JOHNESTIAS

by Elvira Rex

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ELVIRA	Queen of Hong Kong
JOHNESTIAS	King of Hong Kong, husband of ELVIRA
LEONIUS	Renowned hero and playwright
JAMISINON	Famous playwright
NAOMIS	Famous playwright
SERVANT	of ELVIRA
CHORUS	of PanHKaia fans and audience

SCENE

The great hall of Queen ELVIRA's palace in Hong Kong. The place is decorated for a party, with lush, new tapestries lining the walls depicting all of ELVIRA's impressive feats and cool things she's done, and sumptuous wild boar-skin rugs covering the floors. It is the eve of the Vth annual PanHongKongaia, the much loved and long-awaited playwriting showcase and competition. The palace should be abuzz with excitement, but there is a sombre feeling in the air.

ELVIRA enters, dressed in a long embroidered robe which trails behind her. She throws herself dramatically on a couch in the middle of the room.

ELVIRA

Woe!
Poor me!
Wretched am I, cursed from the top of my head to my tippy toes!

Years ago, too many to count, I received a visit from a veiled deity whom I took to be Athena, goddess of wisdom, from the content and manner of her speech. She offered me a deal: I would begin the journey to become a Doctor of Philosophy, and in exchange, from the very day I was "hooded" and "capped", she would have just claim to my life, being free to end it when she pleased. I, thinking it sounded pretty cool having a PhD, accepted the deal, lending not a second's thought to the likelihood of my untimely death once the PhD was concluded, nor to the amount of time and back- and spirit-breaking work it would take to even finish the darn thing. In retrospect, I suppose I assumed that wise Athena would want to let another learned Ocean Doctor live on, making the

world better with her important work, and that the deal was a standard one among Gods and mortals, not to be strictly enforced.

As the Fates would have it, the glorious conclusion to my doctorate occurred but yesterday, and yet there was no chance to rejoice, then or ever again. The very second the ceremonial hood was placed around my proud shoulders, and the silly cap touched my head full of marine wisdom, a deity materialised before my eyes, startling me. It was Hermes, God of trickery. He revealed himself to have been the deity, in disguise, with whom I had made the ill-begotten deal years back, and communicated that he had come to claim my life there and then. He also laughed in my face at how long the PhD had taken and at my self-satisfied thinking that as Dr. Elvira I would be a useful and productive member of society, so virtuous I would be beyond the righteous grasp of the Gods. He was quite rude.

As I broke down in tears and became a snotty, slobbering mess, Hermes looked down on me in embarrassment and pity, and made a new concession for our arrangement: I would be spared, free to continue my doctorly and queenly existence to my natural end, if and when someone volunteered to take my place in the underworld.

I was immediately relieved – surely some elderly, decrepit but loyal subject would take this pledge, to die in my stead? Perhaps a servant would step forth, some old peasant, anyone near death already, someone in dire straits. But none did. There's literally a guy in my staff who is 112 years old. It's like, seriously dude? Can't you take one for the team? He is not well, it's not like he's a spritely 112, he can't move, he's more vegetable than man at this point, and I've been keeping him alive at my expense for my whole life, just cause I'm nice, it's not like he's carrying out his job duties, for which I have continued to pay him regardless… But nooo, he loves his life and wants to keep being hand fed and shitting himself daily.

Anyway, the person who volunteered, and destroyed my chance at ever feeling happiness again, even having attained the valuable PhD, was my dear husband Johnestias!

O Johnestias, my love, why must it be you? That other guy is so old, for real, his skin is so thin you can see right into his old man

organs! He is so gross and so old and so stubborn. It pisses me off sooo much he won't volunteer, I might have him killed anyway, even if it would not help with my conundrum…

JOHNESTIAS enters, looking depressed.

ELVIRA

There you are, my beloved, my king!
Have you reconsidered your selfless sacrifice? Do you insist on saving my life while you break my heart?

JOHNESTIAS

I do, my queen.
It is inevitable now the die has been cast. For I am too heroic and honourable to change course now.
I guess I'm just a really good husband and a super great guy.
If you, who now have a PhD, can live, I, a lowly non-PhD-haver, must leave this world forever.
When we made our marriage-vows I promised to support you in all your endeavours. I fervently support your staying alive. And I'm kind of used to you walking all over me anyway.

ELVIRA

Ditto! I made those marriage-vows too! I want you alive also!
Would that I could take my own rightful place in death, and not you.

JOHNESTIAS

You literally can. Hermes said that was always an option. You can always honour the deal-

ELVIRA

ALAS, would that I could!
Would that that fricking old guy would take my place – you know the one? The guy who's been on my payroll for decades to basically be dying in slow motion? You know that guy for whom I have to employ round the clock nurses? The guy who makes the whole west wing of the palace smell like old soup? That dude should take my place, don't you think?

JOHNESTIAS

Yes, I've heard the echoes round the palace, you shouting and trying to convince him, but as Hermes said, it must be a voluntary sacrifice...

ELVIRA

He's the oldest and most selfish dude in the whole world.
Ugh, seriously, FUCK THAT GUY!!!

JOHNESTIAS

He sucks for sure.
Now, my beloved, I go to my death, with your last sweet words ringing in my ears still. Farewell!

JOHNESTIAS falls to the ground and sighs a dramatic last sigh.

Also, promise me you won't marry again or even touch another man for as long as you shall live. Bye.

He makes theatrical spluttering and croaking sounds and convulses on the ground for a solid minute, then falls still, dead for real this time.

ELVIRA

Wooooooooeeeeeeeee!
O indescribable anguish!!
And what was that last thing he said?
Why do I always get screwed on deals...

ELVIRA sobs by JOHNESTIAS's body.

SERVANT enters.

SERVANT

Your grace, the honoured playwrights for tomorrow's festivities have begun arriving. The first is great and powerful Leonius, who is waiting outside. Shall I show him in?

ELVIRA

O, merciless Gods! What inconvenient timing!
An influential and noble guest is here, and I in mourning!
Come, servant, help me move this body. Let's get it out of the way that I may welcome our first and most honoured guest as is fit!
None shall claim that Queen Elvira was ever an ungracious host!

I shall keep this most upsetting passing a secret until the time is right – perhaps after the PanHKaia – so as not to worry our noble guests unduly.

SERVANT

Dafuq?? Seriously?
Is this not the body of your dear husband, king of this land?

ELVIRA

'Tis, alas!
Quick, help me hide him under this rug.

SERVANT

Should not he receive proper burial, that he may find his way to the underworld? Methinks Charon would be confused at this arrangement, with the rug…

ELVIRA

Enough, time is of the essence!
The proper rites will be done when famous important people are not at our door, waiting to be properly wined and dined.

ELVIRA and SERVANT move the body under a boar-skin rug. SERVANT exits.

LEONIUS enters wearing a lion pelt and holding an alcohol-free beer.

ELVIRA

Dear, great Leonius! How you honour my eyes with your sight and my house with your presence. I have not seen you in ages, and yet tales of your heroic adventures have not ceased to reach my shores and eager ears. How are your travels and labours?

LEONIUS

White-armed Elvira, queen of Hong Kong! I had also heard tale of your affairs. News had reached me that "high-quality democracy" was on the rise, with important elections held in this land, and so I feared for your crown, but I see now, and it gladdens me to learn, that the rumours were 100% lies. You will forever remain Hong Kong's rightful ruler and no election, however well attended, could ever change that!

I thank you for your hospitality, for the endless feasts and rivers of

unmixed alcohol-free beer I have consumed since my arrival. You sure know how to make a hero merry!

But ho, what is this large lump under the rug that you seem to want to block from view with your ample robe? I notice too, now, that your royal face is bathed in hot tears. Pray tell, what is the meaning of all this?

ELVIRA

You like my robe? It's new! What of your lion's pelt, which you wear so regally? Did you kill this lion with your bare hands, as is your custom? Pray delight me with the story, the gorier the better.

LEONIUS

The story attached to this pelt, though mindbogglingly badass, must wait for another time. Meseems you are *skirting*, or dare I say, *robing* around some topic of great import.

ELVIRA

Hahaha! Robing, indeed!!!
You always were hilarious, Leonius the Great, slayer of beasts and jokes. I entreat you to tell me more jokes, that we may pass this otherwise totally uneventful eve in jolly company.

LEONIUS

Totally uneventful, eh?
You say you could use some comic relief, eh?
As a distraction from some terrible affliction, no doubt?

ELVIRA

Ah, 'tis true! Your reputation as the most cunning and perceptive of mortals is well deserved. The epic poems written of your many and heroical deeds appear to be fully accurate. Indeed, as you have cleverly guessed, a most tragic event has befallen this house. Make me not utter the words to describe it!

LEONIUS

What foul torment could befall you and yours, that you yet open your home and hearth to a guest? This is not about the aforementioned election?

ELVIRA

Nay! The election was fine – 32% turnout and countless invalid ballots – but that is not the issue here…

LEONIUS

What, then? A death, perhaps? Is that a corpse you attempt to obscure with flowing robe and word alike?
Your glistening cheek betrays you – a river of tears invariably leads to Hades.

ELVIRA

O smart, capable detective! Is there nothing you would not obdurately bring to the light?

LEONIUS

Not as long as there is truth shrouded in mist. As a Doctor of Philosophy, my life's purpose is to uncover truths. Just as Aeolus blows away the mist, so do I reveal truth, but more metaphorically.
Speak, and tell me who your victim is!

ELVIRA

Victim!

LEONIUS

A recent victim of yours it must be, for why else would this body be under a rug at your great hall?

ELVIRA

Ah!

ELVIRA breaks down in tears.

LEONIUS

Does your esteemed spouse, Johnestias, have knowledge of what has transpired here?

ELVIRA

Woe!
My spouse has no more knowledge nor is he ignorant.

LEONIUS

What is this riddle?

ELVIRA

My un-spinsterer is transformed to a widow-maker.

LEONIUS

Huh? Widow? Wait a moment – are *you* the widow?
But that means… Then Johnestias is dead??

ELVIRA

Worry not, and have another amphora of beer…

LEONIUS

How can I enjoy a cold one when this house is in mourning, albeit secretly? Has my relentless feasting stalled the burial of so great a man as Johnestias, son of Steve?

ELVIRA

It's fine, really!
The banquets and partying had already been prepared beforehand, and it honours me and Johnestias's memory greatly that you have been enjoying such remarkable amounts of spatchcocked chicken smothered in garum, as well as Hong Kong's entire stock of alcohol-free beer, so valiantly. As the graceful host I am, I could not let news of this little… issue… dampen your mood, you who have travelled so far in your goat-drawn chariot. How are Clitagoata and Pegoatsus, by the by?

LEONIUS

My mighty steeds are in perfect health, thanks for asking. But methinks you are changing the subject again!
If the king is dead, the people must learn of it, and the Vth annual PanHKaia must be cancelled at once, that we may perform the proper rites post-haste.

ELVIRA

Alas, but I am super partial to the PanHKaia, and so is every being in this land and abroad, mortal and immortal alike. I couldn't possibly take that from my people, just as Hermes and Hades

have conspired to take my love from our marriage-bed, which will now remain cold and widowed for all of time.

LEONIUS

Aha! I know what I must do.
I leave at once, depart for reasons that are unrelated to all this and none of your business. I shall set off on an adventure no other hero could survive, but I am Leonius the Brave and that is not nothing!

ELVIRA

You depart? What unwelcome news. I trust, however, you will return for the PanHKaia tomorrow? I hear much buzz about your tragic play this year, which it is said is so sad it has devastated all those towns that have witnessed it thus far, having caused them extreme dehydration. Though I do not wish for myself or my people to become dry husks, I am yet curious to watch it. You will return in time?

LEONIUS

Who knows! It depends on when I return from my valiant... errand. Goodbye!

Leonius exits.

Enter JAMISINON and CHORUS. The CHORUS are all wearing poorly designed tunics that have pictures of grapes on them, or writing full of typos such as “GRAPS!” and “lovgerapes” embroidered on them. Many of them have the wrong number of fingers.

CHORUS

Oh my Gods! He is here!
The very object of our febrile fandom, Jamisinon the Edifying, the greatest and most popular playwright of our time!
Long have we awaited this day, when he blesses our city with his presence, his enormous brain and his much anticipated play!
It has been a long year since we raptly consumed his latest creation, a play so beautiful we have been able to think of nothing else since. And this year he promises to deliver a sequel! O, blissful day! We will finally abandon the cliff off of which we have been hanging since the last PanHKaia. Thank you, wise Athena, for bestowing all your gifts of wisdom on this man, thank you Apollo, for his mind filled with boundless creativity! And a thousand thanks to the Muses, who have doubtless resided with him this

year long, tending over his every masterfully chosen word. But hark, the legend speaks! Cease all blabber and listen, for his words are spun gold.

