

CHAPTER 9 — THE ESCAPE

"The escape is on, tonight."



Phaedo was whispering urgently, looking around to make sure they wouldn't be overheard. Delphi hadn't seen him since the day of Socrates' trial. He did not look the prisoner rescuing type. He just looked like he needed a wee. Delphi and Plato leaned in closer.

"We've gathered enough money from Socrates' friends to pay off the guards, they won't stop us from leaving. Then we can get him down to a ship and get him out of the city."

"Where will he go?" Delphi asked.

"His friend Crito has got family in Thessaly. They should be able to protect him there." Phaedo replied.

"But that's the other side of Greece!" Plato said. "We wouldn't ever see him!"

Delphi rolled her eyes at him. "He can hardly carry on walking the streets here like he used to, can he? He'd be an escaped criminal! They'd kill him as soon as they saw him!"

Plato nodded glumly. "So, we won't even see him again?" They both looked at Phaedo.

"Please, I'm sorry but there isn't time!" he hissed. "I must get back to the others. What we need when we bring him out is some kind of distraction. There'll be a crowd around – when news gets out that the ship from Delos has returned and that Socrates is going to die, lots of people will gather outside the prison to find out what's going on. We can't bring him out, even disguised, if everyone is watching."

"So what do you want us to do?" Delphi asked.

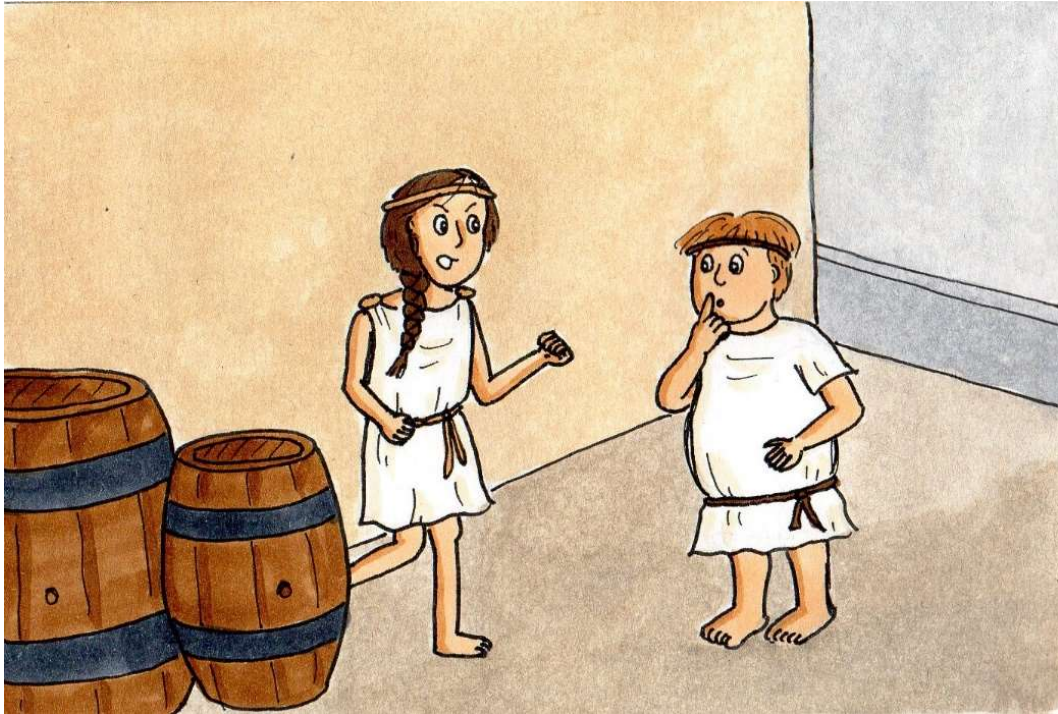
"Be the distraction! I wouldn't normally ask something like this of you both. Just do something big and noisy at exactly sunset that will get everyone's attention. That way everyone will be looking at you and not at us when we bring him out."

"A distraction?" asked Plato. "Like what?"

"I've got an idea," cut in Delphi. "We can do that. No problem." Plato looked at her, unsure, but Phaedo looked relieved.

"Good! Now, I'll speak to you both later. There is a lot to sort out!" Phaedo patted them both on the back, and nervously scampered back to the main street. Plato and Delphi stayed in the narrow alleyway, where they had been hiding.

Delphi watched him go and sighed.



"It's not going to work." Delphi said.

"What? Why not?" Plato asked.

She wasn't entirely sure. She just felt it, like one of those ugly thoughts that decides to camp in the back of your head. Perhaps it was what the gods had said to her or maybe it was just because she couldn't imagine Socrates skulking off to hide in another city. In some strange way, she wasn't at all sure that Socrates really wanted to be rescued. Not like this anyway.

"Will he want to live as an escaped criminal?" Delphi asked. "I mean, think about it. He'd never be allowed back to Athens. He'd have to keep where he was a secret, otherwise they'd send soldiers after him. He wouldn't even be able to see his friends really, otherwise it'd look suspicious, wouldn't it?"

