

Aristophanes **Wasps** (*anglice*)¹

Dramatis personae

Philocleon

Misocleon (*his son*)

Sosias and Xanthias (*slaves of Philocleon*)

Boy (*son of the Chorus leader*)

Demagogue (*Victim of Philocleon*)

Myrtia (*A Woman Baker*)

Accuser of Philocleon

Chorus (*of old jurymen, dressed as wasps*)

Watchdog

(*Sosias and Xanthias are 'guarding', i.e. sleeping in front of, the front door of Philocleon's house*)

Sosias Hey, Xanthias, you evil demon, what's the matter with you?

Xanthias I'm thinking about how to shorten the night watch.

Sosias You're thinking about how to increase the pain on your arse, you mean! Don't you know what sort of a bastard we're guarding here?

Xanthias Yeah, I know but I just want to forget that for just a little while. Distance my brain from the task a bit...

Sosias You're looking for trouble my friend. Still something delightful is weighing down upon my eyelids, too... sleeeeeeep... sleeeeeeep... *begins to snore heavily*

Xanthias Oi! Either you're gone nuts or you're in the middle of a beauty of a wet dream!

Sosias No, no... just a few... frenzied drunk women... slaves... sleeeeeeep... sleeeeeeep... ahhhh! Yes!

Xanthias Just as I thought! We're in the same dream my friend! Caught me a moment ago when a delightful weight fell upon my eyelids too. Heavy weight. You'd reckon a whole platoon of Persians was standing on them! Ahhhh, and what an enchanting dream! Wondrous to behold!

Sosias No kidding, me too! I've never had a dream like it but you tell me yours first.

Xanthias Well, it seems I saw this huge eagle flying over the market. Huge bastard. Flying around the market until down it comes and with its huge talons it snatches a

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shield made of bronze. Then it flew high up into the Heavens again and from there... and from there... Kleonymos the coward, the deserter, dropped it! 15

Sosias Yeah, Kleonymos the shield dropper does make a funny riddle, doesn't he? I mean, fancy dropping your shield and running off in the middle of a battle. Good ol' Kleonymos!

Xanthias Yeah... What do you mean a "good riddle?"

Sosias Well, a man could ask his mates at the pub "what sort of beast drops its shield on land, in the air and at sea?"

Xanthias O, my! A dream like that! What rotten things are heading my way, I wonder?

Sosias Nah! Don't worry, mate. Nothing bad is going to happen to you... Not unless the gods will it! 25

Xanthias It's a dreadful thing though, a man dropping his arms like that, I mean... Now tell me your dream!

Sosias Oh, mine's huge! It's about the whole ship of State!

Xanthias Well, hurry then, tell me... begin with the hull!

Sosias Well, at the first nod, I dreamed in my dream a whole lot of sheep gathering at the gates of the parliament and these sheep were wearing short leather jackets and carrying walking sticks. Then, all of a sudden a huge whale, an absolutely gluttonous beast started making a speech, with what I thought, was the shrill voice of a poked pig.

Xanthias Oh, no!

Sosias What's up?

Xanthias Enough, enough! Shut up! Your dream stinks of rotten leather!

Sosias (*Ignoring Xanthias*) Then, this huge stinking beast was holding a pair of scales and was weighing... ox fat! Or was it fat people?

Xanthias Frightening! Very frightening! I think he wants to divide the people! 40

Sosias And I dreamed that Theorus was there with the head of crow, squatting on the ground, next to the huge cock of a beast and then Alcibiades turned to me and said with his usual lisp, "Thee there? There's Theowus with the head of a clow!"

Xanthias He lisped cowwectly, that Althibiades!

Sosias Awkward idea that isn't it? I mean Theorus turning into a crow?

Xanthias Not at all. It's an excellent sign!

Sosias How do you mean?

Xanthias Well, look: First Theorus is a man and then he turns himself into a crow. Doesn't this signify that he's about to leave us and fly off to... the crows?

Sosias What an expert dream interpreter! Will you accept a two-obols-a-day permanent job with me?

