



30 DAYS

A Play by Andrea Courey

30 Days

30 Days is a play about life and end-of-life. The main character, Socrates, is awaiting the carrying out of his sentence of death. Because of Greek law, he must wait for the ships carrying government officials to return to port. Those leaders are required to witness the carrying out of his sentence. Bad weather keeps them away. So the drinking of the hemlock awaits and in the meantime...

Socrates has no idea if he will die tomorrow or in a week. He is allowed visitors and over the 30 days of waiting, he receives visits from different people and has discussions about life, death, wisdom and the perfection of figs.

With visits from Lennon to Lincoln to Leo Baeck, this is a whimsical treatment of one man's final days. Although he sees himself as an ordinary man, his Socratic method of inquiry makes the dialogue rich and meaningful and offers a scenario conducive to discussing end-of-life issues with the audience. Issues such as management of pain, psychological trauma for families, where one spends the final days, advance directives, what comes after death, leaving a legacy and more can be addressed when the fourth wall comes down.

Characters:

Female*

1. Xanthippe, wife of Socrates 45 – no spoken lines
2. Pithia the Oracle of Delphi 30

* 1,2 can be the same actor

Male**

3. Socrates 70
4. Jailor 20-30
5. Plato 50
6. John Lennon 40
7. Abraham Lincoln 50
8. Leo Baeck, 60
9. Fisherman 20 - 30

**5,6,7,8 can be one actor

Prologue - Read by Pithia on stage

"I am Pithia, Oracle of Delphi. It is 399 BC and Pericles, ancient Greece's greatest statesman, is dead. Dead from the plague.

(Voice rising) For over 40 years he reigned over the city-state of Athens encouraging an intellectual freedom and an explosion of expression. Music, poetry, law, philosophy, education, science, sculpture, justice. Poets could be politicians. Athletes could write drama. (Pause) Men only, of course.

Pericles commissioned the building of the Parthenon, ordering majestic works of art to fill its temples. Pericles, visionary, leader, encouraged artistic endeavours and man's right to be his own master, (pause insinuating that women are still not free) while still running his kingdom with slave labour. Paradox was alive and well 2500 years ago.

(Moves across the stage) Pericles and his vast armies are worn down by too many battles won and lost. As people move to the city in droves, overcrowding brings unsanitary conditions and the plague.

(Music) Many perished including Pericles.

(Can use a papyrus and read/ad lib rather than memorize the speech)

Socrates, then 30 years old, did not. Now he is 70. (Moves back across the stage) Who is this man who lived through the plague while so many others died? How come so many perished during battle but he did not? Was he or wasn't he the teacher to young men who later became traitors to Athens?

Socrates, who makes the status quo quake with his questions and his irritating quest for truth. He debates and questions the existence of our Gods, the equality of women (she shows her approval), the value of truth, of living a virtuous life and the possibility of one divine essence linking all souls.

He stands for freedom of speech. He teaches without pay. But someone must pay for the ruinous result of war. Somewhere, someone is the great enemy of the State that brought this havoc upon its blessed democracy.

And so, Socrates, that great patriot of his beloved Athens, is accused of trying to destroy it. His trial lasts one day. A 500 person jury convicts him 280 to 220.

He is offered two options: go into exile or be condemned to death.

Socrates chooses death. To choose exile is to admit wrongdoing and he will have none of that. He will not slink off in remorse, leave his home as a traitor, an agitator, a man with his reputation dragging behind him as he heads to live what is left of his days - he is already 70.

And we all will die of something won't we? (She eyes the fourth wall). Therefore, he is condemned to drink from the poison cup of hemlock, and then (tone lightens up) a glitch.

(Moves across the stage again) Greek law forbids carrying out such a sentence while officials are away on military manoeuvres at sea. Their boats, delayed by bad weather, cannot return to port. Socrates spends 30 days in an Athenian prison cave waiting for the boats to return and for his death. He wonders what will become of a world where a man whose crime is to ask too many questions, is condemned to die.

He is allowed visitors and he has many. This story begins here – with guests and conversations, and questions about life, end-of-life and the value of a life of principle ... (Lights fade.)

Scene 1 (Been in the cell 5 days – 5 lines on the wall)

S: (Standing in the cell, scratching a sixth line to denote his 6th days) Jailor, are not some who come to your Tartarus condemned to die?

J: (Basket of food in his arms) Tartarus, Master Socrates?

S: Your underworld. Your place where prisoners are condemned, held against their will. Prisoners of the state, men who will not see their Elysium.

J: Elysium, sir?

S: The happy place we go after death -

J: I know of nothing of Tartarus or Elysium Master, but - Yes (fidgety, stressed by his illustrious prisoner) Yes. No one who reaches this place has yet been spared. (Looks in food basket) More food has arrived for you, Master Socrates, sir, master, sir. (not sure how to address Socrates) May I? (Socrates motions for him to help himself) I've never eaten so well. (Helps himself to an orange and hands the basket to Socrates)

S: Then is your role jailor or palliative care worker? Can you not shift an inch and show compassion in these last days?

