

VOLTAIRE

SOCRATES

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Socrates

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Voltaire

Socrates

CHARACTERS:

SOCRATES

ANITUS, High Priest

MELITUS, Athenian Judge

XANTIPPE, Wife of Socrates

AGLAEA, a young Athenian girl raised by Socrates

SOPHRONINE, a young Athenian boy raised by Socrates

DRIXA, a merchant woman attached to Anitus

TERPANDRE, attached to Anitus

ACROS, attached to Anitus

JUDGES

DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES

NONOTI, a pedant protected by Anitus

BERTIOS, another

CHOMOS, another

ACT I

ANITUS: My dear confidants, my dear agents, you know how much money I made you during the last festival of Ceres. I'm getting married and I hope you will do your duty on this grand occasion.

DRIXA: Yes, without doubt, Milord, since you are going to make us earn yet more.

ANITUS: Madame Drixa, I must have two beautiful Persian rugs. You, Terpandre, of you I only ask two large silver candelabra. And of you, Acros, a half dozen dresses of silk embroidered with gold.

TERPANDRE: That's a bit much; but Milord there's nothing I won't do to deserve your holy protection.

ANITUS: You will regain all that a hundred fold. It's the best way to deserve the favors of the gods and goddesses. Give much and you will receive much; and especially don't fail to arouse the people against all the people of quality who do not vow enough, and who do not present offerings.

ACROS: We will never fail in that; it's too sacred a duty not to be faithful to it.

ANITUS: Go, my dear friends. May the gods keep you in these sentiments, so pious and just! And count on prospering, yourselves, your children and your grandchildren.

TERPANDRE:

We are sure of that because you said it.

(Exit Terpandre and Acros)

ANITUS: Well, my dear Madame Drixa, I think you don't find it ill that I am espousing Aglaea; but I don't love you any less. We will live together as usual.

DRIXA: Oh! Milord, I am not jealous; and since business is going so well I am very satisfied. Since I have the honor of being one of your mistresses, I have enjoyed great consideration in Athens. If you love Aglaea, I love the young Sophronine. And Xantippe, the wife of Socrates has promised to give him to me in marriage. You will still have the same rights over me. I am only annoyed that this young man may be raised by that villainous Socrates, and that Aglaea may yet be in his clutches. They must be gotten out of them as quickly as possible. Xantippe will be enchanted to be rid of them. The handsome Sophronine and the beautiful Aglaea are very ill in Socrates hands.

ANITUS: I really flatter myself, my dear Madame Drixa, that Melitus and I will ruin that dangerous man, who preaches nothing but virtue and divinity and who has dared to mock certain intrigues that happened at the Mysteries of Ceres. But Socrates is the tutor of Aglaea. Agathon, Aglaea's father, they say has left her great wealth. Aglaea is adorable. I idolize Aglaea. I must marry Aglaea and I must deal tactfully with Socrates while waiting to hang him.

DRIXA: Deal tactfully with Socrates in order that I may have my young man. But why did Agathon allow his daughter into the clutches of that old, flat nosed Socrates, that insufferable fault-finder who corrupts the young and prevents them from frequenting courtesans and the holy mysteries?

ANITUS: Agathon was infatuated with the same principles. He was one of those sober and serious types who have different morals from ours; who are from another country, and who are our sworn enemies, who think they've fulfilled all their duties when they've adored divinity, helped humanity, cultivated friendship and studied philosophy; one of those folks who insolently pretend that the gods have not inscribed the future in the liver of an ox; one of those pitiless dialecticians who find fault with priests for sacrificing their daughters or spending the night with them, as needs be. You feel they are monsters fit only to be choked. If there were only five or six sages in Athens who had as much credit as he, that would be enough to deprive me of most of my income and honors.

DRIXA:

The Devil! Now that's really serious.

ANITUS: While waiting to strangle him, I am going to speak with him under the porticoes and conclude this business with him about my marriage.

DRIXA: Here he is: you do him too much honor. I am going to leave you and I am going to speak about my young man to Xantippe.

ANITUS:

The gods accompany you, my darling Drixa. Serve them always and beware of believing in only one God, and don't forget my two beautiful Persian rugs.

(Enter Socrates)

Eh! Hello, my dear Socrates, the favorite of the gods and the wisest of mortals. I feel I am raised above myself every time I see you and in you, I respect Human Nature.

SOCRATES: I am a simple man destitute of sciences and full of weakness like the rest. It's much if you support me.

ANITUS: Support you! I admire you; I would like to resemble you if it were possible. And it is in order to be a more frequent witness to your virtues, to hear your lessons more often, that I wish to marry your beautiful pupil Aglaea whose destiny depends on you.

SOCRATES: It's true that her father, Agathon, who was my friend, that is to say much more than just a relative, confided to me by his will this amiable and virtuous orphan.

ANITUS:

With considerable riches? For they say it's the best part of Athens.

SOCRATES: On that subject, I can give you no enlightenment; her father, that kind friend whose wishes are sacred to me, forbade me by that same will, to divulge the condition of his daughter's fortune.

ANITUS:

That respect for the last wishes of a friend, and that discretion are worthy of your beautiful soul. But people know well enough that

Agathon was a rich man.

SOCRATES:

He deserved to be, if riches are a favor of the Supreme Being.

ANITUS: They say that a little hare-brain named Sophronine, is paying court to her on account of her fortune. But I am persuaded that you will show the door to such a character, and that a man like me won't have a rival.

SOCRATES: I know what I must think of a man like you: but it's not for me to obstruct Aglaea's feelings. I serve her as her father; I am not her master. She must dispose of her heart. I regard constraint as a crime. Speak to her: If she listens to your propositions, I will consent to her will.

