed Ionisis into the shadows, and into a wall that took away his ability to breath easily, or to say anything. She then proceeded to look at the ‘booty’ Socrates had acquired as a philosopher while in a location which would, theoretically, cure him of that obsession. She grabbed hold of one of the trinkets made by the fellow outcasts, with a firm fist that broke off a small portion of whoever it was a likeness of, then put it around her neck.

Emerging from the shadows to take it back was Ionisis. Xanthrippe choked for dear life.

“It’s alright,” Socrates said as he tried to pull away Ionisis’ blood soaked hand from the ripping an even bigger wound into Xanthrippe’s neck. “It looks better on her than me, or you.”

“Give it back, demoness!” Socrates; latest and perhaps dearest friend growled. “ Before you turn the good magic in it in to a black curse, for all of us!”

“Socrates...if you let this madman kill me...” Xanthrippe begged, and threatened.

“Your problems will be over, right Boss?” Ionisis volleyed back. “And hers will be too, is that not so?”

“Yes, it is so,” Socrates stated, loud enough for his still unbeaten upon wife to hear this time. “But...she came here to tell me something,” the Old Philosopher said to his ‘Agent’. “Something important,” Socrates repeated, seeing something in Xanthrippe’s eyes, and a scroll bearing the High Council’s seal fall inserted within a belt around her dress.

Socrates gently calmed down Ionisis, then took the necklace off Xanthrippe. Indeed it was a figuring of a goddess, with special magic built into the wood, somehow. He handed it to Ionisis, who dropped it like it is a freshly boiled turnip. The nose of the figurine falls off, making her look ugly.

“She turned the beautiful TransAthenia into a bewitched, butch bitch,” Ionisis accused Xanthrippe.

Socrates grabbed hold of some tar on the wall, found the small piece of wood that had fallen on the floor, and glued the nose back on the figurine, handing it back to Ionisis. “So, turn her back into a beauty....with the Magic inside of YOU!” he requested and commanded his apprentice, friend and, perhaps, literate younger associate who would immortalize his spoken words by putting them into print. And without changing them like his ‘real world’ student Plato was so fond of.

“You showed us the beauty that is in us,” Ionisis informed Socrates. “That is in me...The great man in me.”

Just as Socrates was beginning to feel comfortable with praise and adulation, he notices that Ionisis was speaking to the carved wooden likeness of the goddess. “And the magnificent woman in me!” Ionisis said in a voice that rose three octaves with every word. “And the magnificent woman I always wanted to be,” the man assigned by fate, or perhaps a compassionate guard, said, walking and talking with the musicality of a woman.. “Like Hermaphrodes, we will heal each other...dance with and within each other. The anima and animus, the male and female, the, as the Jews would say, Adam and Eve,” he said with a mind feeling...at peace with and in synch with his soul.

Socrates smiles vicariously at Ionisis’ finding him/herself, wondering if such would ever happen to an for him. The man-woman danced towards one of the imaginary doors on the wall, then disappeared into the shadows, singing softly and dancing loudly.

Xanthrippe dumped the official parchment into Socrates' lap. He struggled to derive the meaning of the words on the papyrus, angered at what met his eyes.

"The light in here is inadequate. As is the penmanship of whoever wrote this..." he said to his wife, hiding his real thoughts from her as best as he could.

"Of course," Xanthrippe noted, with an all knowing eyeroll and more condescension than he ever heard from her. "I can have one of your students read it to you, as part of their life lessons of course," she continued, still thankfully not knowing the secret that would ruin him in the present and the future. "But it's the only way you can redeem yourself for embarrassed me, your sons, and your city. And yourself that rant you did in the public square."

"That I don't remember doing," he asserted, handing the official decree back to her. "After feeling light headed and..."

"And the remarks you said about so many people of power and influence, and the gods, after you were finally arrested," Xanthrippe volleyed back. "For, as this so clearly says, 'corrupting the youth'," she asserted, reading the first line of the document.

"Whose youth?" Socrates bellowed back. "And how did I do that?"

"You want to get out of here, right?" Xanthrippe inquired, arms folded, the Council's letter back into her belt.

"What I want is not important," Socrates replied, reaching a painful yet liberating realization as he walked back to his 'thinking post' under the barred window that let some of light from the outside in, but disallowed anyone's face to be seen, or spoken to directly.