J: (wary) What exactly would said compassion look like Sir?

S: A spoon. (motions to the orange the jailor has taken) A spoon for an orange ...

J: A spoon?

S: Yes, a spoon.

J: Shall I bring a knife and fork too? (pleased with himself)

S (Gives him a dry look. Jailor comes back with two spoons and Socrates begins to dig.)

J: (Alarmed) Are you planning to dig your way out sir? We are deep in the mountainside.

S: Young man. The purpose of this spoon may be to dig out or to dig in. To dig out would take a decade. To dig in begins now. Come back tomorrow and see for yourself.

(Looks at the audience) - Tartarus, Elysium, Heaven, Hell, constructs of the human mind designed to limit, to inspire, to spread fear, to remove fear – Every manner of emotion, this thing called death elicits.

J: (shakes his head, locks the cell.) Lights out.

Scene 2 (Day 8 – the wall has 8 lines)

S is creating an omphalos in the middle of his cell. He is struggling to make the mound grow larger. There is frustration. Then slowly, there is some progress. It begins to take shape.

J: Good morning Sir. What are you doing?

S: What do you think I'm doing?

J: It looks like you're playing like a child. You're making a mound of earth sir?

S: Imagine a dog is going after a bone that is too big, too heavy but also totally irresistible. When does he capitulate? (continues to work on his omphalos)

J: When he's tired out?

S: (nods) Or when he becomes distracted by a fly buzzing in his ear..

J: (scratches his ear) But what if... (knock at the door) Be right back -

S; (smiles and nods. Plato walks in) Plato, my friend, so good to see you.

Plato: (excited, papyrus rolled under his arm) Soc, the boats are still out at sea. (Notices the jail cell left open) This jailor is slack on his job.

S: Escape, like a common thief? (shakes his head)

P: What are you doing? (pauses then continues on excitedly) I have an idea. I want to create an actual space, a physical space in which to discuss the big questions of this universe. Students and tutors alike will gather there rather than have everyone scattered as they are now, throughout the Agora.

S looks up from his work. Motions for Plato to continue.

P: A place to bring different ideas and people together. A space of learning about all things related to heaven and earth and all that rests in between. All things of our universe. University. I think I'll call it a University. Clever no?

S: Why then not call it a Diversity?

P: (pauses) I never thought of it that way.

S: What is the purpose of this physical space?

P: To exchange. To learn. To focus on learning and not be distracted by other less worldly concerns. To encourage...

S: To discuss, yes. But what are you trying to encourage? Diverse opinions or merely propagation of the dominant thinking already in existence – (pause) by Men. (turns to his omphalos)

And what of women? Are they to be permitted?

P: As equals?

S: Are they?

P: As the goddess of wisdom Athena can attest, YES!

S: Then it is a unity of voice or a diversity?

P: A diversity, to be sure.

S: Then is university the best choice?

P: Perhaps not. (He ponders, walking around the cell. S continues to work his omphalos) How about an Academy?

S: How does that feel to you?

P: Much better.

S: Then Academy it is. (They hug. Just as Plato's about to leave, Socrates asks) What my friend, is a miracle?

P: Hope, manifested in the physical world.

S: So how do we come to know what we know? Can knowledge be anything but experiential? Is your telling my knowing?

P: No, Master. To remain principled in the face of tyranny cannot be taught. To contemplate death as a part of life, not apart from it is to believe in the continuation of the soul. That cannot be taught.

S: (Nods his head.) Good man. Next time you visit, could you bring some of those lovely figs from the west facing hillside at Lykabettos?

P: You'll be leaving soon? Are you not taking the exile?

S: To repeat your words, to be principled in the face of tyranny sometimes carries a price. No, when the boats arrive and the conch blows, my time will come.

Plato: (Upset) I will get the others. We need to change this course of events.

(Plato leaves. S sits back down with omphalos and addresses it) You are a great tool for self-reflection, my friend. (Shakes his head) So many of my brothers seem to be allergic to it.

Jailor!

J: Yes, Sir.

S: Jailor, what do you make of your Gods?

J: I don't know Sir. 12 Gods - that's a lot of Gods sir. Too many for me to follow.

S: Are they truly Gods or just promiscuous, badly behaved giants? (Pause) They were powerful. But were they good? One hopes we could do so much better.

Perhaps we could change the myth to 12 disciplined men instead of 12 undisciplined Gods...hmmm 12 disciples - a nice, new twist on an old theme. All this fighting over who is anointed. And what of death? What do your 12 Gods make of death?

J: I only know, Master Socrates, of many confusing rituals – coins, haircuts, journeys that may or may not end well depending on following all those complicated rituals. So, I leave it to the priests. If they get it wrong, at least I'm not to blame...

S: So many emotions around death. And what of you? Do you believe it's the end of your life?