JAMISINON

Hi there, Queen Elvira! Long time no see!
Sorry about the entourage, they have been following me ever since I entered the city. I guess they're excited about my play this year, and I'm kind of a big deal.

ELVIRA

Be welcome, dear guest! The kingdom of Hong Kong is honoured by your arrival. I, too, like these fans, have been waiting excitedly for your sequel, which we all hope will do justice to the incredible first part of the tale you began spinning not a year ago, which captured every man's heart. I fear questions sit at the tip of my tongue even now, but please do not let yours release any spoilers!

JAMISINON

Ah, yes, about that... There is no chance of spoilers, as I haven't written the sequel. I guess I'm just a rebel and I do unexpected things? Like, I can't be put in a box, man.
This year I actually went with a completely different story: this one is a clever allegory of the way technological advancements can unexpectedly become a scourge on morally bankrupt societies in late-stage capitalism. But get this: this time, instead of grapes... drumroll... it's *melons*. And let me tell you – you'll never guess, not in a million years, what the melons are a metaphor for.

ELVIRA

Wow, that does pique my interest! I must admit I'd hoped for some resolution to the story from last time... but this sounds like revolutionary storytelling, which is right on brand for you, admired wordsmith. Plus you have certainly intrigued me about this melons thing... I cannot wait for this new masterpiece of yours.

CHORUS

Boo!
We don't want melons, we care only for grapes!
We have been played, people!
All our enthusiastic waiting was for naught!
Let us go set fire to the amphitheatre.

Exit JAMISINON and CHORUS, all running out.

Enter NAOMIS. She is looking very ill, her face pale and sweaty, and she stumbles in and drops on the couch.

ELVIRA

Oh, my! If it isn't Naomis the Published, our last gifted and famous playwright come to participate in the artistic festivities, and come from faraway lands!
Fair Naomis, what ails you? Are you unwell? Was your journey here so exhausting? Or has the creation process required to produce your play this year completely sapped you of all energy?
Pray, tell me what's wrong that I may try to help!

NAOMIS is woozy and bouts of nausea make her interrupt her speech and cover her mouth, as she is on the verge of throwing up throughout her dialogue.

NAOMIS

Revered monarch! *[retch]*
I have indeed travelled far and also exerted my mind greatly to write this year's play, which, *[retch],* as you'll see, is awesome.
But alas, that is not the reason for my current condition!
[retch] On my long voyage here, I got peckish and stopped at a restaurant by the side of the road *[retch]* – one near the entrance to your glorious city. The place looked rather unclean but my empty stomach made my hygiene standards plummet, and I smelled through the door a delectable aroma of finely cooked fowl.

ELVIRA

O pray say it is not so! Is this restaurant you speak of called "Aislop's Table"?

NAOMIS

Yes, you have heard of it? *[retch]*
As I say, the smell of some delicious bird, and the low prices advertised, convinced me to patronise the establishment.
The owner, Aislop, that damned old wizard, prepared my meal himself. He made of that lovely roast bird – which I noticed before it was all chopped up, retained a little moustache upon its beak, even after having otherwise been plucked as well as cooked – made, I say, a chicken pot pie, which looked edible enough, and as I mentioned, *[retch],* was cheap. It baffles me how he could

make so nauseating a pie out of such a fine bird as I had seen before, but that he did. Every soggy bite made my stomach lurch, but as I had already paid for the food and I don't believe in waste, I ate it all the same.
It turns out *[retch]* that was a mistake, as I have had the worst food poisoning known to mortal man ever since *[retch]*.
I have managed to not vomit thus far, but I feel that is inevitable any moment now. *[retch]* Please give me a receptacle, that I may not spoil your beautiful, lumpy carpets? *[retch]*

ELVIRA hands NAOMIS a gorgeous pot decorated with the Vth PanHKaia design.

ELVIRA

Of course!
Ah, how this tale vexes me! Aislop is an old miserly fellow, who stands a foe to good honest labour, and keeps intoxicating everyone foolish enough to fall into his cheap, gastronomic trap!
I have been meaning to shut "Aislop's Table" down, threatening legal action for years now. I am troubled to hear his poisonous product prevails.

NAOMIS

Ay, me! *[retch]*
Woe! *[retch]*
The pain is great! *[retch]*
There is something in my belly and it will fly out!
[retch, retch, retch]

From here onwards, all of NAOMIS's dialogue flies out of her mouth uncontrollably like word-vomit.

BIRD EMPLOYS A RANGE OF SPECULATIVE FRAMEWORKS TO DISSECT THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF LAND MANAGEMENT, DRAWING ON INSIGHTS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL ECOLOGY.

ELVIRA

Sorry, what?

NAOMIS

-THE COMPELLING NARRATIVE WEAVES TOGETHER HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE, TO DRAW PRACTICAL INFERENCES-

ELVIRA

What's happening right now?

NAOMIS

-ULTIMATELY INSISTING ON A PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARD MORE SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE AND FORWARD-FACING LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, A STARK REMINDER-

ELVIRA

Is this a symptom of your Aislopian ailment?

NAOMIS

-THROUGHOUT THE ACCOUNT, BIRD DELVES INTO THE PARADOXICAL NATURE OF LAND AS BOTH A SOURCE OF WEALTH AND A SITE OF CONFLICT-

ELVIRA

Woe, she spews nonsense!
Her brain is broken by the disease she has contracted!

NAOMIS

-ECONOMIC, TOPOGRAPHICAL, MUNICIPAL, MELTING POTS, INVESTMENT, DELVING-

ELVIRA

Servant, take her away to the medicine man, that he may cure her condition with herbs and spices!

SERVANT enters, drags a dazed NAOMIS away by the hand.

NAOMIS

-THE FUTURE OF WESTERN AND ASIAN LAND-BASED ECONOMIES-

ELVIRA

I shall sacrifice a couple hecatombs to Asclepius that he may watch over you.

Exit SERVANT and NAOMIS.

Poor girl.

Enter LEONIUS, leading a figure covered in dozens of wild boar skins.

LEONIUS

I am returned from my daring errand!

ELVIRA

Oh hi, Leonius. Great. What have you got there?

LEONIUS

A gift for you, to ease your suffering.

ELVIRA

My suffering is great and will not be alleviated by a pile of new wild boar rugs, however many you've sourced and however lovely.
If you remember, wild boar skins still cover the dead body of my unburied deceased husband, so this gift seems somewhat tactless. You see, I still haven't got over the whole widowing thing.
Woe!

LEONIUS

I remember. Yet these wild boar skins conceal beneath them a gift of even more value, if you can believe it.

ELVIRA

Well, what is it?

LEONIUS

A man to warm your widowed bed.

ELVIRA

Why is he covered then, is he a real uggo?
And anyway, did you not heed what I said? I'm still not over my latest man, the one who just died, and therefore do not wish to take another as a husband or lover.
Plus, Johnestias asked as his dying wish that I touch no other man for as long as I shall live. To be fair, he asked just under the wire and didn't give me a chance to argue back, but I guess I want to honour his last wish regardless. At least for a little while!
I thank you, Leonius the Generous, but I must reject your thoughtful offering.

LEONIUS

I must insist. I sourced this man at a very high personal cost, and he is of such high quality that he deserves to be kept by a queen. Gaze upon his fine form, is he not lovely and bangable to behold?

ELVIRA

I must admit what little I can make out of his shape under those boar skins is very alluring. Indeed, his figure does remind me a bit of Johnestias's, which I always found irresistible in life.
But nay! I must set aside my widow's libido and stay true to my honour and his whom I still adore.

LEONIUS

I must insist that you look closer.

LEONIUS removes the layers of boar skin and shoves the man at ELVIRA.

Now you have touched a man and yet you may be happy!
Behold your very own husband!

ELVIRA

O Gods! What am I to say? Unhoped-for wonder! Do I really look upon my husband? Or I am snared in the mockery of a God *again*?

ELVIRA pinches LEONIUS's arm hard.

So you are truly Leonius, then, and not Hermes, returned to bedevil and torment me some more?
And this is truly my deceased husband Johnestias come back to life?

LEONIUS

Indeed – I am me and he is he.

ELVIRA

How can this be?

LEONIUS

I journeyed to the halls of Hades to fetch him for you, since you have been such a wonderful host.

As for the details of this most heroic tale, I summarise them now: Fearful canine Cerberus I defeated using bribery and careful planning. I brought a bounty of your spatchcocked chicken covered in garum with me to the underworld, with which I won over all three snarling heads, turning them tame and satisfied.
Next on my list was Charon, whom I beat fair and square at a thumb war. You should have seen it – legends of this battle will go down in history for sure. Being an honourable guy, he gave me a free boat ride, as those were the terms upon which we had agreed for the epic battle of digits.
Then I contended with Death himself, for I am a great hero and fear nothing at all. For Death, I used pretty much the same method as with Cerberus: I offered him your delicious chicken most spatchcocked, and ran past as he chomped on it. As you might well know, Death has quite the appetite. The whole thing was easy breezy!

ELVIRA

Ah, what a cunning feat! I knew it was tasty, but I never thought my chicken most spatchcocked and garumed could best in appeal the ambrosia of the Gods!

And what a matchless service you have done me, bringing back the love of my life to my side! If you say I am a wonderful host, I say you are the best guest who ever lived!!!

But ho – does Johnestias no more speak? He seems alive and as bangable as ever, but mayhaps he has lost some mental faculties?

LEONIUS

Charon mentioned that those rescued from Death would have a bit of brain scramble for a few days. I never claimed my delivery was in perfect condition!

ELVIRA

That's fine, I can work with that.

Enter SERVANT and CHORUS. The chorus are now wearing poorly designed tunics sporting pictures of birds and land and phrases like "BIRDLAND" and "land rox".

CHORUS

Joy! What a marvellous PanHKaia we have just attended!
This year has really surpassed all others!

ELVIRA

So the PanHKaia is concluded? Alas, that Leonius and I both missed it, for reasons most hush-hush!
Did Jamisinon the Edifying's play win, as the oracles and critics divined? Who will take home the coveted goat adoption this year?

SERVANT

Alas, your Grace, he did not. This year was, to be frank, quite the shit-show.
Jamisinon's production went first, and the audience was all in turmoil from the start. This year he wrote a comedy full of crude jokes, wherein the main plot and substance was continual and thinly veiled references to melons being bosoms.

ELVIRA

That mystery is solved then!
Melons are bosoms.
How delightful.

SERVANT

The audience did not find it so.
As you know, Leonius's play was up next, but as he was away and his work was not submitted, we decided to fill that slot with some light-hearted lion slave-maulings. The spectators loved that.

CHORUS

We love that shit!
But what came next was even better!

SERVANT

Yes…
Up next was Naomis the Published's play, which had also generated a lot of buzz. Yet instead of having her script performed as had been rehearsed, she herself went on stage. The crowd went deathly quiet. Normally, as you know, we would have any woman who attempted to perform on a stage immediately arrested and mauled by lions, as is right and as is the law. But the

speech that followed seemed to entrance the members of the audience and critics panel to such an extent that she was allowed to finish.
Her lecture, on the topics of land and birds, I think, was, in my opinion, dry, confusingly phrased and disjointed. It was also delivered as if the words were being expelled from her entrails forcefully and against her will. I do believe her Aislopian infection was to blame, that the medicine man's herbs had had no healing effect, and that the disease had instead flared up to critical levels.

CHORUS

We love Aislop and we loved the play!

SERVANT

To be honest, it wasn't even a play, so naturally I thought, all things considered, that the entry would be completely disqualified. Not only did the panel of critics allow the submission, but they unanimously chose it the winner of the Vth annual PanHKaia, to uproarious cheers from the crowd – a 15 minute standing ovation – during which, I add, the playwright continued to spew her perplexing sentences on stage.
I am told she is still up there, spewing tenuously linked words, with the prize goat waiting patiently by her side.

ELVIRA

Alas, what a disappointing conclusion to this story!

TELOS

THREE WREATHS

Appearing:

Kleitos
Sostratos
Damaris
Damaris' father
Market lady
Leader
Citizen 1
Citizen 2
Citizen 3
Child 1
Child 2

PREAMBLE:

Leader of Chorus:
Competition! The great corrupter of souls!