Xanthias Well, now, be quiet and let me delineate the play to our audience! 54

Xanthias Don't expect from us either anything grand or anything as low as those dreadful, coarse jokes told by the Megarians. Nor will you see the spectacle of two slaves holding a basket of nuts which they throw at you; nor Heracles whose food they pinch, nor stupid abuse thrown at Euripides. Nor will we make for the second time minced meat out of Cleon who had this recent bit of shining good luck!

No, what you will see is a bright little piece of work... but, of course, no brighter than you though, still not so low as to be insufferable.

Out there, snoring on the roof, we have our boss, a man most noteworthy. He has told us to guard his father and make sure he doesn't escape from lock and key. This is because his father has this terrible and strange disease which if we were not to tell you what it is, you'd never think of it nor would you know of it, nor yet could guess of it! Go on, try guessing what it might be!

Sosias Pronapes' son Amynias, says that the old man suffers from an acute case of dice-ophilia, in other words, love of the dice! What a gambler the man is!

Xanthias Utter nonsense! He's using his own affliction to judge that of our master, by Zeus, by Zeus!

But this word "philia" is the core of his problem. There's a certain Sosias who has told a certain Dercylus that he, Dercylus, suffers from wine-o-philia.

Sosias Utter nonsense! Everyone knows that wine-o-philia is the disease that afflicts the important men amongst us.

Xanthias Nikostratus, though, our great and successful general, who hails from Scambonidae, is of another opinion. His guess is that our master suffers from sacrifice-ophilia... or xenophilia.

Sosias Now that's a doggy poo, Nikostratus! Xenophilus is a ... queer! You know that!

Xanthias Stop guessing, you're nowhere near the truth with all this chit chat. Shut up if you want to learn the truth. I'll tell you what my master suffers from. He suffers from jury-ophilia. And how! More than anyone else would ever love being a juror! You'll hear him sighing deep sighs if he's too late to catch a front row seat!

Not a wink of sleep during the night! Even if sleep does have a chance at his eyelids for a

moment his mind will be constantly hovering around the jury's time piece. All night! Imagine, this habit he has of holding the vote between his three fingers, well, those fingers are now permanently stuck together –like this, see? – and when he gets up he rushes off as if he's taking incense to the altar for the first of the month prayers!

And, by the gods, if he sees a sign on some door that says, let's say, "Pyrilampes' son, Demos, is a cutie pie," he goes and writes next to it, "the ballot box is a cutie pie."

If his own cock woke him up too late even as early as bedtime, our master would accuse him of waking him up too late because the magistrates had bribed him. The moment the evening meal is finished he shouts for his shoes to be brought to him. Then he runs off to the courthouse very early and, being too early he stands stuck by a post like a barnacle. Stuck there like that until the time comes for him to do his judging.

When the time comes for him to show the extent of the guilt of all the accused, he, being such a nasty bugger, draws this huge line across the wax tablet so that his finger nails are so thick with wax that he looks like a bee or a bumblebee. He is so frightened that he'll run out of voting shells that he's got the whole beach brought here into his house. That's how crazy our master is and the more people try to reason with him the worse he gets –the more cases he wants to judge.

That's why we've got him locked up, preventing him from escaping.

His son, up there (*indicating Misocleon*) is very worried about the old man's madness. At first he tried to persuade him with words: not to wear the juror's cape nor to keep running off to the courthouse like that but this old man just wouldn't listen. Couldn't care less!

Then we gave him expiation baths but to no avail. Then his son took him to the temple of the Corybants, hoping for some cure but off he goes again to the court banging on his little drum and there he is again, listening to more cases!

When all these efforts didn't succeed, Misocleon carries him one night to the temple of Asclepios in Aigina and lies him down there but he, even before Dawn, there he is back at the court's gate.

From then on we've got him all locked up but still the bugger kept escaping from different holes or the gutters, so we stopped all the holes with plugs and sealed them up inscrutably. So what does he do then? He hammers great pegs into the wall and ... runs up them like a pet crow and off he hops back to the courthouse! That's why we've put the nets all over the house and the courtyard and we're standing guard all around it.

The old guy has a name: Philocleon. It's true! He's a Cleon lover! His son, Misocleon hates Cleon and that's why they say he's a difficult man, sort of hoity-toity.