J: I don't know, I don't know, Master, Sir. I'm a simple man. (He leaves.)

S: Every man, every woman will face death. Mine could be tomorrow. Until the boats appear – my fate resting on the wind. Literally. With this mound of earth, I meet my maker here and now. Clear the slate with no need of intermediaries to claim my divine nature.

Lights out.

Scene 3 (Day 14) 14 lines on the wall.
(Mound is larger. Beginning to look like a large bullet.)

S: Jailor, what does your six year old self remember?

J: My what Master Socrates?

S: Your six year old self. (pauses and looks hard at the jailor) You are alive, are you not?

J: Obviously, sir.

S: Then every age you've lived is a part of who you are, part of the man standing before me at this moment. Is it not?

J: I never thought of that sir. This is true. (stands straighter)

S: Then your six year old self is still alive too, as is your twelve year old self and the young man you were last week.

J: Now I understand Sir.

S: You understand what?

J: What sir? (Knock at the door). I think we have another visitor sir. (Relieved, heads off to open the door).

(S works silently on the mound. Jailor walks back to cell, followed by a man in long robes.)

J: A Rabbi Leo Baeck is here to see you Sir.

S: Welcome to my humble home. What is a Rabbi? Your robes indicate a traveler?

Baeck: You could say that Sir. It is my honor to be here. Like you, I remained a staunch supporter of my people, my culture. I'm here to salute you in your courage to remain true. When the Nazis threatened to deport me, I too was offered an escape route from death. But I couldn't abandon my people.

(Pauses) What are you building?

S: An omphalos.

B: A what?

S: (Tells the myth slowly, with gestures and much feeling) An ancient Greek myth places my beloved Delphi as the center of the world. How do we know this to be true? By the omphalos sent down by the heavens. The God Apollo released two golden eagles that flew around the globe. Where they met, the middle of the world, was at Delphi. Apollo sent down the large omphalos to mark the spot. It rests on the Carthian mountainside, reminding all who will listen, that we come from an ancient, great race.

Now, (sighs) this room is the center of my life. To create my omphalos is to connect with all Gods, all energies, all myths, all stories.

B: Interesting story.

S: You look like a man who's lived some interesting stories. I have been accused of making men think too much. So, I am a man waiting to die. And aren't we all? I have never been accustomed to think that I deserve to suffer any harm therefore, until my last breath, I live well. They may come for me today. Or in seven days. Since we have just this moment, please (Motions for Baeck to sit)

(Baeck sits. S hands him the other spoon. Baeck begins to speak) I was such a man. The story goes like this. All through the ages, men of principle will raise suspicion, be tortured, tried, and condemned.

This particular life of mine happened about 200 centuries after yours. I gave hundreds of lectures to promote liberal ideas of acceptance and tolerance. Like you, we had many discussions about philosophy and religion and of the value of living freely. (Pauses) You and I have much in common.

Yet, all that effort and I'm remembered chiefly for a small act of defiance, paying my bills, before my arrest by the authorities. That act, my act of citizenry was a small deliberate moment in a great struggle.

S: Act of defiance. Both travelers. Both speaking the truth about acceptance and demonstrating self discipline. Hmm... Where are you from?

B: I'm from the 20th century, AD. This is the 4th century BC.

S: BC?

B: It's complicated. The calendar of planetary days is ruled by different counting methods. Gregorian, Islamic, Japanese, Juche, Julian. Men can't agree. There are more ways to count days than I even can fathom.

S: Men can't agree. That sounds familiar.

B: I am from a time almost 2000 years in the future.

S: In the future?

B: Seems impossible, no?

S: Actually, not. Seems impossible but is it really? Just as the eyes don't see in the dark, does that mean the blackness is empty?

S: (They work on the omphalos, silent for a moment.) So, how do you know of me, 2000 years hence?

B: You are considered the father of modern philosophy.

S: Ha! Me! My wife would laugh at that one! Modern philosophy! What does that mean?

B: That means we examine something using the 'Socratic' method.

S: I have become a method?

B: Correct (smiles)

S: A method of what?

B: Of analysis, of self inquiry, a way of making our way toward understanding our universe.

S: (To the audience) There's that word again. (Turns to Baeck) So this (gesturing the entire cell) has not been in vain?

B: No Sir. No human act, inspired by principles of justice, freedom and truth, is ever in vain. (Looks at his pocket watch) I have only a few more minutes.

S: What is that? (points to the watch)

B: It tells the time.

S: Tells the time – what an interesting expression. If I was to tell time something, I would tell it to fill itself with moments that build happy memories. I would tell Master Time that this whole game is a most wonderful and most tedious task.

B: Are you pleased with how you filled your time?

S: Now that is a question I respect! Thank you. (Ponders the question as he works on the omphalos) For myself, I tried to honor this vehicle through self discipline and self nondiscipline.

B: A man of riddles...

S: A man of contrast, like all men. And all women.

B: And the person you most admire?