ANITUS: I've already got the consent of Xantippe, your wife; without doubt she is informed of Aglaea's feelings; so I regard the thing as done.

SOCRATES:

I cannot regard things as done until they are.

(Aglaea enters)

Come beautiful Aglaea, come decide your fate. Here's a gentleman, priest of high rank, the leading priest in Athens, who offers himself to be your spouse. I leave you complete liberty to explain things with him. That liberty will not be constrained by my presence. Whatever choice you make I will approve. Xantippe will prepare everything for your wedding.

(Socrates leaves)

AGLAEA:

Ah, generous Socrates it's with great regret I see you leave.

ANITUS:

It seems, amiable Aglaea, that you have great confidence in the good Socrates.

AGLAEA:

I owe it to him; he's serving as my father and he forms my soul.

ANITUS:

Well! If he directs your feelings, could you tell me what you think of Ceres, of Cybele, of Venus?

AGLAEA:

Alas! I will; whatever you wish.

ANITUS:

That's well said: you will also do what I wish.

AGLAEA:

No. That's much different from the other.

ANITUS: You see that the wise Socrates consents to our union. Xantippe, his wife, presses for this marriage. You know what feelings you have inspired in me. You know my rank and my reputation. You see that my happiness and perhaps yours depends on a word from your mouth.

AGLAEA: I am going to respond to you with the truth which that great man who just left here instructed me never to dissemble, and with the liberty that he left me. I respect your dignity; I know little of your person and I cannot give myself to you.

ANITUS:

You cannot! You who are free! Ah, Aglaea, you don't wish it then?

AGLAEA:

It's true that I don't wish it.

ANITUS: Are you really aware of the affront you are giving me? I see very clearly that Socrates has betrayed me. It's he who is dictating your response. It's he who is giving preference to this young Sophronine, to my unworthy rival, to that impious —

AGLAEA: Sophronine is not impious; he's been attached to him since childhood. Socrates serves as a father to him as to me. Sophronine is full of grace and virtue. I love him and I am loved by him. He clings only to me to be his wife. But I will no more have him than you.

ANITUS: All that you tell me astonishes me. What! You dare to admit to me that you love Sophronine?

AGLAEA:

Yes, I dare confess to you because nothing is more true.

ANITUS:

And when he demands that you be happy with him, you refuse his hand?

AGLAEA:

Again, nothing is more true.

ANITUS: Doubtless it's fear of displeasing me that delays your engagement to him?

AGLAEA: Assuredly no. Never having sought to please you, I do not at all fear displeasing you.

ANITUS:

Then you fear to offend the gods by preferring a profane man like this

Sophronine to a minister of the altars?

AGLAEA: Not at all; I am persuaded that the Supreme Being cares very little whether I marry you or not.

ANITUS: The Supreme Being! My dear girl, that's not the way you must speak. You must speak of gods and goddesses. Take care: I perceive in you dangerous sentiments and I know very well who inspired them. Know that Ceres, whose high priest I am, can punish you for having scorned her cult and her minister.

AGLAEA: I scorn neither the one nor the other. They tell me that Ceres presides over wheat: I intend to believe it. But she doesn't meddle with my marriage.

ANITUS: She meddles with everything. You know that very well; but still I hope to convert you. Are you really determined not to marry Sophronine?

AGLAEA:

Yes, I am very determined, and I'm very annoyed about it.

ANITUS: I don't understand these contradictions at all. Listen: I love you. I wanted to make you happy and place you in a high rank. Believe me, don't offend me. Don't reject your fortune. Think that it is necessary to sacrifice everything to an advantageous establishment; that youth passes and that fortune remains. That riches and honors must be your only goal and that I speak to you on behalf of the Gods and Goddesses. I beg you to reflect on it. Goodbye, my dear girl. I am going to pray to Ceres that she may inspire you. And I hope that she will touch your heart. Goodbye, one more time. Remember you promised me not to marry Sophronine.

AGLAEA:

I promised that to myself not to you.

(Anitus leaves)

How that man increases my chagrin. I don't know why I never see that priest without trembling. But here's Sophronine. Alas, while his rival fills me with terror, this one increases my sorrows and my tenderness.

SOPHRONINE: (entering) Darling Aglaea, I see Anitus, that priest of Ceres, that evil man, that sworn enemy of Socrates, is leaving you, and your eyes seem damp with tears.

AGLAEA: Him! He's the enemy of our benefactor, Socrates? I am no longer astonished by the aversion that he inspired me with even before he spoke to me.

SOPHRONINE:

Alas, is it to him that I must impute the tears that darken your eyes?

AGLAEA: He can only inspire me with disgust. No, Sophronine, only you can make my tears flow.

SOPHRONINE: Me, great gods! I who would pay for them with my blood! I, who adore you, who flatter myself to be loved by you! I, who must reproach myself for having cast a moment of bitterness into your life? You are weeping and I am the cause of it? Then what have I done? What crime have I committed?

AGLAEA: You didn't commit any. I am crying because you deserve all my tenderness; because you have it; and because I must renounce you.

SOPHRONINE: What funereal words have you uttered? No, I cannot believe it; you love me, you cannot change. You promised me to be mine; you don't wish my death.

AGLAEA: I want you to live happy, Sophronine, and I cannot make you happy. I hoped, but my fate misled me. I swear that, not being able to be yours, I will belong to no one. I declared it to that Anitus who is pursuing me, and whom I scorn. I declare to you my heart is full of the most acute sorrow and the most tender love.

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