

EUREKA!

A Play in One-Act

Synopsis

Although Sophron and Aphareus were ancient playwrights, please do not overthink the names I've assigned the characters. They are mere substitutions for the "D1" and "D2" I used throughout the writing. So why the mention? Quite simply, to beg your indulgence. As a mere juggler of sorts with words, I suspect you will find them pretentious and loathsome mouthfuls. They certainly are!

Now, as to this little number itself. My starting thesis is straightforward. Namely, when his supervisor is tasked with increasing the laboratory's revenue can a university scientist through the use of some simple, but traditional, magic tricks, turn-the-tables in an impromptu performance review? Should you decide, by a chuckle here and there, he can, you are certainly the witty and splendid type who will no doubt appreciate the title. It is you, and you alone, my friend, for whom this play has been written.

Let me leave you with one final word. Abracadabra!

Cast of Characters

Sophron: 40s, physician and university professor.

Aphareus: 70s, physician, mentor, and university bigwig.

Hermes: An exceptionally ambiguous, but crated, rabbit.

Scene

A university laboratory.

Time

2025.

ACT I

SETTING: Screen projection of slow floating biological cellular transformations plays in continual loop on large black screen stage front pre-show. These cell images occur in time with instrumental music like a slow but bright *bossa nova* jazz or ripping Grateful Dead jam.

When ready to begin, stop the montage and take houselights all the way down. In blackness, projection screen up taken up.

AT RISE: Snap spotlight on HERMES, a rabbit inside an oversized crate sitting atop the desk centerstage.

Stage lights up slowly to revealing a scientific/teaching laboratory. In addition to the rabbit crate, the desk includes a faux sink and is a hive of work activity: a microscope, racks of glass beakers, containers of colored liquids (some possibly smoking or boiling gently), along with piles of other effects as desired.

Behind the desk now hangs an industrial size whiteboard with a complex and long handwritten scientific formula.

A "door" on one side is the lone exit point, intended to be "a hallway."

Between the desk and the whiteboard, facing the audience, DR. SOPHRON wearing a white lab coat works his way around the desktop meticulously taking measurements and recording reading in his notes.

DR. APHAREUS enters from the "hall" closing the door to wait without

interrupting. He surveys the inventory of the laboratory with a big smile. The casual demeanor of both doctors conveys familiarity and the visit is scheduled.

DR. SOPHRON maintains absolute attention on his work at the microscope until stepping away and asking his guest to have a look. DR. APHAREUS responds eagerly and bends to put one eye against the instrument.

SOPHRON

Dissected nodule biliary.

APHAREUS

Birated tubual.

SOPHRON

Noprascopic arithemia.

APHAREUS

No protusions or dispatic colectomi.

(Standing, the old doctor backs away from scope post examination.)

Perfect health.

(Ab lib personal greetings; shaking hands warmly and the like)

SOPHRON

No dificulitis?

APHAREUS

(After a second look)

No.

SOPHRON

Note any enzyme irregularity?

APHAREUS

Slightly concentrated.

SOPHRON

And shape? Expanded?

APHAREUS

Slight. Atypical but within the mean of normal.

SOPHRON

Eureka!

APHAREUS

Ha-ha-ha! You've got it made. Not a care in the world.

SOPHRON

Nothing but fun and games.

APHAREUS

(Affectionately tapping his fingers
at the rabbit in the crate.)

Research night and day. No distractions. Barely a
disruption. No monthly nut. No soul-sucking administrative
shackles.

SOPHRON

I leave all *that* to you.

APHAREUS

The whole department does!

(DR. APHAREUS suddenly teases out with
a few gentle pulls a large white bra
buried on the desktop, holding it aloft
for astonishment. SOPHRON calmly takes
the bra, folds it carefully, then for
the audience to plainly see locks it in
cabinet with a key from his pocket.)

You can't kid a kidder. Now. Forgive me for being forward,
but you got my message.

SOPHRON

I did. The mid-year impromptu review.

APHAREUS

Yes.

SOPHRON

You look well. Which I admit is a pleasant relief. In fact,
you seem perfectly glued.

(Begins low-intensity physical examination of visitor.)

Tell me about it.

APHAREUS

Don't exaggerate.