"But who you really want is," Xanthrippe replied, walking towards him with only a very slight limp, perhaps due to a new kind of sandal she was wearing or some kind of herb which the new physicians in the City were experimenting with to diminish short term pain, but at the price of long term addiction. "And if you don't do what the authorities say...I can't be responsible for what happens to Aspasia. And YOU will be."

"So, what am I supposed to do?" Socrates asked.

Xanthrippe lost no time in relating the terms of Socrates release to him. It delighted her to no end, as Socrates imagined his own end, a painful one beyond any dimension of suffering he could imagine or had endured. Or, because he had underused so many abilities and opportunities given to him, deserved.

## Chapter 9

When Aspasia walked into the sculpting shop, she was shocked at what came into her disbelieving eyes. She beheld a man she hardly recognized, He wore a clean white robe, complimented by perfectly combed hair and a beard that was evenly trimmed, on both sides, and on the sculptor's feet were actual shoes. The chunk of stone under his chisel was rapidly giving way to the likeness of Lyceus, conferring to the face the compassion of Apollo, the wisdom of Zeus, and the boldness of Prometheus. But it was the face of the well-fed servant putting all of the lies about Lyceus into a form that convinced any viewer, even her, into believing they were the truth.

“What is this all about?” Aspasia asked Socrates.

“Nothing,” he replied from the sides of his mouth with a secretive assertiveness, and a lifeless, monotone voice reeking of deadness. “I was requested to teach, preach and say, nothing now. And all I have to do for everyone I care about to be taken care of is...to do nothing.”

“But not to BE nothing,” Aspasia grunted out at the Old Philosopher who still kept averting his eyes. She grabbed hold of his robe, attempting to pull him away from his work so he could look into the mirror in her eyes. “A nothing who makes these marketable, money making, mindless, mind-numbing happy images of these...these nothings,” she continued, looking at the other likenesses of the gods, and goddesses, done with the faces of the movers and shakers in Athens who did the least yet got credit for the most.. .

Socrates took in a deep breath, looked around him, then into space. “Sometimes we have to serve the nothings we don't believe in to preserve the someones we still do value, so they can do, and be something,” he replied with more than the usual elements of secrecy as to the particulars.

“Plato. Aristotle. Xenophen,” Aspasia countered. “And whole lot of other knowledge seeking and comfort mistrusting souls who have been asking about you. And what you are doing now, other than turning expensive bread in your mouth into stagnant crap coming out of your anus?” she continued, looking at the back door orifice hoping the perhaps something making more sense or being more honest would come out of that end somehow.

“Sometime we have become immersed into ...doing things in the material plane,” Socrates replied, getting back to his work perfecting the likeness of Lyceus, adjusting the size of his ever sniffing nose from size right to perfect. “And seeing that no harm comes to those in it. Especially those who---“

“-----Those who mock you! Use you!” Aspasia blasted out of her usually sweet and tender lips. “That family of yours you created with your sperm. And that unworthy sperm receptacle who—“

“... who I’m responsible for!” Socrates shot out of the side of his mouth. His real meaning still held back. “And the consequences of being responsible, even if to the wrong persons, and to the right person is...” Just as anger was about to push the truth out of Socrates’ sweat-soaked neck, his chisel extracted a health portion of material from his finger rather than the stone. It bled, and hurt.

Aspasia self observed herself rush in to help, but he pulled his hand away from hers. The used his still uninjured hand to pound the hell out of the insured one. “No...I deserve this pain....I deserve it. I’m bad....bad...bad...”

While Socrates delivered punishment to himself that he perhaps deserved, or perhaps didn’t, Aspasia found her glance back on the statue of the now more drunk than sober power hungry abuser who she empowered with advise as to how to move his way up the political ladder. “But this stone mason who used to be much more is not bad as you are, Lysecis,” she said to the stature which had eyes that seemed look straight into her. “Tricking Socrates, Aristophanes and everyone else to make you look so...noble, intelligent and kind..And for what? So you can show me off as a beauty...a beauty...who....will become and be very ugly....”

Aspasia grabbed hold of a knife, and her long hair. She looked in mirror, preparing to chop it off. Then pondered first cutting off her breasts, then her tongue. Just as the blade was about to turn her into a mute, Socrates stopped her.

“No! No!,” he pleaded as she tried to push him away.

“Say, or, no, DO something to give me one reason why I shouldn’t cut off my beautiful hair,” she said, pushing him away, grabbing hold of her waist-long, thick, curly mane, which made her the envy of so many women and desired by so many men, or their experimental sisters. “Or my supple, according to some, size perfect breasts,” she continued. “Or maybe everyone’s problems would be ended if I cut out my witty tongue, or defiant and goddess-like long neck...RIGHT NOW!”

