

Q & A

“The dead flicker like candles. They are burning their memories for warmth. Don’t speak to them.”

-Kelly Link, *Flying Lessons*

“All my lies are only wishes...I know that I would die if I could come back new.”

- Wilco, “Ashes of American Flags”

Glaucon just began drinking his third glass of wine; he drank in slow, shallow sips, slow moving gaze fixed on the stone counter, the smooth glass, the sky. Plato drained the last drops of his third glass of wine. On the tabletop, scattered grains of mica caught the light, drifting like the tiny bubbles floating in the wine. Plato’s hands moved quickly to cover the splotches of moonlight, dancing across the counter. His fingers drummed fast patterns on the stone.

He was excited; he was acutely aware of being excited, in tingly, shimmering warmth embedded deep in his blood. “When I was in the market with Socrates, we used to ask people what they did. Anyone - we’d ask them, “What do you do, really? What does tilling a field mean for the world? What does pounding shapes out of iron mean for the world?” Glaucon stared with murky green eyes, looking steadily at Plato’s squinting face, long black-shadowed toga, feet protruding from under the table. His legs cast two perfectly cylindrical shadows on the street.

“People do what people need to survive.” It was the first complete sentence Glaucon had uttered in nearly twenty minutes.

“He said you find one little truth, you build up to make a big truth. Find how to plant a million little seeds, find the truth of one big forest.” Plato throws back his long hair, laughing at the sky. Glaucon could barely make out tongues of smoke rising from distant offering fires.

The temple stands on the top of the hill, overlooking miles of busy streets. Faded pillars support the old roof, stiff and strong as old elephant bones. Fires devouring offerings of meat and bread burn like leaves. A family feeds a smoky fire long strips of cedar bark and thick cuts of lamb meat. The smoke curls down through the temple, masking children’s chins with wispy beards. A boy with short soot-dusted hair dangles a long piece of lamb skin, staring with river blue eyes as it shrinks and curls in the flames.

Walking through the market, Plato overheard two long robed men discuss Socrates. The man with feathery hair said Socrates is spreading a new method of thinking, a revolutionary method called induction. The other man listened quietly, nodding occasionally in agreement. “He builds arguments through question and answer sessions,” continued the feather haired man, gesturing excitedly with one hand. Plato did not know what induction meant, but it sounded bright and mobile, river waves licking at the shore.

“Stand here,” said Socrates, gesturing towards the edge of the bridge. Stepping across the wooden slates, Plato peered over the railing. The water expanded emptily into the horizon, two or three fishing boats bobbing. The waves skittered like bird feet. “Look down.” Socrates paced back and forth across the bridge in long strides. “What do you see. Look at the water.”

Plato answered before the other men could open their mouths. “Small choppy waves. White foam, bubbling up as the water collapses. Calmer circular patches - eddies - water swirling in unsettled currents around them. A few branches, stripped of bark, washed half-submerged under the bridge. Fishing boats. Seagulls.” Plato watched Socrates’ furrowed face, walking purposefully to the edge of the bridge. He looked like an old god, Plato thought; Poseidon commanding his kingdom of water, stabbing one finger down towards the river. He stood beside the bridge for a few seconds, waiting as the wind rose in rough sighs. Two fishing boats rowed slowly towards shore.

Socrates’ eyes burned, clear and blue as an old heron’s. “Look under. What’s under the water?”

“The dim shapes of boat hulls, shadowy schools of fish, darting beneath the surface. Black tree branches, waving with coats of algae.” Plato braced himself against the wooden railing, sharp gusts of air slapping the water below. The wind tossed Socrates’ thin hair like fish fins.

“And what’s under them? Tell me, Plato - I’ve heard you’re quite a bright young student - what’s at the bottom of the river?”

“Solid water layered on top of a sandy floor. Leaves of seaweed, growing out of the silt. Catfish sucking at the sand.” Plato stepped towards the edge of the bridge, folding his toes over the rough cut boards. There are seagulls in the air, screeching and skimming the waves with salt-splashed wings.

Socrates smiled, lacing his fingers together with slow purpose. “Have you ever seen the bottom of the river, Plato?” The water churns faster now, a throbbing, muscled machine.