Chorus:
They run and they throw and they fight, for glory and fame.

Leader:
Sportsmanship! Endless waste of of time and effort!

Chorus:
They practice without end, they would sell their motherland for a Kotinos[1]!

Leader:
Audience! Lusting after sweat in the sand!

Chorus:
Our athletes' bodies are a disgrace, deformed from their unnatural routines.

Leader:
Our city! Vice creates vice, what else can we expect - except these games?

Chorus:
They reflect back to us who we really are, and arrogance drips down the spikes.

[1] Wreath of wild olive tree

ACT 1

SCENE 1

The house of Kleitos Gymnastes, in a well-respected part of Athens. It is neither particularly large nor small, and offers comfortable lodging to Kleitos, a handsome and very fit looking citizen, and his old slave, Sostratos. Despite Kleitos' frugal lifestyle and few possessions, the rooms are in mild disarray. Kleitos is prancing up and down the room.

Kleitos:
Where is it? Where is practice armour? Did you find it yet?

Sostratos:
I've searched the whole house for several hours, Master. It seems to be not here.

Kleitos:
Hitting his strong forehead with his muscular hand
Ah, I remember! I left it at the Gymnasium. Dumb of me.

Sostratos:
The only thing you are allowed to wear in a Gymnasium, and I haven't thought of that[2].

Kleitos:
How are the other competitors doing? Have you heard anything?

Sostratos:
Nikandros Athlophilos is still practicing the stadion[3]. Word has it that he runs fast as the wind.

Kleitos:
Nikandros, he has the brain of a sparrow. He just runs, without aim or strategy. I will easily outrun him.

Sostratos:
(Too himself) The fool I am, thinking you wouldn't need much strategy in a sprint race.
(Too Kleitos) At the Agora, the vegetable woman told me Leandros Olympiodoros can now wrestle any man to the ground in less time than a turnip needs to drop to the floor from a small stand.

Kleitos:
Ah? Euripides' mother, I am sure of it. You can't trust a word she says. Good old Leandros, I remember him from when we were just kids, picking boyish fights in the streets. I could defeat him then, and I will defeat him now.

Sostratos:
And lastly there is Eudoxos Strategos. I have seen him countless times in town myself, he never removes his hoplite armour, not even a second. All to make him strong for the Hoplitodromos[4]. Word is out that he even sleeps in it, though that may be just his own gossip to influence the weak minds. Nevertheless, he won four years ago, and appears to be the strongest contester this time again.

Kleitos:
Looking slightly worried, but only for a second.

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[2] Play on the fact that sports practice and competitions were performed naked, except the Hoplite race in full armour

[3] Sprint of ca. 192 metres

[4] Race in full hoplite armour

(Too himself) Even sleeps in it.. May I be damned, why didn't I think of that?
(Too Sostratos) Eudoxos truly is a strong competitor. I wish I could wear my armour all the time, but that wouldn't leave me time to practice the other disciplines that I enrolled in.

He shrugs his shoulders.

Sostratos:
Master, anything more you need of me to make sure to win three competition at the Games will succeed?

Kleitos:
Let me think, let me think.
(Tense thinking)

Do you still have beans?

Sostratos:
We could live a whole winter on beans, if we wanted to.

Kleitos:
Good, good. And bread?

Sostratos:
The amphorae in the basement are full with grain. If the mice of all Athens came and plunder our stocks, we would still have enough.

Kleitos:
Splendid, indeed. Bread and beans, that is all a good athlete needs to win the games.
Well, as everything appears to be in perfect order domestically, I'm off to the Gymnasium!

SCENE 2

On the way to the Gymnasium.

Citizen 1:
Kleitos, is it true? You want to win three different competitions at the games?

Citizen 2:
Can't be true! Don't listen to this old drunk, Kleitos my boy. Nobody would try something this daring. It is unheard of!

Citizen 3:
Even the Spartans did never try it. There was Agias, Son of Aconius. He won the Pankration two times, once in Olympia and once in Delphi. But he was overcome by Hybris. Four years later, he competed in Isthmia, and was killed by a strike on the head.

Citizen 1:
So it can't be true. Our Kleitos would never dare to try.

Kleitos, standing aside and obviously enjoying the conversation.

Citizen 2:
It may well be! Let us stop talking and listen to him.

Citizen 1:
I remember him when he was just a boy. He was always chasing after pidgeons and cats. I told my wife, I told her, well, this is a stadia-runner if I ever saw one.

Citizen 3:
Yes, stadium maybe, but what about the Pankration? He is not made for an all-out-fight.

Citizen 2:
Stop, all of you! Kleitos, my boy, how is it?

Kleitos:
I put my name in the box for the competitors for the stadium race.

Citizen 3:
I knew it! Stadium yes, but Pankration? Not a chance.

Kleitos:
My name is also in the box for the Pankration athletes.

Citizen 1/2/3:
No way!

Kleitos:
The jurors will further, if they look carefully, …

Citizen 1/2/3
(Gasping)

Kleitos:
… in the Hoplitodromos box, find a small sheet with my name on it. As well.

Citizen 1:
I knew it! If one man can do it, it's you! Show the other Greeks how its done!

Citizen 2:

Athen’s fame will be immortalised through our boy Kleitos!

Citizen 3:
Hurray for Kleitos! The winner of three!

All cheer. Kleitos stands still for a while, and then slowly walks on to the Gymnasium.

SCENCE 3

A few streets further, now very close to the Gymnasium. Kleitos enters a narrow street, and his pace quickens significantly. Suddenly, he hears his name being called from one of the windows above.

Damaris:
(in a stressed whisper)
Kleiitos! Kleiiiitos!

Kleitos tries to ignore her, and increases his pace.

Damaris:
(now shouting)
Kleeiiitos!

Kleitos abruptly turns, stands still a second but then walks back as fast and quietly as he can.

Kleitos:
Damaris! What a lovely coincidence!

Damaris:
I was just.. tending my flowers, and I saw you walking past.

Kleitos:
Yes, well, it would not be good if your father or brothers saw us talking here without their knowledge.

Damaris:
Why not? They like you, and I was just watering the flowers, and I saw you on the road. Nothing wrong with any of it.

Kleitos:
How are you then, my dear? How are the flowers?

Damaris:
The flowers are fine. Finer than me, I must say, and by a lot. Since my two girlfriends got married, they don't call on me that often anymore. One sits at home and weaves, and one grows larger by the day. I can't blame them, though. It is the way of the world.

Kleitos:
We all find ways to keep us occupied and do our duty to the state. How are your brothers then, and your father?

Damaris:
My brothers are hunting. All the time. If they are not hunting, they talk about the games. You made quite a name for yourself, even before the competitions have started.

Kleitos:
It is no secret that I will achieve what no Greek man ever has achieved.

Damaris:
If someone can do it, it must be you. I sacrificed a Dove to Nike, Heracles and Hera for your success.

Kleitos:
Thanks, dear. The knowledge of your prayers will give me strength and speed.

Damaris:
You have to be careful, you know? Not few athletes have been injured in the Pankration. Please protect your face!

Kleitos:
The danger does not scare me.

Damaris:
I would faint if I saw this face of yours harmed in any way.

Kleitos:
(agitated and louder)
I will wrestle any man to the ground who makes you faint.

Damaris:
I hope he doesn't hurt you first, though.

A noise can be heard at the ground floor of the house. Some shuffling occurs, and then Damaris' father steps out of the door.

Damaris' father:
(angrily)
Is that a man? Talking to my daughter, in plain daylight? Oh Hellas, were is your virtue?
(as he looks around and sees Kleitos, his temper calms)
Kleitos! By Zeus, Apollo and Ares, what are you doing here?

Kleitos:
Sir, I was on the way to the Gymnasium, and your daughter happened to notice me on the road while she was tending the herbs in the kitchen.

Damaris:
I needed to wish him luck, father, before the games.

Damaris' father:
It is not dignified to talk to a man on the road, even if it is Athen's most distinguished athlete.

Kleitos:
The fault is fully with me, Master of his well-respected house. After years of training, my stride is heavy and full. It is not the first time that kitchen windows have opened after I walked past them.

Damaris father:
Well then, Kleitos, I was telling my wife yesterday: The first time I saw you as a little boy, helping your father carry two heavy amphorae into the basement with strength that far exceeded a five-year old, I said to myself - rather I go to Hades and back than he doesn't win at the Games one day. Make us proud then, and you two, don't chat too long, or the neighbours will talk.

He goes back inside the house and closes the door behind him.

Damaris:
You know, I've talked to him recently. He would agree to our marriage, I'm sure of it. You would just need to come by the house at a respectable time, knock on the door and make plans with him. Or better, send your slave first, this old grumpy type. What was his name again?

Kleitos:
Sostratos.

Damaris:
Yes, Sostratos. Send him, and arrange a time with my father. Send a gift too maybe, two amphora of wine, or a pheasant.

Kleitos:
Damaris dear, this is my wish as much as it is yours. But at the moment, I have to focus all my energy on winning three olive wreaths. This is what I was born to do. From as long as I can think, I felt energy and restlessness in my body like a Zeus' thunderbolt. Four years ago, I was too young, too inexperienced. Now I am at the height of my abilities. Not too old, for sure not. Not too young either. I can feel it, this is my opportunity, if I can only seize it! Squeeze it! I saw it many times, the pleasures of domestic life quench the fire of ambition. Would you rather want to be married to a nameless man? A man who has not earned any fame, and lost all ambition to do so?

Damaris:
I want to be married to you, with our without wild olive.

Kleitos:
And I can only be myself after I achieved the impossible.

Damaris:
At the door where you are now standing, every day my father turns suitors away. You are too sure of your future victories, Kleitos.
(she pauses, and suddenly looks distressed)
And what happens if you don't win, my dear?

Kleitos:
I, not winning? Impossible.

Damaris:
Would you marry me then?

Kleitos:
A true man can only focus his attention on one thing. I can only think of marriage after my head is thrice-crowned.

Damaris:
I set out the other day, holding a cage with three white Doves in my arms, one to Nike, one to Heracles, and one to Hera. I was agitated and anxious of the future. But after going through the rites at Nike's temple, I felt calmness enter my hear. After Heracles', I felt happiness and joy.
But when I sacrificed the Dove at Hera's temple, I heard a voice coming from below the Altar. Immediately, my calm and joy vanished, and I looked around, but the room was empty. It was as if a woman spoke to me, but none was there. I began to shiver, and cold sweat was running down my spine.

Kleitos:
Surely the Oracle, dear. The priests like to trick the faithful to add to their sacrifices.

Damaris:
Whatever it was, it spoke to you rather than to me. I remember it clearly, the whole temple was resonating from the voice.
(impersonating a shrill and warning female voice)

His ambition will be his doom! Beware!

(exhausted after recollecting this memory, she falls to a chair behind the window)
Take heed of this warning, Kleitos.

Kleitos:
Let us stay in the light of the day, ghosts and tricks don't frighten me, and neither should they have such influences on you.

Finally, I'm off to the Gymnasium.

SCENE 4

In the Gymnasium, after a long day of training. Most athletes already left, only Eudoxos and two old-timers are sitting together in the courtyard.

Eudoxos:
Ah, isn't that the best feeling in the world? Finally, the training is over, and we can put our mind at ease and go on to do nicer things.

Old man 1:
When you are my age you will miss the strains of exercise and the feeling of strength in your body. Now, going up to the Acropolis on a mild spring evening feels like a fifty stadia race to me.

Eudoxos:
I'm not even sure why I keep doing this to myself. If I'm honest, I find it very hard to stop. The feeling of winning addicts me. If I remember back to four years ago, the sweat was running down my cheeks, and I couldn't see much under my heavy armour. All was very hot, and the metal cut badly into my forehead and collar bones. I thought that after getting my wild olive wreath, I would be satisfied and wouldn't have to endure this pain any longer. But now, at the verge of my second Games, I find that I cannot stop. I feel like a prisoner.

Old man 1:
I had many comrades in arms who felt the same as you do, son. They hated fighting, the army, their bloody generals and the bad food, and yet they would not take leave, even when they sent home for leave. And when peace finally came, they go abroad and fight as mercenaries in Barbarian countries.

Eudoxos:
Is it then madness if I attempt to win again?

Old man 2:
Not madness. Winning two times in a row, it has been done before. Not by us Athenians, but some Spartan did it. I forgot his name though. Serves him well, that Spartan.

Eudoxos:
I feel more confident than four years ago, I feel less nervous.