S: The woman. The carrier of wisdom, the bearer of children, unequal by the law yet the foundation of this unjust society. If a law is unjust, we must change the law. My life was devoted to encouraging people to look at laws, at beliefs, at their thoughts so that they could live fully before they die.

B: (Looks around the cell) So, how would you rate your success?

S: (Throws his hands up in a gesture of acceptance) Time will tell. For me, there are no regrets.

(The guard walks in)

Jailor: Sir, (hands S a small sack) your figs from Master Plato.

S: (Offers one to Baeck)

B: (Takes fig. Bites in. His body language indicates it's delicious) A great honor sir.

S: You came back from the future?

B: I did.

S: And you chose to visit me?

B: I did.

S: May I ask one question?

B: Of course.

S: Has Man learned to be kinder, to think with conscience before acting?

B: (Lengthy look at S, munches on the fig. Grabs a second one and leaves.)

Lights fade.

Scene 4 –Day 15. 15 lines on the wall.

(Hear a woman cursing the jailor to let her in. She's pushy, loud)

J: Sir, I hope she's not intruding. I tried to ask who she is but she would only say, 'he'll recognize me'.

S: (Looks up at a half crazy woman, hair a mess) I don't know this woman.

Pithia: Not by sight, but by insight. You never questioned me - unlike all others who you led around. Mount Parnassus? Know the place?

S: (Stands up, cleans his toga, runs his hand through his unruly hair)

P: Who pronounced you the wisest of the Greeks?

S: Pithia...

P: (She interrupts him.) I provided the enigma, the puzzle that became your purpose. I proclaimed you the wisest man, and you proclaimed to know nothing. Nothing! The purpose of your life became clear - to meet, to inquire and to search for a wiser man than yourself. Did you find him?

S: Him, no. Her, yes - my beloved Pithia of Delphi.

P: Philosophy begins when one questions accepted wisdom, begins to examine one's own beliefs. Did you?

S: I did. Only you ask me such questions....you crazy woman. (He hugs her)

P: Did it not become your work, to expose false knowledge? Did you find that wiser man?

S: (Shakes his head no). Pithia, I just met a man trying to do the same thing only he lives 2000 years after me. How does this happen?

P: (Breathes deeply). He came because he can. Because time is elastic. Because of your quest to know. Many, many years from now, another seeker, William Buhlman, will write: 'My thoughts are the energy of my personal propulsion'. He is correct.

Whenever a seeker questions, the forces of the universe answer... a nudge, a dream, a flash of light or a rabbi. (She pokes through the food and finds a fig.)

S: And does this mean, we never realize the goal?

P: Goal? What goal? Now is simply the short moment of a man called Socrates, who will never, ever die.

S: A small comfort, considering the hemlock awaits.

P: Trust me on this as in all things. The message will live. The method will plant seeds that become a forest covering much of the surface of this planet. And this, because you've chosen not to flee, not to choose exile but to choose the truth. Your debate, the ongoing conversation with your students over living well or living justly is now reconciled. One can do both. (She sits briefly then is up, pacing.) ALL is known at the soul level. All thoughts, all words, all deeds.

S: Yes. I choose death before dishonor and I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in the manner of my accusers and live.

(They are interrupted by the jailor accompanied by a towns person bringing Socrates more food.)

P: Well said.

S: I followed. I led. As a boy, I followed orders and found many of them to make no sense. Inequality of race, of women, idleness of the minds of men... So I led, and pushed men to question, to ask themselves 'why?' To question and to be free to speak. What is a man, what is

a woman (pointing to Pithia) if we aren't one with Divine justice. I was too honest to be a politician, to care for wealth, position. I sought to persuade every man that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his private interests – to understand that an unexamined life is not worth living.

I travelled great distances, fought in wars, enjoyed music and food and tried to honor this vehicle, and now, for this brief moment, my world is small. (Gestures around his prison cell.) Soon, perhaps tomorrow, it will be large again.

P: We will see each other on the other side – Are you ready to meet God?

S: What of this journey called death?

P: A simple reset. The body, a temporary vehicle, no longer in service. It's delight – it's light actually ... the best way I could describe it is - it's HOME.

S: And what of pain? Hell? Judgement?

P: Sounds like your present circumstances...perhaps ?

S: (Smiles.) Now I ask the questions. What of Pericles? And Homer? Will we converse? Can we?

P: All is possible. Begin to plan it now.

S: And justice?

P: No one will judge you as harshly as you will judge yourself.

S: The land of hell, of injustice, of pain is here then, in this land of contrasts and infernal heat?

P: Yes

S: As is the land of dance, of music, of wisdom, of beauty and love and.. figs. (He eats one)

P: Yes

S: Man lives the paradox of heaven and hell simultaneously while on earth. He therefore chooses how to label, how to reconcile and how to rejoice.

P: Precisely.

S: Hmm (ruminates for a moment before speaking) Another will take up this discourse. My time is up.