Socrates’ smile is water, flowing over ripples of skin. Q. Have you ever seen the bottom of the river? A. Plato stares at the lapping water, forcing his gaze deeper and deeper into the river’s depths. He sees silt and seaweed and slow, toothy fish, oozing through the water like dribbled mud. The river’s bottom is scattered with yellowed whalebones and ancient ship wheels made of rust. “No,” he said finally, hair blowing back over his eyes.

Socrates stretched his hands outwards as he spoke, taking in water and sky all at once. “We are living in water...the air is water. we know less about the heights of the sky than the bottom of the ocean. You assume what’s at the bottom of the river - from the seaweed that floats to the surface and dead fish that wash ashore. We assume what’s in the sky, too - from the rain and snow that pass down through the air.”

Meletus was short and fat, with layers of skin creased in rough folds. “The gods are in the sky. They accept our offerings every day,” Meletus pointed a bony hand at the smoke drifts, meat reduced to cinders and air.

“Say what the gods’ will is when the gods come down and tell you! The only thing more arrogant than believing the gods worry over the daily lives of each individual Athenian is claiming they can be appeased with a few slabs of lamb meat. The oracle at Delphi told me to preach. Did the oracle at Delphi tell you to burn meat? Did Zeus appear in mortal form and tell you to make him a nice big dinner?”

Socrates held Meletus’ head with big hands, veins webbed in the shapes of rivers. “How bright is the sun, Meletus? How many offering fires bright is the sun?” Meletus’ face squirmed between Socrates’ hands, eyes squinted shut. “Look at the sun, Meletus. That’s the domain of the gods, isn’t it? Tell me what the gods are doing right now. Can’t you see them?”

Socrates dropped his hands suddenly, Meletus' head slumping down against tensed shoulders. "We can't know what the gods want, until the next time Zeus or Hera decides to appear in mortal form. But blacksmiths know the best way to shape metal in fire, and farmers know the best seasons to plant and harvest crops, and artisans know clever, skillful ways to craft nearly every type of tool. We can live without the gods, Meletus, or at least we can live in uncertainty."

In the dim shade of the roof, Plato struck flint sharply against steel. *Induction*, he said softly, the ember bursting to life, letting the bright flames run atop his fingers.

Glaucon and Plato play kottabos, launching glassfuls of wine against a wooden circle. The target is etched with a tiny smirking stick man the color of burnt dirt. Plato flings wine with controlled force. The same tensed motion again and again, the same slapping noise of wine against wood. *Kobattos requires anger*, Socrates told Plato, as they drank in an open air tavern. *Wine's a drug; it makes men sleepy, and clumsy and weak. Kobattos is turning something that makes men sleep into a power to be harnessed and used. It's overcoming a sedative, transforming weakness into energy.* Plato only finished two small glasses of wine that day, careful to keep alert. Socrates' voice did not slow as he drank, draining glasses in easy gulps.

"Plato! Glaucon!" Crito's feet bang heavy against the stone. He balances a half-full wine glass on an outstretched palm. "Playing kobattos?" Crito takes a seat next to Plato, loosely flinging his remaining wine in the target's general direction. The liquid expands in midair, bursting in a wide stain across the wall. His shadow twists frantically under the table.

Plato and Crito wandered between the stalls in the marketplace, critically appraising heaps of fruit and hand woven blankets. Hot air prickled Plato's skin; the day trembled with humidity. Stalls cast dwarfed, half-formed shadows on the packed down dirt. It's early; Plato likes the marketplace before the midday rush, when the first buyers shuffle across the street and negotiate in softened voices. The merchants arrive sporadically, yawning and propping up displays. A frowning merchant led twenty sweating donkeys to a stall beside the street. Crito

squinted, stepping up to one restless, gray and white patched donkey. “Oh, don’t tell me these beauties are bred from authentic Silver Damascan stock.”