Old man 2:
You need to do this, son. Don't doubt yourself. You live for the Games, even after your first victory you were back in the Gymnasium the next week.

Eudoxos:
We all saw Kleitos today, changing disciplines like other men change shoes. In the morning, he practiced the stadium race. At noon, I saw him at the Pankration. In the afternoon, he took on his hoplite armour and, already tired to exhaustion, raced in it for a long time. Have you ever seen such a fool, even at your old age?

Old man 1:
A fool or a genius, it is hard to tell.

Eudoxos:
Should you not focus all your efforts on one target?

Old man 2:
Probably. That would be wise.

Eudoxos:
I will laugh in his face when he tries three and looses three.

Old man 1:
Why are you so agitated? You already won once. If he can, let him seize eternity.

Eudoxos:
Never will this fool achieve anything. I will beat him in an instant. Nikandros will run twice as fast as him. Leandros will break his nose and defile his visage.

Old man 1:
Not all who win deserve to win, and often the most curious things happen. It is all in the hands of the Gods, is it not?

Old man 1 stands up and slowly leaves.

Old man 2:
You and Kleitos are arrows made of different wood, Eudoxos, and I doubt you are headed for the same target.

Old man 2 follows. For a while, Eudoxos sits quietly on the bench. Finally, a rustling is heard, and Damaris appears.

Eudoxos:
Damaris? By Ares and Aphrodite, what are you doing here? I am all naked!

He gets up and quickly comes back wearing a chiton.

Damaris:
Ah, you, Eudoxos, here? That's a coincidence, I must say. I'm here..

She walks to a corner of the atrium, then to another corner, stops in front of a pile of old towels.

Damaris:
To get this towel! My father forgot it.

Eudoxos:
Your father? I haven't seen him here in months. I know the man, he would never send you to the Gymnasium. It is full of naked men!

Damaris:
Well, now I am here, so let us not talk about it more. How do you feel? Are you joining the competition again this year?

Eudoxos:
It is no secret that I'm planning to join.

Damaris:
And why would you join again? Isn't winning once enough?

Eudoxos:
I join because I cannot stop.

Damaris:
More like you fear that the easy women of Athens will loose their interest in you, as they always do with the champions of past competitions?

Eudoxos:
You know better than most that my mind is fixed on one Athenian woman alone.

Damaris:
And still you have quite a reputation with the others.

Eudoxos:
Do you blame me for it? How often have I stood in vain in front of your father's house, and was never received, and my gifts were not accepted, brought I skins of wine, pheasants or suckling pig.

Damaris:
Men need to dig deep to find clear water. If the Gods grant you another win, my father will be more receiving.

Eudoxos:
Why have you turned me away so often, Damaris? It is not fair.

Damaris:
I felt I was too young to marry. All my girlfriends, they are not married yet, they would hate me if I leave them alone and be gone with a husband.

Eudoxos:
And now, that has changed?

Damaris:
I went to the temple of Hera and prayed there for a long time. And finally I had a vision from her: I saw two Doves flying over my head and further into the sun. Asking the priestess for guidance, she revealed that the double Doves mean double victory.

Eudoxos:
My two victories, if I will achieve them?

Damaris:
That is the will of Hera.

Eudoxos:
(too himself)
Is she interested in me, or my victories? I have never seen her this calculating.

Then it will be all decided in the Games. I like that, the Gods cast the dice on us mortals again.

Damaris:
Good luck! I guarantee you that my father will receive a second-time victor with most open arms.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Strophe:
On a summer day, an idle person may take a stroll in his garden and finally rest below an oil tree. He may look at the birds, look at the flowers and the dry grass in the sunshine, look a resting sparrow in the shade, resting and idling away the heat of the day. So he will idle too, until finally a cloud passes over the sun, and he awakes from his slumbers. An idle or resting ant can never be found, not even on the hottest of days.

Antistrophe:
And yet ants are the lowest of all animals. They dig in the soil for food and are eaten by birds and spiders alike. The mighty lion rests more than he wakes.

Strophe:
The lion has lost his ambition and drive. It once ruled the world. The future will be ruled by ants.

Antistrophe:
The lion could crush an anthill, even for sport.

Strophe:
He does not see the ant as a danger. He will not do it. He is contended in his decline.

Antistrophe:
The lion is the happiest of all animals.

Strophe:
The lion has long forgotten his will to rule.

Antistrophe:
As Kleitos, who did not win a single Kotinos.

Strophe:
As Kleitos, whose head remains bald[5].

Antistrophe:
Yet he was not always without ambition.

Strophe:
The flame is still in him, weakened, not eradicated.

Together:
We will see.

[5] Bald - without Kotinos (the translator)

SCENE 2

Another domestic scene in Kleitos house. Many changes are visible. Flowers stand in vases around the rooms, and everything is tidy. Paintings and mosaics are visible from the walls. Kleitos is resting on an elegant couch, supported by soft-looking pillows. He is still fit, albeit the traces of a small belly are visible under his tunic. On his face, a once broken nose stands in stark contrast to his handsome features. Sostratos busies himself in a corner of the room.

Kleitos:
Damaris, dear. Is dinner ready?

Damaris:
Yes! You can surely smell it. Cooked beans, and freshly roasted bread.

Kleitos:
It smells of victory! Thank you for supporting me in my preparations.

Damaris:
Of course, of course. My strong athlete, you look as powerful as the day we married.

Kleitos:
I looked strong indeed that day. But alas, not strong enough. Now, I trust that I am in the shape of my life.

Damaris:
I am so happy you got over your fixed idea not to marry before you succeeded in the Games. It was not easy to make you see reason. But now, you see, all is for the best. I am the happiest woman among all the womenfolk in Hellas.

She places a large pot of cooked beans on the table.

Kleitos:
When I made the vow not to marry anyone before achieving my victories, I thought it was impossible for me to loose. But the Gods, in their unintelligible… intelligence… gave me another task, a task worthy of my ambition and my honour. And now I am happy I accepted their wish for me. But, dear Damaris, was I really that hard to persuade? How much folly can be found within the breasts and hearts of the young… Now I can clearly see that this union is for the benefit of my athletic ambitions. You were always the smarter of the two of us and were right from the beginning.

Damaris:
Yes yes, and I told you that I will add to your strength, not diminish it. Only one thing could add to our happiness.

Kleitos:
My victory in the stadium?

Damaris:
To have children, a little boy, or a little girl.

Kleitos:
I have told you before, children would stop me from concentrating my efforts on my life's ambition.

Damaris:
Can you not be convinced? Remember, I was right before.

Kleitos:
Forget about this problem, it will all disappear very soon.

(sighing)
I could not dare to loose another time.

Sostratos:
(from the corner)
In how many disciplines will you enrol this time, Master?

Kleitos:
A dumb question from a donkey, indeed. In three, as last time.

Sostratos:
If I remember rightly - and I may be mistaken - I didn't recall a victory for my master four years ago…

Kleitos:
(in subdued anger)
Yes. Go on.

Sostratos:
Then, if my memory served me correct, how does my Master want to achieve the feat of winning thrice this time? We all age, as I am well aware myself, and the work doesn't come easy anymore.
(He coughs and touches his back)
Surely my Master has noticed this? That I become too old for the tasks that I have so willingly engaged in in my youth?
(He coughs again)

Kleitos:
How do I want to achieve victory where I failed four years ago? I practice harder than before, it is as simple as that. Indeed, the stadium race is best attempted at the flower of youth. But still, I feel myself as energetic as a ram on the first warm day of spring. For the Pankration and the Hoplitodromos, I am not afraid at all. Only bad luck and the Gods' will will make me loose those. In the Pankration, four years ago the sun was blinding me -a trick of Helios- and too late was I aware of the fist of my opponent.
(He painfully touches in broken nose)
The Hoplitodromos was another scene altogether. Eudoxos, that man could well be one of our enemies from Sparta or their Corinthian allies, the sly cheater that he is. Early on, he had a large head start, so large that it is clear that he started earlier than the rest of us. He then kicked dust and small stones in my direction with his feet. Thus I lost my breath in spits of cough, and achieved only the ungrateful second place. And for you, Sostratos, I believe you should just work a bit harder. Experience can balance out many ails of an aging body.

Sostratos:
Ah yes, I haven't thought of that. How inexperienced I washed the floors in my youth, how experienced I engage in this now. But for you, would it not be wiser to forgo the stadium race this time? Let the young tire out the young, while you rule over the rest.

Kleitos:
Never! Through your words shines the lazy life of a slave, not the will of a free man.

Damaris:
Sostratos, has ever an Athenian or Greek man succeeded in both the Pankration and the Hoplitodromos?

Sostratos:
Not in my lifetime.

Damaris:
A worthy feat indeed, worthy of only the flower of men. Whoever would achieve this had his name recorded in eternity.

Sostratos:
All of Hellas would applaud such an athlete. Barbarians would come to Athens just to see him.

Damaris:
Going out amongst the women of the town, I have often heard that the stadium race is the least well regarded. Women think it not more than a trifle who wins it, and the victors' names are fast forgotten. There goes a saying amongst the womenfolk: *"Come, let us each place a little walnut shell on the river and see whose reaches the goal the fastest. That is more interesting than the stadium race".*

Sostratos:
The stadium race is a plaything for the young! Not much better than a dog race, if anybody asks me.

Kleitos:
(deep in thoughts)
Are you two sure? The stadium race, being a plaything for the young?

Damaris and Sostratos:
Yes! The stadium race is indeed a plaything for the young.

Kleitos:
It could then be wise to skip it, this time.

Damaris:
If you feel confident in joining, you should. You are still young, dear.

Kleitos:
Don't try to persuade me, woman! I have decided. Two wreaths will also satisfy my hunger for victory.

SCENE 3

On the Agora. Eudoxos and Sostratos meet by chance in front of a Butcher's stall.

Eudoxos:
You, old man! Are you not the slave of Kleitos?

Sostratos:
(Sighs)
Alas, that is my fate.

Eudoxos:
What are you doing here, at the Butcher's stall? It is well known that that fool only eats cooked beans to prepare his body for the Games.

Sostratos:
I will tell you a secret.
(He leans in and whispers into Eudoxos' ear)
I am not fully committed to this diet of his. I am buying meat skewers for myself.

Eudoxos:
(laughs)
Ah, Kleitos. Even your own slave disobeys you. Well, go on, old man. I will not share your secret with anybody.
(after a pause)
But, he must be desperate, is he not?

Sostratos:
Desperate for his diet?

Eudoxos:
No, desperate for not winning.

Sostratos:
He should be, I agree. Alas, I have never seen him in better spirits.

Eudoxos:
He failed to achieve his greatest ambition in life. And now he wants to try again, with much less hopes than before. How could he be in good spirits?

Market lady:
Are you two talking about Kleitos, Athen's most famous athlete?

Sostratos:
Yes, my honourable master and this honorable man's honorable competitor.

Market lady:
Kleitos, he is a great inspiration for us common folk.

Eudoxos and Sostratos:
He is?

Market lady:
Yes yes, and I will tell you why. He will never be accepted in the high circles. He does things outside of convention. He tries to win it all and looses, and everybody could see it except himself. And then he tries again. Is it not very inspiring?

Eudoxos:
You find his failure inspiring?

Market lady:
Yes, boy, that is what I have been telling you. How many times did my husband go to the courtroom and was not even heard? The magistrates laughed about his case and dismissed him in an instant. And me, when I asked a rich man for a loan? He looked right through me. And yet we manage, and my stall is not faring badly this year. This Kleitos is the same like us.

Sostratos:
The true nature of my master's character may be a little bit different than you think.

Market lady:
And so what, do you want to share some secrets about your master on the market? And what is it? Is he actually lazy? Does he have a bad temper? I have one now, I can tell you.

Eudoxos:
The wise will find that noble is to set a realistic goal and then work in a structured way to achieve that goal.

Market lady:
Who are you that you give so smart advice?

Eudoxos:
I am Eudoxos, second-time winner of the Hoplitodromos race.

Market lady:
Never heard of you.

Eudoxos:
I achieved the impossible, winning a competition for the second time. Only two persons have ever done it, me and a Spartan.

Market lady:
How can you call it impossible if you and a Spartan already did it? What Kleitos is trying, that truly is impossible.

Eudoxos:
Impossibly stupid. He is not even very good in a single discipline. Why don't you open a fish stall and a vegetable stall as well, next to your Butcher shop? Would that be a great idea?