Enter the chorus of old jurors dressed as wasps and carrying torches. Part of their dress includes a cap.

They are accompanied by the boys who are guiding them. The boys are carrying on their shoulder a small "shopping bag."

Chorus Onward and forward lusty chaps! Eh, you, Komias! You're very slow these days. Not like in the olden days when you were tough like a dog's leash. See, now even Charinares walks faster than you! 230

Chorus Strymodorus of Conthyle, my best comrade juror! Can you see Evergides or Chabes of Phlya anywhere? No? Oh dear, look at us! I'm afraid that's all that's left of that beautiful youth that did guard duty at Byzantium. Just the two of us! Hey, remember when we went roaming about the streets one night, pinched a bread-woman's kneading bowl, turned it into firewood and we cooked some pimperl? Come on then boys, let's get on with it. We're hearing Laches' case today. They're all saying he stuffed his hive full of money! That's why our patron the General Cleon has given orders yesterday for us to get there very early, each of us carrying three days' rations of rotten rage for Laches so that he will not escape our punishment.

Chorus Come on then, old comrades before it gets to be daybreak. Let's move on and make sure we look carefully everywhere with our torches that we don't stumble on any stones and hurt our selves badly.

Boy Careful, daddy. Careful of the mud there!

Chorus Well, pick up a twig from the ground and trim the torch!

Boy (Holding up a finger) No, it's all right, I think I'll use this. 250

Chorus You idiot! Who taught you to trim the torch with your fingers? You know how expensive oil is? But then again, it's not you who feels the bite when the prices rise like that! (*Slaps him one*)

Boy Oi! Slap me once more to teach me a lesson and I promise you, we'll blow out all the torches and run off home on our own. You'll be stumbling around in the dark then and sloshing about in the mud like a partridge. 257

Chorus Watch it, me lad! I've taught lessons to bigger folk than you. But... damn! I think I've stepped into some mud! Well then, I say that this means that it will rain within four days! And I can see that the torch is gathering mold and that's when the rain loves to come down. All those crops that aren't up yet will need the rain followed by the breath of the North wind ...

(They've reached Philocleon's house) Hey, what's going on here? What's the matter with our comrade juror, Philocleon? Isn't he coming out to join our crew? I wonder what's wrong with him. He's never been late before. He's always been the first among us and he'd be singing the Phrynichus repertoire. He always loved those songs.

Chorus My friends, I think we should stand here for a while and sing him out of the house. Once he hears my voice he'll be most happy to slide out of his door.

What could the matter be with the old man? (272)

Why isn't he standing before us, by his door?

Has he lost his shoes perhaps?

Stubbed his toes, perhaps?

Hurt his ankle being such an oldie?

Chorus A case of swollen balls?

He used to be keener than all of us (280)

Once!

Once he'd get a thought in his head,

He'd never let it go

And if anyone asked him for a favour

He'd say, "poor suck, up your Khyber!"

Chorus Perhaps it is because of Carystos the Samian's

Case yesterday! The rotten man tricked us into

Thinking he was pro-Athenian and

Told us the goings on at Samos. He slipped

Through our fingers.

Chorus Perhaps that made the old man so angry that

He's lying in his bed with a fever!

That's our old Philocleon,

What a man!

Chorus (Shouting)

But, dear sweet chap, do get up and out of bed! (286)

Don't feel so bad or angry about yourself,

They brought us a real heavyweight today

One of those who betrayed us at Thrace,

Let's make sure we have him in the pot

Old boy!

Move on, boy, move on! (290)

Boy Daddy, if I ask you for something will you give it me?

Chorus By all means my dear boy! Tell daddy what

Nice things you want him to buy for you.

Knuckle sandwich, perhaps?

Boy No, daddy, I prefer some dried figs

They're much sweeter!

Chorus No, by Zeus! Not even if you go hang yourself!

Boy Then I'll stop guiding you. (*Pulls his torch away*)

Chorus Listen you! With this tiny wage I've got to buy three things: flour, firewood and food for the three of us. What figs are you on about, boy? (300)

Boy (*Thinks for a moment*) Tell me daddy, if the Minister doesn't call the court into session today, how are we going to eat? Do you hold any hope for the provision of food for these little Hellenes?