SOPHRON

Nah-ah-ah. That was one doozey of a voicemail! Even Department Chiefs need to let off some steam now and then.

APHAREUS

Oh, that.

SOPHRON

Not so fast. Any chest pain?

APHAREUS

No.

SOPHRON

Regular fatigue?

APHAREUS

No. Age appropriate, I suppose.

SOPHRON

How is your sleep?

APHAREUS

Restful.

SOPHRON

Would you say more than normal, or not enough?

APHAREUS

Normal.

SOPHRON

Intrusive or repetitive thoughts? Feelings of dread, anxiety or despair?

APHAREUS

No.

SOPHRON

Good. Good. Good. Patient presents alert, with a mild and pleasant affect; devoid of undue stress or anger. No symptoms of chronic disability apparent. Indication: full recovery from recent acute psychotic episode.

APHAREUS

Are you finished? And watch it.

SOPHRON

Funny bone restored.

APHAREUS

May I be blunt?

SOPHRON

Please!

APHAREUS

The Board of Regents has approved the establishment of a new Committee on Innovation, Partnership and Progress. The I.P.P. This is big.

SOPHRON

The big I.P.P.

APHAREUS

Big changes. This department is going to be the bell cow as part of the rebrand.

SOPHRON

Rebrand?

APHAREUS

We're being designated as 'The Elon Initiative.'

SOPHRON

William Elon?

APHAREUS

Yes.

SOPHRON

Good ole' Bill.

APHAREUS

Without question. But this is strictly an honorarium. The reorg is piggybacking off The Bloomberg Charitable Trust Endowment.

SOPHRON

Cha-ching.

APHAREUS

So, while Bill Elon's name is on it, the actual work is being tasked to me.

SOPHRON

Wise choice.

APHAREUS

I'm Chair and 'Director of Scientific Innovation.'

SOPHRON

Naturally. Who's on the committee with you?

APHAREUS

Lightweights! Corporate-partnership-sponsor-types. Business muck-itty-mucks with money falling out of their ears.

SOPHRON

Huzzah!

APHAREUS

Huz-nothin'. The deck is stacked. I'm out voted two-to-one every time.

SOPHRON

Bogus.

APHAREUS

Jack, this place would never make it with without me.

SOPHRON

Oh?

APHAREUS

I've always fought the good fight.

SOPHRON

Every board-certified Infectious Disease practitioner in the country would give their right arm to be Department Chief here, even if it meant serving on the 'Committee for the Appeasement of Fat-Cat Donors.'

APHAREUS

Not if they knew what's good for them.

SOPHRON

Give it time. It'll die down.

APHAREUS

I'm not so sure.

SOPHRON

It always does.

APHAREUS

I've died and gone to bean-counter heaven!

SOPHRON

Say, now that you're back in your old element, let's do *this* right!

(DR. SOPHRON finds a white laboratory coat.)

The old doc consents and DR. SOPHRON assists his colleague with the exchange of his blazer for the traditional garb.)

APHAREUS

Thank you. How do I look?

SOPHRON

Sharp.

APHAREUS

Thank you.

SOPHRON

Comfortable?

APHAREUS

Just like old times.

SOPHRON

Dr. Protein Rides Again!

(Old APHAREUS dropping his hands into the front pockets of the lab coat. He removes a rubber thumb tip and examines it before handing or gently tossing the apparatus to the younger SOPHRON with a look of puzzlement.)

In turn, SOPHRON riffles inside a desk drawer casually while keeping his full attention on the conversation.)

Sounds like just another busybody Coonan committee. They can't do squat anyway.

APHAREUS

Geez! Ancient times! No, it's a new day. For us all I'm afraid.

SOPHRON

(Fitting something in his hands)

It'll pass. Let it die down.

APHAREUS

Things are different now. Hey, don't give me the evil eye! Before you say another word, I'll let you in on a little secret. It's not just here. Things are changing everywhere. You and I, we're from the old way. Institutions are evolving. It's adapt-or-die time.

SOPHRON

(Giving a Bronx cheer)

Just this week's existential crisis.

APHAREUS

Noted. But mark my word. Like it or not, this institution is moving to a leadership top-down model.