Socrates kissed her before any actions could be taken. Then he pulled back. Then took the knife from her shaking hand. Then crushed threw it a narrow crevice between two large stones too heavy to move, even for him. Then....went back to carving the statue of Lysecis which would elevate him into an even more popular leader now, and a legend for future generations.

“Hold onto that, kiss, please. And remember it always. Something that can never be again,” he related and confessed. “Something that I don’t want, or need...or... Will ever inflict on you again.”

“You never inflicted anything on me,” Aspasia said, feeling all expressions of love for Socrates, eros, philos and Agape. “What do you want me to...do?” she asked, prepared for any sacrifice or compromise her most valued lover requested, or required.

“Go. Just go, please!” Socrates requested. “Go! Now!” he then commanded, looking at her with eyes she never saw on him, or any other man she loved, or thought she loved. “It’s over between us...Just go! As far away from me,” he requested with a more understanding but far more assertive tone. “And away from him,” he said of the likeness of the man who through his art would elevate to the status of a god. “As far away as possible,” he went on, tending to adjustment of the ears of the statue that, yes, seemed to be listening to the conversation between an open hearted Aspasia and a now closed soul Socrates.

“I cccann’t,” the always well spoken Aspasia said, with a stutter neither she nor anyone else heard from her mouth. “I...eh...I eh----”

“----Need to stay in the good graces of Athenian society so the history books write good things about you?” Socrates proposed, as what she felt as an accusation, as he added yet more hair to Lysecis scalp which, in reality was balding down to almost nothing on its crown.

Aspasia’ fear turned into rage.

“So they will write good things about a witch, a temptress, who made me belief in philosophical fairy tales,” Socrates went on, each pounding of his chisel feeling like a knife into Aspasia’s confused and broken heart. “Instead of hard, honest....”

Aspasia left the workshop, leaving Socrates to hear and feel the door slam. Along with intense regret. “Yes...Leave, please, my dear Aspasia,” he said to her in absentia, having pushed her away the harshest way possible, so that she could biologically survive and, perhaps, find love somewhere a lot safer than Athens, or maybe Greece. “So they, Plato, and all the others, will write about you the truth....truth. Something that...” Socrates’ blank stare led him somehow to an intense gaze into Lysecis’ face. “Something that you know nothing about,” he said to the statute. “You good looking, handsome, likable man...whose face...” The sun, being a character who Socrates always considered a harsh and necessary enemy against the comfort and security of darkness, moved higher in the sky, shining its light upon the face of Lysecis. And its other rays into Socrates’ now Soul-connected head. All according to plan, sort of. “Yes, I DO have a responsibility to show the world, Lysecis. Even if you don’t see it yourself.” With that, Socrates viewed with his now determined eyes what his hands had created in stone. An idea occurred to him. Something he hadn’t planned but something with Spirit, which still was talking with him, had given to him as a challenge, opportunity and gift.

## Chapter 10

Socrates appeared at his assigned place on the street converted into a ground level stage because it was him and because it was him as well as the location being in front of Lycesis' two story house. He of course came in a clean, white robe, combed hair, neatly trimmed beard, and, of course footwear. Sensible shoes which the most privilege servants and slaves of the upper class wore on their feet. In front of him, a mixed crowd of onlookers spanning the spectrum between involuntary slave to voluntary aristocratic cohort, all eager to see the representation that Lycesis' converted philosophical opponent had sculpted to honor his own contrition and of course the wisdom, and power, of the man he had, out of good sense, finally surrendered to. Some of them Lycesis' friends, some his potential enemies, but all, one way or another, admirers who wished they could be like him, or be around him. Amongst them was Hippocrates, physician whose high courage insights regarding medical ethics or perhaps hidden fortune from doing something else allowed him to not charge for medical services. Who, by the ample muscle, flesh and reserves fat on his weary bones, was well rewarded for being skillful, moral, or lucky, and not required to compromise his morals to feed his body like most everyone else, including miracle inventor Mechanos.

Socrates said nothing, of course, except 'I now see your reason and yield to it' with a bowed head as he pushed the statue of Lycesis off its cart, then slowly uncovered the white sheet covering it from head to toe. He then heard music being played, a victorious melody inspiring people to march to war rather than question the necessity of it. Such was expected of course. As was the cold ray of benevolent approval Socrates could feel on the back of his neck from Lycesis, looking down from the window above him, along with the smile penetrating down from Aristophanes, to his side and slightly behind his patron, master and, Socrates feared, friend.