Chorus Ah! Poor me! I have no idea how and from where I'll get us a bite.

Boy Oh, my poor, wretched mother! Why did you give birth to me?

Chorus Why? She gave birth to you so that I would have to deal with the worry of feeding you, that's why!

Boy (*Talking to his shopping bag hanging from his shoulder*) What a useless little ornament you turned out to be my poor, little shopping bag!

Philocleon (*Pokes his head out of a window*) My dear, dear friends! I've been listening to your sweet voices all this time with a broken heart because I just can't get out of here. What shall I do? These men are guarding the door because I want to go with you to the court house and give someone some big sentence.

O Zeus! Zeus the great chunderer! Do turn me into smoke, or else into a Proxenides the great boaster or into the son of Sellus, a real boaster of the vine climber nature.

Do me this favour, great Lord! Pity my torture and smash your great burning thunderbolt upon my head, turn me into ashes, throw me into a hot sauce ... either that or turn me into a pebble ... the sort the jurors use to count votes!

Misocleon Come on, come on! The sooner you take your seat the sooner I'll call the first case! (825)

Philocleon Go on then! Here I am, sitting patiently.

Misocleon Right, now let's see... whom should I bring out first? Any of the slaves misbehaved recently? What about that Thracian girl who scorched the pot yesterday ...

Philocleon (Interrupting him) Hold on, hold on, there sonny! You're killing me with this. You're calling a case for me to hear without even a tiny bit of railing? Railings are the first of the holy objects we see when we're at the Court House!

Misocleon Oh, dear Zeus, there is none around!

Philocleon Well, hang on then and I'll run into the house and find some that will do the job.

Philocleon goes into the house.

Misocleon See what a powerful thing a habit is?

Enter Philocleon carrying some fencing wood.

Philocleon Damn it, what a dog to look after!

Misocleon Now what?

Philocleon That bitch of a dog, Barker, came into the kitchen and pinched a whole wheel of Sicilian soft cheese!

Misocleon Well then, that's the first indictment I shall bring before my daddy. Come, Mr prosecutor, come and sit here.

Philocleon O, no! No, no, no! Not me! He says that the prosecutor should be the other dog if someone else reads out the case.

Misocleon All right then, bring both of them out here.

Philocleon Done!

Misocleon (Indicating the rails) What's this?

Philocleon The pigpen of the goddess Hestia.

Misocleon Did you steal it, you sacrilegious bastard?

Philocleon Not at all. I'll be slaughtering someone so I'll begin with Hestia. So, come on then, read the case! I can smell the fines already!

Misocleon Hold on, I'll go and bring the tablets and the docket.

Philocleon God damn it! You'll kill me with all your delays! All I need to do is to draw a line!

Misocleon (*Showing a tablet*) Here you are.

Philocleon Come on then, come on, call the case!

Misocleon All right.

Philocleon Now who is the first among this lot?

Misocleon Oh, no, damn it! This will kill me! I've forgotten to bring out the voting urns! (*Gets up and heads for indoors*)

Philocleon Where are you off to now? Hold on!

Misocleon I need to bring the ballot boxes.

Philocleon Forget them. We don't need them. I've brought these ladles. (855)

Misocleon Fine. Then we've got everything except the water clock.

Philocleon So what's this then (*Indicating the chamber pot*) if it isn't a water clock?

Misocleon You're a true Athenian, full of wisdom! Quickly, someone bring out of the house fire, myrtle and incense, so that we may begin with a prayer to the gods.

Chorus We too will add our propitious prayer for you, to celebrate your truce and the way you've settled your enmity and strife so politely.

Misocleon Silence! Let there be sacred silence first!

Chorus O Phoebus Apollo, Pythian! (870)

Let this strange machination which this man has started inside his doors be a success for him as well as for us all and let all our errors be forgotten.

O, Paian, Io!

Misocleon O, Lord and Master, Apollo, my neighbourhood god who protects my threshold! Receive this new ceremony, Lord, as I have prepared it for my father.

Soften him, Lord! Let some honey run into his heart!

