

THE PLOT TO SAVE SOCRATES

by Paul Levinson

Chapter One

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Chapter One

[Athens, 2042 AD]

She ripped the paper in half, then ripped the halves, then ripped what was left, again, into bits and pieces of history that could have been....

Sierra Waters had read once that, years ago, it was thought that men made love for the thrill, while women made love for the sense of connection it gave them. Sierra had always done everything for the thrill. She had no sense of connection, except to her work. Which should have made her an ideal person for this job.

Still ... an ideal person would have followed the plan. It was written on the only substance which could survive decades, maybe longer, without batteries, which required only the light of the sun to be read, or the moon on a good night, or a flickering flame when there was no moon. Paper. A marvelous invention. Thin and durable. And she had just torn it into pieces, opened her palm, and given it to the wind to disperse in irretrievable directions.

[Earlier, New York City, 2042 AD]

Sierra was a doctoral student at the Old School, in the heart of Manhattan. Her specialty was ancient Athens, or, more precisely, the adoption of the Ionic phonetic alphabet by Athens around 400 BC -- the sprouting of the teeth of Cadmus, as Marshall McLuhan had put it -- and its impact on the future of the world. "A nice, tidy, manageable little topic," Thomas O'Leary, a member of her doctoral committee, had commented, testily. But he had agreed to help her, anyway. He was accustomed to unusual pursuits. He was an odd-ball, himself, an independent scholar with no university affiliation. The Old School had a tradition of allowing one such outside expert on its doctoral committees.

Sierra was making good progress on the dissertation -- 72 out of a projected 250-page document, written in under half a year's time -- when Thomas called her down to his office, just off Fifth Avenue and 18th Street, on a wet November evening. He had a copy of a slim manuscript, just a few pages in a worn manila folder. He hefted it, as if to assess its intellectual weight. By the expression on his face, it looked to be quite important. He slid it across his pitted oak desk to Sierra. She had mixed feelings about this -- it was no doubt an article of some sort that Thomas had come across and deemed relevant to

her dissertation. Sierra hated the thought of having to rethink and rewrite any of her work at this point. On the other hand, she relished uncovering new information. It made her heart jump.

She opened the folder. She looked up at Thomas, who was carefully regarding her, his mouth slightly pursed, a long pen of some sort dangling from his fingers like a plastic cigarette. "It's apparently been kicking around for a while, at least since the 20s," he said. "It surfaced recently at the Millennium Club up on 49th Street -- their librarian spotted it in an old bookcase, sandwiched between the usual stuff."

"The 2020s?" Sierra asked.

Thomas smiled. "Well, could have been the 1920s, as far as the club goes -- it was founded in the 1870s. But the librarian is sure it wasn't there before 2023 -- that was the last time they did a thorough inventory of their holdings -- and the Preface says something about carbon-dating the original."

"So it's not an obvious forgery. Otherwise, you wouldn't be showing it to me, right?"

Thomas nodded. "So far, it looks damn good."

Sierra looked back down at the document. It was ancient Greek on the left side, English translation on the right. That was the logical assumption -- that Greek was the original, and

English the translation, not the other way around. Not only because the Greek was ancient. But also because the words in front of her were apparently a fragment of a Platonic dialog, featuring his mentor, Socrates. "I've never seen this before," Sierra said.

Thomas nodded again. "Apparently neither has most of the rest of the world."

Sierra stepped out of the hot shower, slipped into her terrycloth robe, and cuddled up with a spiced tea and the new Socratic dialog on her sofa. It had no title, no translator listed, but it read a lot like Benjamin Jowett, the great Oxford Victorian who had rendered so much of Plato into English. She had read it at least five times, already.

The first page contained a Preface, signed only "Ed," which was almost certainly short for "Editor," not Edward, Edwin, or Edmond: "The following is a translation of a manuscript self-identified as written by Plato. Carbon-14 dating (enhanced mode) situates the papyrus and the ink upon it as approximately 400 CE -- the date of this manuscript's creation, not the date of the original writing (which, if Plato was indeed its author, would be much earlier). The manuscript was unearthed in excavations near Alexandria, Egypt, in the first decade of the

21st century."

Sierra pressed her face against the warm tea cup, and her back and neck into the sofa. It wrapped around her, felt so good, so comforting, and-- No, it was still on sleep mode, from last night, and Sierra didn't want to feel quite so relaxed right now. She ran her hand on the side, and flicked the "read" control. The contours subtly adjusted. She felt energized, strong. She turned the page.

Persons of the Dialogue: Socrates; Andros, a visitor

Scene: The Prison of Socrates

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Socrates. What time is it?

Andros. The dawn broke a little while ago.

Soc. I must have been dozing. I did not see you enter.

Andr. You were indeed dozing when I arrived.

Soc. You have come to take me to my destiny? I am more than willing. But I thought I would be allowed another day or two.

Andr. I am here to take you to your destiny. If indeed you are willing.

Soc. I just said that I was. I may criticize the state, but I do not presume to place myself above it.

Andr. The destiny I am here to offer you may be different from the one you suppose.

Soc. Different? I would never accept a life that prevented me from praising good and denouncing evil. And placing myself beyond the state would put me in just such a compromised position.

Andr. Yet you would accept death, and via hands you know are unjust.

Soc. Ah, so you are indeed here to try to persuade me against death. This is the destiny you wish me to avoid?

Andr. Yes.

Soc. You are not the first suitor to make that proposition.

Andr. I know.

Soc. Such a proposition obviously has much to commend it.

Andr. Yes.