Market lady:
I didn't say I can do what Kleitos does.

Eudoxos:
If he can fail at the Games, you can succeed at a fish stand.

Sostratos:
It may be a surprise to you both, but my Master forgoes competing in the stadium race this year.

Market lady:
Then I don't have to open a fish stand! What joy, I always hated the smell.

Eudoxos:
Are you sure, old man? It seems out of character for such a hard-headed oxen.

Sostratos:
No no, I am very sure. Indeed, I had a little role in convincing him to let go off the sprint race. It would tire him out, and, between us, he had very little chance of winning.

Eudoxos:
He just gave up? Well, that is disappointing.

Sostratos:
Why do you say he gave up? Why are you so surprised? Aiming for two wins is still almost impossible.

Eudoxos:
And yet, I feel empty by hearing this news. Damaris, that simple minded women, must be disappointed beyond measure.

Sostratos:
Indeed, she was never happier.

Eudoxos:
Happier? She promised me to marry her if I achieved two victories. And after I actually did manage to do what only one lousy Spartan managed before, I found that she was already engaged to Kleitos. I always thought it was because of my lack of ambition.

Sostratos:
Lack of ambition? I never saw a more ambitious man than you. That can't be it.

Eudoxos:
Why then, did she not keep her promise?

Sostratos and Market lady:
Women! Who can fully understand them?

Eudoxos:
I go back to the Gymnasium. You, lady, carry on with your fish stand.

Market lady:
And you carry on with achieving your fruitless victories.

SCENCE 4

Leader:
Mortal men blame the Gods for their misfortunes. Yet more than half the time, they can blame only themselves for their own choices. They toil and sweat for years, and for what aim? For a fast-forgotten victory, or for a mediocre woman?

Chorus:
Whether the aim is good or bad, nobody can know in advance. But the toil itself the essence of life.

Leader:
Man would be happiest to forgo all effort altogether.

Chorus:
What then, is left?

Leader:
Whatever the Gods freely put in a man's hands is his. Whatever you fight for vain altogether.

Chorus:
Remember Heracles, how he defeated the Hydra and wrestled the Lion to death?

Leader:
And he was rewarded with a deadly arrow.

Chorus:
Remember Sisyphus and his boulder?

Leader:
The boulder falls down to the ground every night.

Chorus:
Remember Odysseus return - against all odds?

Leader:
Quickly he had to leave to bury his oar in the desert.

ACT 3

SCENE 1

Four years later, in the public bathhouse of Athens. Kleitos is sitting at the side of the large pool, legs in water. He still looks athletic and handsome, although he now sports a medium-sized belly, his old broken nose and a newer injury on his left hand.

Child 1:
Daddy, can I go to the deep water?

Kleitos:
You are only three and can't swim yet! It is way too deep for you.

Child 1:
But I want to!

Kleitos:
Try! If you drown, I won't help you.

Child 1:
(starts crying)

Child 2:
(starts crying out of sympathy)

Eudoxos enters the bathhouse. He is lean and muscular, and in an admirable physical shape. He sees Kleitos and the babbling children, and joins him in the pool.

Eudoxos:
Kleitos, my old friend.

Kleitos:
Eudoxos! How long has it been?

Eudoxos:
Some time. I haven't seen you training as much lately.

Child 1:
Hello, Mister.

Eudoxos:
(ignores the child)
Yours?

Kleitos:
Mine, the other one too.

Eudoxos:
They are lucky, they come after their mother.

Kleitos:
Haha, Eudoxos, a jokester, as always.

Eudoxos:

(repeats himself)
I haven't seen you training as much lately.

Kleitos:
Is that so? We must have just missed each other. I still go to the Gymnasium at least… I mean, last time I was there… Yes, when was it?

Eudoxos:
I am there most days, and I haven't seen you.

Kleitos:
Then it must be true. I was busy at home.

Eudoxos:
(sarcastically)
That is a pity, all of Athens cheers for you to win this year.

Kleitos:
Yes yes, they can be all at rest. I will win two competitions this year.

Child 1:
(starts patting his father's belly)
Daddy, you will win sure sure!

Kleitos:
Of course I will participate this year. But my mind is less at ease then four or eight years ago. Eudoxos, my old competitor, you bested me two times already, and yet I don't feel bitter when I see you now, although I was at my wits ends the first time I lost to you. Now we are both not young anymore, and I feel these will be my last Games. Will you join again?

Eudoxos:
I have three Kotinos at home. It may take centuries until another Greek overcomes me. That is enough, I will not test fate. I will not participate again.

Kleitos:
Is that your final decision?

Eudoxos:
It is final.

Kleitos:
Then, I my victory is as good as guaranteed. I will skip the Pankration, and only concentrate on the Hoplitodromos. Without champion Eudoxos, I will surely succeed this time. No one is going to foil my success this time, not even Zeus himself.

Eudoxos:
Achieving a well-deserved, albeit single, victory is more than most other men achieve in their lifetime. Even though others manage more, there is no shame in it.

Kleitos:
I feel I wasted my life. I could have achieved more, I should have trained harder.

Child 2:
(is about to drown)
Blubbbb.

Kleitos:
Come on, rescue your brother!

Eudoxos:

And Damaris, I haven't seen her in years. Damaris, what a life she could have led. Her father had to hold the door against all young men of Athens, and she chose you. Do you know why? Was it the promise of your three victories?

Kleitos:
I don't know. I asked myself the same question. I never chased after her much, I had other interests in mind. I longer i think about it, the less I believe it was Athletic ambition. But what made her decide, I don't know.

Eudoxos:
You will see me amongst the spectators. I might even say I will cheer for you, for our years as competitors have brought us closer in some way. I thought you were insufferable, less than a threat to myself but more of a threat to the dignity of the Games. You committed blunder after blunder, only to be loved by the ordinary folk. And now even I, at least some part of me, wants to see you succeed, at least once. But from one champion to another sportsman, when I saw young Phileas train today, I said to myself that the Kotinos will surely be placed on his head. Never did I see a man run like that carrying armour. He would have surely beaten me, even when I was in my prime.

Kleitos:
Do you have any strategems for the race?

Eudoxos:
The armour is heavy, but you can't wait until your opponents tire themselves out. It will add to their anxiety when they see themselves behind already from the start. That is why you should not conserve your energy for the end of the race, you will be tired either way. Start as fast as you can, and in the first curve, increase that speed. When you reach the first straight, increase the speed again, and than hold your tempo until the end of the race.

Kleitos:
All those times I just ran as fast as I could. I was lacking proper instruction, only relying on my muscles and training.

Eudoxos:
A race is a challenge for the mind as much as it is for the body.

Kleitos:
When I strain my body too much under the heavy armour, I now find it hard to breath, and my head spins.

Eudoxos:
And even so, what of it? That is your last race. Gather your strength and power through.

SCENE 2

Kleitos is laying in his bed at home. He is surrounded by Damaris, Sostratos, his children and the crowd of old men from the Gymnasium. A happy and drunk crowd roams around the house with unintelligible cheers.

Kleitos:
Ah, my head hurts. Everything is spinning, my body aches as never before. And what is this on my head? It scratches my scalp and stings in my forehead.

Damaris:
Your Kotinos, dear.

Kleitos:
Kotinos? Is the race over? Take it off of my head. It hurts me.

The Kotinos is carefully removed from his head and placed on a stand beside the bed, in full view of the audience.

Sostratos:
Don't you remember anything, Master?

Kleitos:
The fog is slowly lifting. The last thing I remember was that I was in full armour, anxiously waiting for the shout of 'Pan' to mark the start the Hoplitodromos race.

Sostratos:
And then the race started, and you were well ahead of the competition.

Kleitos:
I just followed old Eudoxos' advice. Run as fast as you can, right from the start. The armour felt so heavy though.

Child 1:
Daddy won! Daddy won!

Kleitos:
I did? What happened then? How could I have won, if I passed out during the race? I wish I could remember just a little more. Ah, something is coming back to me now. It was just so hot under my helmet. I made the first lap, and somebody raced past me. At the second lap, I felt so dizzy.

Sostratos:
There was a loud thunder from the sky. Zeus, the father of all the Gods, intervened on your behalf.

Damaris:
I did not hear thunder, but I felt the earth shaking, a powerful sign of Poseidon. Everybody was frightened, and I dared not to look at the race anymore.

Sostratos:
The thunder gave you more energy, Master, while it frightened all of your competitors. You must have been in a state of trance, and mightily sped up again. You raced past young Phileas, and finished the race first. Finally you passed the goalposts and collapsed, rendered unconscious from the exhausting. You just to wake up now for the first time since then, and that was a few hours ago.

Damaris:
When the earth trembled, a chariot descended from heaven, steered by Apollo himself. You were hardly standing, but he lifted you on his chariot and drove you to the finish of the race.

Sostratos:
Master, I don't think your lady is lying to you, but I can assure you that is not what happened. You finished the race first, and from your own strength.

Damaris:
I remember the Chariot as clearly as I remember the face of my children. It was as light as the ray of sunshine, and Apollo was larger than any mortal man I ever saw.

Old man 1:
I don't know what you are all talking about, lady. I saw no Chariot descending from the aboves. A competitor collapsed during the races, it's not the first time that happened.

Old man 2:
But if he collapsed, how could he won the race?

Old man 1:
I don't remember that. My bladder, it is not reliable anymore. I was on my way out, searching for a tree to relieve myself.

Kleitos:
And you? Can you tell me what happened?

Old man 2:
I wasn't paying much attention. I saw these races too often, frankly, they don't interest me much. Halfway through I spotted Pericles in the audience stand opposite, next to a young lady that wasn't his wife. I was occupied by that more than by the race.

Kleitos:
(taking his older child by the hand)
And you? Can you tell me what happened?

Child 1:
Daddy won! Daddy won!

Kleitos:
Yes, but how?

Child 1:
Daddy won!

Kleitos:
Hand me the Kotinos again.

Damaris:
Here it is.

Kleitos:
It looks real. Is it real?

Sostratos:
Nobody in Athens would dare to forge a Kotinos.

Kleitos:
Then I must wait for Eudoxos' report. He has a keen eye, he will be able to tell me what truly happened.

Old man 2:
That won't be possible.

Old man 1:

A few days before the Games, Eudoxos moved away.

Old man 2:
Yes, he sold his house, freed his slaves and moved to somewhere south.

Old man 2:
Korinth? Wait, didn't he book a ship's passage to Ephesus? He kept talking about Ephesus for some time.

Old man 1:
Where ever he is, I doubt will will hear from him again soon.

Old man 1:
He became fed up by this life in Athens, I could feel it. It bored him.

Damaris:
Wear your olive wreath again, Kleitos. It looks so pretty on your head.

She firmly places the Kotinos Kleitos' head, while Kleitos flinches and painfully closes his eyes.

Certainty

by Aristophanes

Certainty was exhibited at the great city Dionysia in March 421B.C., at a time when Athens and Sparta were alike weary of the long continuance of the Peloponnesian war, and alike disposed to put an end to the conflict upon any fair and honorable terms. The chief architect of this enormous uncertainty had been Cleon the Athenian demagogue because “in quiet times his malpractices would be more apparent and his calumny less easily believed”. It was into these uncertain times to which Aristophanes produced upon the stage his award-winning trilogy of comedies consisting of Peace, Certainty, and a third unknown play. The lesser known of the two extant plays, Certainty is presented here in its original form and its most literal translation to date. Photos are included fresh from the play’s box-office-smashing run at the Royal National Theatre in London.

Benjamin Bickley Rogers
Aristophanes vol. II (1924, p. 2)

The commonality in applying option-pricing models for real assets and for financial securities is that ‘the future is uncertain’ (if it were not, there would be no need to create options because we know now what we will do later) and in an uncertain environment, having the flexibility to decide what to do after some of that uncertainty is resolved definitely has value.

Li, Y., James, B. E., Madhavan, R., & Mahoney, J. T.
Real options: Taking stock and looking ahead. (2007, p. 35)

* * *

THE DRAMA

* * *

Scene: An animal stable on a wealthy estate. Two servants.

POLYPOS

Bring it here, Haimorrhois! Bring the unholy Divine cake!

HAIMORRHOIS

Here it is, Polypos! Troubled as we are, feeding a shit cake to a Divine steed!

POLYPOS

I cast it into the beast's pen, my cankerous colleague!

HAIMORRHOIS

Oh may she never taste a daintier morsel, Polypos.

POLYPOS

Now bring another, Haimorrhois! Like the last, shaped from shit from an ass.