Soften his oaken disposition, make him feel more for the accused than the accuser, extricate his hatred for humanity and make him feel the tears that fall when people beg him for a mercy call.

Tear away his nasty temper and cut away the anger from his waspy sting.

Chorus We join in your song and in your prayers for your new system. Your utterances were well received. (885)

Now that we know that you, of all the young men, love the people more than anyone else, we stand by you.

Misocleon Let any juror standing at the door enter now. No admittance once the show starts.

Philocleon So, let's see. Who's this defendant then? He's really going to cop it!

Misocleon Hear ye, hear ye all! This is the charge against the defendant: "The Watchdog, a citizen of Cydatheneum, accuses Barker, citizen of Aixone, of having grossly cheated him of his share of one rich Cicilian wheel of cheese because he ate it all by himself. Penalty, a collar made of sycophantic wood." (894)

Philocleon Not on your life! If this dog is found guilty, he'll cop the ultimate dog's death penalty!

Misocleon And here's the accused, Barker.

Philocleon Wow, what a dirty stinker! His face says it all: Thief! Look how he shows his teeth! He thinks he'll pull the wool over my eyes. Where is his accuser, the watchdog of Cydatheneum?

Watchdog Woof, woof!

Misocleon He's present, sir.

Philocleon Good one. Just another Barker, if you ask me. He barks well but licks the bowls better!

Misocleon (To Watchdog) Quiet you. Come here at the stand and pronounce your accusation!



Philocleon Meantime I shall sip some lentil soup.

Watchdog You've already heard my accusations, friends of the jury. Barker here has committed unspeakable atrocities against me and our whole navy. He ran off into a dark corner of the house and there he wolfed down a whole Sicilian cheese ...

Philocleon By Zeus, that's obvious! What a dreadful cheese-stinking burp he just gave in my direction!

Watchdog ...and when I asked him for some he refused. Tell me then who'll be able to do you justice if your watchdog doesn't get a scrap or two thrown his way? (914)

Philocleon Didn't share it with you and he didn't share it with me, the public. The dog is as blistering as this lentil soup, damn him!

Misocleon By the gods, pappy, don't prejudge! You must hear both sides of the story.

Philocleon But my dear son! This is a most obvious case. Can't you hear it? It barks at you! (920)

Watchdog Don't you let him off then! Of all the dogs he's the most unilateral eater! He circumnavigated all around the island and ate the place out completely—every rind of every city!

Philocleon And here I am, not having the tiniest bit of plaster to patch my urn!

Watchdog That's why you should definitely punish him! No single bush can feed two thieves! And don't make me bark unnecessarily here, or else I'll never bark again!

Philocleon Ho, ho! What a lot of deplorable deeds this man has denounced! What a thief! *(to the rooster on the roof)* What do you say Mr Cock? Yes, judging by the wink he gave me, I do believe he agrees with me. Now Mr Chairman... where is he? Pass me the chamber pot. (931)

Misocleon Get it down yourself. I'm calling in the witnesses. *(Calls into the house)* All those witnesses for the defendant, Barker, come out, please: Bowl, Pestle, Cheese grater, Brazier, Pot and the rest of the utensils come out and testify.

Meantime, Philocleon has brought down the chamber pot and begun pissing into it.

The utensils have entered the "court room."

Are you still doing your wees? Come on, finish up and sit down!

Philocleon Sure—but as for this defendant here, I think he'll be shitting himself today.

Misocleon Will you stop being so difficult and awful to the defendants? Must you constantly be biting them?

(To Barker)

Come on then, take over and defend yourself. Come on, speak, say something!

Philocleon It seems he's got nothing to say. (945)

Misocleon No. Hmm, I think the same happened to Melesias' son, Thucydides, Pericles' chief enemy. He was testifying one day when his jaws suddenly became numb. Gentlemen of the jury, it's difficult to defend a dog that's been slandered. Nevertheless, I shall try and speak for him. Gentlemen, Barker, here, is a good dog, a brave dog that chases away the wolves.

Philocleon Rubbish! This dog is nothing more than a thief and a conspirator!

Misocleon On the contrary. Barker, here, is superior to any dog of the current generation. He can look after a great many sheep.

Philocleon What's the good of that, if he eats our cheese? What's the good of him?