Soc. But I would tell you what I tell all such noble souls: attractive as such a proposition is to me, I cannot accept it. For such would entail my commission of an evil at least as great as that of those who wish to end my life. It would say

that I was lying when previously I maintained that criticism of the state, to be taken seriously, required an ultimate acceptance of the authority of the state, flawed as it may be. My fleeing now, evading this authority, would make all of that a lie.

Andr. Suppose I were to tell you that you could leave this prison, and live, without flouting the authority of the state?

Soc. I would say you are dreaming, and you are wrong to tempt an old man with an impossible dream. How could I possibly leave here, and not show contempt for the decision of the state that I must die here?

Andr. What if your body did die here, but you did not?

Soc. You mean my soul would live, but my material essence would die? There are those who claim that the two -- soul and body -- are inseparable. And when one dies, so must the other. Do you deny that?

Andr. I mean to say, your material essence and your soul would be saved, and would live. And another material essence of you would die here, absent any spirit.

Soc. How could that be? Are you suggesting my soul will inhabit another body?

Andr: No. I am saying both bodies -- the one with your soul, the other without -- would be yours.

Soc. As far as I know, my material body is unique -- there is but one of me, not two.

Andr. Have you ever seen twins?

Soc. Yes. They do seem to have the same physical body at birth, I grant you. Are you telling me that there is a twin of me, whom I do not know of? Even so, by this age -- my age -- we would likely not look exactly the same. The world wears our bodies in different ways.

Andr. No, as far as I know, your mother did not bear you and a twin. But are you seeing where this may lead?

Soc. No, am I not. For even if I had a twin, and even if he were willing to trade places with me here at this late hour, and die in my stead, when the ship from Delos arrives, it would not be right for me to allow that to happen. It would be an unspeakable act of cowardice for me, an act of evil upon the body and soul of my brother. That would be far worse than the evil of my simply escaping.

Andr. Yes, it certainly would be. But what if it were only his body that was left in your place? And what if he were not truly your brother -- not born of your mother? And what if he were not truly alive -- just a perfect copy of your body, in every way but one? What if it had no soul? It would then not be truly intelligent, not fully alive.

Soc. Leaving aside, for a moment, the impossibility of what you are proposing, where would you take me?

Andr. Somewhere close to Ithaca and Syracuse.

Soc. But those places are not close to one other. How can a third place -- your destination -- be close to both?

Andr. In my world, they are close.

Soc. Yet you are in my world, where Ithaca and Syracuse are not close.

Andr. Yes.

Soc. In what manner is your world different from mine, that Ithaca and Syracuse are close in yours?

Andr. My world is the future.

Soc. Are you saying your city is more advanced in the crafts of transport than this one, and you possess there a new means of conveyance, some swift ship, which permits more rapid travel between Ithaca and Syracuse, and that is why you contend that they are close?

Andr. There are new means of transport in my world, but they are not the most profound reason why I say the two cities are close.

Soc. Cities? Ithaca is an island, not a city.

Andr. Yes, in this world. Your world. Your time.

Soc. Your time is different from mine? Different from this time? And that is what you meant when you said your world is the future?

Andr. Yes.

Soc. You claim to have travelled here from the future?

Forgive me. I appreciate your visit at this very late hour. But only a god or a liar would make such a claim. And my fellow Athenians who have sentenced me would be happy to tell you what I think of the gods.

Andr. I assure you, I am neither god nor liar.

Soc. Travelling from one age to another cannot be the same as travelling from one place to another, in the same time.

I think the two -- time and space -- are very different.

Andr. That is true.

Soc. I do not understand how such travel across time could be possible.

Andr. Could we return to that question later, and consider now how I might help you, were such travel possible?

Soc. You wish to proceed on the basis of an impossible premise? I suppose such a conversation is preferable to thinking about the hemlock.

Andr. My point, precisely.

Soc. Is your world, then, the same as this world, except that your world is in the future?

Andr. I would say so, generally, yes.

Soc. Then, if that is true, you would know
that I have indeed died -- that I will die, in the next few days.
For, that, truly is what I intend to do.

Andr. We know, in my world, that a body identified as Socrates
indeed died after consuming hemlock. I am here to convince
you that that body need not be yours.

Soc. So far, although I can only be grateful for your ingenuity
and good intentions, I cannot say that I am persuaded.

Andr. May I continue my attempt?

Soc. If you wish.

Andr. Let us look again, then, at the nature of souls and life,
and examine, if you will, the nature of copies.
Do you agree that a statue could be made of you, of such
precise resemblance that it could be mistaken for you when
viewed at a distance?

Soc. Yes, I have seen such statues of others.
When painted with colors of proper hue, they can quite easily
be mistaken for the human being whose image they embody, especially
when viewed in dim lighting, in twilight or
pre-dawn hours, or, as you say, at a distance.

Andr. Good. Do you think it possible, then, that such a statue could be made of someone -- of you -- but comprised not of stone but of living material?

Soc. Yes, I have on occasion seen fine work of that sort constructed not of stone but of wood. Is that what you mean?

Andr. The replica I have in mind for you would be comprised of something closer to wood than stone, yes.

Soc. But no one, on close examination of a wooden replica of me, could possibly mistake it for me, or my body. Wood is material that is no longer alive; my body is still alive.

I suppose there would be more similarity between wood -- material, once alive, from a tree -- and my body, once dead, and no longer alive.

Andr. Yes.

Soc. But, nonetheless, surely no one could confuse a wooden replica of me, however well rendered, with my dead body?