As Socrates uncovered the statue, he imagined what Lycesis was saying, and his overfunded playwright Aristophanes was agreeing to. "So, Socrates finally gave in to reason" Socrates heard in the imagined voice between his ears. "The Old Man finally became a sane one, which is good health for him, his family and Athens itself," he could Lycesis saying. "And how should this conversion to REAL WORLD reason be portrayed I my next play, in a way that keeps the audience entertained and me popular that is," Socrates could feel Aristophanes thinking. "And as for Aspasia, I'll just get another whore who thinks she is a philosopher as arm candy, and ask her what the common people think of me so I can adjust presentations to them accordingly," the Old Philosopher envisioned being said, or felt, by Lycesis, hoping and praying to Spirit beyond and with any of the gods, that Aspasia had taken his advice and left Athens, for good this time.

Upon completion of the music, and a theatrical uncovering of the statue which Socrates did slowly, so as to both draw in more people, as well as derive internal experience and self observation during this crucial moment, the cards were all on the table, finally. The statue indeed showed the ugliness of Lycesis and his cronies on the outside as well as the inside. Both in eyes, one of them showing fearful confusion, the other revealing childish

anger and or course ignorance. The features of the rest of the face revealed elements of Socrates' own, a mis-shapen nose, cheeks that made him look old, tired and cranky, and perfectly shaped ears which were three times larger than his body, making him look like a donkey, or rather, an ass. As for what was on the other side of that ass, between the legs, Lycesis' testicular and penile manhood were ten sizes smaller than his body. And on his chest, breasts. Topping it all off, a prominent bald spot on his head which glistened in the sun between the thin strands of hair that the bearer thought was hiding it, with lettering in dyslectic characters reading 'do not look at this, or you will die'.

The first thing that Socrates flung off from the material realm were the shoes, then the clean, gold trimmed robe, revealing his old trademark, weather-beaten toga underneath it. After putting his fingers through his hair, and shaking his head around, he unbridled the straggly mane which was only made to look symmetrically trimmed by oil and grooming, proud that he made some hacked cuts without a mirror with his knife into it himself to make him seem unsymmetrical.

"Yes, the face of truth," Socrates said pointing to his interpretation of Lycesis' real face immortalized in stone, the ugly features of it for the superficially minded matched only by Socrates' own physicality. "The truth behind the lies in Lycesis, and all of us. And why? Because does not absolute power corrupts absolutely?" he continued inviting the shocked, then amused to make of its own mind, individually and collectively. "And does it not so easily turn a strong masculine saint into a sissy snake, with a small mind, small heart and small, defective and some would say weak womanly features?" he continued showing the tiny male reproductive organs and the oversized female breast on the man's man who, in reality, had never been seen bare chested by anyone, even Aspasia.

Socrates could hear through his reality-based imagination the conversation going on two stories above him as he went on to describe the internal anatomy of Lycesis as he really was, and how we all could become that pathology if we didn't self observe ourselves. As the crowd both thought about his ideas, and laughed at his wisdom-derived as well as sometimes pleasure-driven jokes.

"I have to admit, he is a first rate stone mason...and satirist through that medium," Socrates envisioned Aristophanes saying to his now mocked and exposed patron. "To make people react is simple. To make them think is harder. And to make them laugh while thinking is..."

"---Unacceptable," grunted back Lycesis in the play in Socrates' mind. "And...deadly," the coda to that remark, delivered with vulnerability and secrecy. And tears that...when Socrates looked up at the hidden vantage point where Lycesis stood, were tears of grief. Which he was able to hide from Aristophanes.

"Deadly for who?" Socrates read on the lips of the playwright who so many hid their real or alternative selves from as they would be portrayed on stage for everyone to see. "The

already powerful? The comfortable walking dead who are afraid to be really Alive?  
The....”

“...Playrights who ask too many personal questions. About...” Lycesis said with his lips and now beet red cheeks, fuming with anger. With that, Lycesis flicked his hand. Three wise insights and two jokes later, both of which were interspersed with each other, Socrates could feel the ground shake from inside the house. Then he saw soldiers coming his way, the visors on their helmets hiding their faces, and keeping anything from coming into their eyes.