SOPHRON

Call it what you want. The question becomes, whether the original purpose is redefined, and if adjusted or outright abandoned, what becomes the underlying calculus for the newly adopted purpose.

APHAREUS

Listen, I've gone round and round on this with them. But the fundamental idea has been proven sound. It's all process-oriented models. And the fact is, there is more value in push-and-pull, rather than, sit-and-wait. It's no use.

SOPHRON

I follow. So, what? What's our fundamental measure of success going to be?

APHAREUS

The Bottom Line. What else? The only thing that ever moves the needle.

SOPHRON

Isn't that the kind of scientific research the big corporations do best?

APHAREUS

Need I remind you this academic institution *is* a corporation. It's not a dirty word.

SOPHRON

We're not profiteers. What about the students?

APHAREUS

Times change. Our students come here to get jobs, not study. College is about post-graduation employment nowadays. Students *and* parents rank hands-on experience above traditional classroom instruction as the number one factor in choosing a college!

SOPHRON

Considering the cost, who could blame them.

APHAREUS

Experiential learning is the future.

SOPHRON

Excelsior! Dr. Sayer is rolling over in his grave.

APHAREUS

Things are different.

SOPHRON

Can you imagine his reaction? 'Memorization is a waste of time because your iPhone can determine atomic structure, so it's clearly a better use of your time to just open the chest cavity.

APHAREUS

Listen friend, this goes all the way up to the Board of Regents. The President is even fully onboard. The world is changing.

SOPHRON

And you're the grim reaper here to jettison my laboratory to the dinosaur heap.

APHAREUS

Ha-ha-ha! No, no, no. Don't panic!

SOPHRON

Machine learning can run circles around me.

APHAREUS

Believe me, they checked! It's cost prohibitive. At the moment.

SOPHRON

They what?!

APHAREUS

We're old farts. The days of deference are over. None of our labs will operate in a vacuum going forward. Pure scientific autonomy is a thing of the past. The Board of Regents has tasked the Committee on Innovation, Partnership and Progress with implementing results-oriented regulations. And they want something exciting. *Something big!*

SOPHRON

(Performs the magician's "thumb to silk" trick slowly while maintaining full attention to the conversation.)

Yeah?

APHAREUS

Horsing around isn't exactly the mid-year impromptu review the Board had in mind.

SOPHRON

You could barely say 'Something big' with a straight face.

APHAREUS

Let me start over. Ingenuity without leadership is . . . for lack of a better term, merely, effort.

SOPHRON

Is that so.

APHAREUS

What do all great periods of change throughout history have in common?

SOPHRON

Chaos?

APHAREUS

Disruption. And the most skillful leaders are the ones who harnessed the disruption most successfully.

SOPHRON

Little known fact. Hippocrates' early work was funded by a conglomerate of olive oil producers.

(SOPHRON performs the "vanishing silk" trick, this time faster.)

APHAREUS

Enough hocus pocus. Please Sophron, help me. You're one of our best and brightest.

(SOPHRON places the thumb tip back in the pocket of the older doctor's lab coat where found.)

I, for one, agree strongly that this department, as a body, could be missing out on some exciting breakthroughs.

SOPHRON

You're pulling my leg.

APHAREUS

It's indisputable fact. It's being demonstrated right before our eyes every day!

SOPHRON

Really?

APHAREUS

Without question. We have Dr. Dorphus up at Syracuse to thank. The Board of Regents got wind of his success, and it wants the same.

SOPHRON

The same?

APHAREUS

Yes, only different.

SOPHRON

Only different?

APHAREUS

That's right. The numbers are huge!

SOPHRON

Phonus balongnus. In the fields of vitamins and sports drinks maybe.

APHAREUS

Nowadays we can't look down on that sort of thing.

SOPHRON

Baby stuff. Who but scientists can define 'significant'? Isn't simply the *ah-ha!* discovery of the known world through true understanding the only true 'significant.' Don't forget your Aristotle.

APHAREUS

Aristotle? You're mad.

SOPHRON

The telos of knowledge. Revelation springs from contemplation. The highest form of knowledge is pursued for its own sake. At best, that jacktard work up at Syracuse is a new *application*, but not scientific discovery.