The merchant eyed Crito suspiciously, taking in the gold-embroidered toga and worn out sandals. Plato mirrored Crito’s expression of shocked amazement, bending down to stare intently at the nearest donkey. Two bearded farmers and a middle aged couple lined up beside the stall, watching with inscrutable expressions. Plato nodded and smiles slyly, letting the merchant trip over his words. “Well, yes-they are Syrian, authentic Syrian, from the finest-”

“What is this?” Crito shook his head in slow shock, tracing a tiny, crescent-shaped spot on one donkey’s sweating flank. “This isn’t an accepted breed mark. The line must be impure. Come on, now, Plato, I’ve taught you not to jump to conclusions.” Plato gripped Crito firmly by the arm, walking in fast strides against streams of people headed towards the marketplace. Droplets of sweat bloomed gradually on Plato’s forehead, the bemused merchant’s neck, Crito’s gently prickling arm. Crito and Plato never actually buy anything as expensive as a donkey; for as long as either can remember, they’ve both been dead broke.

Plato and Crito ran jerkily up the hill overlooking the market. Passing clouds shook in frenzied starts and stops; seagulls were white blobs lurching across the sky. Plato pulled on Crito’s arm, slight imperceptible tugs towards the far slope of the hill. A brown barred grouse exploded into the sky, buried in the bright plant-tangles fringing the marketplace. Plato drags Crito through the drooping spears of grass, breath coming in hurried gasps.

The humid smoke of offering fires drifts over the hill in burnt-smelling clouds. Crito laughs and slaps Plato’s arm away, leaping into the tall grass. He slumps down in a patch of delicate purple flowers, petals laced together like overlapping fly’s wings. Plato sits up, watching the offering fires burn with silent consistency. “We should cook a meal on the offering fires,” Plato stared at the sweltering gray stained sky. “We should eat a meal cooked on an offering fire.”

“I don’t know, Plato. I wouldn’t want to jeopardize my chances of Zeus descending from heaven and fucking me in the form of swan.” Crito’s self-proclaimed life goal is to make love to every popular deity, and as many titans as safely possible. His hands absentmindedly pluck the seed husks from long strands of grass.

“No, I mean it, Crito. We’ll feast on pheasant while the other’s meat is wasted. Everyone just assumes they know what the gods want without any real proof. If the gods do exist,” he jabs Crito gently in the shoulder, “Why would they care where a couple of Athenian twenty one year olds eat their meals?” Crito smiles thoughtfully, flicking grass seeds towards the sky.

Q. What does Crito do?

A. Crito and Plato met in primary school, when Crito wore a long purple striped toga he got for his seventh birthday. Theseus and Frolo screeched with laughter and threw milk to splatter over the lines of dye, but Plato likes the purple toga. He says hi and sits down next to Crito. He watches the places the milk changed the toga’s color, dark clouds of purple fading to pale splotchy shadows. Crito told Plato his father saved up special to buy the purple dye. Crito’s parents worked all day folding iron in massive, sweating fires behind the marketplace. Crito’s father said never to disturb the blacksmiths, so Plato and Crito squatted behind the cobblestone wall and watched the fires from the holes in the masonry. His father scowled in concentration, pulling tiny animals from the flames. In fourth grade, Crito jimmied Plato’s quill, so it spurted Plato in the face with black ink. When Plato cried to the teacher, Crito apologized by asking him if he wanted a ticket to watch two gladiators fight to the death. He said yes, but his parents wouldn’t let him go.

A. Every weekend after high school, Crito got drunk with Theseus and Constantine and Prosperus. Theseus and Constatine lit fires in the tangled fringes behind buildings, and practiced launching rocks at thin cats skirting the cobblestone walls. Crito threw rocks wide and reckless, swinging in exaggerated, drunken movements. “Crito - Crito - can you hit this?” Prosperus held a board inches in front of Crito’s face, and Crito laughed too loudly. Once, Theseus dressed Crito in a faded pink dress and a dusty bear mask made of wool and wire. Theseus said, “Now, dance! Waltz like a good little lady!” and the boys circled and clapped while Crito’s feet clumped harsh against the flagstones. Prospero slapped Crito as he stumbled over scattered rocks, and Theseus shouted and cheered like a gladiator winning a fight. Crito emitted sudden, high noises, halfway between laughter and sobbing.

A. Most days after midnight, Plato would lead drunk Crito across the road, framed by walls shifting with light. Crito’s stumbling, weighted steps fell heavy against the stones, Plato’s

arms steadying his body upright. Plato leaned down to open the door with two fingers. Crito would throw up twice, sometimes three times, before falling into his hammock like a spent shadow. After Crito fell asleep, Plato stayed beside the fireplace, reading Archimedes and listening for footsteps upstairs. When Crito stepped wearily into the living room, Plato would lie down on the hammock, pretending to have slept. He would stretch and rise and brew tea in kitchen, and Crito would smile a slow, flickering smile and say, "This is the best tea I've ever drunk. This must be the best tea brewed since the fall of Troy."