Such called for fast thinking as well as clear thinking on the part of Socrates. He positioned himself in front of the most influential looking members of his now growing audience. Most of them were very old, some were very young, few were in between. He spoke to them, and as many of the soldiers as he could reach.

“But, should we not speak in generalities about such ‘men’ as Lycesis and not this man, who any of us could be at any time?” Socrates proposed, to the crowd as well as individual people in it, with rapid speed and intense feeling. “Is it not within any man the capacity to release the cruelty within him if he perceives, in his less faculties, that he is being attacked? But what do you do with such a man who feels himself to be more powerful as a man by doing harm to a woman? Or harm to anyone? And do we not do our worst harm to others when those others are about to find out something about ourselves? Truths about ourselves that when faced, can be redeemed? And cannot the means by which we use to exert harm to each other be turned around so that they help others, and ourselves?” Yes, it was a lot to absorb, but...there was much that had to be delivered before the ending of this play, which hopefully was being recorded on paper by perhaps his re-energized student Plato or perhaps someone who was more accurate in his memory than imaginative, or unconsciously self serving. That curtain fell to the ground quickly as the soldiers eventually surrounded Socrates, blocking him from a shoulder to shoulder crowd to a scant gathering of which was now reduced to nothing, fearing for their own lives if they were seen laughing, agreeing or questioning anything.

“And the charge of course is what?” Socrates yelled up to Lysecis, awaiting his reply.

“Corrupting the youth! MY youth!” Lycesis barked back, pointing to Plato, who had the pen and papyrus stolen from his hand by the head soldier, a lad of no more than 21 years of age. “And...corrupting history,” he continued, ordering his men to destroy the less than flattering but, in the ways that mattered anyway, truthful statue of him.

Socrates was taken away, accepting his fate with a somber sense of Bliss. Plato and his colleagues, all students of Socrates, backed away from the soldiers when they tried to pull their mentor away from captivity, terrified for the lives they thought were already forfeited to the Cause. History was the only observer that knew the pain, and significance of both of those cyclic dynamics.

## Chapter 11

For Socrates it was one of the Eternal Now moments, yet again. One that he had always lived, always will live, and was living now. But, it could all disappear, along with the possibilities for transformation of the alpha into the omega in the windowless stone room which felt as much like a womb as seemed like a coffin, or a temple.

Socrates was seated on a chair in which was not that uncomfortable on his hard ass. His wrists were in chains, this time the ones from the material realm rather than the invisible restraints that he felt for his entire life as someone who freely accepted a Calling rather than desires of the flesh. But, he was now more free as a prisoner than as any of his jailers, who he would be liberated from soon enough. Particularly after the death verdict of the Athenian Council was made official. Still, that judgment was put onto paper, brought in by the man who made it possible, and inevitable. Lyceus presented the document to Socrates for his own assessment, then dismissed the Aide.

“As you or anyone else can see,” Lyceus asked Socrates as an Aide, with bowed head and hunched back, placed a cup of tea next to the Old Philosopher. “The verdict determined by ballot in the Council, the Council members of elected democratically. It would be easier for all around if you added your own comments regarding the proceeding,” he said presenting himself with a writing implement.

“Before, or after, I start drinking this specially brewed, mind altering or perhaps mind killing tea,” Socrates replied, putting down the pen.

“Said as the charlatan who can’t read, or write,...but expects everyone else to write about him?” Lyceus replied with an all knowing smile, having known, or guessed the secret Socrates was trying to hide from everyone who he knew in life, or be known about by those after his death.

“An affliction of perception,” Socrates replied, in all honesty, considering that he had the luxury of extolling that virtue now that he was in the final curtain of the drama, and perhaps comedy, that was his life. “The letters here, and the ones I think I try to put down...they do tricks on my eyes.”

“As you did tricks on everyone else’s minds, including mine,” the cleverest politician and least gullible soul in Athens replied.

Socrates smelled the tea. Then tasted a bit of it, reflexly spitting it out. “Hemlock is it? But we can pretend that the rats drank it, as you slip me out the door, if tell you...hmm...”

“Where Aspasia ran off to!” Lyceus barked back.