"Better than being dead though, isn't it?" Plato pointed out. But for some reason, Delphi wasn't so sure.

***Do you think Socrates
should escape and live the
life of an escaped criminal?***

Delphi suddenly stamped her foot down.

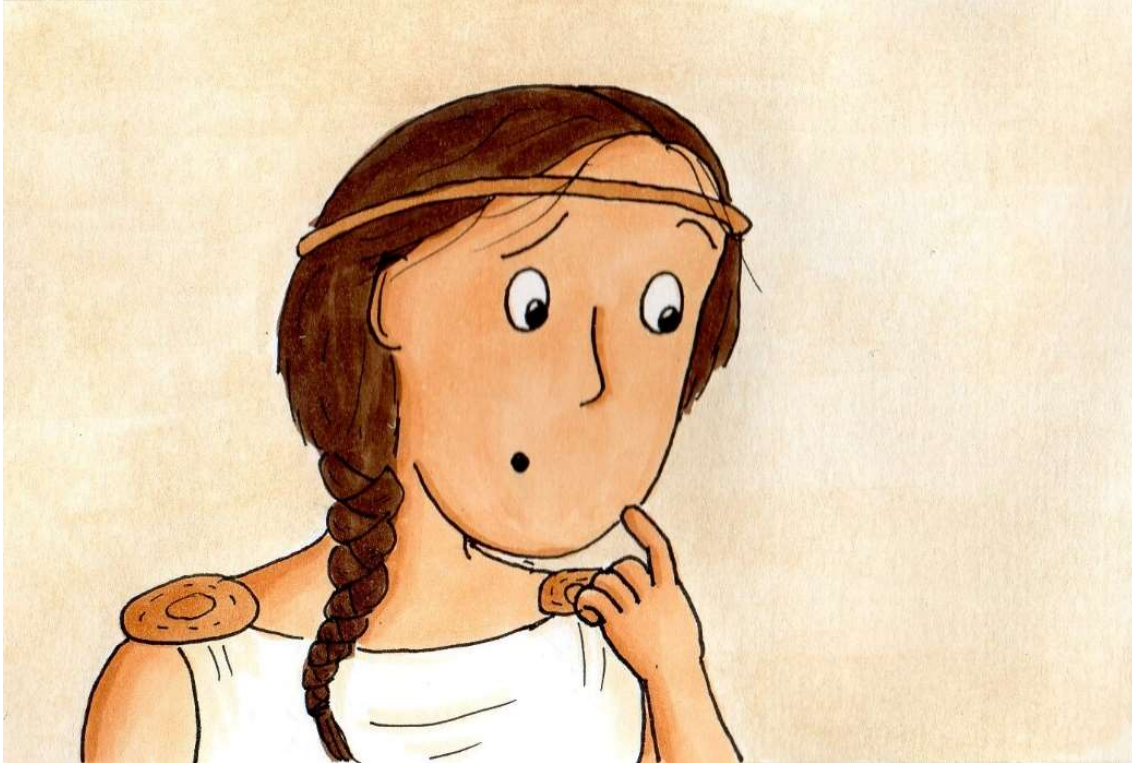
"This isn't right! He shouldn't have to sneak out like he's some murderer or something! He's done nothing wrong!"

"Sssshhhh! Delphi keep your voice down!" Plato hissed.

“No!” she shouted back. “I’ve had enough of keeping quiet about it. They’ve locked him up just to shut him up and that’s not right! We don’t need to sneak him out. We need to get everyone to let him off! That way he can stay here and go back to doing what he always did.”

“Delphi, that’s never going to happen!” Plato said, waving his hands at her.

“Yes, it is,” Delphi replied, coolly. “Because we’re going to persuade them all to let him go.”



So they came up with a new plan.

Plato was not altogether convinced by this new plan, but Delphi eventually managed to talk him round because even if it didn’t work, it would still be the distraction that Phaedo had asked them for.

While Phaedo was getting Socrates out, Delphi would make a speech.

Now, speeches were not particularly unusual in Athens, particularly in the Agora where opinion and debate were, mostly, encouraged, but speeches by young girls were pretty much unheard of. At worst, they would tell her off and try and throw her out of the Agora. Then she could run around and cause a bit of chaos. That would at least distract people from the escape.

But if they actually listened... Delphi felt sure she could persuade them that Socrates should be released. It seemed so obvious to her. She just had to *explain* – and then just imagine what would happen! Socrates would emerge from prison and be welcomed home! Everyone would be happy and then everything could go back to normal.

It wasn’t the best plan in the world. A lot could go wrong. But there was something in Delphi that felt sure that she could do it. The gods had been preparing her for this moment. This was when she would finally be listened to.