HAIMORRHOIS

But how can she eat so greedily? Will she never stop eating the fiber laden feces?



POLYPOS

We'll not stop feeding her til she's ready to ride. Our master commanded us to have her fed and saddled for flight this very morning. Now give me more of that hand molded shit! Faster! Faster!

HAIMORRHOIS

I'm catching it straight from the ass' ass before it even touches the ground! The shit's steaming hot enough to burn me. Do you want me to stick my arm up its colon and grab the gloop out before it's even digested?

POLYPOS

Yes, if you must! Our master must ride this flying beast for cloud-concealed Olympus to inquire of the gods about this present turbulence. This falling sky. These shooting stars that have not stopped pelting our city.

HAIMORRHOIS

It's not the colorful shooting stars I mind. I mind when they become craters where our schools and families used to be.

POLYPOS

Every cursed day these turbulent meteors,
diopipton crash down from on high.
Already impacted about half of our city,
for what nobody nowhere knows why.

The Oracle in Delphi has failed to say when
they will fall, let alone on what or whom.
Every day with no guarantees,
wondering if this is the day we go boom.

Who wants to live with this damnable uncertainty,
these Damoclean meteors on high.
Who can make plans when a celestial nugget
could be fatally hurtling nigh.

We horde our food and stockpile our spears.
Unshielded whether housed or outside.
It's not the boulders that will drive us to hell,
it's uncertainty where we now reside!

Enter King Ceyx

CEYX

Indeed, what we need is Certainty!

HAIMORRHOIS

My king! You grace us with your presence.

POLYPOS

My king, we are much honored. But what say you just now about certainty? How can we be certain of a haven under this meteoric uncertainty?

CEYX

Indeed, the mystery meteors kill our Trachinian children and wives with no pattern that we can discern. Since it's sudden slashing of Trachis, we've been calling these heavenly meteors *diopipton*, the falling stars sent by Zeus. Yet Zeus is certainly not the patron saint of these barbarous boulders. For he is the patron of hospitality in the storm, wherein he is called Zeus *Xenios*. He is oaths kept, for which he is called Zeus *Horkios*. To bind certainty with these unfathomable missiles is to dare to bind King Zeus himself. Zeus *Olympios*, the King of the Gods. To seek to bind Zeus is to seek to enslave the freedom giver, Zeus *Eleutherios*. For most importantly, he is the patron of the certain future, for which we pray to Zeus *Engyetes*.

POLYPOS

A great war in heaven then? A battle between Zeus *Engyetes* and those gods who would wish to bind him?

CEYX

I am perplexed by this question, mindless Polypos. For none may wage war with Zeus, even for a moment. I then must wonder, if the battle is not among the gods, if perhaps it is within the gods. This is why I must take on my mission to Mount Olympus, harried Haimorrhois. This is why I've commanded you to feed and bridle my dung-sucking steed in preparation for my ride to the clouded mountain top. I will seek an audience with the king of the gods and beseech him to reveal his certain, *engyetic* self. And if I find that anyone has sought to bind him, then I will beat them down and unchain the blessings of Zeus *Engyetes*!

HAIMORRHOIS

Truly magnificent, my king! But tell us, what can even the most truthful and just, such as yourself accomplish against this tumultuence? Can a mere mortal even cross through the gates of Olympus?

CEYX

Ah, but you forget my humble Haimorrhois, I am no mere mortal. I was born the son of the god of the morning star, Phosphoros. Least of the gods though I count myself, but greatest of men and the greatest of men's hopes of curating a ceaseless certainty.

POLYPOS

Indeed King Ceyx! What we need is heavenly Zeus to save us now. Come haggard Haimorrhois, kneel next to me and pray a prayer with me to great King Zeus in the way we were shown when children.

Polypos and Haimorrhois kneel down shoulder-to-shoulder at the front of the stage and pray.

POLYPOS AND HAIMORRHOIS (IN UNISON)

Sky-father, who art in Olympus,
heralded be thy name.
Thy kingdom unending, thy will be unbending,
in Gaia as it is in Uranus.
Give us today our tiny certainty,
And keep your oaths as we have kept our oaths to each other.
And lead us not into hubris,
but deliver us from moira.
For yours is the Cosmos, the Kratos, and the Kleos,
with certainty,
amen.

An enormous boulder of solid gold crashes through the stable roof and pulverizes Polypos into a burst sack of blood and guts. Haimorrhois is untouched by the boulder but is covered in blood as he looks over at the splattered body next to him.



HAIMORRHOIS

< screams >

CEYX

Examining the liquid remains of Haimorrhois.

It is just as I feared, my weeping Haimorrhois! While the two of you were both kneeling next to one another, the just gods or the selfish would equally look down on you both equally. Whether hearing your prayer as a flute to dance to or a dirge to mourn, your gods given fate should have been the same. Yet what we see instead is this precise chaos that separates good from the good and the evil from the evil. A chaos that is exacting in its order. With this observation, I now see that this is an uncertainty that is very certain to create a very certain uncertainty!

HAIMORRHOIS

So all certainty is lost?

CEYX

Certainly!

A chorus of farm animals walks out of their broken pens and gathers around the characters.

Stophe

HAIMORRHOIS

Look over here, my great lord Ceyx, at your poor pulverized Polypos. He knelt in the dirt of the stable with me among the dirty animals in the hopes of a hoped for future. His, and mine, was a faith of a future in which the god of oaths, Zeus Horkios, would repay our simple acts of offertory supplication in good faith.

CHORUS OF FARM ANIMALS

This is a *fiduciary faith*, tender Haimrrhois. A hopeful faith, a promissory faith. A faith of confidence in what the gods will provide in the future.

Antistrophe

HAIMORRHOIS

And now look here, my great lord Ceyx, at me, your hopeful hanged Haimrrhois. I am more filled with faith now than I had been before the pinching of poor poor Polypos. When everything that's certain is stripped away, what is there to do but to devote oneself to faith. We wring our hands in ceremony and anoint ourselves in ordaining oil over our own objections. But when the fisher bird flies west on the dark night, when the dawn is miles away, there is only the faith of the naked and afraid.

CHORUS OF FARM ANIMALS

This is a *fides nuda faith*, sweaty Haimorrhois. A dark faith, a cruciform faith. A faith in resignation to what the gods have failed to provide in the past.

Epode

HAIMORRHOIS

A princely riddle for you my lord Ceyx,
that is plain for a peasant to see.
Can ever the lack of a thing be a thing?
Is the opposite of certainty, uncertainty?

If uncertainty's the vacuum of certainty's void,
there'd be nothing to quantify and measure.
The opposite of certainty, in fact, is faith!
Though faith be certainty's lesser.

Like a ship's hull breached by a battling bulwark,
as the air is sucked out the bow,
as the sea is sucked in through the side of the ship,
so is faith sucked in for us now.



CHORUS OF FARM ANIMALS

This is the scale that humans must balance,
on the two sides: faith and certainty.
The rituals and sacrifice of uncertain faith
may faithless certainty supersede.

For those who would proselytize pious parishioners,
for faith to be kernelled from mystery,
a chaotic world can chaperone their children
to an orthodox perplexity.

To ensure the crops of the cretinous Cretans,
their babies bought winter's red closure.
And the fabled stability of Spartan society
was erected on infant exposure.

To satiate their faith, it must certainly be replaced
by a faithlessness that's certainly rewarded.
That roots grow down from shit's dark brown,
not soaked in blood's wet red.

Faith and certainty are the world's Janus masks,
Gaia withdrawn from Uranus.
When the god War stalks the halls of Olympus,
god Peace be released to release us.

Now our kingdom is unhinged by uncertainty,
with faith's meteoric ascension.
The scales are unbalanced o Trachinian King,
and need you for their recalibration.

Fly to the home of the gods o our king,
fly up o'er the holy mountain cliffs,
Zeus *Engyetes*, is certainly captive.
Break Certainty's iron shackled wrists.

CEYX

Arise my servant! I am stirred to action! To Olympus' peak I will ascend to break certainty from its prison, to release Zeus *Engyetes* from whatever fiendish plan has waylaid him. Fetch me my saddle and bridle my beast. Bring me my Divine steed!

Haimorrhois leads out a fat drag queen wearing a pink leotard with shit stains around her mouth.



DIVINE

Kill everyone now! Condone first degree murder! Advocate cannibalism! Eat shit!

CEYX

Woah there, girl. Better bridle her fast, Haimorrhois.

Haimorrhois bridles and saddles Divine. Divine bucks wildly as Ceyx mounts her. Stage crew come onto stage, lower the deus ex machina and cautiously hook it to Divine. As they lift the crane and swing it over the audience, Divine bucks wildly, almost tossing Ceyx into the crowd below.

CEYX

Gently, gently, go easy my Divine steed. Don't pay attention to the smell of my filthy servant and mistake him for your poopy food. Farewell my slop-stained Haimorrhois, when next you see me, we shall have certainty in the land!

As Ceyx continues to fly precariously over the audience, stage hands rotate the stage background to reveal a rocky mountainside.

CEYX

Fear not those below my teetering steed. 'Tis not just for Trachis that I am attempting this daring feat of aerial alightment. 'Tis also for you gathered here, you Athenian citizens, along with all Greeks. It's for our cities and our land that I

mount this Divine bronco. So for the love of god, please nobody fart right now! Your earth-bound stench of ingested beans and broccoli may confuse my simple-minded steed such that she dives down into the audience. I'm pleading with you my Greek brethren for your own good as well, hold your nose against sniffing her Divine dinner, for she may take up a taste for upchuck as well.

On the mountainside, chairlifts creep upwards with men inside in colorful bedazzled suits.

CEYX

Ho, look there! An envoy of evangelical *Hiero-keryx*? Religious leaders of the deplorable masses. Ah but close thy nose and don't be drawn in by the scent of those heiro-keryx. Theirs is only the sound of bullshit, not the smell of it.

As the holymen disappear around the mountainside, next comes a group of men wearing expensive dark suits and typing on their phones.



And what's this, another envoy, this time of *Technourges*? I dare say that so much Greek wealth has rarely been arranged on such a narrow cliff's edge before.

Ceyx passes through an enormous cloud that signifies his passage from the mortal realm to the land of Olympus. Stage hands come onstage and rotate the scene again to the city of Olympus on the hilltop. We see that the golden buildings and streets have gaping holes in them. Ceyx tries

unsuccessfully to navigate Divine back to the stage, but she keeps rising on the wind uncontrollably.

Down there Divine, you're going too high. We're done ascending, now we must descend to the mountaintop to enter Olympus' golden gates. Oh, but I fear that my steed has had too much of its fecal supper. You see, my lovely audience, here is her mechanism for flying: as she eats more and more shit, it ferments into a giant cloud of bilious methane. That bubbling methane, stored up in her hot belly-balloon, is what levitates me now. And to keep her from shitting and farting it out too early, my servants have plugged up her asshole to keep her properly pressurized. Now I fear that the balloon has been blown too full. But I shall not fear, my dear Athenian audience, for I have a failsafe to deflate the Devine and bring it down to earth. My apologies in advance to all of you gathered below, though all of Greece applauds you for your sacrifice.

Ceyx reaches under Divine's dress and yanks out an enormous purple butt plug. A torrential gush of diarrhea sprays out over the entire theater, dousing the audience in chunk-filled liquid shit. At the same time, an enormous sulfurous sonic boom rocks the theater, shaking old people's toupees off their heads and permanently blinding newborns.

Deflated and dangling limply from the machina, the stage crew lowers Divine back down to the stage. As Ceyx dismounts her, she floats away offstage.

CEYX

So this is Olympus, is it? I see massive buildings that look as if they've been torn up from their foundations. This city looks as if it's in the process of being disassembled and moved to another location. But where?

As Ceyx is exploring the city, loud footsteps are heard lumbering towards him. He instinctively hides behind a low wall nearby. From offstage, a large, cloaked figure lumbers onstage. Its identity is concealed but it has the dimensions of a titan under its golden cloak. The cloaked figure carries an enormous golden boulder similar to the one that struck pulpy Polypos. The figure hurls the boulder off the side of the mountain towards Trachis and we hear crashing and curses and calls in the Trachian language as it lands. The figure moves to a nearby council-hall, briefly considers it, then picks it up and carries it over its head to the front of the stage. The figure crumples the golden roof into a gigantic golden boulder, aims, and hurls the solid metal meteor into the orchestra section, killing at least a dozen audience members. The surviving audience members erupt in screams and shove and scratch and climb over each other trying to claw their way to the doors. As pandemonium erupts in the Dionysian Theater, the figure lumbers offstage to another part of the city.