Q. What did I do last night? Crito asked groggily.

A. You have sores on your feet because they pushed you over the coals. Tomorrow they will split open and leak blood when I lead you home again. You never have time to heal.

A. They loved it when you danced. Clothed in old lace and bear fur, you became a different species, some mythical wilderness creature emerging to humanity for the first time. They cheered for you like the emperor, like a one man olympics, clapping louder than a crowd at the Coliseum. You stepped on coals and screamed your predatory defiance, body spinning and blending into dirt and flames. They hooted and yelled when your mask slipped back to show your skin, red lined veins burning with streams of liquid fire. Your teeth were fangs, and your fur was thick and smooth as shadows. You spun and leapt, stepping through fires, body flowing in a thousand movements like a bear with its skin burnt off.

A. You sat next to a fire burning dirty grass and wood scrap. You drunk six beers, four in fast smooth gulps, two in sputtering messy sips, spraying beer droplets across the ground. You smashed the glass bottles on the dirt, but we'll go clean them up tomorrow. You told stories about fucking, but they were mostly lies. You threw rocks at cats, but they all went wide.

Crito sat up and grinned at the sky. "That would really fuck with people, wouldn't it? OK, why not, let's do it."

The air was dense and hot, a mass of simmering white light. Plato could have flicked a match and set the sky on fire. Crito sprawled on the grass, feet thrown forward, wooden sandal soles worn and shining. Plato imagines jerking his head back towards the sun.

“Tell us a story,” Crito’s voice slurs, leaning heavily against the tabletop. Glaucon centers the target behind the glass stem of his wineglass, squinting one eye to aim. The little stick-man bends in distorted waves, shifting fluidly back and forth. Glaucon thinks he looks better under glass.

Plato taps three fingers lightly on the stone, keeping time to an imaginary rhythm. He and Crito took turns telling a fantastic story on the way to the marketplace, a tale of monsters and heroes with thousands of beginnings and no real end. He introduced a host of new characters each morning, and invoked the gods whenever the plot stalled. Plato recalls the legends of Perseus and Theseus, young men with blue eyes and muscles and curly blonde hair. He recalls the hideous monsters, with beastly heads, or multiple heads, or no discernible heads at all. The moonlight projects monster-patterns on the tabletop as Plato thinks, and taps a simple rhythm and prepares to speak.

“Once upon a time there was a man and a woman born in a cave filled with dark shadows. In the hours following their births, the two children’s parents bolted thin metal chains to the cave’s floor and handcuffed their babies to the rock. Afterwards, the parents kindled an offering fire at the back of the cave, gathering wood in an ever growing pile. The chains did not allow the babies to turn and see each other, or look behind at the fire and ever growing heap of wood. Every day, the parents brought more fuel, feeding logs methodically into the offering fire. Sometimes the parents spoke in low, secret voices, and the growing children heard and learned to repeat the noises. But the children were always less concerned with speech than the gray shapes projected by the fire’s flickering light. As the parents moved back and forth, lifting branches, the babies watched snake-shaped shadows slide repeatedly across the lighted cave wall. The parents’ shadows swept across the rock in giant motions, and at first the babies panicked, cowering against the floor so as not to be overwhelmed by the waves of darkness. The children watched their own two dwarfed shadows projected on the wall, downy gray like dove’s feathers. Both the boy and the girl imagined their shadows as velvet soft, almost unbearably soft, falling apart with only a little touch.”

“But wait. Where did the children get their food? How did they eat, if the chains didn’t even let them move?” Crito shifted restlessly, blonde lion’s mane of hair slipping over his neck. “And where did they shit? Did someone come to clear their shit away?”

“They ate dust. They ate shadows. They shit shadows. It doesn’t matter.” Plato’s face moves slowly, tongue traveling expanses between the front and back of his mouth. *They ate shadows*, he thinks lucidly, tracing the wine glass’ long oval shadow. His own arm’s shadow is thrown carelessly back to front across the table. *Shadows taste crisp and textured*, he realizes suddenly, *like bread crusts made of air*. His own body feels like an ocean of empty space. Plato’s bones sway like water bags, swinging and bumping together.