P: Your time is just beginning. Jailor!

The jailor shows up and Pithia picks up her skirts to leave. Jailor hands Socrates food and drink.

S: (Addressed Pithia as she leaves) We are not so different you and I. Your task is to disturb. To shake out the unknowing, to push. (Turns to the jailor) What is your name?

J: Spiro, Sir.

(Socrates eats heartily and drinks and hands the plate and goblet back to the jailor)

S: You are a gentleman, Spiro.

J: It is an honor to serve you, Sir. I have to escort this woman out. Seems that I can't lock this door and see her out at the same time....so I'll just leave this door open for a bit ...open, for a bit (he motions to Socrates to leave the cell)

S: (shakes his head, sits down and works on his omphalos. Jailor appears a few minutes later. Upset that Socrates is still there.) What do you mean by honor? Do I honor this jail cell? Do I honor your skill as a jailor?

J: (Stands straighter, adjusts his belt on his robes) I have a longer view after listening to you, watching you. I never had a prisoner like you before.

S: Should we hope for more or for no more?

J: Sir?

S: Have you ever thought about what constitutes justice?

J: The laws, the rules? (Starts to pace.) There is no justice Sir, when an honorable man is condemned for speaking truth. (He looks outside, shakes his head.) Why didn't you flee?

S: Fleeing would simply confirm the guilty verdict for which I am innocent. Justice is the psychic harmony between our needs, our long term satisfaction and pursuing our life's purpose. (He looks at jailor who is unable to speak.)

My need – a simple place to sleep,
My long term satisfaction – None. there is no more long term for me
My life's purpose – To help people think. Since when is thinking a crime?
(They stare at each other).

J: Yet you are blamed for the war losses, the plague, the atheism that runs rampant...

S: Ha, that I could be so powerful! (Goes back to his omphalos). Lights out.

Scene 5 - Day 21. 21 lines on the wall. The omphalos is much bigger.

Fisherman comes to deliver fish for Socrates's dinner.

S: Have you been to the sea today?

F: Yes Sir, I was out from before dawn.

S: Was any seaweed washed up on the shore?

F: Seaweed?

S: Yes, those massive clumps ...what color were they?

F: Color of the seaweed? I don't remember them having color, Sir.

S: Go look and report back tomorrow. (turns to audience) How much of our natural world, the world that holds the answers, do we truly observe, allow in?

Life is mostly mundane...raised to an exalted state for no other reason than age.

Scene 6 – Day 23.

(John Lennon's music is playing. He walks in as Socrates is silently arguing with his wife. Music is loud. Their argument is mimed. Lennon observes the scene of domestic dispute. Socrates's wife, holding their young son, leaves in a huff, giving Lennon an angry gaze and making an angry gesture at him on her way out.)

Music fades.

Lennon: Some things never change.

S: (Looks up.) And who might you be? I get no rest.

L: No worries my friend. If you think you're busy now, wait till you get to the other side. Your world gets really, really large. Your life will be choice, and expansion and oneness.

S: (Gestures for Lennon to have a seat) Big words! Beware great orators... Big words are simply big persuasion. Oratory moves, incites but it is not always (he pauses for effect) the truth. Truth seeks not to influence. It seeks to uncover, to illuminate. Hmm... (speaks slowly) first you ruminate then you illuminate.

Lofty words for a man who's wife is angry with him. My wife (gestures toward the door) she's angry because I choose to die. My young son will not know his father.

L: I did the same.

S: You what?

L: I did the same as you in that I lived and died in a way that best demonstrated the qualities I tried to live by.

S: A man who knows why he lives. (Moves to salute and introduce himself.) Opa. They call me Socrates (extending his hand)

L: (shakes his hand) John Winston Ono Lennon. A man who knows why he lives? Sometimes, not always. Almost never. But...a man who tried through music to show that peace is the way. So, I chose a violent death to show the insanity of killing. My lyrics, come alive, so to speak.

S: You chose a death that best illustrated the vision of your life? (Moves around the cell slowly and then shakes Lennon's hand again) Opa, opa. Hmm.... Thank you. From your style of dress, I see you too are from another era.

L: Not so different. None of us are really so different...(looks offstage at the place where his wife exited)

Jailor: (Socrates now calls him by his first name Spiro and uses the diminutive Spi. He appears with the Fisherman). The fisherman, Master Socrates Sir. He wants to see you Sir. I told him you were busy but he insisted.

S: It's fine. Thank you Spi. (Gestures Lennon to sit. Welcomes Fisherman. Imagine plays softly in the background. Socrates hands Lennon a spoon and he begins working on the omphalos, looks at Socrates wondering what this thing is)

Fisherman: (Excited) I never noticed before – how could I have missed the purples, pinks, three shades of yellow, even burgundy.

S: (Listens silently, nodding) So you saw the burgundy. Good. How could you have missed...How many other things in our lives do we miss seeing? And what of the sea? Is it cloudy today?