Andr. No -- no one could confuse those two. But in the case of wood, could you imagine a branch, pulled from a tree, that was still in part alive?

Soc. Yes. It could be placed in water, and might live for a time. Or, depending upon the tree, its branch could be placed in soil, where it might take root, and eventually give rise to a new tree.

Andr. Exactly. Now, do you suppose it possible for flesh to exist in that same relationship to your body, as a branch newly pulled from a tree?

Soc. Flesh taken from a living body is to that living body, as a branch pulled from a tree is to the tree?

Andr. Yes.

Soc. But the branch would be mistaken by no one for the tree. Nor would flesh be confused with an entire body, dead or alive.

Andr. True. But just as that branch, properly planted, and if it were from the right kind of tree, could yield an entire tree, would you grant that flesh, taken from a body and properly treated, could be grown into an entire body?

Soc. You mean, inserting a severed arm into some special soil, such that an entire body would come forth? I have never heard of such a thing, outside of stories of the gods, and you already know my opinion of gods and men and their stories.

Andr. Are you acquainted with the story of Cadmus, who raised soldiers from the teeth of dragons sown in the soil?

Soc. Yes. It is at best a useful myth.

Andr. Suppose I were to tell you that one way in which my future world is different from this one is that we can make some of those mythic tales come true?

Soc. You can raise soldiers from the teeth of dragons?

Andr. No, but we can raise dragons from the teeth of dragons, if the teeth have been preserved in the right way.

We call them 'dinosaurs' -- 'terrible lizards'. We can sometimes take something from the teeth -- their essence -- and insert it in a very special kind of soil--

Sierra sighed. That was where the fragment ended. She looked again at the Preface--

Her outer doorbell sang. Damn it. Who could that be, this time of night? She looked at her watch -- 12:17am/4 April 2042.

She touched another device on her couch, and flicked on her guest display, on the far wall. Jesus -- she'd forgotten completely about Max-- No, actually, she had not forgotten. He wasn't due back in New York until tomorrow evening--

The bell sang again. She cursed, put down the dialog, and

buzzed him in.

He was up the stairs of her brownstone, and at her door, on the second floor, in seconds. She turned from the screen and walked to the old-fashioned peephole in her door. She peered through it, just for good measure. She had to admit, Max looked good.

She opened the door.

He walked in grinning, a present of some sort in one hand, a bottle of wine in the other.

"I thought you were coming back tomorrow," Sierra said.

"I got an upgrade to an HST," Max said, still smiling. "Long story, short flight -- 45 minutes in the air!"

"I didn't know they had hypersonic service from Iceland," Sierra said. She realized that her voice sounded a little icy, too.

Max seemed undaunted. "Well, that's part of the long story. A friend of a friend at the conference I was attending said I could get a free upgrade -- part of some promotion Iceland is doing -- if I took an overnight flight tonight. Except, of course, with that quick jump into the atmosphere and back, I was here in New York well before I left Reykjavic. Incredible timing -- I thought I'd surprise you!"

Sierra nodded. "Bad timing, for me."

"Am I interrupting something?" Max asked, finally getting it.

"Yeah, but not what you think."

Max managed another smile. "Oh, I'm sure I know what I'm interrupting -- the dissertation, right? Look, I'm sorry. I know how hard you're working on it--"

Sierra looked at him. She felt a little bad, now. He did look appealing, standing there with wine and a gift. "All right, come on in, but not for long."

They walked to the kitchen table. Max put his package and bottle down. He reached for her.

Sierra had forgotten that she was wearing only a robe, and partially open, at that. Make that two things she had forgotten tonight-- no, she had not forgotten about Max's arrival, he had come home a day sooner than expected. But she didn't realize she had forgotten about the open robe until Max put his arm around her, on the inside of the robe. The crook of his arm brushed against the underside of her breast. His hand moved slowly down the small of her back. She knew this would be a little bit longer than "not for long"...

She brought him up to date on the whole bizarre evening, in interludes of conversation over several hours.

"The Millennium Club?" Max said with something between admiration and awe. "I'm still in touch with one of the profs on my doctoral committee -- he took me there to lunch last year.

They have holdings in Greek and Latin to rival Harvard's." Max was an Assistant Professor of Analogic Studies at Fordham University himself, and by virtue of that expertise, had more than a passing knowledge of the ancient world and its modes of communication. "You know, I never bought that Socrates just allowed himself to die, when Crito was giving him a way to escape."

"I've always felt the same way," Sierra said, playing absently with Max's long hair. "Why not opt to live, and continue your critique, your philosophy? But, you know, time travel and cloning -- that's what the 'visitor' was hawking -- no way they could have been available in Socrates' time, outside of science fiction."

"Time travel's a tall order in any time," Max said, "no doubt about that. But if it's ever worked out in some future time, then people would be able to get back to our time, Socrates' time, any time, probably just as easily -- the arrival time would likely make no difference, once the technology became available."

Sierra considered. "Good point ... They've been working for years on some kind of artificial wormhole in California, haven't they?"

"Yeah -- based on some equations that Kip Thorne worked out decades ago. But as far I know, it's all just theoretical."

"Better than nothing," Sierra said, and kissed his neck. "Ok. But what about cloning?"

"Growing a twin of Socrates?" Max shrugged. "Who knows. But I do know that the ancients had a lot more knowledge than we give them credit for. So much was lost when the Library at Alexandria was burned -- and it happened more than once. So, granting that they didn't have lasers, or electron or even analog microscopes. But they understood farming. They understood deliberate breeding to improve crops and livestock. So, who knows what they knew -- maybe they knew how to put a swatch of human cells into some kind of medium, where it could grow into a clone. Anyway ... even if they didn't know squat about cloning, if this 'Andros' was really from the future, he could have brought back light-weight equipment with him -- hey, we have already have that, today."

