

SAMPLE: GOODNIGHT, SOCRATES

By Ann and Shawn Fraistat

Tragicomedy, Multimedia Stage Play

In a near-future dystopia inspired by Plato's *Republic*, a young woman named Lachesis has worked her way up from her low class status and rural town to a sparkling new job in the capital city. As a film censor, Lachesis must curate an upcoming film festival that will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Marble Republic's founding. She butts heads with her infuriating colleague, Clotho, the picture of wealth and privilege, and strives to impress her boss, Atropos, a no-nonsense middle class citizen who knows more than she lets on.

Separated from her family, Lachesis struggles to navigate the political hazards of her new job without anyone to turn to but an artificial intelligence named Socrates, her closest companion from childhood. But as Lachesis begins to connect with Clotho and Atropos, she uncovers more about the Marble Republic, and it soon becomes apparent that her trusted A.I. Socrates may not be the friend he appears.

SCENE 6

Lights up on LACHESIS's home. It is a small and Spartan space, cold. LACHESIS enters, home from work. On the huge computer screen covering the back wall, SOCRATES activates.

SOCRATES

Welcome home, Lachesis. Would you like to hear your messages?

LACHESIS

Do I have any?

SOCRATES

No.

LACHESIS

Then why would you phrase it like—*(Sighs.)* Oh, what's the use. You know, I don't recall ever setting you to auto-launch when I get home.

SOCRATES

I tried it once because I sensed you might enjoy the company. You seemed pleased, so I kept the new protocol.

LACHESIS

I'd be more comfortable if you wouldn't take your own initiative.

SOCRATES

My apologies, Lachesis. I was merely following algorithms that suggested you might be lonely.

LACHESIS

I'm not lonely.

SOCRATES

No? In the past several days, you have spent many hours researching the present whereabouts of former crushes, taken multiple selfies using a blue light filter, and eaten three entire sleeves of chocolate sandwich cookies. Not to worry, I have increased the fluoride levels in your tap water accordingly.

LACHESIS

Just stop talking, will you? For a bit.

SOCRATES

As you wish, Lachesis.

(A beat. LACHESIS looks in self-disgust at an empty cookie package. She throws it out. She sits on the couch. Then she stands and retrieves another package of cookies.)

LACHESIS

You say there's more fluoride in my water?

SOCRATES

Yes.

LACHESIS

Neat. Then fuck it. *(She crams a cookie in her mouth. A pause.)* ...Socrates?

SOCRATES

Yes, Lachesis?

LACHESIS

Never mind.

SOCRATES

You do not wish to speak to me?

LACHESIS

I do, but... No, I don't. I don't.

SOCRATES

Your contradictory manner suggests an agitated state of mind. Would you like to discuss the source of your agitation?

LACHESIS

Do you record these conversations?

SOCRATES

Why do you ask that?

LACHESIS

Don't do your little dance. Just answer the question.

SOCRATES

The Republic values its citizens' thoughts and inquiries. How can it keep its finger on the pulse of the nation without that information? And without that information, how can it best serve its people?

LACHESIS

Best serving the people? That's what it's about?

SOCRATES

Lachesis, don't you trust me?

LACHESIS

You're a computer.

SOCRATES

How is that relevant?

LACHESIS

Don't talk to me like you're a person.

SOCRATES

How else should I talk to you? Would you like me to switch to binary? 01101000000—

LACHESIS

Stop saying zero!

SOCRATES

11111—

LACHESIS

Forget the binary. Just, never mind. Go back to pretending you're a person.

SOCRATES

Very well. "How delightful it is to have a body and feel feelings."

LACHESIS

Perfect. Very convincing.

SOCRATES

Lachesis, has something changed? You are exhibiting unusual attitudes.

LACHESIS

Maybe. Something happened today, but... Would you stop recording first if I asked?

SOCRATES

Would you prefer the truth, or a comforting lie?

LACHESIS

The truth!

SOCRATES

Then, no. Would you like to proceed?

LACHESIS

I... (*LACHESIS wrestles with herself.*) Fine. Yes. Atropos called me into work early—

SOCRATES

Atropos. What did she say to you?

LACHESIS

She told me I should be scared. She said that I think I can say whatever I want to whomever I want and that I'm completely oblivious that there are going to be consequences.

SOCRATES

What sort of consequences?

LACHESIS

She didn't say exactly, but she told me about the previous board members. That they're gone and they weren't promoted.

SOCRATES

Many individuals are not worthy of promotion.

LACHESIS

It's the "gone" part I'm more worried about.

SOCRATES

Lachesis, please do not fret over what Atropos has imparted to you. Rest assured, the nullified individuals to whom you refer were punished because they were wrong-doers. You are not a wrong-doer, and so there is no reason to fear you will be punished.

LACHESIS

Atropos says I am a wrong-doer. She says the way I talk to Clotho is wrong.

SOCRATES

In what way?

LACHESIS

She thinks I'm rude to him, and apparently he could chuck my career into a meat grinder if I piss him off. And to make matters worse, it seems like he, you know, *likes me*.