Fisherman: It is Sir.

S: I thought as much. My bones tell me it's cloudy. Did you notice the colours of the clouds?

Fisherman: Of the clouds, Sir? Of the sea? I'm confused.

S: (speaks with patience and love for the sea) Yes, the sea. How, on a cloudy day, the sea is a softer, lighter grey up close and a deeper, darker shade on the horizon?

We are great sailors – great men of the sea. In small boats we ventured far, covered great distances on rough seas. (Pauses and looks up) Do you know why?

F: Because it was there?

S: What was there?

F: The sea?

S: No, the land. Because we could always see land, with so many small islands scattered about, we ventured forth. Do you know what those islands were to us?

F: Women and fun? (Smirking, smiling. Lennon laughs)

S: Oh, yes -they were that, and men...do they love to drink! But, mostly those islands were encouragement.

F: Encouragement?

S: Creating courage in the hearts of men. They ventured forth because land seemed never that far away. (Pauses, works on the omphalos. Fisherman shifts around a bit uncomfortable) Once on the water, they quickly learnt how distances are difficult to estimate. Go forth they did, becoming intrepid men of the sea, as a result. (Glancing up) What kind of man are you?

F: Just a fisherman Sir. Uh, those are many questions. I have to leave. I just came to deliver your supper. (He leaves in a hurry)

S: Just a fisherman. Why do we not consider ourselves enough? (Turns to Lennon.) And you sir, what kind of man are you?

Jailor walks in with yet another basket of fruit and puts it in the corner. Socrates gestures to the food in the corner and offers Lennon to help himself. Jailor leaves the cell, leaving the door wide open.

L: (Eating a fruit) A songwriter and singer, an entertainer, a mirror.

S: So the arts still matter. I love to dance. Correction, 'loved'. It is memory now. To live my present is to live two moments. What it is and what it no longer can ever be. Such are the moments before death. (He stops to work on the omphalos)

Do you see this withered body that has withstood the Athenian sun past any reasonable age? The whitened hair. Spots on the skin. And yet, no greater thing has ever been crafted than the male and female body. (He pauses to contemplate) Tell me, are women educated the same way as men in your era?

L: Women? (Examining the open jail cell door) Oh no. Only a small percentage – most of the world's women are still considered second class citizens.

S: So not much has changed...

L: I did change my name to honor a woman.

S: How so?

L: I added my wife's name 'Ono' to mine.

S: A man who adds his wife's name to his! You are a courageous man. Is this a common custom where you come from?

L: (Smiles and shakes his head)

S: We keep it simple. My wife is simply Xanthippe. What of you as a man? What do you consider your formula for happiness?

L: I used to listen to the critics – but that stopped my work. Now, I just focus on living my truth, not someone else's lie. I ask myself where my joy lies and try to keep doing that....

S: (Nods, hands Lennon a spoon and they sit together, working on the omphalos)

L: I notice your jailor leaves your cell door unlocked.

S: He's been trying for weeks now to get me to leave. (He walks to the wall and counts the bars.) 23 days. Each one my last. Each one a first. Each one filled with acts of love and his act of treason. Good man – Spiro.

I was offered amnesty if I went into exile but I refused. I'm already an old man and what do I have if not my integrity? To meet death with equanimity.

(He takes a bite of fruit) I'm already 70. I'm ready. My contemporaries are long dead decades ago. I have to go somehow. I do feel the pang of leaving my young son. To become a father again at 68 hmm....

Lights out.

Scene 7, Day 27

S: Spiro?

Jailor: (Walking in with a basket) Yes Sir. More food for you Sir. And my wife says thank you for the figs. We never tasted any finer. Fragrant, tender, delicious...

S: (Cuts him off) Spiro, I have a question for you...

Jailor: Oh, how come I knew that was coming?

S (smiles): If you could live well or live justly, which would you choose?

Jailor: (Takes his time to reply) Must I choose Sir? Could I not live both?

S: (nodding) A valid response given as two valid questions. If all is known at the level of the soul, then all is possible at the level of the body...Thank you Spi. My students and I debated that heatedly yesterday. I also asked them what does it mean to die well?

Jailor: Sir? I don't know. I never thought about it. I'm leaving for the night, Master, Socrates, Sir.

S: (Nods his head. Spiro leaves.) Precisely. While busy living, most don't give it a thought. Is it possible to die well? What does it mean to have a good death? Is that about the nature of dying or of living?

(He gets up, rummages in the basket that Spiro brought and pulls out grapes. Begins eating. Goes back to work in the omphalos which is almost 3 feet high now.)

Perhaps the answer lies in embracing love not fear. In leaps of faith. It is called a leap because it carries some risk. It is a leap not a tiny step ... in risks worth taking. Love of life. Love of life. No matter its length.

I was accused of making people think too much. Ha! Living without thought and reflection should be the crime. (Pauses and walks the cell. Listens for the conch but hears nothing.) If this be my final day, there are no regrets.