Sierra moved down, and kissed Max, full on the lips. He had a way of making the surely impossible seem less so. It was at times like this that she understood just why she let him in in the middle of the night.

She was in Thomas' office the next morning. "The librarians in ancient Alexandria make no reference to this, or anything like it. No other reference to anyone named 'Andros,' either," Thomas said, studying his copy of the fragment, while Sierra did the same with hers.

"Jowett says the Alexandrian lists are unreliable," she replied.

"Yeah, but he was saying they included shams and spoofs, not that they overlooked Platonic dialogs that were real."

"Unreliable is unreliable," she maintained. "Lies of commission, lies of omission, just plain mistakes -- they all add up to the same thing."

Thomas nodded, slightly.

"The 'Ed.' is really more key than the Alexandrians, isn't he," Sierra continued. "We have only his word for it -- or hers -- about the carbon dating. The translation looks accurate enough, but we have only Ed's word about the original Greek words, as well."

"You found fault with some of the translation?"

"No big deal," Sierra replied, "but here, and here, for instance." She pointed to two places in the manuscript.

"'Comprised' is a little overkill, pseudo-intellectual.

'Composed' would have been fine."

Thomas chuckled, approvingly. "The translator is definitely a 'he'," he said.

"You know him?"

Thomas nodded.

"That's why you have confidence that it's not a forgery?"

Sierra asked.

"I saw the original," Thomas replied. "I helped with the translation. 'Comprised,' if I remember correctly, was mine."

Thomas prepared roasted green tea. Sierra sipped, enjoying the aroma as much as the flavor.

"The original manuscript was breathtaking," Thomas continued. "I was amazed it could survive so long, and in such good condition."

"How'd they manage that?" Sierra asked.

"Those Alexandrians were the cream of humanity, at that time," Thomas replied. "What a mix they were -- Greek culture, by way of Macedonia, situated in Egypt, under Roman rule by then. They had literacy rates exceeding anything until our nineteenth century. They had the basis of motion pictures, in persistence of vision toys. They had gadgets that ran on steam. Heron of Alexandria invented them both. And they apparently had ways of preserving documents in airless containers. They survived oxidation, but not the human stupidity that torched their great Library. But this one got away."

"Ok, so the manuscript is real, at least regarding the creation of this copy in 400 CE. But how do we know that the person who made that copy was just copying and not really creating the fragment -- and the larger story, whatever that may have been -- from scratch? Let's face it, even if we knew for a fact that Plato wrote it, that doesn't mean the story is true. It could just be another of Plato's fictions -- another tale of Atlantis, right?"

"Yes," Thomas allowed. "All of those points are well taken."

"Why did you ask me to look at this fragment, now?" Sierra asked. She knew it wasn't necessary to voice the end of the sentence -- "now, when I'm moving so well on my dissertation" -- because Thomas of all people understood that.

"I wanted you to think about this," he replied, unhelpfully.

"Yes, but why now?"

"I'm going away, for a few days."

She looked at him. His tone concerned her.

"I have an aneurysm near my heart -- it's likely no big deal. But I had a by-pass and some digital reconstruction around the area, so the operation could be a little tricky. There's a new hospital in Wilmington, Delaware, where they specialize in this."

"How long ... will you be gone?" Sierra asked.

"Just the weekend, probably," Thomas replied. "So why don't you take that time to think about the fragment, decide if you'd like to get any more involved in it I have complete confidence that you'll be able to get back to your dissertation and finish it with distinction, if you decide to take a little breather on it, first."

She glanced fitfully at some of her notes for her dissertation that evening. "Phoenician alphabet comes to Greece around 900 BCE ... Greek alphabet written from right to left, like Semitic text,

900-600 BCE ... after 600 BCE, Greeks write left to right, top to bottom ... 403 BCE, Ionic version of Greek alphabet used by Athenians ... spurt in literacy ... approximately 400 BCE, Socrates denounces the written word, according to Plato's account in the Phaedrus ... 399 BCE, Socrates drinks the hemlock..."

She focused on the last four entries, underlining them, circling them, in her mind. Those had always been the most intriguing sections of her dissertation. The Ionic alphabet comes to Athens, revolutionizes literacy there, aggravates Socrates but not Plato -- at least, not enough to stop Plato from writing -- and Socrates dies shortly after. Oh yeah, at the hands of the newly restored Athenian democracy, perhaps energized, solidified, by the written word.

So Plato winds up hating democracy, because it killed his beloved mentor, Socrates -- or, actually, because Socrates allowed the death sentence to be carried out, refused Crito's good offer of escape. And Plato, lover of the written word, eventually crafts his masterpiece anti-democratic manifesto, *The Republic*, inspiration for everything from the totalitarian societies of the twentieth century to the Islamic "republics" and the Far Eastern cyber-cities of the twenty-first -- government by the wisest, or at least those who deemed themselves the most wise...

Yeah, that had always been the most fascinating part of her doctoral work, anyway, and now this damned untitled fragment with a new look at the final hours of Socrates ... Even if Thomas was right about its 400 CE authenticity, it was likely no more than some very early science fiction, myth-writing, anyway... But damnit, that was almost as fascinating, in its own right...

She called Max. "How about we go away to my parents' place for the weekend? Bounce some ideas around?"

Max was available.