**What should Delphi say to persuade everyone to free Socrates?
Imagine you had to make the speech.
What would you say?**

"Um... Socrates should be free," Delphi said, her voice wobbling a bit. "He's a really... nice man and he hasn't done anything wrong, so you should all let him go. Err... I'm sure that if you really think about it then... um... if you met him then you'd know that he's no problem to anyone. I mean, yes, he can be annoying, if you wanted to get somewhere quickly and then he asks you a question or something, but you shouldn't... I mean, you should... um." Her voice had dropped to a mumble. She looked down at the scrap of papyrus in her hands and mumbled into it some more. Then she looked up at Plato.



"Right..." said Plato, slowly. "It's not very persuasive is it?" They were at Delphi's house, in the courtyard. She was standing on top of a wooden crate and addressing her pet tortoise, who had gone to sleep.

"I'm doing my best you know!" Delphi replied hotly. "It's really hard!" It was in fact, much harder than Delphi had expected.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" asked Plato, for the fifth time that afternoon.

"Yes!" Delphi snapped. "I just need to practise. Stop looking at me, you're putting me off!"

"Delphi, we want people to look at you. That's the whole point!" Plato said. He stood up and walked towards her. "Look, you're not even standing properly..."

"Yeah? What do you know about making speeches?" Delphi asked, folding her arms. Plato shrugged.

"We had some lessons from someone a while ago. I think his name was Protagoras? He was a sophist."

Say it like this!
Soh-fist

"What's a sophist?" Delphi asked.

"It's someone who can make speeches and persuade people. Like in the trials. It's the sophists who make all the best speeches. He told us to stand like this." Plato stood next to Delphi and put his feet about shoulder-width apart and stood up straight with his arms by his sides. "Don't crease your body up, it makes you look scared. You need to look confident." Delphi reluctantly unfolded her arms and tried to copy him.



"Like this?" she asked, stretching herself up on her toes. She looked like she was being pulled in different directions by invisible tigers.

"No, not that much! Just relaxed, but confident." Plato said. He was quite enjoying telling Delphi what to do for once. Delphi stood up straight, her chin pointing forward. "Now try it."

Delphi immediately looked down at her notes. "We sh..."

"No!" Plato snapped immediately.

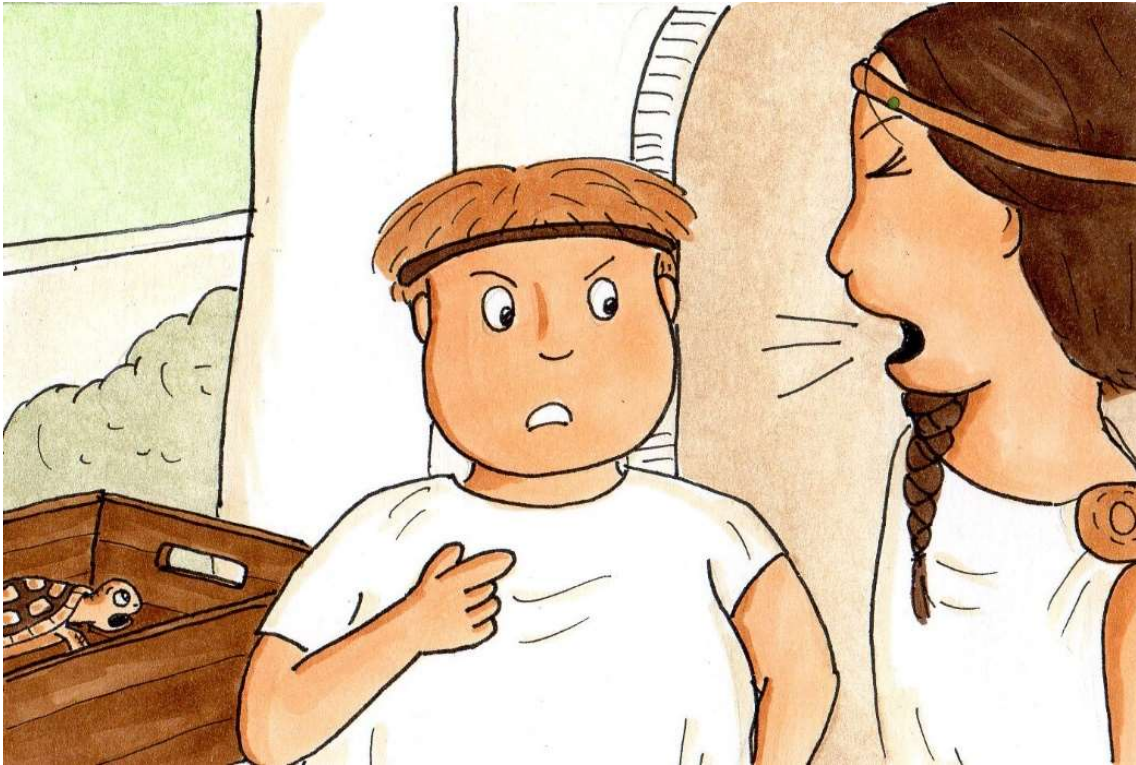
"What? You were the one who suggested drawing out some ideas for me!"