Plato, Crito and Glaucon visited the marketplace and bought strips of salted beef, a bottle of moderately good beer, a cheap little knife with Zeus engraved on the hilt, and three flat silver herrings with surprising red eyes.

Crito discussed management strategies for his anticipated intimacies with the city’s gods. “I was thinking of setting up a party first, sort of a divine mixer,” Crito spoke loudly, tossing a flopping herring from hand to hand, “I want all the gods to know me, enjoy my company, before anything actually happens. Besides, I wouldn’t want anyone getting jealous. Gods tend to get jealous a lot.”

“Artemis is celibate,” Glaucon glanced at Crito with bored skepticism, pausing at a stall displaying pyramids of carved figurines.

“Not after she meets me!” Crito laughed, hands spread open, herring dropped onto the cobblestone street.

“Socrates says sex is just an ineffective way of trying to find truth.” Plato pauses; Crito bends over to pick up the dropped fish. His tunic sags and shadowed folds form under his arms. “I don’t know, what do you think about that?”

“I heard him say that. I was with you,” says Glaucon, chewing a strip of salt beef with measured precision.

“Well, what do you think of him?” Plato’s heart beats like water.

“I don’t know, he’s kind of into himself, isn’t he?” Glaucon swiped the knife in measured strokes, cutting patterns in the air.

“I mean, he does have some interesting things to say,” Crito examined a tiny figurine, carved in the shape of a soldier battling a monster with six heads. “And he certainly doesn’t deserve to die for being a little full of himself.” Dropping the figurine back on the shelf, Crito launched the dull silver herring into the air. “Here, Plato, surprise catch!”

The herring sagged into Plato’s hand, flesh limp and vaguely moist. Its shallow red eyes gaze blankly at the ceiling. Plato would turn 22 in exactly two weeks.

Q. What would you like for your birthday?

A. I want a party, like I always have. Glaucon will rub cuts of lamb with rosemary and fresh squeezed olive juice, slicing the meat along its thin skinned edge. Crito will roast the lamb over a fire and accidentally burn one side. Afterwards, Crito will say, “Sorry about the meat. Let’s go to the marketplace, come on, I’ll treat you,” and Crito will buy some kitschy artwork showing mythological heroes having sex with anthropomorphized animals. On the way home, our arms will weigh heavy with junk, and Glaucon will tell another story about his new girlfriend, who likes to have sex in the wine cellar surrounded by the scent of grapes. Crito will chew on a piece of dried pheasant and my body will ascend like a gray seagull, hung from the sky by a string.

A. Socrates will ask me to be his apprentice, and we’ll travel together to the Library of Alexandria. Socrates’ mouth will twitch with amusement, and say, “I am not a teacher, but one thing I do know...” We’d pour through philosophies from seven countries, chasing down inferences between pages of thousand year old texts. We’ll theorize until our sentences muddle with universal statements, then finally replace the crumbling texts on the shelf. “I don’t miss Glaucon’s girlfriend,” I’ll confess to Socrates, “She apologized too much and always smelled like fish.” After our lessons, I’ll lean my head out the window of the highest stone tower, and feel the night gathering with quiet footsteps, like a secret meeting of foxes.

Plato walks close behind Socrates, tracing the riverbank into the wild meadows beyond the city. He watches Socrates’ feet settle quietly in the mud, leaving lines like the branches of

trees. The skin of Socrates' feet is old, but not loose or flabby. His heels are textured densely with calluses, foot-lines shaped in dense circles that remind Plato of the topography on maps. "Crito and I are planning use the offering fires to cook a feast. Like you said, we don't know the gods want us to burn meat for them. It's presumptuous to assume."

"You're right, Plato. I did say that," Socrates' mouth twitches in the hint of a grin. "Cook pheasant on the offering fires simply for the sake of cooking pheasant on the offering fires, not to make some grand point. Don't concern yourself with what the other Athenians do; as you point out, what pleases the gods is impossible to know, so religious practices are mostly irrelevant anyways. Standing on our heads and hooting like an owl could please the gods, for all we know."