Then she called Thomas. But all possible numbers only yielded all possible voicemails. She didn't leave a message. That wasn't why she called. She just wanted to wish him well, tell him how much he meant to her. She knew he would never have drawn her into this fragment had his operation in Wilmington been assured of success.

Her parents had a little place on Sea Street, in Quivett Neck, near the town of Dennis, on Cape Cod Bay. But they were wintering on the Baltic Sea in NeoRome, formerly Romania. They had the time. Her father had been Chief of Detectives, NYPD, and had taken an early retirement. Her mother was Professor of Mathematics at Harvard, on sabbatical.

Sierra and Max arrived just in time to see a purple sunset over the stippled grey-blue bay.

"So, did Socrates ever see anything as beautiful," Max said softly. He ran his hand through Sierra's long dark hair.

"Probably," she replied. "Piraeus has western views over water.... Certainly Plato did. He travelled as far as Egypt, after the death of Socrates, and spent lots of time in Sicily. He had to have seen at least a few suns swallowed by the sea."

"You almost expect to see the steam rise," Max remarked.

"Yeah," Sierra said. She turned to Max, stroked his face, then turned back to the smoldering sunset, which had a slice of orange floating in it now. "Do you think he took Andros up on the offer?" she asked.

"In reality or in the story?"

"At this point, I'll settle for the story."

"Well, Socrates' rejection of Crito's escape plan seems pretty deep-rooted," Max said. "'Suffering is a better response to evil than committing another evil' -- didn't Socrates say something like that? And he thought running away was an evil."

"According to Plato, that's what Socrates thought."

"It all goes back to Plato, doesn't it," Max said. "Any other reliable contemporary accounts of Socrates' death? I know Aristophanes has a Socrates character in *The Clouds* and some of his other comedies, but that's a far cry from Socrates' death."

"Xenophon has a less dramatic, still mostly compatible recounting of the trial and death," Sierra said. "What Plato also has going is that no one subsequent to him, close to that time, contradicted his account. We're talking Aristotle, Plato's student, who disagreed with his mentor about lots of other things. Aristotle said nothing about the trial, one way or the other, but says a lot about Socrates, and likely would have mentioned, somewhere, any reliable accounts of the trial that contradicted Plato's. And, for that matter, there's Alexander the Great, who was Aristotle's student."

"Would help if you had a look at the rest of the manuscript."

Sierra nodded.

"You think he's holding out on you?"

Sierra considered. "Much as I admire him, I wouldn't rule that out completely." She thought more about Thomas. Why would he give her just a piece of a manuscript, if he had more? Didn't make sense. But, for that matter, none of this quite did.

By the end of the weekend, she had made a decision. Actually, she had already mostly made it when she had decided to come up to Cape Cod, with Max, to make the decision. Nothing like the sky and sea and shore of the Cape -- the north shore, the bay shore, at least, for her -- to help confirm the cosmic importance of things.

And this fragment and its implications were cosmic -- at minimum, a lot more profound, if any part of the fragment was true, than anything she would be doing in her doctoral dissertation.

She called Thomas when she got back to her apartment on Sunday evening. She doubted he would be in -- he hadn't been clear about exactly when he would be returning from Wilmington. There was no live voice, anywhere. She got the number of the hospital in Wilmington, and tried that. No way Thomas would be annoyed to hear from her.

"Professor Thomas O'Leary?" the computer repeated the name Sierra had provided. "I'm sorry, but we have no patient under that name in our hospital."

"Perhaps he already checked out?"

"I'll check," the computer told her. "No, sorry, we have had no patient under that name for the past ten years. Should I check further back?"

"No..." Sierra opted instead for a human operator. About 20 minutes later, a Ms. Dobbins called her back. She sounded more like a computer than the computer voice, but Sierra had no choice but to take her word for her humanity. "Sorry," Ms. Dobbins confirmed the computer's report, "I can verify that we have had no patient under the name of Professor Thomas O'Leary, Professor Tom O'Leary, and both names without the professor, here at the hospital

for the past ten years."

So Thomas had lied to her about going to the hospital -- or, at very least, the hospital in Wilmington. Maybe he was at another hospital. Maybe he was in Wilmington, but not in a hospital -- what attractions did Wilmington have, other than its new hospital, its old theater district, and its superhub train station?

Maybe Thomas was neither in Wilmington nor in a hospital anywhere. Why would he lie to her?

What else had he lied about?

The obvious thing was the manuscript. But why would he get her going on that, only to put its veracity in doubt by telling her an easily discoverable -- self-revealing, in fact -- lie about something else, like going to a hospital in Wilmington, Delaware?

Perhaps something had happened to him, along the way. But she would have heard, had it been anything bad -- it would have made some sort of news.

She pressed her head back into the sofa, and this time she didn't contest the sleep settings. She felt herself nodding off, and realized she was about as uncomfortable as she had ever felt in her life. Nothing like committing yourself to something, only to have it cut out from under you a few hours later.

She awoke the next morning, repeated her rounds of calls to Wilmington, the Old School, any place Thomas might have been.

She got the same result. No sign of Thomas O'Leary, anywhere. She toyed with reporting him to Missing Persons. No, the most likely explanation was still that he had lied to her, and there was no point in bringing in the police about that...

She looked again at the manuscript, as she fixed her first tea. Where had Thomas said this thing, or his copy of it, had been recently residing, brought there by whomever?

The Millennium Club was on 49th Street, east of Fifth Avenue. These clubs were famous for being extraordinarily protective of their members -- an oasis of civility in an age of omni-accessibility, one of them had unfurled a new banner outside its entrance. This, of course, had drawn a round or two of media attention.

