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## Socrates' Class: A One-Act Play

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[As the play begins, the curtain is closed. Before it are two young adults, MICHAEL and JUDY. MICHAEL is eagerly opening a letter, and is suddenly jubilant.]

MICHAEL: Oh, wow, I've been accepted to law school, Judy!

JUDY: Oh, how wonderful! I'm so happy for you, Michael! Which one?

MICHAEL: Nova!

JUDY: Oh, that is so fantastic! That's really great! You must be so excited! (pause) Where is it?

MICHAEL: Mmm, let's see . . . (He looks over the envelope) It must say somewhere . . . Ah, there it is: Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

JUDY: (embracing him) Oh, I'm so happy!

[They freeze, as ROD SERLING enters.]

ROD

SERLING: A simple letter indicating that the recipient has been accepted to law school—ordinarily an occasion of great joyousness and celebration, and in all other respects a relatively common occurrence; but, for one Michael Balk, a ticket for a most uncommon journey—a journey into a region neither of sight nor sound, but one of mind—a journey . . . into the Twilight Zone.

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\* © 1993 Marc Rohr. Marc Rohr is a professor of law at Nova University's Shepard Broad Law Center. "Socrates' Class" was originally performed in 1980 as part of the annual "Faculty Roast" at Nova Law School, and was performed again in 1982 and 1985. The role of Socrates has always been played by Professor Bruce Rogow.

[The familiar "Twilight Zone" theme music is heard, as the stage darkens. The lights return, and JUDY, while retreating into the wings, is seen waving goodbye to MICHAEL as he sets out for law school. Suddenly, ominous music and wildly flickering lights suggest a storm!]

MICHAEL: Oh, no! A tornado!

[The storm passes, and he finds himself on the ground. Slowly, somewhat bewildered, he looks around.]

I don't think I'm in California anymore!

[He then wanders off stage in a daze. The curtains open, revealing that we are in ancient Greece. We can tell because people are dressed in togas and sitting on simple benches. The teacher's chair, in the center, is vacant. Those present are, at left, PLATO and ZORBA, and, off to the right, AQUARIUS.]

PLATO: Boy, am I sick of this class! I'm not sure I can stand another session of this!

ZORBA: I feel the same way. I am so lost in here! What I know about Greek Jurisdiction could be written on a single drachma.

PLATO: Well, that's what you get for taking a course with the great Professor Socrates! Where is he, anyway? The sands of time are trickling away.

ZORBA: He's probably up on Mount Olympus, talking to the gods. Or maybe he's advising the Oracle at Delphi.

PLATO: You got any notes in this class?

ZORBA: Nothing, except for the questions.

PLATO: I don't even write them down anymore. He just doesn't *tell* you anything, you know? Just questions all the time.

ZORBA: (nodding) Don't complain. I had him for Greek Pro, too.

PLATO: All the other teachers lecture. Just this guy has to ask *questions* all the time.

ZORBA: The man's got his own method.

PLATO: The only law professor in Greece who teaches this way, and we have to get stuck with him. I am so *out* of it in here. This stuff is Egyptian to me.

ZORBA: Well, it'll be over soon, and we'll be long gone from here.

PLATO: Yeah, that's true. You got any plans for after graduation?

ZORBA: Yeah, I'm thinking of joining a small piracy firm over in Carthage. How about yourself?

PLATO: I've been interviewing with some of the big firms in Athens. I'm hoping for an offer from Hector, Achilles & Hector . . .

ZORBA: Oh, well, of course—you're on Law Slab . . . Hey, what's the going rate in Athens these days, anyway?

PLATO: 10 to 12 thousand drachmas, depending on the firm.

ZORBA: That's great! Gosh, I won't get anywhere near that much in Carthage.

PLATO: Well, you don't have the taxes in Carthage that you have in Athens. And the cost of living is so much lower . . .

ZORBA: That's true.

PLATO: Gosh, how do you compare the cost of living in Carthage to the cost of living in Athens?

AQUARIUS: Hey, will you guys give me a break? Money, money, money—that's all you ever talk about.

PLATO and ZORBA: Well, *excuse* us.

PLATO: Don't pay any attention to him; he's just jealous. He'll be lucky to get a job with the GCLU or the Balkan Club or something.

[MICHAEL wanders in, from right, still in a daze and quite bewildered.]

MICHAEL: Where am I?

AQUARIUS: Greek Jur., man.

MICHAEL: "Greek Jur.?" What is that?

AQUARIUS: What are you, Socrates the second? Have a seat and find out, man.

[MICHAEL sits.]

PLATO: Yeah, *maybe* he'll find out. If you find out what's going on in here, you can explain it to me.

ZORBA: Hey, where'd you get those funny clothes, brother? Are you from Troy?

MICHAEL: No, I'm from California.

PLATO: California? Is that near Macedonia?

MICHAEL: I don't think so. Listen, I'm very confused. I was on my way to law school, and I seem to have gotten lost along the way.

ZORBA: Well, this *is* law school.

AQUARIUS: You're *here*, man.

MICHAEL: Oh, good. I didn't recognize the name of the course, "Greek Jur." I don't think I have the right book.

PLATO: Don't worry about that. It won't make any difference.

ZORBA: Gentlemen, I think I hear our distinguished professor arriving—yep, here he comes.

[Enter SOCRATES, rushing to the center, speaking as he walks.]

SOCRATES: Sorry, I'm late, gentlemen. I was arguing a motion in the Southern District of Sparta. Okay, I have an announcement to make. There'll be a meeting next week of all those interested in starting a legal fraternity; it's going to be called PDP.

PLATO: What's PDP?

SOCRATES: Those are English letters, Plato.

ZORBA: What's a "fraternity?"