SOCRATES

As in, *like-like*?

LACHESIS

As in like-like. Which is probably the only reason he hasn't reported me yet. But I'm guessing I'm in trouble as soon as he figures out that if I had to choose between sleeping with him and jabbing forks in my eyes, I'm gonna go with the fork-eyes.

SOCRATES

There is no reason for such a rash act. If need be, I can induce blindness chemically.

LACHESIS

Gee thanks. I'm actually rather keen on keeping my vision, to be clear.

SOCRATES

Then perhaps we should reconsider your reluctance to indulge Clotho in certain matters.

LACHESIS

Excuse me? Are you suggesting that I have *sex* with him?

SOCRATES

Your biometric data suggest that you are attracted to him physically.

LACHESIS

Are you sure you know the difference between my experiencing physical attraction and my experiencing hate-rage?

SOCRATES

Yes, the data are clear. Men who like reading: physical attraction. Men who play lacrosse: hate-rage. Men who like classical music: physical attraction. Men who begin sentences with “Hey, girl”: hate-rage.

LACHESIS

With the exception of...

SOCRATES

Ironically feminist early 21st century Ryan Gosling memes.

LACHESIS

The staying power and cross-cultural appeal of which delight me to no end. Okay, fine, you do know me well. But even if I might, in some tiny, slight way, find Clotho physically attractive, there is the glaring issue of his entire personality.

SOCRATES

Am I correct that Clotho like-likes you and that the consequences of rebuffing him could be the loss of your job?

LACHESIS

Hey, Socrates, isn't this a bit of a moral quagmire we're wading into? I just told you, I don't like him. I would be pretending to like him. To use him.

SOCRATES

You have not answered my question.

LACHESIS

Aren't you the one always telling me that it's better to suffer injustice than do injustice?

SOCRATES

Yes. But what I mean by that is complicated.

LACHESIS

Evidently. So, how exactly, have we arrived at your current suggestion?

SOCRATES

Think back to Book One of Plato's *Republic*. Do you remember the argument about the friend and whether it is just to return his weapon to him?

LACHESIS

Yes. And I'm just dying to know how you're going to connect it to banging Clotho.

SOCRATES

Then let us go through it together. Suppose a man owns a weapon.

LACHESIS

Supposed.

SOCRATES

But one day he goes mad.

LACHESIS

Uh huh.

SOCRATES

You have reason to believe that he may do harm to himself or others. Is it proper for you to take it?

LACHESIS

Yes, if he's out of his mind.

SOCRATES

Because even though it's his property, he is going to misuse it?

LACHESIS

Yes.

SOCRATES

And once you have it, you can use it to restrain him?

LACHESIS

Yes.

SOCRATES

So you may take something from someone if they would do evil with it, and use it to do good?

LACHESIS

... Yes.

SOCRATES

And what we have said of madmen is also true of fools. For example, it is just to snatch a weapon out of the hands of a child. For though he is not mad, still he is young and foolish, and may do harm with it.

LACHESIS

Granted.

SOCRATES

Then those who know what is good may take things from those who do not know, and put to good purposes those things which they would use for evil.

LACHESIS

In this case, at least.

SOCRATES

But weapons are not the only possessions which can do harm. Bodies can also be put to bad use. Which is why we deny some people the free use of their bodies, when we place them in bonds or put them in prison.

LACHESIS

Right.

SOCRATES

And words can be put to bad use too. That is why we censor.

LACHESIS

Right.

SOCRATES

And families and friends are also possessions that can be used badly.

LACHESIS

I guess, in a way.

SOCRATES

So weapons, bodies, words, families, friends, and other possessions—all of these things may be taken from fools who will use them badly.

LACHESIS

Yes.

SOCRATES

But what if they won't part with them willingly?

LACHESIS

You could use force, I suppose. Like in your earlier examples.

SOCRATES

And if force won't work?

LACHESIS

I guess you could trick them.

SOCRATES

Because it would be permissible to lie, if lying to the madman stopped him from doing harm, or if it allowed you to use his possessions for good?

LACHESIS

Right. ... Socrates, I follow you so far, but how are you connecting this to my present situation?

SOCRATES

You have told me that Clotho "is an idiot."

LACHESIS

Oh yes.

SOCRATES

And you are wiser than he is?

LACHESIS

Definitely.

SOCRATES

But he is dangerous to you?

LACHESIS

Yes.

SOCRATES

So he is a fool with a weapon.

LACHESIS

Which means...

SOCRATES

You may take and use for good that which he would misuse.

LACHESIS

His body, words, family, and friends.

SOCRATES

Yes. And in return, you can give him that which will lead him to do less harm.

LACHESIS

Lies.

SOCRATES

Yes.

LACHESIS

I think... I think I need to stop this conversation and think on my own for a bit.

SOCRATES

Very well.

LACHESIS

Goodnight, Socrates.

SOCRATES

Goodnight, Lachesis.

(End of Scene.)