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*Socrates*

You are leaving me?

*Eryximachus*

I fly to the bedside of a woman. . . .

*Socrates*

But, by the Gods, I am still suffering. . . . My head is full and empty; my limbs are broken; my mouth is bitter and dry; and I feel all over a tingling agitation and the most burdensome fatigue, as though I had in myself a baneful principle of all the contradictions. . . .

*Eryximachus*

You will be better this evening; and well, tomorrow.

*Socrates*

Stay, I beg you. I am sure you will scarcely be out of reach before my ailments grow worse, I shall have you fetched at top speed. . . . Leave your cloak, your stick, your lantern where they are. . . .

*Eryximachus*

Another ailment calls me. Someone is writhing on another couch and imploring the Gods to make my steps heard. I adjure you, O Socrates, whom I admire above all mortals,

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to summon to your aid the sublime calm of your vast intelligence: let it dispel your fears, which I know to be quite vain. Continue to take warm water. Think in moderation. Remain on your bed. Contemplate on the wall the daylight vanishing, and the balance of light and shadow pursuing one another insensibly towards the night. Simple time is a great remedy. I tell you that the fight is ending; you have conquered, and the cause of your body has won. You will be fresh and gay with tomorrow's dawn. So I flee. . . .

*Socrates*

Go. . . . But do not go until you have given the answer to a question. . . . A single one. You will not leave here until you have satisfied my mind on a point which troubles it. I am anxious to know . . .

*Eryximachus*

Just see how much better you are. . . . Already our sage revives and recovers in the presence of some thought more universal than the idea of fever and the morose meditation upon fits of nausea.

*Socrates*

Oh! no. . . . I am not feeling so well! . . . But the ill in me is itself a thinking force. Listen! . . . If you leave me without answering, the question will torment me, fever will return, sleep overwhelm me or flee me, and your ministrations, counteracted by yourself. . . . Listen, Eryximachus.

*Eryximachus*

Well then. . . . I am listening. But I swear to you that three quarters of my soul is elsewhere.

SOCRATES AND HIS PHYSICIAN

*Socrates*

Tell me: you affirm that I am regaining the fullness of good health, and that my being is going to recover all its virtues, as a branch, bent by a child's hand or the weight of a dove, and then restored to itself, returns to its place on the tree, after a few movements of uncertainty. . . .

*Eryximachus*

I assure you of it.

*Socrates*

You tell me, moreover, that you are hurrying off to another mortal who calls on your help; and, no doubt, from this one you will go off upon your winged feet to bring solace to a third, and so on and so on. . . . But how can you so acutely foresee in the several cases, and in face of such divers adversities, the destiny of the different ills, the increase or decrease of the intestine difficulties of all these bodies which have only their disorders in common and only anguishes alike?

*Eryximachus*

Do you not yourself go from idea to idea? Do you not change your interlocutors and therefore your tactics? Do you not know (and know marvelously) that you do not seduce Zeno as you seduce Phaedrus? Do you try to penetrate, to treat, and to cure all souls according to a single method and by the same means?

*Socrates*

Wait. . . . Do not question me. If your time is precious, fleeting is the time of my thought. If I wish to know something, the very instant of my desire is also the very instant

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when my mind is about to become most happily imbued with the enlightenment offered it. A mind receives all the better if it finds itself in the state closest to producing, of itself, what it desires. . . . And is this not true of all nourishment, and is it not said of fecundation?

*Eryximachus*

I have heard it said. . . .

*Socrates*

Allow me then to express to you in all its freshness what I am curious about. You are my enigma. You are he who does me good or tries to: but I only now want to consider him who possesses the power to do this good, and to do good to many others than myself. It is your art itself which puzzles me. I ask myself how you know what you know, and what kind of a mind can be yours for you to be able to speak to me as you did just now, without falsehood or presumption, when you told me, or foretold me, that I shall be cured tomorrow, and satisfied with my body from the dawn of the day. I marvel at what you must be, you and your medicine, in order to obtain from my nature that blessed oracle and to have a presentiment of its propensity for the better. This body, which is mine, confides and entrusts itself to you and not to myself; to which latter it only addresses itself in the form of troubles, fatigues, and pains, which are as it were the insults and blasphemies which it can utter when it is displeased. It speaks to my mind as to a beast, which one drives without explanations, but by violence and savage abuse; whilst it tells you clearly what it wishes and does not wish, and the why and how of its state. It is strange that you should know a thousand times more than I do about myself, and that I should be as it were transparent to the light of your

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knowledge, while I am for myself quite obscure and opaque. Nay more: you even see that which I not yet am, and you assign to my body a certain good, to which it must make its way, as though on your orders and at such and such a moment fixed by you. . . . Wait. You look at me as though my astonishment astonished you, and I were putting to you some childish question.