Lights fade.

Scene 8

S sits at his omphalos. It's now 4 feet tall. A conversation is going on offstage between the jailor and a man.

J: That's amazing. That color – I've never seen that color of dress here. Nor the cut, the shape, the nature. You must come from another type of climate.

Abraham Lincoln: And another time, yes. My suit is illsuited - no? (He laughs at his joke)

Yes, yes, it's true. Your civilization is everywhere in our own. In science, math, language. Towns are called Ithaca and Marathon and, not long after my death, the Olympic Games were revived. Hmmm 1896 - 97 something like that.

(Laughing) Elgin made a royal mess of things...grabbing and looting and then losing it all to the sea.

J: Elgin Sir? What are you referring to?

L: The symbol of humanity's greatness and achievement. The Parthenon. An English bounty hunter, Elgin, disguised as a hero, offered to 'protect' the invaluable works by removing them and taking them back to his home country. And then, a storm. A sinking...you don't want to hear this ...

But, I came to meet the great man himself, to discuss freedom, slavery and try some of those figs I've been hearing about.

S: Spiro, who is this man?

J: I'm not sure Sir. He certainly has a peculiar dress. (They walk onstage together) What is your name Sir?

AL: Abe. Abe Lincoln, a poet, a statesman, a politician, a simple man who loves trees and music.

S: So, (smiling) we already have much in common then. I could hear you have a gift for oratory.

L: It served me well but I understood that some use it as persuasion, not as a means of conveying truth. I tried to do both.

S: A man who speaks words from my own mouth. Ah, truth. First you ruminate, then you illuminate.

L: (pauses to ponder those words) Very nice. I like that. It is a great honor to meet you Socrates.

S: You are the first man in a while who has called me by name.

L: Is that not your name?

S: It is. Most think I am something else. A hero, a devil. But I am a simple man. My role now is to linger...

L: Most truths are simple, no? How do you manage this infernal sun? (pulls at his necktie)

S: How does one manage anything? (They look at each other for a long moment) My method of choice is to search for meaning by encouraging -some say pushing - man to question his beliefs. And then, to eat figs. (He hands L the bag. L takes one.) to ask, to incite reflection. A tough task. (Turns as if looking at an imaginary person) STOP. THINK. THINK MAN THINK!!

L: (Nods) What is this?

S: A fruit, sweet, perfect, a fig.

L: Delicious... (Takes another bite) I too lingered for hours before death delivered me. People gathered. Only they thought I couldn't hear them. They spoke. I heard every word. Their sorrow actually delayed my letting go until it could stop me no more.

I came to talk about equality, slavery, to discuss the concept of one God versus many, to commiserate about democracy, philosophy but, that would be a personal indulgence. You must wonder what has happened to the planet in 2000 years. What would you like to know about our world – a world created out of yours?

S: (Pauses) A window on the world in 2000 years....Has Man learnt to think?

L: Man has learnt to build. (loosens his tie, wipes his brow with a large hankie) although, looking at your monuments and the tools available to build with, I reckon your achievements are grander than ours. I also see the similarity – both great countries both built with slave labor.

S: (interrupts, incredulous) Slaves still exist? Is that possible?

L: (Nods) I also see how war devastates families, empties villages, causes fields to be abandoned. This hasn't ch....

S; (Shakes his head) No change. Slaves?

L: Slaves. (He nods and wipes brow) We fought hard to abolish slavery but although we won a battle, the war continues. People were enslaved to other people. Now, 150 years after my death, the enslavement is to money, technology, the world of outer accomplishment. People enslaved to debt.... Still not free.

S: So, we are not that different. Our slaves copy our texts, they read and write and run the shops.

L: The working poor! Not much has changed...

S: The idea is for them to work the fields and do the heavy lifting so that citizens – men, can gather, discuss, participate in the political process.

L: What about the women?

S: The women? our mothers, our nurturers. You've touched on a sore spot to me. What did you say your name was again?

L: Abraham, but call me Abe.

S: Abe, please call me Soc. (motions for him to sit down) Ah, the women...Do you know what this is?

L: Looks like a way to help you think.

S: Precisely!

L: Looks like a giant bullet.

S: A what?

L: A tool for killing. I remember reading the words of your final speech that your student Plato, scribed for eternity. 'If you think that by killing men you can prevent some one from censoring your evil lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape which is either possible or honorable; the easiest and the noblest way is not to be disabling others, but to be improving yourselves.

S: My words, remembered, repeated! Have they helped?

L: Helped, inspired yes. But...Bullets – fired from a weapon that shoots them out with a fury and can kill a man. We've developed weapons that fire out small metal pieces. They're just that shape. They can kill a man. Funny, it was just about the same time as we revived the Olympic Games....hmmm

S: So this is a giant earth bullet.

L: Imagine if bullets were made of soft earth. Fire them and they just make a puff, innocuous, unable to hurt another...hmm... I'm a dreamer my friend (smiles, wipes brow with a hankie). This heat – an inferno.