Socrates steps out around dangling tree branches, and the sky expands like unfolding paper. "The last time a god actually appeared to a mortal was hundreds of years ago. They're probably amused we think we know what they want."

"Yesterday, a man defined piety as 'what is loved by the gods.' Even if you believe in the legends, its hard to imagine them all ever agreeing on anything, but I didn't press the point." Socrates walks gently across stones like the backs of animals.

They walked the flattened dirt path through the city outskirts, the roofs of stone houses scattered on the horizon. Long stems of plants brush by Plato's feet, bending with hushed rustles. Their feet leave no tracks on the dense packed earth. The day is bright and clear as water.

The two men pause by the bridge marking the entrance to Athens proper, Socrates watched the dancing river, and Plato watched Socrates. Socrates skips a few rocks across the quiet, shining water. His hands bend to echo the stones' shapes, forming smooth, elongated ovals and rough edged squares.

Q. So Plato, what are you doing?

A. I am following a pudgy bearded man named Socrates, who is on trial for murder. My father runs a rich law firm, so I can afford to spend large portions of the day wasting time with eccentric old men. Two years ago, my father got me a part time job at the law firm, but we had creative differences. He didn't particularly like working with me, said our styles weren't compatible. The feeling was mutual.

A. I am standing on a bridge beside a man with blue heron eyes, who claims to know nothing but the folds of skin on the bottoms of his feet map the universe. He releases a pebble to soar over the water's surface, and finally sink gently, like a small offering. I lean down to kiss him. His mouth tastes like sweat and sky.

Socrates stepped back after a few seconds, eyes bright with surprise. "I am no teacher," he said with slow precision. Socrates' smile spread towards both ears, beard trembling like cat's whiskers. "You should know that by now." He pressed Plato's palm between both hands, squeezing warmly. "Ha! It's not my fault if the youth want to be corrupted," Socrates sighed and chuckled under his breath, the windblown trees soughing back and forth. The scrape of Socrates' shoes on cobblestones faded into the dusk, Plato watching the fires burn below the temple burn like a dozen distant eyes. A flock of seagulls rose with the smoke, mewing in low voices, ducking between waves of sparks. The meat is soft and bloody, sweating drops of moisture. Away from the temple, butchers strip skin and hooves and eyes off the fat carcasses of sheep. Plato could hear faint bubbling and hissing, the sound of meat burnt off bones. The flames curled like sheep's tongues burnt black, the remains of meat rising towards gods.

Plato throws up in strained, gasping pulses. Glaucon holds his head low over the river. Plato watches the vomit change color as it sinks under the water. First yellow, then orange, then purple, then dimmer and dimmer shades of gray. *What's under the water?* Socrates commands with a wave of his hand. "Who knows what's under the ocean? You can't see to the river's bottom. No one can. Look up at the sun, it is too bright, look down at the water, it is too dark." Plato wonders if there are inverse offering fires, flames licking down under the water's surface. Built to send meat to the underworld gods, beneath miles of leaden water and black silt. Socrates is beneath the earth, shrinking, flesh eaten down to strings of rotting muscle. His eyes would be the first to decay. Plato could crush an eyeball as easily as a rotten apple, between two fingers.

He is setting down a final account of Socrates' life and death. It will survive, passed down through generations, read and understood by Athenians for centuries. Plato and the other loyal disciples will live for Socrates' memory, write exhaustive texts immortalizing their shared beliefs. Plato stretches an arm beneath the water, touching muddy sand and shreds of dark leaves.

The soft, slow decaying flesh of dead fish sinks to the bottom of the river. Meat flakes off the gray stained bones of drowned seagulls. Plato throws up again, his body empty as clear water, as heaps of thin watery sand.

Socrates stands on trial for treason, corrupting the youth, and worshiping false gods. Plato is not at the trial, where the majority of Athens collectively gossips and murmurs for justice. Plato is intently working a tiny wire into the warden's bronze lock. A tiny sliding bolt clicks backwards. Crito motions Plato aside with a bent finger and slides into swallowing darkness.

Crito sprints to the bright hall, sour currents of sweat running over his skin, toga brushing the floor in quick rustles. Plato's steps dance quickly across bare stone floors, padding in fast, frantic rhythms. He throws open the bolted bursting into the shining day. Crito draws one hand secretly under a fold of cloth, producing a thin bronze key. Plato draws Crito into a crazy circle dance, feet skimming buoyant as deer hooves over the street.