“To which I say, yet again,” Socrates replied, with a calm voice, attempting to find and speak to the Spirit dwelling, though admittedly still sleeping, somewhere within Lyceus’

soul. “That Aspasia is smart enough to better off without you and your...complications. And...wise enough to be without me and my...complications,” he stated with an absurdity that defied reason and logic, but was nonetheless true. “But...there’s another complication that’s behind this charge of corrupting the young men of Athens,” Socrates continued, spreading his legs as much as he could with the chains around them, adopting the teaching position once again. “Plato...Xenophen...and,” another thought came to Socrates, from somewhere Real big R, which could not be identified, and perhaps should not be. A memory that he had remembered just now. “Rebolis. Your son, who I last heard, chose to leave Athens to go to----”

“----Where no living man returns from! By his own hand!” Lycesis screamed back, out of his mind, pouring out the volume and kind of sweat that only came from a man possessed by desperation, and despair. Moving the shock of his relived grief into action, Lycisi grabbed hold of his knife, edging it at Socrates throat.

Socrates, though remorseful, remained calm as he felt the blade cut into the first layer of skin on his neck. “I didn’t know,” he related, and confessed the grieving and vengeful father.

“You should have!” Lycesis grunted through clenched teeth. “ You told him that an unexamined life is not worth living, so he examined his life, and decided it was not worth living!”

“I merely posed to him some questions he could answer for himself,” Socrates replied as the next layer of his thick neck felt painful as well as wet with blood. “And as a wise man knows that he there is more that, he doesn’t know than he does know, I can only say--”

Socrates felt something hold his tongue back from finishing his proclamation, and hypothesis, in the form of Lysecis’ fist. Appended by the knife being poised to cut it out. Socrates self observed himself looking into his eyes of his oral surgeon.

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“No more lies or destructive truths will come out of your mouth here or in the afterlife if I cut out your tongue!!!” Lycesis screamed back in a forced whisper “And stop talking to me with your eyes like that...Mirror that Aspasia says you are blessed and cursed with that makes people see themselves, what are, and what they did, and...”

For reasons Socrates couldn’t determine, not figure out with his godlike ability to read people’s minds while trying to connect their souls, Lysecis pulled away, then disappeared into the darkest corner of the cell, contracting his tall, godlike body into a very mortal fetal position. Regret found its way into his glassy eyes, holding his shaking body hostage.

Socrates rose to his feet, walked up to him, and placed his hand on the now terrified and haunted politico’s shaking shoulder. Lycises pulled himself away from it, turning his back on the old man. “Get away!” he commanded Socrates. “Rebelos,” he begged to

the sky above the ceiling. "I want to join you! Wherever you are!" Lycesis edged the blade of his dagger onto his wrist, took in a deep breath, closed his eyes, and said "I'm coming my dear, deluded son! I'm coming."

"But," Socrates offered, gently closing his knarled fingers around Lycesis' hand, working his way to the handle of the blade within it. "Is it not wiser to redeem suffering by than to end it?"

"And is it not a philosopher's duty when he doesn't know, what he's talking about to fuck off!!!" Lycesis sneared back, an unexpected sense of pride and intention. The previously, and perhaps seemingly, weak and defeated politico pushed the Old Philosopher away with more strength than Socrates experienced from anyone else, including his soon to be departed wife, Xanthrippe. His back hit a hard wall.

"And is it not interesting that a soft head comes with soft painful bones and an even softer and more painful..." said by rhythmic wit, holding onto his scrotal tissue, searching for a colorful name for his testicular tissue which would convert it into mind liberating humor, for him and his life assigned 'student'

"You can't talk your way out of what we both have to do," Lycesis said, with a voice that belied total control of his mind, apparently uninjured body and unrevealed intention.

"Me being found here, by your dead body, having killed you," Socrates speculated on the spot as the best intuitive and logical explanation for all that happened. "A politically successful and, more important likable citizen, because of the speeches Aspasia wrote for you, so the Athenian Council deems me a vicious sadistic criminal instead of a lovable masochist wack job?" he continued, noting that rage and indignation was overtaking Lycesis in the 'game' the politico had been setting up, for a long time no doubt. "Or rather, a self-assessing experiment that the one God set in motion to serve humanity, and itself...who..."

"...Who the city Council will NOT erect a statue to if I have anything to say about it," Lycesis informed Socrates, getting back onto the horse that just threw him off, determined to break the steed or turn it into stew. "Here, or in the afterlife!"