"No, don't talk down. Look at your notes when you forget what to say but talk at everyone. Look at them!" he pointed at her tortoise. "And you need to give reasons for why he should be free. Use because! And if!"

Delphi sighed, and fixed her gaze on Zeno, who had opened one eye.

"We should free Socrates because he's a good man," she said, quietly.

"Louder!" Plato called. Delphi took a deep breath.



“WE SHOULD FREE SOCRATES BECAUSE HE’S A GOOD MAN!” Delphi screamed. Zeno almost leaped out of his shell.

“Don’t shout it! Just... project your voice. Make it come from your chest. Make it clear and loud, but don’t scream.” Delphi tried again.

“We should free Socrates because he’s a good man!” Delphi said, loudly and clearly. She looked at Plato, who nodded.

“Yeah, that was better.”

“But none of this is changing what I’m actually saying, is it?” Delphi pointed out.

“Yeah, but we got taught that when you persuade people, it’s as much about how you say it. You’ve got to be clear and confident and make sure you’ve got everyone’s attention. Change your voice so it sounds important, repeat things and stuff like that.” Plato said, trying to remember if there was anything else.

“Oh, and don’t giggle!”

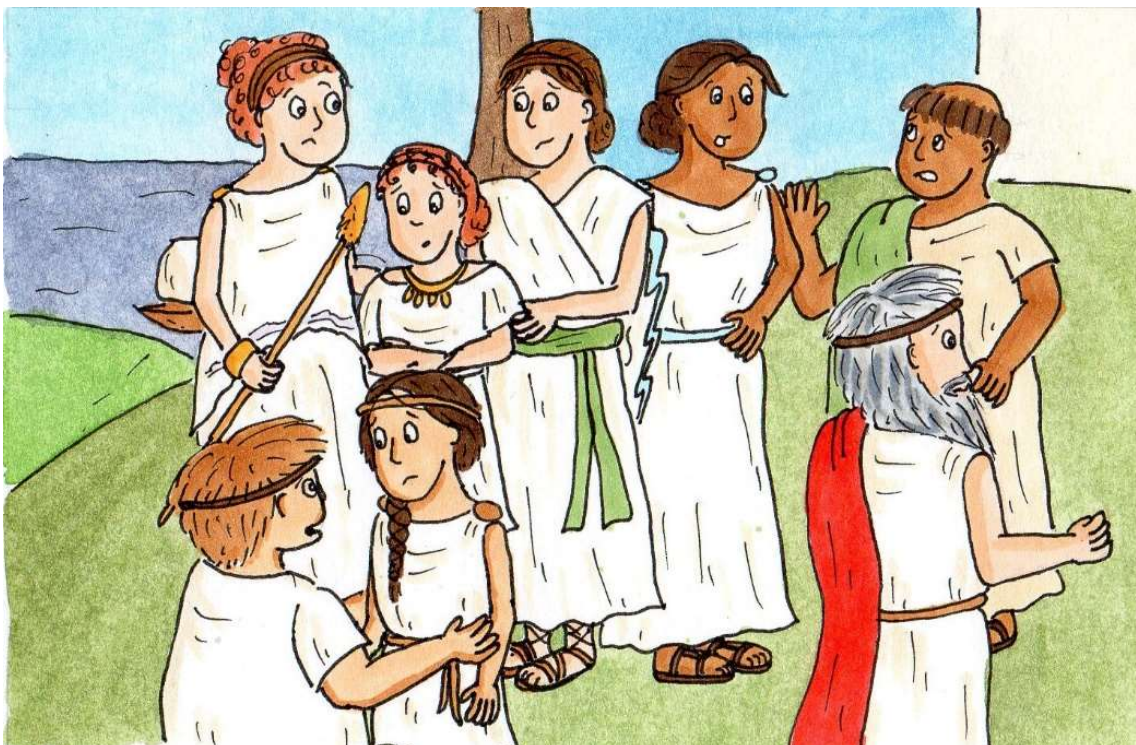
Delphi gave him a Look. She wasn’t really the giggling type.

Plato shrugged. “Just be you, Delphi. You’re good at getting people’s attention.”



Delphi smiled at him. But there was a swarm of butterflies flying around her stomach. It would be sunset in only a few hours. ○ ○

Do you have any other advice for Delphi on how to give a speech?



The shadow from the Acropolis was lengthening across the city as Delphi and Plato ran back towards the Agora and Socrates' prison. Sunset was not far away. It was almost time.

There were noticeably more people than usual out on the streets this evening. Word had got around that the ship from Delos was due back any time now, and that Socrates – the famous thinker, who had been an ever-present character of the city for sixty years – could die that night. Part of Delphi was pleased to see considerably more women and children around than usual too. Perhaps that was a good sign.

They ran to the prison and found the crowds were gathered in the street outside – there were even a few faces she recognised. Myrtis was there with the priestesses from the Temple, and the market sellers from the Agora and...



"Ah, it's the little philosopher!" The voice boomed from an extremely fat stomach above her. It was the philosophers from the Acropolis.