SOCRATES: Zorba, it's a group of friends who get together to drink ouzo. At any rate, gentlemen, let's proceed: I believe our topic for today is Divine Intervention, the extraordinary process by which a judge's decision is appealed to the gods. Now then, uh, Plato [PLATO groans], under what circumstances should a god intervene in a contract dispute between two mortals? Suppose a simple contract for the sale of land, and the seller refuses to convey the land to the buyer. Divine intervention? Yes or no?

Ah, but just a moment—I see we have a new student in the class. What's your name, young man?

MICHAEL: Michael, sir.

SOCRATES: Michael? Well, that's an unusual name. And your mode of dress is unusual, too. Where are you from?

MICHAEL: California, sir.

SOCRATES: California? Is that near Thrace? or Corinth?

MICHAEL: No, it's not near any of those places. Hasn't *anyone* here ever heard of California?

AQUARIUS: Perhaps California is simply a state of mind, Michael.

ZORBA: None of us has ever been outside of Greece.

MICHAEL: Greece? Is that where I am? Oh, no! Hey, I've got to go home. How can I get home from here?

SOCRATES: That's a good question. How *can* you get home from here?

MICHAEL: That's what I just asked *you*.

SOCRATES: (shaking his head) That's not the way it works here, Michael. Plato, how do *you* think Michael can get home from here?

PLATO: He could walk, I guess.

SOCRATES: Interesting suggestion. Could you walk?

MICHAEL: But how far and in which direction?

SOCRATES: Ah, good points. How far and in which direction, Zorba?

ZORBA: In the direction from which he came?

SOCRATES: But how far must he walk? Aquarius?

AQUARIUS: As far as he came to get here?

PLATO: (to ZORBA) Is this the class? Are we supposed to be writing this down?

[ZORBA shrugs.]

SOCRATES: So, my friend, you must go as far as you came and in the opposite direction. Once again, we see how difficult problems are solved through the use of probing questions.

[PLATO and ZORBA, hearing this, glance at each other anxiously and immediately begin taking notes.]

MICHAEL: But which direction did I come from?

SOCRATES: Ah, surely *you* must know that. [MICHAEL shakes his head.] Think! How did you get here? Did you walk?

MICHAEL: No.

SOCRATES: Then did you ride?

MICHAEL: No.

SOCRATES: You were dragged by a chariot?

MICHAEL: No.

SOCRATES: He did not walk, did not ride, and was not dragged by a chariot. How did he come to be here, then?

AQUARIUS: Did you drop from the sky?

MICHAEL: I think I did.

SOCRATES: Dropped from the sky? But how can it come to pass, that a man should drop from the sky? What must be true, Plato, for a man to fall from the sky?

PLATO: If a man falls from the sky, then it must be true that the man . . . was previously *in* the sky.

SOCRATES: But how could a man be in the sky, Zorba?

ZORBA: Uhh . . . for a man to be in the sky, the man would have to be . . . a bird!

PLATO: Is this gonna be on the Final?

SOCRATES: Is Michael a bird, then? . . . Think! What are the criteria for being a bird? What are the three tests? [Aquarius raises his hand.] Aquarius?



SOCRATES: Wings, a beak, yes . . . and what's the third requirement?  
Plato?

PLATO: Intent!

SOCRATES: Right! Of course . . . intent!

ZORBA: Is that the Athenian rule?

[SOCRATES waves the question away.]

SOCRATES: So, Aquarius, is Michael a bird?

[AQUARIUS looks MICHAEL over carefully.]

AQUARIUS: I see no wings, Socrates.

SOCRATES: And therefore?

AQUARIUS: And therefore he is not a bird.

ZORBA: What about intent?

PLATO: No, you need all *three*!

ZORBA: Oh.

SOCRATES: And if a man comes from the sky, and is not a bird, then  
what are we to conclude?

[All pause and reflect for a second. Then, in unison, the three students  
shout: "He's a god!" and fall to their knees, bowing toward MICHAEL.]

MICHAEL: (taken aback) A god?

SOCRATES: You must be. My method never fails.

[JUDY enters, in a toga.]

JUDY: Excuse me, Socrates. The Colossus of Rhodes is waiting to  
see you, and he says it's urgent.

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[MICHAEL jumps to his feet, staring at JUDY in disbelief.]

SOCRATES: Well, he'll have to wait until class is over.

MICHAEL: Judy? Can it be? Is it you? How did you get here?

JUDY: (serenely) My name is Clytemnestra.

MICHAEL: (crestfallen) Oh, . . . I'm sorry. I could have sworn . . .

[He turns away.]

JUDY: (gazing at MICHAEL) Socrates, do you believe in retroactive reincarnation?

SOCRATES: I don't know, but it sounds unconstitutional. Why?

JUDY: That young man. He's divine.

SOCRATES: Yes, he's a god.

JUDY: A God? [She rushes to MICHAEL and bows to him.] Oh, forgive me, O exalted one! I did not recognize you!

SOCRATES: But, he seems to insist on being mortal.

[MICHAEL turns, and JUDY rises. They gaze at each other intently.]

MICHAEL: No, actually, I've reconsidered.

SOCRATES: I thought you would. So, now that we have identified him as a god, how do we get him back to California? Plato?

[PLATO groans.]

MICHAEL: Actually, that's quite all right. I think I'll be staying.

SOCRATES: Ah, staying, are you? That raises another fascinating question: Is this problem moot? Zorba?

[ZORBA groans. All stand in tableau as ROD SERLING reappears.]

ROD

SERLING: One of the few known instances in which a law student confronted Socrates and came out ahead . . . occurred somewhere between the past and the present . . . between ancient Greece and modern-day California . . . in the very center of the high cerebral plain known as . . . the Twilight Zone.

[Theme music and lights-out.]