Socrates scratched his chin with his chained wrist, feeling the blood spilling down his still intact neck, but thankfully nothing from his still intact tongue. "And, is it not possible that since there is life in the afterlife," Socrates said, doing his best to rehearse the moment of dying so that he would make his exit calmly, focusing on Spirit rather than lower spirits and thus merge with the Light rather than fall into another lifetime of darkness. "That life never ends? And that---"

"--Is it not the worse kind of afterlife is to be lectured to by a wise but not smart philosopher about questions that have no fucking answers?!!!" Lycesis answered back, seeming to be a pathetic character in one of Aristophanes' comedies, breaking into street

vernacular that he never spoke in public, or was said to say in private. “Huh!!!! Is it not possible for you to just shut the fuck up! Shut the HELL up!”

Socrates walked around in professorial mode, baffling and frustrating Lysecis to tragic-comedic proportions, as the politico who was known to never lose his cool or composure puts his hands over his ears, knife in hand.

“Perhaps...Maybe...There is a possibility that...” Socrates went on, getting calmer as Lysecis lost even more control of his senses. Socrates used the opportunity to take away the knife, throwing it into a slot in the stone wall which perhaps led to the outside world, or perhaps into the underworld. Lysecis with his large hands tried to retrieve it, cutting his wrists up, and getting his hand stuck in the wall in the process.

“It’s bad karma to leave your own blood on someone else’s floor to clean up,” Socrates informed the man who had everything to live for who, apparently, was preparing to end it all. “Yes, bad karma.”

“Karma? What’s that?”

“Something that a student of mine from East of Persia taught me about,” Socrates said as he gently pulled Lysecis’ arm from being permanently attached to or amputated into the wall....”But...” Socrates retreated back to the chair provided for him, and the hemlock tea. He poured a portion of it into the water mug he was provided with.

“It’s bad manners to drink alone. What shall we drink to then?” Socrates said to his host, offering him one of the mugs.

After a long, pensive delay, which Socrates allowed him to have without being looked into, or into the mirror in the Old Philosopher’s face, Lysecis picked up one of the hemlock containing mugs.

“To you,” Lysecis said, toasting the Old Philosopher with an admiring bow. “Drinking alone,” he continued, his chin upright again, putting down his mug. returning to his arrogant, ignorant self since, after all, thinking is for most an exhausting and courage-requiring endeavor.

Socrates smiled with resolve, and, with a fulfillment that he didn’t fully anticipated, took a sip of the hemlock tea, this time not spitting it out

“And I suppose you want me to have the historians write about all of this,” Lysecis sarcastically said, voicing not only his own desires, but those of the many mortals who choose to live non-thinking lives along with the demons of dull out and ignorance who Socrates still considered real.

Still, Socrates had to take on the challenge and answer the accusation that his intellect was based in arrogance rather than virtue. “I do the thinking on a good day, the

agonizing on a bad day, the talking on a productive day, and they do the writing,” the Old Philosopher who was younger than his middle aged opponent, in the ways that matter anyway. He then raised the mug to his mouth, and took another sip of the hemlock, which now seemed sweetened with honey. Or perhaps, it was the sweetness of death that made the brew seem more than merely palatable.

“Any last words?” Lycecis asked, as officially as he could.

“Hmm...I have to think about that,” Socrates related to the last mortal he would have to endure, or try to transform. “But in meantime, could you please wait, outside?”

Surprisingly, Lycecis bowed his head slightly, then left the cell without fanfare or final words of his own. Socrates took another sip of hemlock tea, finding that there was a hint of raspberry in the mix. “Last words...” Socrates said, going to the door, knowing that someone was listening outside. Perhaps that I...hmmm...”

“Still owe a man in Athens a rooster you didn’t pay for,” Socrates heard from a familiar voice from the other side of the cell. “Is that not so?” Aspasia continued, as beautiful as ever, dressed in an un-torn gown, and for the first time outside of her house, temple and bedroom, barefoot.

“Yes,” Socrates said to Aspasia, putting down the mug after swallowing another swig from it. “Tell my Nikos that I want to pay him back the cock I owe him.”

“Or...truth be told, used very much, especially with the woman you really loved,” Aspasia answered with an all knowing yet still questioning smile, overshadowed with regret and sadness.

“I wanted to keep our love pure,” Socrates said by way of explanation to so many of her and others’ unanswered questions regarding their mostly Platonic affair that lasted longer than any involving passions of the flesh. “To keep our love pure.”

“And in the process, almost sterilized it,” Aspasia replied with downturned eyes, after which she stared at and into Socrates’ soul, “Or were you too afraid of getting too close to me in matters of the heart without having complete control of your mind. Or...were weary of, and terrified of...happiness?”