"Oh, hello Fat One..." she said nervously. The man's face froze.

"Sorry, what did you say?"

"I mean... hello!" Delphi said quickly. The man appeared to relax, much to Delphi's relief. All four of them were here. Even Diogenes, the Smelly One, had dragged himself out of his barrel. There was a noticeable gap in the crowd around them, occupied by only a few flies buzzing around. The smell was familiar now at least.

"Still asking some good questions, are we?" The Fat One asked. He didn't wait for an answer. "Shame about Socrates of course, but death comes to us all in the end." The Strict One nudged him aside.

"Didn't manage to rescue him then, I see!" He laughed, and Delphi pulled a face at him.

"Um... could you give us a hand with something?" Plato asked them. "There's going to be a speech and we need a platform for them to stand on." Delphi noted that he left out the detail of who was going to make the speech.

The Dopey One smiled at them. "Oh sure, like, I'm sure we can sort something out. Diogenes – where's your barrel, man?" They hustled off into the crowd, shouting at people.

Delphi swallowed. She felt like she couldn't speak. This really did not seem like a very sensible idea at all now. She could barely hear herself think over the talk of the crowd – was she really going to stand up and make a speech in front of all of them?

There was a tap on her shoulder. She turned around to see Phaedo, looking very red and flustered and the least likely man to break into a prison in history.

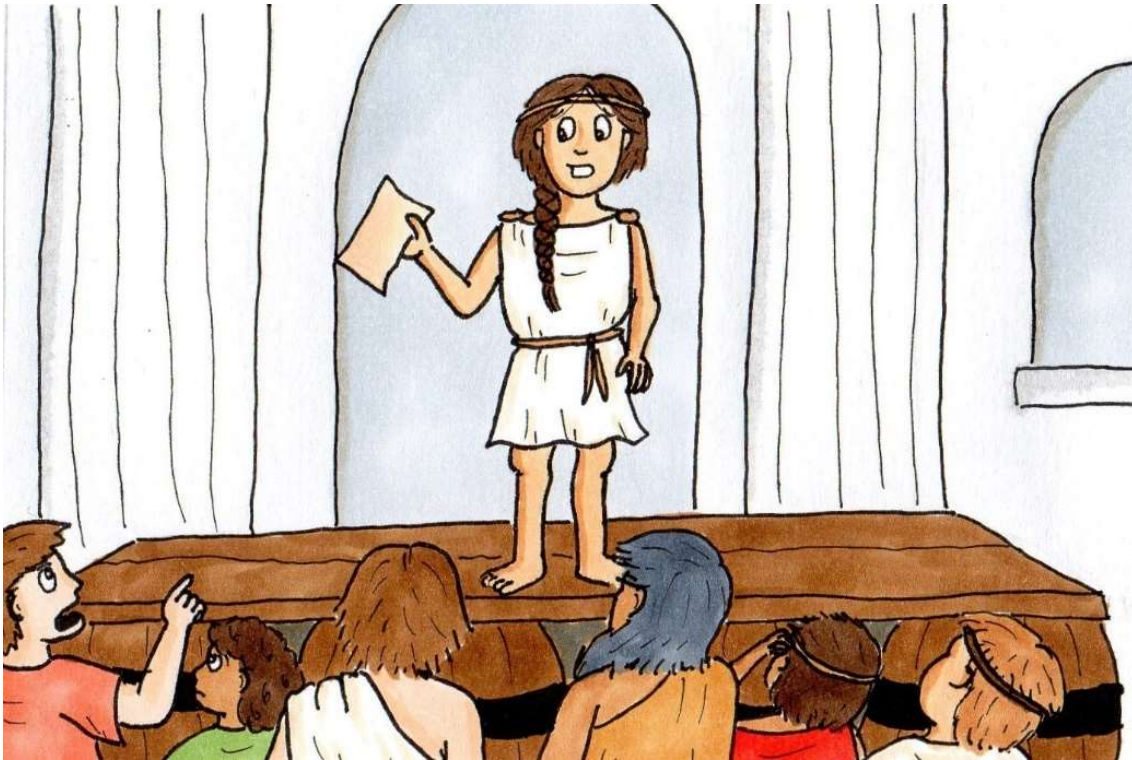
"Is everything ready?" he asked.

Plato nodded. "Delphi's going to do something to distract them."

"Well whatever it is, do it now!" Phaedo said, pushing past them. "We're going to get Socrates out!"

Delphi looked at Plato, her face a mask of terror.

"You can do it, Delphi!" he whispered, and to her surprise, gave her a hug. "No one can talk people into things like you can. Believe me, I know!" He let her go and they pushed their way through to where a rough stage had been assembled between two statues, out of some barrels and wooden planks. It wasn't much, but it would get her above the crowd. It was directly opposite and facing the prison – so if everyone was looking at it, they wouldn't be looking at the prison door.



Delphi nervously clambered up. The sun was just sending its final rays of red light across the marble columns and walls of the Agora, lighting up the crowd in front of her. It felt like Delphi had never seen so many people in all her life. Not one of them was looking at her.