Misocleon What's the good of him? He guards your door, he fights for you and he is, in all other respects, a virtuoso! All right, he might have stolen from you but ... well, he's not exactly highly educated. He hasn't been sent to the lyre school to learn how to play the instrument, so you must forgive him.

Philocleon Indeed, I wish he hadn't got educated at all so that he wouldn't be stuffing up our accounts. (960)

Misocleon Listen to my witnesses, my dear man ... (*To Barker*) You, cheese grater! Come, take the stand and speak loudly so that we can all hear. You were an Accountant at the time, is that right? Speak clearly. Explain what were your duties. All that cheese you grated off, you distributed among the soldiers, didn't you?

(*Barker barks*)

He says "yes."

Philocleon What a bloody liar!

Misocleon My dear man! Feel sorry for the bedraggled! Barker here, only eats scraps of chicken necks and bones and he never hangs around in the same spot for long, whereas the other dog, Mr Watchdog, he hangs around here all day long, doing nothing and when all the others come home, he demands his share of the food. And if he doesn't get it, he begins his biting.

Philocleon Good Lord! Good Lord! What on earth is going on with me? I am being softened by something evil! I am changing my mind!

Misocleon Come on, poppy, be merciful to him. Don't destroy our poor Barker! Now, where are his puppies? (*Shouts inside the house*) Come on you lot, come and take a seat, poor babies, let your tears fall, start crying, begging and grovelling.

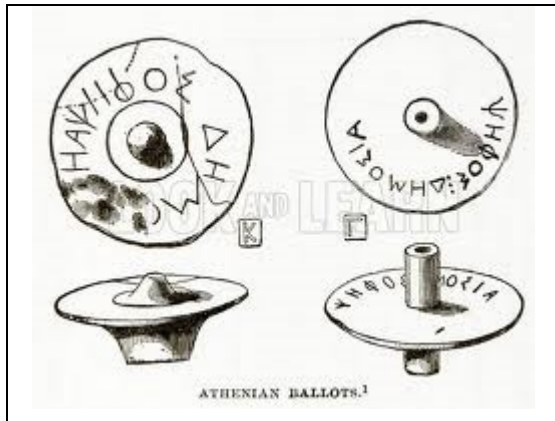
Philocleon Get down from there! Get down, get down, I say! Get down!

Misocleon I will get down, even though this phrase, "get down" has tricked a great many people. But, here you are, I've stepped down. (980)

Philocleon The crows take it! It's no good slurping lentil soup. I'm crying now for no other reason but because I've slurped so much of it!

Misocleon So he's not getting off?

Philocleon Hard to say. (985)



Misocleon Come on, pappy. Turn over to another page. Be nice. Take this pebble and with your eyes shut, walk over to that second urn and acquit the poor bugger!

Philocleon Nope! I haven't been taught to play the lyre either!

Misocleon Come on then, daddy, let me take you around. This way ... it's the quickest.

Philocleon Is this the first urn?

Misocleon Yes.

Philocleon There she goes! (*drops the pebble into the urn*)

Misocleon Ha, ha, ha! I've tricked him! I've got him to vote for acquittal without his knowing! Come pappy, let's do the count.

Philocleon So... what's our verdict?

Misocleon We'll soon know (*Looks into the urn and brings out the single pebble*) ... Barker, you're a free dog! (*Philocleon looks faint, then falls onto his chair*) Pappy, daddy, what's the matter? Oh, dear. Where's some water? Come on, pappy, come to!

Philocleon Tell me this one thing: Is he a free dog?

Misocleon He is, by Zeus.

Philocleon Damn! And I am a big fat zero! A nobody!

Misocleon Don't think about it now, darling. Come on, get up!

Philocleon How in Heaven's name am I going to live with this? How could I have let a defendant go scot free? Most honourable gods above, forgive me. I did it accidentally. This is not my way at all!

(999)

Misocleon Come on, now, don't get so angry. I'll take excellent care of you. I'll feed you well, take you to the theatre, to dinner and to parties. You will live the happiest of lives from now on and no one will be laughing at you when Hyperbolus plays his tricks on you. Come, let's go inside.