Not the Millennium Club, but Sierra doubted that she, as a non-member, would be given much more than the time of day there...

She considered ... Hadn't Max said something about the Millennium Club a couple of days ago, when he had shown up at her door a day early? Yeah, one of his profs had taken him to lunch there -- that meant the professor was almost certainly a member. She called Max, told him about Thomas and her predicament. One of the other things she liked about Max was that he always accepted her phone calls. A rarity in this world of allergies to omni-access.

"Goldshine? Sure, I'll give him a call right now, and see what I can find out for you."

Her own phone rang a few minutes later. "Sierra Waters?" a jovial voice inquired. "I'm Samuel Goldshine. Maxwell Marcus said you'd like to talk to me about the Millennium Club?"

"Yes--"

"The best dissertation I read that decade. He's a smart fellow."

"Yes--"

"You free for lunch today, at the Millennium Club, 1 pm?"

"Yes."

"The food wasn't always so good here," Goldshine told Sierra, smacking his lips after tasting the blueberry-cherry souffle. "The Club finally relented and hired a new chef about six months ago -- I've heard nothing but compliments. Part of his secret is he's unafraid of using new genbrids. This blueberry-cherry is actually a single fruit, as you probably know."

Sierra nodded, savoring her raw cloysters, also a new species.

"Anyway, about your manuscript fragment, as Thomas O'Leary probably told you, the Club was founded in 1879. So, hell, Mark Twain could have smuggled it into the library -- he was a member, you know."

Sierra washed down a tangy cloyster with ice cold ale.

"That's why it would be great if we could speak with the Librarian,
Mr--"

"Charles, yes. His first name is Cyril, but I checked before
you arrived, and I couldn't get a firm answer as to whether he'll
be in today. Something about a sister, ill, in Baltimore-- Ah,
Franklin, this is Ms. Waters, Thomas O'Leary's student."

A well dressed man, about fifty, had approached their table.
He bowed, slightly but graciously, in Sierra's direction. "I have
definite word on Mr. Charles' whereabouts," he said to Goldshine.

"Oh, good," Goldshine replied.

"Well, I'm afraid it is not very good, for your purposes
today, Professor. Mr. Charles is expected to be in Philadelphia,
with a sick sister, for the rest of the day."

"Philadelphia? I thought it was Baltimore."

"Philadelphia is what I was just told, Sir."

"Ok, well, thank you, Franklin."

Franklin bowed again, slightly, to Sierra and Goldshine, and
excused himself.

Goldshine looked after Franklin, then back at Sierra. "Well,
bad luck, but I can certainly show you the general place --
including the part of the Library where Mr. O'Leary says the
fragment was found."

The Library was actually a series of libraries, elegantly appointed, as the Victorians said, on the third and fourth floors. The armchairs were burgundy, plush, and inviting. Maple tables of varying dimensions were overflowing with various newspapers, magazines, journals, some of which looked like they could have been on the tables since 1879. And the books on the shelves were phenomenal, to Sierra's eyes ... an autumn rainbow of rust, brown, green, and red bindings that put her small collection of Appleton editions of Darwin and Spencer that she had at home to shame.

But the nook of the Library that held Plato and his progeny was the prize. Sierra recalled an old engraving she had come across, as a child. It featured a man on a ladder against a library wall of shelves marked METAPHYSIK, his nose in the pages of an open book held in one hand, a second book in his other hand, a third between his knees, a fourth between his elbow and waist... Too many books, too little body ...

Sierra felt that way now, although the only things she was clutching were her hands--

"Can I be of assistance?" A deep voice inquired, with a trace of a British accent. It was not Goldshine's.

Sierra turned. A short, stocky, bald man smiled first at her, then Goldshine.

The professor gave no indication of knowing the man. "Well,

yes ... Ms. Waters, a student of Thomas O'Leary -- a club member -- was wondering about a partial manuscript that apparently Mr. Charles located here."

The man scrunched his face. "What sort of manuscript would that be?"

"Oh, yes, sorry, it was a piece of a Platonic dialog, apparently unknown until now, and ... look, well, I know it sounds crazy--"

"The dialog with Socrates and Andros, taking place, presumably, right after Crito has taken his leave--"

"Yes!" Sierra burst out. "I mean, you know it?"

"Of course I do. Mr. Charles indeed discovered it. We know it wasn't here during the last cleaning, that would have been nineteen years ago, in 2023. Mr. Charles knew just what to do with it -- he took it out for a proper scientific appraisal, which confirmed the authenticity of the ink, from the late Alexandrian era, about 400 AD, if memory serves Oh, my apologies, talking about memory, I forgot to introduce myself! I spend so much time in the back stacks that I forget how to behave among people. I'm Mr. Bertram. A Millennium Librarian, like Mr. Charles."

"Professor Samuel Goldshine, member since 2026." Goldshine extended his hand. "A pleasure."

Mr. Bertram took the hand, shook it, briefly.

"Do you know anything more about the fragment," Sierra pressed, "how it got to be here, who else knows about it other than you, Mr. Charles, Thomas O'Leary?"

"Oh, well any member could know about it, of course," Bertram answered. "We don't keep any of our holdings secret from the members."

"Do you know who else Mr. Charles or you talked to about this, in addition to Mr. O'Leary?" Sierra tried a slightly different tack.

But this drew disapproving looks from both Bertram and Goldshine. "Those who serve the Club would never reveal such details," Goldshine advised. "Why, at the beginning of the 21st century, the Club even stood up to a Federal subpoena once, and refused to divulge its members' reading habits!" he concluded, proudly.