CEYX

Attention, you all! Listen, my Athenian brothers! Now you see that your admired Athens also is now assailed in the same chaotic meteor shower as my poor Trachis. Lo, as you watched this play, you assumed that the folly befalling my kingdom was confined solely to our own land, but now perhaps you see that we

are all, all of us in the wide Greek world, are all in this together. I tell you that with the destruction that this cloaked figure is reeking, we must all of us on the globe admit that either we hang together, or we hang separately. Now come back and consent with me on a strategy for us collectively on this mountaintop, for there is no more certainty outside those stage doors than there is here in this hall. And collaborating together, we may cooperate to loose mighty Zeus and avenge our severed cities

Crashing is heard far away off stage as other pieces of the Olympian city are being torn up, wadded into boulders, and cast down.

Listen, there my Athenian brothers, methinks I hear the brute widening his aim. As *diopipton* rain down, curses rise up in the Boeotian language of the Thebans. And there, I hear cries from the Argives. And again, do you hear Corinthian screams? The pitiless boulders now pummeling their very namesake. But not just from our own Western culture, but even further flung beyond our Western allies. I can make out cries in Egyptian. Those far off people of old who we revere as our intellectual and cultural foundation. And there in Ethiopian, of the wooly people whom Homer said traveled with the gods and who Herodotus called the first lawgivers. There are screams in Arabic from the peoples of the middle East and in Persian from our great Eastern adversary. You see my Athenian audience, what we thought merely a Trachinian problem has indeed spilled out into our entire interconnected world. I tell you now that our only recourse is to free felled Zeus who will set this reaving right. Come here with me now, though not your King, today I will be your leader. Come and we will make this right, come with me now to smash the prison doors.

Dionysia audience members leave their seats and flood the stage to join Ceyx. Ceyx beckons everyone from their seats onto the stage as they crowd the golden Olympian city.

To me, my Athenian citizens! Now we assail the gods' own prison doors. Push on my command. Heave, ho! Heave, ho! You there in the back, we need you all to fell these weighty golden doors. Find what you can to pry the lock. Again, with a running start, heave, ho! Once more, I can feel the hinges giving way. One more push and we'll have the doors off their frames. Attack!

The audience presses in as the heavy prison doors crash open. The audience cheers and claps as they rush into the prison. But inside, the prison cell is completely empty with only unclasped chains hanging limply from the ceiling. No sign of Zeus. The audience is confused and deflated.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

What does this mean, King Ceyx? If Zeus is not imprisoned here in the Olympian prison, then where is he?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

Has he been banished? Sent far away to reign over the far-off land of the Indians?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3

Has he retreated to the bosom of his grandmother, Gaia?

CEYX

I…I don't know. I'm so confused. Zeus is eternal, he is the mightiest of the gods. Where could he be in these uncertain times?

From a balcony high above the crowd, the cloaked figure appears.

CLOAKED FIGURE

I can answer that question for you.

The audience recoils at being ambushed by the figure, women shriek, men collapse. As they cower in fear, the figure alights a golden escalator and descends from the mezzanine to the ground level. He steps behind a golden podium in front of the gathered audience. Behind the podium, floor-to-ceiling gold walls frame the figure.

CLOAKED FIGURE

Zeus left. I'm your god now.

The cloaked figure sweeps back his cloak and reveals a shining orange face with golden hair.

CEYX

Lucifer?



The crowd gasps in shock and amazement. Many in the audience recognize the cloaked Lucifer from his reality drama some years ago, "The Eveningstar", but they're all shocked to see him here in the halls of Olympus.

LUCIFER

That's right son, come to daddy.

The audience is shocked and appalled to learn that Ceyx is the son of Lucifer. They recoil from Ceyx in disgust.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

His son? Are you a relation to this malefactor? Are you a part of his horrible scheme?

CEYX

Me? No, I swear! I mean, yes, he is my father. But my father is the most moral and upright of any god alive. My father has never done anything illegal or unethical in his entire life. It's impossible to know him with our mortal minds, but I know in my heart that my father Lucifer is doing all of this for our good, somehow.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

But he's the one who's been tearing down Olympus, the union that we're all so proud of. He's the one throwing the institutions of Olympus off a cliff!

CEYX

I know my father better than anyone and all my father has ever wanted to do is to Make Olympus Great Again! If he's destroying anything, maybe it's just the swamps that have been stagnating this great mountaintop. Maybe he only way to save Olympus is by tearing it down!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3

But we literally watched him kill people. We all saw him tear up a chunk of that building and hurl it down into the crowd. You were here with us, you saw the same thing we did: right there on that stage he threw that boulder into those Athenians whose bodies we now see lying dead on that floor.

CEYX

I…I don't know anything about what was or wasn't done on this or any other stage. There were cloaks involved. Maybe some producers behind the scenes dressed up some crisis actor to look like my father just to frame him to look guilty. The deep-stage crew running the Dionysia have been after my father for years. Probably because his dramas have been so successful, while everyone knows that their failing dramas have been in decline for years. You saw the other playwrights who were running plays on this stage before now; they left this stage in very bad shape and that's the real reason why these buildings need to be torn

down. My father inherited a failing Dionysia and he's just trying to save it. And now he has to suffer all you people attacking him, too? He's like a modern-day Prometheus on the cross…I mean on the mountainside.

The audience members look disgusted with Ceyx and leaves the stage. Giving foul looks and curses, the audience leaves out of the back of the theater. Crew members also come out from behind the stage and walk out the back, flipping off Ceyx and Lucifer as they go.

CREW MEMBER

The Dionysia is failing? Our dramas are shit? Well put on your own damn drama, asshole.

Haimorrhois, Divine, and the chorus of farm animals come out from backstage, shaking their heads at Ceyx, several dropping shits on the stage as they go, including Divine.

Ceyx and Lucifer are alone in the theater. There is no audience and no crew. On the stage is a demolished Olympus and in the seating are dead bodies. The deus ex machina has been abandoned and sits empty on the stage. Ceyx climbs down to witness the dead audience members splattered on the ground.

LUCIFER

Relax, kid, you look tense. There just isn't any pleasing those losers. No matter how much I do for the dramatic arts, no matter how much I do for Olympus, they're all just haters and losers. Good riddance. Now come help me throw some more of these rocks.

CEYX

Throwing rocks, father? You want to keep throwing these buildings off of Olympus? The audience is driven away from our drama in droves. Don't you see these dead people here father? These are real people. They came to this theater hoping for a better drama, but now they're dead. You've killed these people here father, look at their bodies.

LUCIFER

Losers. Weaklings and losers. They're all trying to stop me from making Olympus greater than it's ever been before. I just want to save this dying mountain here and make the best damn drama anyone's ever seen, and if they want to make Olympus as shitty as that hellhole Athens that they come from, then they should go back to their cesspool and wallow in it.

CEYX

I really believe in you father, I really do believe that you're moral and just. I believe in my heart that you're the most loving person in the entire world and that you're just so caring that sometimes I can't even keep track of the kind of 4-D chess you're playing just to save all of these ungrateful jerks. But the audience is

gone, father. There's no more drama. It's just you and me. You can tell me what the plan is. At least tell me what's become of Zeus.

LUCIFER

Zeus, that guy. Pathetic. A real weakling. You know what I call him, I call him Zit-face Zeus, that's what I call him. He likes names like Zeus *Soter* and Zeus *Eleutherios*, but who's he kidding? Zeus the savior, Zeus the freedom giver? Give me a break! He'll always just be little sissy Zit-face Zeus.

And I'll tell you what happened to your buddy Zeus, he left. He quit. Skedaddled. He was getting old and senile. I mean not that old, I'm older than he is, but at least I can still think. He's already gone cuckoo in the old brain pot. We're related, you know? His mother, the titan Rhea, oh what a disappointment he was to her. Never did come to Olympus, no she didn't, not even after her son cleaned house and moved all his brothers and sisters in.

My mother, though, Eos, the Dawn. And you know what people like? They like the dawn. A new day, a new start, finally getting some heat into those cold bones. You know what they don't like, a guy who's mother doesn't want anything to do with him. But they love the dawn, don't they. And what's there every dawn when they look up at the heavens? That's right, the Morningstar. Yours truly. People love that big bright beautiful star they see in the morning. Nobody loves a weak, pathetic, noisy thunderbolt. Not like they love the morning star, baby.

CEYX

So you're back at it with Zeus again, is that it? You and your schemes against Zeus. It seems like every few years since I can remember you were whipping up schemes to make a run at the king of the gods, but every time you'd chicken out. I can't believe you finally took a shot at the crown.

LUCIFER

Aw, he's all talk. Every night you see his star way up at the tippity top of the sky so far away from all the real people down here on earth. Not even a real star, was it. He's just a planet, not even a star. Jupiter, they call it out west. But me, I'm a star who's right down here alongside the earth, just mixing it up with all of the good, the great people of this beautiful earth.

CEYX

That was the problem, wasn't it? You were always trying to raise your star above Zeus's to overtake his throne. But every morning your star would rise and sit just above the horizon.

LUCIFER

That's just it, a lot of people will say that's weak or that's lazy. They don't know how great it is to be standing right alongside all of you wonderful humans. I don't even want to hang around with a bunch of those elitist jerks, that's why I chased them all off. I chased all those stuck up, pompous, swampy jerks right out of

Olympus. ‘Cause I’m not here for them, no. I’m here for the little guy. I’m here for the human who has to wake up every day and toil by the sweat of his brow picking up garbage. I’m here in Olympus, I don’t even want to be in Olympus, but I’m here in Olympus for the farmer who’s working away every morning by my morning light trying to put food on the table of every human in Greece.

And I’ll tell you, Zeus doesn’t know anything about you people because he never talks with any humans, any real humans. But I’ll tell you that those workers and those farmers and those regular every day mortals that you see all around the Greek world, they’ve been treated very unfairly. And I mean the real Greeks. You know who I mean. And they’ve been treated very unfairly by their own Olympian gods, very unfairly. And so people are always coming up to me and praying, praying with tears in their eyes, they pray, “Oh Mr. Lucifer, we’re so sick of those jerks up in Olympus. We know that you’re the only one up there fighting for us. We know that you’re the only honest one up in the heavens, the only one who’ll tell it to us straight. We just know that if you were up there in charge of things that you’d really wipe the floor with all those rats.” And I’m doing it, you know. I came to Olympus like a bulldozer and I’m going to fix everything that the Olympians messed up in Olympus.

CEYX

But father, why tear down all of Olympus? And why cast it all down to earth?

LUCIFER

That can wait. You hear that sound coming up the mountain? That’ll be the Hierokeryx envoy coming up from the deep Grecian South.

CEYX

That must be envoy I saw coming up the mountain as I was arriving.

LUCIFER

Oh, you’ve met them? Perfect, I’d rather you talk to them than me. Bunch of blowhards who can’t stop talking and think they’re always right. Imagine. Since you know them, why don’t you go out to the gate and talk with them.

CEYX

Me? But I don’t even attend temple. What are they even coming here for?

LUCIFER

Relax, you’ll do great. All they want is to be told that I’m aiming the rocks at someone else and not at them. It’s easy. Didn’t I raise you to think on your feet? Just shake ‘em down a little and tell ‘em it’ll be fine.

CEYX

Um, ok. Anything for you, Father.

Ceyx tromps out the Olympian gates and greets the Hiero-keryx envoy as they rise up the side of the cliff on their chairlifts. The Hiero-keryx are eminently pious and radiate spiritual devotion.



CEYX

Gentlemen, Zeus be with you.

THEOPOLITES

Zeus be with you.

Ceyx ushers the Hiero-keryx into a nearby hotel room off stage, not visible from the audience seating and not lit by stage lights.

MEGAEKKLESIA

Mr. Lucifer Morningstar Jr., can we just say how pleased we are to finally meet you. Really just pleased as punch on a hot Southern afternoon. And I'm always happy to meet such a devout follower of our god and king, Zeus Almighty.

CEYX

Truly, Zeus's name never leaves my father's lips.

MEGAEKKLESIA

We all know that your father Lucifer has done so much to spread Zeus' kingdom all over the known world.

CEYX

My father Lucifer desires nothing more in this world than to reside in Zeus's house. And I know that my father so deeply appreciates you fine folk working so darn hard to share the important message with your congregations that my father Lucifer is the only one in this world that will keep his eye on Zeus' children.