"Hey," she said weakly. There was no reaction from the crowd whatsoever. One man looked up at her.

"Have you got stuck up there, little girl?" he asked.

Delphi looked at Plato helplessly, who was standing at the front, staring up at her. Delphi could see the fear in his eyes – but she could see the hope there too. He gestured standing up straight. "Project your voice!" he hissed.

Delphi's heart was racing. It didn't quite feel real. It felt like when she was visiting the gods in Olympus or when she was wearing the invisibility ring. She looked at the notes Plato had helped her draw that afternoon and she couldn't recognise any of them. Her mind had gone blank.

She found herself looking up at the statues next to her. One was of Athena, looking much fiercer and younger than Delphi remembered. The statue was looking down in her direction. It winked.

Delphi took a deep breath. She was a philosopher. She could do this. She stood up straight.

"People of Athens!" she declared, and her voice launched itself across the crowd. "People of Athens, listen to me!" The crowd suddenly went quieter.

"My, the girl is going to make a speech!" she heard the Fat One declare below her. "Quiet, you lot!" It did take a while, but eventually friends nudged each other and paid attention to the girl on the stage, with the fierce expression and no shoes. Many of them were laughing, but slowly, the crowd grew quieter.

Delphi waited until all she could hear was silence. It was, in fact, a loud silence.

"People of Athens!" she said again. "Listen to me."

And Delphi started her speech. ○ ○

**What are you expecting
Delphi to say?
Will it work?**



"You're here because of Socrates. That's why I'm here too. I know you're not used to listening to girls like me and I know I'd never be allowed to speak in the Assembly, or the Law Courts or anything like that. But that doesn't mean girls haven't got anything to say." She paused. There were one or two shouts from the back, but she was expecting them.

"I think Socrates should be free!"

There was some laughter, but a few people cheered as well.

“He should be free because... what has he actually done wrong? What has he done that means he has to die for it?” She was about to carry on but the shouting against her grew louder. She could hear cries of: “He’s a know-it-all!” and “He’s a fraud!”

“All he’s done,” she said, louder across the crowd. “as far as I can see, is ask questions. All he’s done is want to find the best way to live.” To her relief, the shouting started to die down again. She swallowed and carried on.

“Now I know for a lot of you, and for me too when I heard about him, that Socrates is the cleverest man in the city.”

There was a shout from someone in front of her. “Rubbish!”

“But when I said that to him,” she continued, even louder. “When he was first being taken to prison, he said something weird. He said that the only thing he knew, was that he didn’t know anything at all! I didn’t know what he meant at first. It seemed stupid. But I think I’ve managed to work it out.”

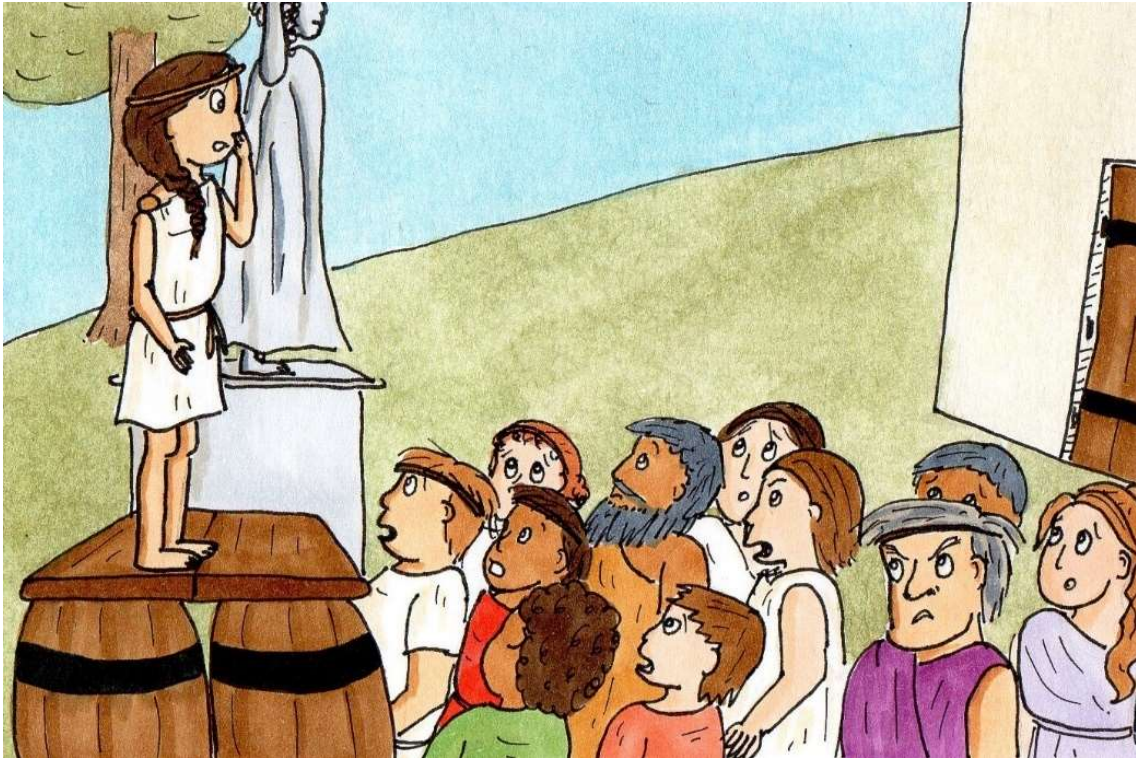
She hesitated, hoping she had worked it out correctly. “I think he meant that everyone thinks they know everything. We all go around thinking that we understand how to live our lives properly, and how to run the city properly. But I don’t think we do really. I’ve been watching grown ups my whole life and it looks to me like no-one has much of an idea what they’re doing!”