"I can show you the other piece," Bertram offered. "That is, I can show it to Professor Goldshine, and if he doesn't mind your reading over his shoulder--"

"Yes, thank you--" Sierra said.

"That would be grand, thank you," Goldshine said at the same time.

"Do you know if Mr. O'Leary knows about--," Sierra began, but stopped as soon as she saw the beginning of the return of the stern looks. "Thank you," she simply said again, to both men. "This means a lot to me."

She sat next to Goldshine at a small, cherry maple desk. A green banker's light provided warm illumination. Sierra reckoned it was the real thing, not a repro, likely from the 1920s.

Bertram returned a few minutes later with a folder. He handed it to Goldshine, smiled slightly at him, then her, and left.

Goldshine opened it. There were two groups of papers, each clipped together. Goldshine picked up the first, looked through it briefly, then handed it to Sierra.

It was the same fragment which Thomas had provided. Sierra picked up the second. "Ok if I read this?" she asked Goldshine.

"By all means," he said, and busied himself with the first.

Sierra turned to the second. It was smaller than the first, and apparently did not begin where the first left off.

Soc. The time is not sufficient. Even if I were inclined to agree with your proposition, which I am not, the ship from Delos with the priest of Apollo will be here in a day or two, after which I am bound to follow the wishes of the Athenians. And, surely, one or two days is not enough to grow a full-bodied likeness of a man.

Andr. That is true, Socrates. Even with the special craft the people of my time and place possess -- the life-growing craft I have described to you -- one day would not be enough to grow a man. But believe me, O' Socrates, there exists a yet deeper craft, which makes that one day, any given amount of time, irrelevant for our purposes.

Soc. What is this deeper craft?

Andr. It is part of craft through which I have arrived here, from a future world, a future time.

Soc. Ah, the godly craft, the unknown craft, which you have yet to explain to me. Are you saying that this craft gives you the power, as it is claimed for some gods, to make time stand still for some events, but move forward for others?

Andr. Yes, that is similar to what I am saying. But in my world, such power is reality, not myth.

Soc. But you are in my world now, are you not?

Andr. True. But by virtue of my being here, you are in my world too, are you not, Socrates?

Soc. Yes, I would agree. If indeed you come from another world. But, then, tell me, how in your world, or in the connection between your world and mine, could time stop in such a way as to allow a man to grow seventy years in a day?

Andr. I will try. Let us say that, by the process of branching we were talking about earlier, a part of you could be moved to the future, and placed in a soil such that the branch could grow into a complete, living likeness of you. Now, whether that growth took one day or seventy years would not matter, as long as our two worlds remained connected, and as long as your part of the connection, your world, the place and time in which we are conversing, at this moment, was this very time.

Soc. You are saying you could return to your world and time, and then return here, at this very time, before you left, and there would be two entities of you this instant in this room?

Andr. Yes, that would be possible. Though I would try not to do that.

Soc. And you could return with a living replica of me, which took even seventy years to grow, as long as at the conclusion of that seventy years, the path to this time and place, from that future world to this room, shortly after the break of this dawn, in which you and I now converse, at this very moment, remained open?

Andr. Yes, that is what I am suggesting.

Soc. And, if that were truly possible, all you would need to complete your plan would be a branch, as we have been describing it, of me.

Andr. Yes.

Soc. I could never allow that.

Andr. What if I told you the branch had already been taken?

Sierra realized her hands were shaking. This fragment of the dialog ended with Andros' words. Who the hell was he?

She glanced at Goldshine, still engrossed in the first, longer fragment. She tried to calm herself. Reading this dialog in public was not a good idea, if she didn't want everyone to know how it was affecting her. Maybe that didn't matter.

She looked around. No sign of Bertram. She needed to have a copy of this, but she doubted the Club's rules would allow it. Maybe she could prevail upon Goldshine to request a copy?

She couldn't chance his saying no. She reached, quietly, for her palm-phone. She placed it in her palm, set the rapid photo function, then moved her palm quickly over the pages in front of her. She'd study this on the screen back in her apartment. Thank you, Thomas, she thought, by dragging me into this, you've turned me into a goddamn spy. But she couldn't say she really regretted it, now, either. No, not at all.

She thanked Goldshine, profusely and truly, and walked home, down Fifth Avenue, with her thoughts. Goldshine had seemed more amused than thrilled by the fragments, in the end. Well, he probably didn't believe they were real, even if carbon-14 said they had been copied in 400 CE. Time travel and cloning in the ancient world were a lot harder to believe than an error or fudging of carbon-14 dating in the present. Time travel was hard to believe in any world....

Goldshine had said he'd return the fragments to Mr. Bertram. "And come to my lecture next week -- 'The Vulgate and the Vulgar'."

She had looked for Mr. Bertram. But he had receded into the stacks. She would have loved to question him further about what he knew about the fragments. He seemed like something of a fragment from another time and place himself...

The stone lions on the steps of the New York Public Library on 42nd Street looked especially stoic today, as if they had the lost Library of Alexandria on their minds. Somehow that Library of Alexandria, burned by the Christians, burned by the Muslims, reputed to have a copy of every manuscript at the time, was a keystone in all of this. The Preface to the first fragment had said it was discovered in excavations near Alexandria in the first decade of the 21st century. What excavations? Exactly when?

She thought about what Thomas had said about the Alexandrians in Egypt. A magnificent culture, one of the three Hellenistic pieces of the sprawling empire Alexander the Great had left on his untimely death at 33.... Alexander the Great, who died a year before his mentor, Aristotle, in 323 BCE. Aristotle, student of Plato, student of Socrates....