APHAREUS

(The old doctor now begins the magician's tried-and-true "egg bag trick" routine by taking up a black medical bag from the desktop. He opens and knocks on the bottom, turns it upside down, then shakes to demonstrate it is empty.)

Would a little bit of money be too much to ask?

(The younger SOPHRON takes the bag now. He reaches in and his hand comes out bottom. Puzzled he turns it upside down, then right side up several times, each time giving it a good shake.)

SOPHRON

(He now reaches into the bag again, but this time removes the large white bra locked away earlier.)

No, a little money wouldn't hurt either. . . I'm after big game. Proteins and natural transformations. What we're wired to respond to as humans. Our basic internal DNA appeals. The human brain's true destiny. My work is a search for the mental on the physical. I'm in the surprise business.

APHAREUS

Tell me what you have up here. Looks promising.

SOPHRON

It's beyond promising. It's transformative.

(Biting and chewing a carrot.)

My entire theory described up here explains these building blocks.

(APHAREUS removes his iPhone and clicks several pictures of the formula on the whiteboard.)

APHAREUS

You don't mind, do you?

SOPHRON

Get one with me. . . You'll recall the slide we reviewed earlier under the microscope.

APHAREUS

Yes.

SOPHRON

They prove this theory. That's the *splash* for your impromptu review.

APHAREUS

Fantastic!

(Thumb-typing on iPhone screen
excitedly and sending.)

Tell me how.

SOPHRON

You want something mind blowing?

APHAREUS

Absolutely!

SOPHRON

If I show you, you'll leave happy?

APHAREUS

You give me mind blowing, and I'll leave dancing over the moon.

SOPHRON

Here, let's make some room then. Please move the crate. Up against the side here.

(Giddy the old doctor, baby-talking to the rabbit, now lifts the oversized crate and sets it on the floor up against the side of the desk with his foot. SOPHRON using a towel quickly wipes the desk area where the crate sat, then discards the towel draping it over the crate.)

Wunderbar. Thank you. Now, are you ready?

APHAREUS

I'm giddy! Spill the beans.

SOPHRON

The big strike! The bean counter bonanza! The move-the-needle-ronni! You sure you're ready for this?

APHAREUS

I was born ready.

SOPHRON

Here it comes then. *'Le Splash Monet-May-ka.'*

APHAREUS

Let's have it!

SOPHRON

To properly demonstrate my Principle of Transformation, I need you to knock three times on the table and say, 'Innovation, Partnership and Progress.'

APHAREUS

"Innovation, Partnership and Progress!"

SOPHRON

Please retrieve the rabbit from the crate.

(The old doctor turns to comply, but before he can fully bend and open the latch, a [INSERT DIRECTOR'S CHOICE]* climbs out from the side of the crate!

[*Possibilities for HERMES transformed? A glamorous lady in a long sparkling gown; a pig with wings; a golden goose, a male midget covered in gold wearing a pig's nose, a "living" caduceus which frees itself from a straightjacket, a walking money tree, a person wearing a rubber mask of Donald Trump, Elon Musk, Joe Biden, etc.; a young ballerina, a procession of students in college branded gear wearing backpacks; a local "celebrity"; or the playwright's favorite: a "member" of the audience

who entered the seating area from the front before the start of the show in such a way to draw the attention (and derision) of the whole audience, such as a muttering "bag-lady" before taking a "seat" in the back.]

In on the joke in every way, our she/he/it HERMES and SOPHRON exit happily out of the laboratory via the door to the "hallway."

Alone on stage, APHAREUS "examines" the crate perplexed. He inspects under the desk, "pounding" on the side to demonstrating it to be solid. He puzzles over the formula on the whiteboard, trying to follow the steps with a pointing finger.

Finally the old doctor goes taking his sportscoat but not removing the white laboratory jacket. As he exits, he "shuts off" the light switch by the door causing the stage to go completely dark except for a spotlight illuminating "the scientific formula" on the whiteboard.

The bright pre-show music begins. Slowly the house lights rise all the way up. Music continues for audience walk-out. The pre-show black screen descends, this time with "SORRY, NO REFUNDS" projected.

In lieu of the actors return to the stage for applause, send them quickly through the back so they are waiting in the lobby to shake hands with and say goodnight to the audience. APHAREUS may wish to "pass the hat" for donations.

THE END