This got a laugh from the crowd in front of her. Delphi felt a little thrill run up her chest.

“Socrates was the only man who knew that he didn’t know things. Who could see it when other people were just faking or hadn’t thought about it properly. He wasn’t trying to be rude or horrible to people when he asked questions – he just wanted to know.”

Part of Delphi’s brain noticed a couple of people were nodding. That almost put her off.

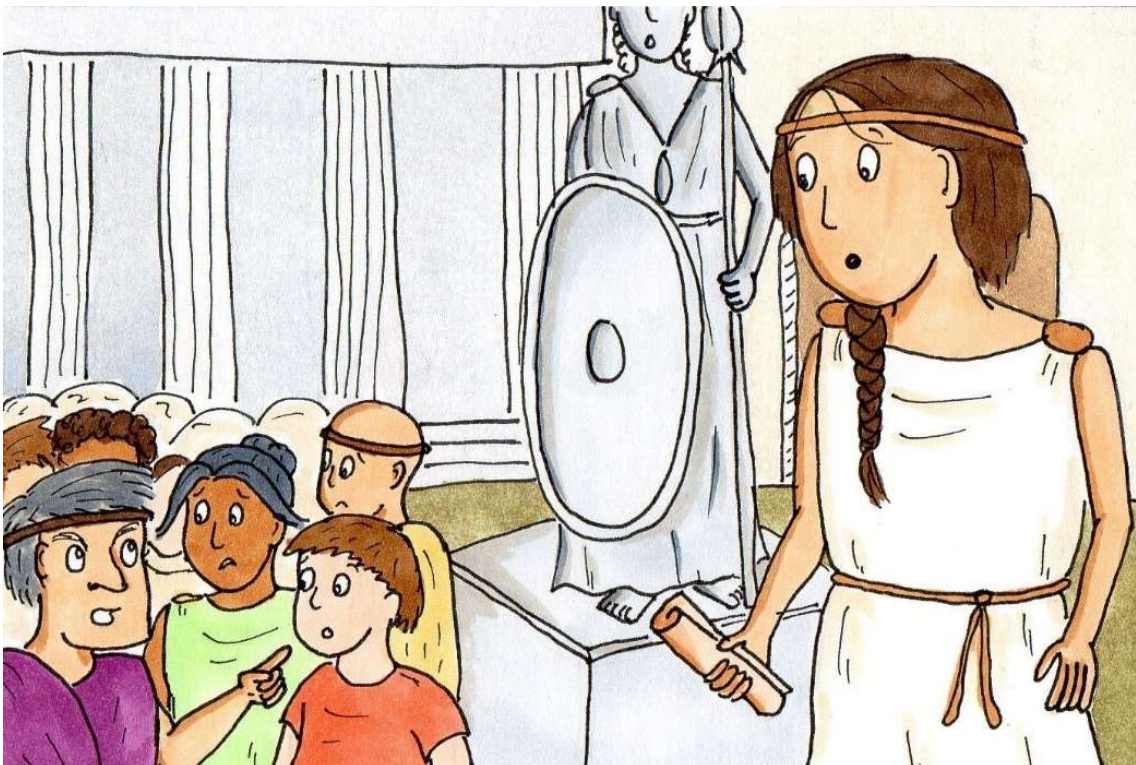
“We need Socrates. The city needs him because he can teach us how to find the best way to live. Doesn’t everybody want to know that? I know I do. I haven’t a clue what I’m doing most of the time and usually I get everything wrong. Maybe you feel like that too. Because it’s really hard isn’t it? It’s a philo... It’s a philoloph...” she hesitated. “It’s a really big question!”



The crowd were hushed and listening now. They were all facing her way. She had been, without realising it, keeping an eye on the door to the prison opposite her. As soon as she saw Phaedo get Socrates out then she could stop – but there was no sign of them yet.

“Socrates thinks we should think for ourselves and not just accept what other people say. Because what if we don’t think for ourselves? Wouldn’t we just be mindlessly doing what other people wanted us to do?” She glanced across at the prison door again. Still nothing.

“I think when Socrates was sentenced to death there were a lot of people letting someone else do their thinking for them.”