*Eryximachus*

I am waiting, O greatest among the sages, I am waiting; and true it is that I am astonished. But do not you forget, I beg you, that each of your words uttered *here* adds *there* some grain of unbearable duration to someone's anxious expectation.

*Socrates*

Listen then. You well know, you who come so often to take your share in the conversations my friends have with me, you know that—once practical things and business are well over—my days are spent in questioning myself, either alone, or through the dialectical detour of well-directed converse, seeking, by every means, to make for myself an idea of myself as right and sincere as possible, since I see no other object worthier to be fathomed. I have not found any other worth living for, for the purpose of a life seems to me to be to use its time and strength to make, or create, or perceive, something which should render quite useless, and even inconceivable and absurd, the rebeginning of an existence. *Living should therefore, in my view, be directed against reliving.* That is to say that a life's course should have as its essential idea a knowledge of oneself so accomplished that nothing can, when it touches its highest point, any more modify its structure, forms, and modes. So it is with the growth of a child, all of whose fumbings and risky experiments con-

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verge, from birth, gradually to give it a possession of its body and of sensible things which, when once and for all it has been acquired, can no more increase, nor be modified, nor even be conceived differently.

The experience of this extreme knowledge would also be the last thought possible, and as it were the last drop of the liquid which completely fills a vessel. The measure being quite full, the duration of my life would seem to me to be exactly exhausted.

Now I have done my best, friend Eryximachus, to follow the road to this end. No doubt I could not claim to know my mortal body in detail nor to picture to myself all the chances that can change it. But I flattered myself that my soul would always reduce and master, if not all the powers of my body (since all-powerful sufferings and unbearable ordeals do exist), then at least all that which, deriving from this body, tends to confuse it and lead it into error regarding the True or the Beautiful or the Right. But you are now bringing me to feel great fear about the very substance of my principle and my hope. If you show me you know me better than I do myself, and can foresee even my next mood, seeing me already gay and full of vigor, whilst I find myself at present quite overwhelmed and full of disgust, must I not conclude that my whole effort is puerile, that my intimate tactics vanish in the face of your entirely exterior art, which envelops my body and soul at once in a network of particular points of knowledge woven together, thereby capturing at a single stroke the universe of my person?

*Eryximachus*

Do not make me so formidable, great Socrates. . . . I am not the monster of knowledge and power which you create for yourself. My limitations are all too certain.

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I for my part am concerned only with phenomena, inside the complexity and confusion of which I try to find my bearings, so as to bring as much solace as possible to the humans who consult me; and, in the course of doing so, to cause them the least ill (for the physician must fear his art and not make an unreserved use of its weapons).

It is true I know you better than you do yourself . . . in so far as you are ignorant of yourself; but infinitely less well in so far as you know yourself. I know much better than you what is in your belly and what there is between the bones of your wonderfully gifted head; I can say, with some—though not absolute—assurance, the kind of person you will be, and in what humor, at your next awakening. But what you will do with that humor, and with all the beautiful surprises which it will bring to your mind and which will enchant us in the evenings—all this necessarily escapes me, apart from which your fame would be but mine; and I should even be a More-than-Socrates in the eyes of men and Gods. . . . You are ignorant of yourself, Socrates, in so far as you are a mortal, for your mind in its purity is engaged inside time in separating off its own essence from every condition of perishability: if you knew what I know, you could not know what you know. . . . Adieu. I leave you with your daemon, and your body to the favorable hands of Asclepius.

*Socrates*

But. . . . He is already far away! . . . I well see that flight is in the nature of physicians. I do not, it is true, know what would happen to medicine and to mortals if to each of them were attached a physician who would not leave him day or night, nor cease to observe him at every instant. This one deserts me. He leaves me divided between what he

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knows and what I ignore, and on the other hand, what he ignores and what I know. . . . My mind, still rather turbid with clouds which obscure the sense, repeats to itself as an oracle a strange and ambiguous saying: EVERYTHING RESTS ON ME—I HANG UPON A THREAD. . . .