"I don't know," Socrates looked up with deep blue heron eyes. Meeting Socrate's eyes was like swimming into miles of melted glass. "This cell is a good room, don't you think? It has four solid walls and a window to look out into the sky." The inside of the cell was slightly moist. Shadows collected in shifting, restless groups, scratching at the walls like half-formed mice.

The shadows' hot, itchy weight pressed on the men's backs; Plato felt them like a wool cloak. "I have been full of a lot of shit, haven't I? I'm seventy six years old, surrounded by people who worship but don't understand me, just as I philosophize to but don't understand them, and I will die tomorrow. The stone in the wall is good stone, thousands of years old and still strong, and it will make sure I have solid ground beneath me for a few more hours." Plato stared down at the dark cell floor. Stirring masses of shadow-mice pressed against Plato's feet, claws making rough scrabblings on the floor. They merged and split as easily as streams of water. A seething wave of shadows scurried up Socrate's legs, like ants running over a wall. Plato thought of walking across to Socrates, but the ground was carpeted with breathing black shapes.

Plato walked out of the shadow cave, stepping gently on the backs of the shadows. They feel warm, and furry, and slightly sweaty. He travelled home along the main road through the

market, watching people pass by. A tall woman led a pudgy, wandering toddler across the street. Five thirteen year old boys kicked a leather ball, shouting vague curses. A young couple walked past, a lanky boy with coiffed brown hair, girl peering from beneath his arm with intense blue green eyes. Plato practices writing a beautiful final speech, in which Socrates discusses justice and propriety and conducting yourself as an example for the world. Socrates informs Crito of the nobility inherent in acting justly in the face of oppression. Before dying a martyr, Socrates cups a big, river-webbed hand and encapsulates the world in the spaces between his fingers.

Q. What happened after Plato left?

A. Crito and Glaucon stayed in the shadow cell, to watch Socrates drink poison from a hefty clay mug. It was a good cup, Glaucon attested, after the fact. It had a sturdy handle and smooth, seamless walls. The liquid shimmered in the slanted light from the window, thin and still and ready to drink. Shadow mice gnawed at the men's feet, reopening old sores.

Transparent, watery liquid dribbles from Plato's mouth in tiny streams, until there is nothing left to throw up. The ground expands and contracts suddenly, folding into itself like a scared mouse. Crito helps Plato splash river water over his face. "There we go," Plato says under his breath, "There, thank you, I think I can go on now." He breathes in deep shuddering sighs. "I would like to keep telling my story."

Crito thinks Plato looks like a drunken king, sitting high and silent on the marble barstool.

"OK. Shadows. OK. Over time, the boy and girl learned to speak through shadows. The children talked in measured, minute movements, They practiced touching shadows, grazing each other almost imperceptibly at first, doing their best to make sure pieces of shadow didn't flake off. Once in a while, the boy tossed shadow offerings on the fire, to supplement the shifting shadow-wood the parents brought. Once, a local farmer discovered the children living in the cave, who by this point were nearly grown. The farmer snapped the chains off each child's ankle, and asked in a rough, startling voice that the boy and girl leave the cave." Plato's breaths heave, lungs souging back and forth in an ocean of watery bones. He slumps onto the smooth table,

beached whale stomach slapping the marble. “So, now. Yes. The man’s shadow twisted crazily on the wall, shifting back and forth with unpredictable aggression. When the man leaned down to take their hands, his shadow expanded suddenly, consuming the cave’s far wall. The children cowered in the corner, and screamed like dying rabbits. The man left, and the children’s shadows held each other in a desperate hug.” Plato feels his bones floating on lofty thermals that morph into Crito’s hands, carrying him to a solid cloud of shadows, carrying him off the bridge of the sky.

Plato awakes to a shimmering morning, and moves his hands back and forth to cast shadows on the bedroom walls. Q. What shapes were the shadows? A. The shadows were dying rabbits. A. The shadows were seagulls skimming the water. A. The shadows were world maps of rivers, and burning bears, and one too many glasses of wine. Plato’s eyes burned bright and clear as a heron’s. He dreams of feathers floating down into an offering fire, the birds’ dead flight rising as a procession of smoke.