So, what is this really?

S: An omphalos. O-M-P-H-A-L-O-S. It represents the center of the earth, the spot of recognition that the Gods chose this spot as the center of the planet. Apollo, God of medicine and healing, music, poetry, art and oracles, sun, light, son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother to Artemis, father of Hippocrates chose this spot as the center of the earth after releasing two eagles...you may have heard the legend?

L: So you believe in many Gods?

S: (Nods) I tried to shift that discussion to one unified, Divine source but it will take another far more influential than I.

L: Ha! (shakes head in amazement) He'll show up in about 400 years.

S: Amazing. (then slowly) One intelligent uni -verse, one verse, one poem (smiles at his private joke, lost in a reverie) And you?

L: I believe that Man chooses his way. It's not up to God to create my life. It's up to me.

S: (Nods again) Freedom to reflect and to choose wisely. The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death. (Eats a date). So, if I understand, you have done away with formal slavery but slavery still exists?

L: Can I have another one? (motions to the bag) Precisely, it's just the master that has changed.

(Call of conch shell in the background. Socrates listens, stands up and goes to shake L's hand.)

S: Well, it seems you are my final visitor sir, the boats have returned. My time has come. (They shake hands, then hug)

L: We'll meet again shortly on the other side. (Tries to be lighthearted).

Even though St Augustine wrote those prophetic words in about 400 AD, it took about 1700 years to let go of that fear...

S: 1700 years! We learn so slowly but it doesn't have to be that way.

As the omphalos leads us to define the center of the world, so did my method of inquiry attempt to lead man within, to discover and examine his own beliefs and to find his own truth, his own center. And to ask himself, what is the value of this life? What is a life?

L: A blink of an eye really... (Another quick hug and he leaves the stage) Lights out.

Scene 9

S; (Talking to himself out loud, working on the omphalos) Is there no end to this infinite loop of sadness?

Is it possible that a man can chose the particulars of his death? Man makes an interesting correlation. I am therefore I choose. Hmm.....

Jailor (solemn): My illustrious prisoner

S: The illustrious keeper of my Elysium.

J: Elysium?

S: Go, look it up! (Waves jailor out of his cell and jailor leaves.) These young men want everything spelled out for them. People make quite a to do that I never wrote anything down. Spiro?

J: (reappears on stage) A last wish Sir?

S: May I have paper and ink.

J: Ink and paper Sir?

S: (He nods. He writes the word ELYSIUM on paper and renames his cell, hanging the papyrus up.) Elysian fields, the resting place of bliss for slain warriors. Would that I rather die for my beliefs than live in a world with shifting barometers for truth and justice.

(Sits down and starts to write. He writes and writes. The jailor returns. Socrates reads his words to the jailor.)

A few thoughts, my good friend, on death. My judgement was swift. There was little time to debate, to counter debate. So, my parting words are what is left to offer the good men (and women) of Athens.

*‘There is great reason to hope that death is good for one of two things—either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as my visitors say, there is a change and migration of the spirit from this world to another to rejoin the soul.

Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the great king will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death be of such a nature, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night.

But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead abide, what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the otherworld, he is delivered from the professors of justice in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, that pilgrimage will be worth making.

What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again. I myself, too, shall have a wonderful interest in there meeting and conversing with Palamedes, and Ajax, my new friends Abraham and John and any other hero who has suffered death through an unjust judgment; and there will be no small pleasure, as I think, in comparing my own sufferings with theirs.

Above all, I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in the next; and I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not. What would not a man give, O judges, to be able to examine the leaders and what infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! In another world they do not put a man to death for asking questions: assuredly not. For besides being happier than we are, they will be immortal, if what is said is true. If what is said is true, we are all immortal.’*

J: Sir, it is time. Would you wish to sedate?

S: To sedate? Fascinating word. As an adjective, calm, dignified as in 'a sedate setting.' As a verb, to numb pain, to artificially induce calm. No, my good man, and please take this home to your wife and distribute it back to the good people of Athens (he gestures to all the food which has reached a tall mound.)

J: May I say, Sir, that it has been an honor and the greatest tragedy of my life.

S: (Looking at the omphalos.) Everyone lives in the center of their own universe. For some, it is large, even stretching through time and space. For others, it is small – a few streets, a fishing boat and 'the catch of the day'.

Life carries questions and we must keep asking them. May the Goddess Athena, daughter of Zeus and Metis know my heart, bless this journey and accompany me to the other shore. (Looks at the audience) The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows.

(The jailor begins to bind his arms in a chain and then tosses it aside, symbolically gesturing for Socrates to exit the cell first, unbound. Socrates glances at his omphalos, places one last bit of earth on it in the same gesture we use over a casket. Stands up straight. Brushes earth off his clothes. Walks out. Lights out)

The End.

*Taken from The Apology of Socrates by Plato.