There was suddenly a commotion in the crowd below her.

“Do not listen to this horrible little fly!” It was Miletus, and he looked as angry as he had in the Agora.
“There was a fair trial and I won! I will not be lectured at by some little girl!”

A wave of panic suddenly shot through her. She looked desperately at the prison door. How much longer were they going to be? Miletus was angrily marching up towards the stage. He might have reached it too, but the crowd were pressed tightly together and he suddenly tripped over a small priestess and landed face first into a pile of horse poo on the street.



He gave a rather pathetic scream and scrambled to get away. There was a wave, and Delphi realised it had been Myrtis who had tripped him up. Delphi smiled at her and turned back to the crowd.



“So what if we free Socrates?” Delphi asked. “Why don’t we let him come back to the streets and ask his questions again? What bad thing could possibly happen? The worst thing that could happen is that someone will disagree with you about something, and that will make you learn something.” She took a deep breath.

“Because maybe that is the best kind of life anyway. One where you can think your own thoughts and you work out what is right. One where you don’t just accept things without thinking about them. One where all of us are philosophers. Where you know about yourself.”

She paused and saw that every single person in the crowd was staring at her.

“That’s all we have to do really isn’t it? Know yourself!”

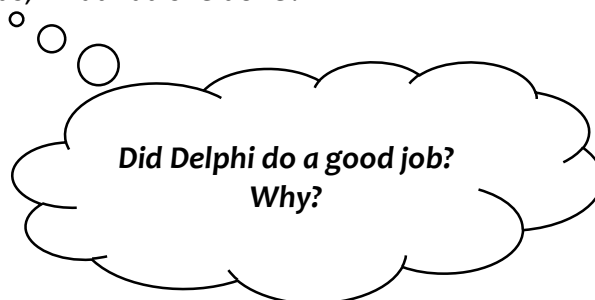
Silence. Delphi breathed it in.

“And that’s why we need Socrates to be free.”

Delphi stopped, her heart sinking as she ran out of words. The prison door still hadn’t opened in all this time.

“That’s what I think anyway,” she mumbled, the confidence falling out of her.

The crowd was quiet, as if waiting for her to say something else. No-one was shouting but no-one looked ready to leap up and agree with her either. Everyone was just staring like she was a dog who could do a particularly good trick. Oh gods, what had she done?





Slowly, someone started to clap.

Delphi tried to see who it was. It took a couple of seconds before she realised. The man was looking rather proud and had tears rolling down his face. It was her father. She hadn't spent enough time with him recently, she realised.

She smiled at her dad and gave him a wave, and then the applause was taken up by other people in the crowd, slowly spreading out and growing, sucking other people in.

Delphi was amazed to see the philosophers were cheering her name. Diogenes was applauding so fast that some of his flies were getting squashed in between his hands.

"Delphi that was brilliant!" screamed Plato from the front. She smiled down at him as others started to cheer too. A chant of 'Free him!' started up somewhere. Delphi realised she was holding her breath as the chant grew and grew, until it echoed across the Agora and through the city. "Free him! Free him! Free him!"

She had done it! Surely, they'd all let Socrates go now! She took a deep breath and started to relax.

But the shouting from the back of the crowd had changed. Were they bringing Socrates out? No – she could see that the prison door was still closed.

"The ship from Delos!" the cry came. "The ship from Delos has returned!"

Delphi looked up at the prison in horror. A group of soldiers had approached the door and was speaking to the guard. Surely, they still wouldn't?

"Delphi!" Another voice from nearby. She clambered down off the stage. It was Phaedo.



"What's going on? Have you got him out?" she asked desperately.

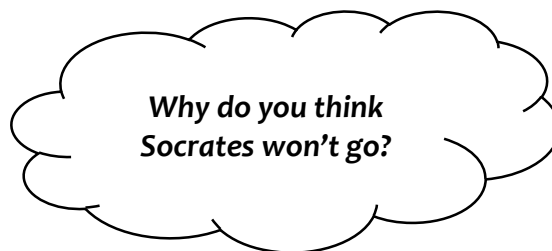
"He won't leave!" Phaedo cried, almost hysterical. "We paid all the guards, unlocked all the doors and untied him and he just wouldn't go!"

"But everyone wants him to be free now!" Plato said. "Can't they just let him go?"

"He doesn't want to go!" Phaedo panted. "It'll be too late! They'll be taking the hemlock poison to him now!"

No, Delphi thought. This wasn't supposed to happen.

"And he wants to speak to you!" he added, looking at Delphi.



Delphi the Philosopher

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The details of Socrates' life and trial are drawn from Plato's dialogues Apology, Crito and Phaedo (found in: The Last Days of Socrates, Penguin Classics, 2003).

Details of life in ancient Athens are drawn from several sources, most notably The World of Athens (Cambridge University Press, 2008). Also invaluable was The Hemlock Cup by Bettany Hughes (Vintage, 2011). Delphi the Philosopher is fictional but has been written to at least be consistent with historical events and practices. Any errors in that regard are my own.