“Yes, such is amongst my regrets,” Socrates related, and confessed. “And miscalculations. But...” The Old Philosopher drank the remainder of the first mug of hemlock, then a large gulp from the other one. Though time and space had no meaning here, he did retain body sensation, particularly the beating of his heart in his chest, which evolved into a pounding harder than any drum he had heard, or felt. “Why are YOU here?” he asked Aspasia as she began to sing a melody in another dialect that sounded both foreign and familiar, both at the same time. “I heard that you went back to Melitus. Your homeland.”

“And had a miscalculation along the way,” Aspasia replied, averting her florescent eyes.

“Too much of this!” Socrates demanded to know, referring to the poisoned drink in his still intact yet now cold hand.

“Too much of this,” Aspasia replied, pointing her now illuminated finger to her halo enwrapped head. “And and this,” she continued, placing her other palm on her heart. “Apparently, female philosophers in Melitus are considered a public nuisance. Dangerous to the way things are. And when the danger becomes too much..” Aspasia slid her index finger across her neck, after which a blood soaked deep line popped up.

“And I was not there to defend you from those bastards!” Socrates grumbled.

“You weren’t supposed to be,” Aspasia replied, with a deep somehow Devine wisdom which transcended knowledge. “I suppose. It was fast. And necessary, I suppose,” she related with resolve and relief.

“And what do suppose we do now?” Socrates asked, bracing himself for whatever answer came out of Aspasia’ mouth, or Spirit that seemed to be talking through her.

Socrates felt the weight leave his body, then saw, and sensed, that it became light. Though he was relieved to be rid of his ugly, painful mortal body, he yearned for the security of having it back again. Aspasia eased his mind, and terrified soul, with a touch of her light onto his. “Life on earth is in stages. You learn it, do it, teach it, then...”

“Leave it?” Socrates found himself discovering, and knowing.

“For something else...which we will find out about...Together,” Aspasia’s reply in a language Socrates could feel but not fully understand. She kissed him, on the cheek, with unbridled optimism and love, all forms of the latter. Socrates felt his body of light transforming into something younger. Which, to the eye, appeared to be himself at a younger age. The one he had control of, for the most part, when he and Aspasia were first brought together by Life, experiencing Eros, Philos and Agape in ways that intermingled with each other, somehow, for a time anyway

“Yes?” Aspasia proposed to the many questions brewing in between Socrates’ now NON-hairy ears and under his hair covered head.

“Yes,” Socrates replied feeling to be the best elements of an old and young man. “But is it not so that...” he continued, feeling ruled by his mind again.

Aspasia kissed him on the lips, then pulled away.

“Yes?” she asked, again.

Socrates was still not sure of the question, or the answer.

“Yes,” he replied, stroking his now brown beard with his non-arthritic fingers....”But, is it not appropriate to...”

Aspasia rolled her eyes. “Fine...what else do you have on your mind now?”

“This,” the old and young Philosopher replied, after which he kissed Aspasia on the lips, with loving commitment. “Yes?” he inquired, leaving the answer to not the Fates, Spirit, but to Aspasia.

Aspasia thought about the answer for seconds that felt to Socrates like years, then finally replied with a warm smile through which she said, “Yes” in Greek as well as every other language in the world Socrates knew while in the land of the living.

Something futuristic came over Socrates as he noted his voice turning into a dialect from someplace well West where the sun set.

“Just as long as we don’t have to reincarnate as stone worker and advertizing couple in suburban New Jersey!!!,” he self observed himself saying as his soul left the body, merging into a ray of light heading to a distribution house from which it would be shot out again.

“What the hell is wrong with New Jersey?” he felt Aspasia say from the ray of light moving forward above the clouds and heading toward the stars next to him.

“Is it not so that New Jersey people always feel inferior to anyone across the river in Manhattan?” Socrates proposed.

“Yes, it is so, but is feeling inferior to people who think they are superior something that has to happen if you are going to be really superior to everything, even yourself?” the reply.

“OK, yeah...But...Schlepping around in New Jersey when we can be in Manhattan where it’s always happening.”

“Or maybe the woods of Oregon, where you can make things happen on your own terms.”

“Fine, so the Siberian exiles become the greatest writers Schtick again. I suppose you want to consider reincarnating in someplace exotic, and cold, like Canada. “

“With free health care, like Hippocrates said any civilized country has.”

“And forty below winters that kill any bugs that will make you sick in the first place. With...”

“... Yeah I know, two seasons. July and Winter.”

There would be two winners in the banter of course, in another time, another place, but still within the Eternal Now.

END