But the scholars of Alexandria were by and large not great philosophers. They were mathematicians, astronomers, like Ptolemy, whose calculations of the Moon's orbit would have been

good enough to land a rocket there. They were tinkerers, like Heron of Alexandria, who invented the toy steam engines and persistence of vision devices Thomas had mentioned. Heron had invented lots of other things -- automatic doors, coin-operated machines.... Had he tinkered with a time machine, too?

Not likely, from what Sierra understood of physics. Steam engines and motion pictures and automatic doors operated on Newtonian principles. Time machines, if they were real, would likely operate on a physics that made current quantum gravitics look like child's play.

She reached her brownstone, on 11th Street, between University Place and Fifth Avenue. For a second, she thought she saw Thomas sitting on her front stoop. He looked terrible, somehow twenty years older than a few days ago. The operation hadn't gone well ... what did they do to him down in Wilmington, or wherever he was?

But as she approached, she realized the old man on her staircase was just a derelict staring at his photophone.

She entered her apartment, and checked her screen. Good, the second fragment, photographed with her palm phone, was there, as expected. She was a researcher, she assured herself,

not really a spy, and that surely took precedence -- the pursuit of truth -- over any conventions of the Club. Yet she still felt a little bad.

She showered and put on something more comfortable. She had dressed up for her lunch at the Millennium. She returned to her screen, and printed out a copy of the second fragment. Not because she was afraid of losing what was on her screen -- her grandparents had told her that, in the early days of the computer, people were often afraid of that, and printed out documents as a way of saving them. But Sierra printed out the second fragment because it seemed more connected that way, more a part of the first piece of the manuscript, that Thomas had given her.

Security in numbers. Two fragments, connected to each other, made each seem more legitimate, more real. But that feeling, she knew, was still mostly illusion. Two people, buttressing each other's stories, made neither story more likely, unless at least one of the people was already known to be trustworthy. What if both were liars?

The two pieces of the dialog she held in front of her, each with Greek on one side, English on the other, could well just both be fragments of the same lie. She shook her head, beginning to feel as if she were having a Socratic dialog with herself...

She looked back at her screen, and requested information on "excavations," "Alexandria," "2001-2010". Hmm... the search yielded stories about a couple of apparently minor activities in 2008 and 2009. Nothing about a new Platonic manuscript. Well, Thomas had given no indication about how well the 'discovery' had been reported or publicized at that time...

She searched "Andros". Nothing other than that it was the name of an island near Athens, which she already knew. People in the ancient world were often called by the places of their birth. But the Andros of her dialog presumably came from the future...

She put in another request, "Alexandria," "inventions". Heron of Alexandria dominated the 800 hits.... Also known as Hero.... Date of birth and life uncertain -- estimates ranged from 150 BC to 250 AD.... Most common date, 75 AD.... Invented the "aeolipile" -- ah yes, the toy steam engine.... His manuscript, Heron's Formula, lost for years. Fragment recovered in 1894, complete copy in 1896....He wrote in Greek...

She searched on Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Benjamin Jowett, 1817-1893 ... She came upon his quote, "The way to get things done is not to mind who gets the credit for doing them..." She wasn't sure she agreed.

She read *The Crito* anew. No hint of Andros -- man or island -- anywhere. Just the angst, everywhere, of Socrates' refusal to escape. She looked at *The Apology*, too...

It was evening when she finally turned away from the screen, and thought about eating. In a feat of perfect timing, that was just when the screen beeped -- she had set it to alert her about any news stories that mentioned Thomas O'Leary.

She clicked and read the brief report in the Athenian Global Village: "... three men missing in a boating accident in the Aegean..." Two of the names meant nothing to her.

But the third was "Thomas O'Leary, a scholar from New York..."

She searched frantically for more information about Thomas and the accident. She searched on his name, his picture, the titles of his books...

She got nothing more about the accident.

But in her fast scanning of the photos, something caught her eye. She looked more carefully, expanded it to full screen, maximum resolution. She enhanced the part she wanted to see more of. It was a grainy, sepia-toned photo, on a page, appropriately enough, with an old-fashioned Web address, and a stat box that said it hadn't been visited in twelve years.

She rubbed her eyes, and looked again.

No doubt about it, unless Thomas had an ancestor who looked

exactly like him. There, standing in front of the Millennium Club with two other gentlemen, was Thomas, looking just as he did the last time she saw him.

No real problem in that, she'd seen photos of Thomas taken more than twenty years ago, and he looked pretty much the same as now. He had one of those faces, she had recently heard him remark, that looked fifty when he was thirty and fifty when he was seventy.

Except this photo, hanging nicely on a page about Victorian New York City, was captioned "a new literary club, 1883, a few years after its founding".

PAUL LEVINSON BIO

Paul Levinson writes science fiction, sf/mystery and popular and scholarly non-fiction. *The Silk Code* won the Locus award for Best First Novel of 1999. His novel *The Consciousness Plague* won the 2003 Mary Shelley Award for outstanding Fictional Work. He has published more than 25 science fiction stories, some of which are now available on fictionwise.com. His novella *Loose Ends* was a 1998 Hugo Award finalist, a finalist for the 1998 Sturgeon Award, and a finalist for the 1997 Nebula Award. The radioplay of his novelette *The Chronology Protection Case* was nominated for an Edgar Award for Best Mystery Play of 2002. *Digital McLuhan* won the 2000 Lewis Mumford Award for Outstanding Scholawork has been translated into eleven languages.

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