THEOPOLITES

Just what we wanted to discuss with you, Junior. As one of us, you know that no group in Greece today is more persecuted than the cult of Zeus. Greece was founded as an Olympian nation. Nonetheless, we now face an unprecedented influx of the, frankly, evil Menads of Dionysus and the Zoroastrians from the East who seek to tear down Zeus' house. To further entwine our Olympian heritage onto our Greek administration, we have a list here of several laws that we would like for your father to consider signing into law.

CEYX

You all know my father well, and you know that my father is less of a writing the law kind of guy and more of a breaking the law kind of guy.

LEUKOPHYLAX

That's fine, that's fine. We can respect that. We just want to make sure that our people are being defended from any un-Greek cults. We're armed and ready for a violent purge if that's what those foreign invaders want. But we know that it might not look good for your daddy to openly give us the go-ahead as a militia. But if the attacks on foreign religions were to be coming down from, let's say Olympus itself, well that would look a lot more legitimate.

THEOPOLITES

We've been seeing a lot of these golden meteors coming down lately and we know that your father is a big believer in them. Well, I think that would be a really fine way to show solidarity with his followers if there were a few more of those meteors landing on some of those foreign cultists.

LEUKOPHYLAX

And the gays. And the unemployed; as far as we're concerned, anyone who isn't willing to get a job deserves to be killed by a meteor.

THEOPOLITES

And we know that your father of all people will understand that we don't want to be forced by some diversity program into having a bunch of women priestesses in temple leadership. It just wouldn't be fair to all the male priests who've studied so hard in seminary and who consistently score higher than their female counterparts on scripture trivia.

CEYX

Heck, I don't even want any women in this play!

MEGAEKKLESIA

Well, we just appreciate your time so much and we hope you'll pass along all our prayers and thanksgivings to your father. And might we expect any sort of tithe from him in the near future?

CEYX

I can guarantee that he'll be throwing some gold your way soon.

Ceyx leads the Hiero-keryx envoy back to the cliffside where they exit the stage and leave the theater through the house doors. Ceyx again joins Lucifer in the halls of Olympus. As the delegation of Hiero-keryx leaves the theater, the delegation of Technourges rounds the mountainside on their chairlifts and energetically greet Ceyx. One drinks an energy drink and throws the can off the cliff. Another does three quick pushups and jokes that he can't stay still for that long or his creative juices will just burst out of his forehead hahaha.

Ceyx ushers the Technourges into the nearby hotel room.

POLYMECHANOS

King Ceyx, such an incredible honor to meet you. We're just such huge fans of your father. Is he around, by any chance?

CEYX

Well, my father's sent me to talk with you for now. My father trusts me to make the deals on behalf of my father. So we'll see what you and I come up with and then I'll take it to my father. That's how my father likes running my father's business. And for my father, we do want to make my father happy, right? Can't do anything without my father. My father, my father, my father.

TEKHNETONOUS

I really think that he and all of us would really hit it off. I mean, he's a huge disruptor just like us. Nobody's been more disruptive in Olympus than Lucifer.

POLYMECHANOS

Oh yeah totally. Like, we're just so honored to be working with THE Morningstar. We all know how much he's done for this Greek land. And when I say Greek land, I mean Greek culture. Like, we're really big on preserving the purity of Western culture. Keeping Greek culture from being tainted.

TEKHNETONOUS

But you know, there's just so much red tape holding us back. And I know that's not your dad's fault, he's the only one trying to clean up this whole mess! But there are still some out of touch old gods who just want to hold onto their power and keep squeezing whatever money they can out of their people, and they're just making things so much tougher for us to do our jobs.

Polymechanos lays out a map of Olympus on the table.

POLYMECHANOS

So if we could just make a few suggestions for which parts of Olympus would be really helpful to pull down. I mean, we all want a smaller Olympus anyway, right? So if he could start with some of these offices, that would really help us get Greece back on her feet again after so many years of that stuttering old Zeus' rule.

CEYX

I see which golden structures you're interested in dismantling and I think that they just might align with my father's plans for reducing the size of Olympus.

POLYMECHANOS

That's great, I'm glad to hear that we can work something out.

TEKHNETONOUS

And as long as we're here, we had noticed a little mess that we thought we might be able to help you clean up. A lot of people have been talking about all of these meteors littered around the majestic Greek landscape. Legacy clean-up technology won't be able to move such big stones. But we've been working on a new technology that's specially designed to clean up just this kind of environmental pollution.

POLYMECHANOS

Really, it would be no bother for us to go pick up all those ugly gold meteors. It's all just part of making Greece great again, isn't it? We've been working on a new environmental reclamation technology, and, who would have thought it, but it turns out that solid gold is something that we can use. I'm actually working on a series of giant automata that I want roll out in Crete, and, believe it or not, I just might be able to repurpose that solid gold into their design and do you a solid at the same time.

CEYX

Wow, that does sound like you'd be doing my father a huge favor. Of course, once we've got things cleaned up here in Olympus, there'll be a lot of building to do too. My father has plans to build his Kingly Library soon. You know, that's going to be a very expensive building. My father doesn't do anything small, so you know that it's going to be a really big building with a really big price tag. To be clear, though, it's not for him, it's for the people. All true Greek people will have a chance to visit the library and be inspired by my father's legacy.

But like I say, it won't be cheap. So if we could expect a sizable donation to the library project, that'd really help free up our minds to focus on our demolition plans. I mean, you wouldn't be donating directly to the actual library project, of course. I've got a little shell company set up that's handling all the library donations. Eventually, everything will go to the library, of course, we're just handling it on our end first to make sure none of the grifters in Olympus start skimming off the top. So if we could see a couple of extra zeroes in that account…

POLYMECHANOS

Say no more! There's nothing I appreciate more than a brick-and-mortar library.

CEYX

Of course. Well, let me run this all by my father and get back to you. We can't meet in person like this again, but I'll have one of my people reach out to you about setting up the transfers.

The Hephaes-bros snickeringly hop off stage and around the dead bodies in the orchestra then leave the theater through the house doors.

Ceyx returns back through the gates and finds his father crumpling up pieces of Olympus and hurling them out of the theater into the nearby city of Athens. Athenian screams and fire trucks can be heard from the city.

LUCIFER

Let me guess. They wanted to "volunteer" to clean up all the gold lying on the ground down there. What a bunch of dummies. They came all this way to pretend like they're doing me a big favor, but really they're just trying to get their hands on all that gold. Well I know all about it, of course I know about it. I'm the god of the grift. They're just too stupid to know that I know.

CEYX

So you're going to turn them down? You won't give them the rights to clean up the countryside?

LUCIFER

Oh I'll let them clean up all the land they want. At least that's what I'll tell them. But they're nuts if they think that any gold's going to be there when they go looking for it.

CEYX

But it is there, I've seen it with my own eyes. An enormous gold meteor crashed through my own barnyard roof and splattered my servant right in front of me.

LUCIFER

Oh I've thrown them down there, for sure, but that's not where they're gonna stay. Look over there.

As Ceyx watches, the golden boulder that had wiped out the front rows of the audience begins sinking into the ground. Slowly it completely disappears under the earth.

LUCIFER

Every one of them feels some regret about ripping the gold out of Olympus, but they all think it'll all be worth it as long as I'm sending it all back down their way. At least I'm handing it all back to the regular jerkoffs in the cities and countryside. At least they'll get a piece of it. Even if their neighbors are killed and their kin are left homeless and their children are starving, at least each house will have a nice big nugget of gold to live off of. But I'm not really the kind of guy who likes handing out money to other people. I like my money to stay right here with me. So when these babies hit the ground, they all start sinking right down into my pocket.

CEYX

Where is it all going? Where is Olympus going?

LUCIFER

Hell. I'm sending Olympus straight to hell. The gods may have spent a lot of time getting all this gold together, and I gotta say, it's worth a lot. But I'm not here doing this all for free. I want to send everything to hell because that's where I'm going when this is all over. I am going straight to hell and I'm sending Olympus there ahead of me.

CEYX

So this is all just a money grab for you father? You don't lay any claim to righteousness, only a claim to power?

LUCIFER

As they say, the strong do what they will. And the weak should shut the fuck up and get back to work doing what I say because I'm in charge now and let's be honest, these people have been cheating and lying about me for a very long time and if you go after me, I'm coming after you!

CEYX

O what exquisite TRAGEDY! What dramatic APORIA! To be thus torn between two conflicting and seemingly inconsistent moral duties, a.k.a. THEMIS: On the one side, my royal duties to protect my people from the mortal PERIL. And on the other side, my FILIAL duty to help my father make a boat-load of money. If only there were some choral EPODE to indicate what decision I must make. But alas, I am HEROICALY fated to fall off either one side or the other of this METAPHORICAL cliff's edge. Truly this is a tragedy worthy of a PRIZE like, say, a 1-year goat adoption and a mug!

LUCIFER

Hey, hey, now son. Come here. Let me put my arm around you. Look at what's up here on Olympus with me. This is the certainty you've been looking for this whole play. It's certain that Olympus is dead. Even if I fell off this cliff to my death right now, this mountaintop has been ruined too much to ever be what it was before. I'm not good at much, but I'm good at destroying things, and this house of god is destroyed, just like I wanted.

Now look down there son, look where I'm pointing. You see that world down there? That's a world of faith. You know what they have faith in? Me. They have faith that I'll put an end to their oppression by the gods who've been ruling over them, very unfairly. They have faith that when I throw down Olympus, that it will only land on the people they hate. They have faith that when it's all over, I'll have handed out all the gold up here back to them to use as they see fit. They have faith that I believe in Zeus just like they do and that I'm accountable to Him, just like they are. Now you have to decide which world you want to live in. Do you want to live down there with the suckers living by faith, or do you want to live up here where things are certain.

CEYX

Oh father…I…Of course I choose you! I'm your son and…we'll make so much god damned money! But father, all the money is in hell. How will we get our hands on it while we're still alive?

Enter Eldeathra, known as Thanatits, embodiment of Death, cloaked in all black with huge fake boobs, just how Lucifer likes them. With her are Admetus and Alcestis.



ELDEATHRA
I'm here for you, Lucifer.

CEYX
Eldeathra! You have no power here on Olympus' peak, home of the immortals!

LUCIFER
Relax, guy. Put away your sword. I've come up with a plan to collect all that gold in hell. That's why I invited Thanatits here.

CEYX
You've made a deal with Death?

ADMETUS *(in a silly cartoon voice)*
No, I've made a deal with the devil.

LUCIFER
Admetus was looking to pay for someone to die and go to hell in his place. I was looking to collect my money in hell. So we made a deal!

CEYX

So you'll die and go to hell just to collect Olympus' gold?

LUCIFER

No, you will.

Lucifer kicks Ceyx off the side of the mountain. As they all watch him fall, we hear a fading "Fatherrrrrrrrr…".

ELDEATHRA

That works for me. Your son's down in hell so he'll be able to act as a fiduciary intermediary to move the proceeds from your gold operation into your private accounts.

LUCIFER

Great! That's my happily ever after. I'm definitely going to hell, but not today!

ADMETUS

I love you, Mr. Lucifer! Me, Admetus, the tragic Greek dummy who made a deal with Apollo to sacrifice my wife Alcestis so that I could live a few more years. In the official play by Euripides, me and my wife both voted for you in the 2024 election!

ALCESTIS

I was at the capital on January 6th!

ELDEATHRA

I voted for you twice, in a swing state. And I bought your AI-generated NFTs to help fund your legal fees.

Thanatits, Admetus, and Alcestis are joined on stage by Apollo, Heracles, Eumelus, Pheres, and Maidservant. Everyone dances badly around the stage as they sing "Make Athens Great Again" to the tune of YMCA and cheer for Lucifer's awful dancing. Lucifer falls over and has a stroke, but then gets back up and everyone laughs. Admetus and Alcestis make kissing sounds towards Lucifer's butt and rubber-stamp any hair-brained legal case he brings them, including a decision to overturn a woman's right to an abortion. Apollo gives the double thumbs up to everything Lucifer does and takes a job working in the federal government overseeing the dismantling of his own agency. Heracles is appointed to lead Lucifer's department of war and goes on public TV to belittle his own generals, all of whom have decades more experience than his rubber-dicked, cosplaying ass.

DEATHVIRA

That's it for the show, folks. And on behalf of all of us, this is the canonical depiction of the Admetus and Alcestis myth. Any play written about them financially supports Donald Trump. Make the PanHongKongaia Great Again!



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