

THE FROGS
 by Aristophanes
 English Translation by Terry Glaser
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Scene 2

SETTING: A road leading from HERAKLES' house to the River Styx.

AT RISE: DIONYSOS is on foot, and XANTHIAS is riding on a donkey. Disguised as HERAKLES, DIONYSOS wears a long yellow robe with a lion skin over it and boots on his feet; he carries a big club and a tiny package. XANTHIAS has a yoke over his shoulders with large, obviously heavy bundles at each end.

XANTHIAS

Oh, Master, please don't make me go! Why don't you find a nice clean cadaver to hire? Somebody newly dead and in need of ready cash. He's the man for you.

DIONYSOS

What if I can't find one?

XANTHIAS

Then I'll go, but I won't like it!

DIONYSOS

Such a choice.

(A CORPSE is carried
in.)

Look! Here comes a corpse now.

(calling to the CORPSE)

Hey, you! Yes, you -- the dead one. My friend, I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse. How would you like to carry a few teensy, weensy bags to Hell?

CORPSE

(sitting up)

How many?

DIONYSOS
 (pushing XANTHIAS in
 front of the bags to
 hide them)

Oh, just a couple.

CORPSE
 All right, but it'll cost you two drachmas.

DIONYSOS
 By the wily wings of Hermes, one drachma!

CORPSE
 (lying down again; to
 the bearers)
 Keep moving.

DIONYSOS
 Wait, friend, don't be so hasty -- one and a half.

CORPSE
 Two! And that's my last word.

XANTHIAS
 Two and a half! Take it or leave it.

CORPSE
 Over my dead body!
 (to the bearers)
 March!

(The CORPSE is carried
 out.)

DIONYSOS
 (calling after the
 CORPSE)
 Crowbait!

XANTHIAS
 Never mind, Master, he'll get his comeuppance.
 (resignedly)
 Give me the bags.

DIONYSOS

(slapping him hard on
the back)

Stout fellow! Remind me to thank you some day.

(singing as they start
to walk)

Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to Hell we go!

CHARON (offstage)

Belay, me hearties! Ship the oars and drop the anchor!

XANTHIAS

(stopping short)

Look, Master, it's a gigantic bottomless lake!

DIONYSOS

By the ominous omens of Apollo, so it is!

(looking offstage)

And here comes old barnacle-back and his boat!

(CHARON enters in his
rowboat.)

XANTHIAS

It's Charon!

DIONYSOS

Hola, Charon! Comment ça va? Como esta Usted? How's
tricks?

CHARON

(in a drone)

Now leaving from pier number 5, the Tartaros Express,
making stops at the River of Woe, the River of
Forgetfulness, and Pan-demonium.

DIONYSOS

Pandemonium -- that's for us!

CHARON

Hoist your trotters, young whippersnapper, and hop in.

DIONYSOS

Are you sure you can get me into Hell?

CHARON

With your track record? No problem.

DIONYSOS

(to XANTHIAS)

All right, drudge, get your ass on the move.

CHARON

Hold on there, matey! I'm not taking a slave. Not unless he's one of the freed slaves who fought at the Battle of Arginusai.

XANTHIAS

Oh, what a shame! I just missed that one because of an infected toenail.

CHARON

Then you'll have to hike around to the other side.

XANTHIAS

Where will I meet you?

CHARON

At the first rest stop. You can't miss it -- all the signs are scorched.

DIONYSOS

Got that, stewpot?

XANTHIAS

(picking up all the
bags)

I've got it all right. I just wish I could get rid of it.

(He staggers off,
muttering to himself.)

I couldn't have gotten an ordinary mortal for a master, could I? No-o-o-o, not Xanthias the Unlucky, Xanthias the Inept, Xanthias the Awesomely Unfortunate, Xanthias the . . .

(XANTHIAS exits.)

CHARON

(to DIONYSOS)

Take your oar, me lubber.

(DIONYSOS climbs into
the boat and sits on the
oar.)

CHARON

(calling loudly)

Final boarding call for the Tartaros Express. All those traveling with small children or who need special assistance, forget it.

(to DIONYSOS)

Avast there, laddie, what do you think you're doing?

DIONYSOS

What am I doing? I'm taking me oar, the way you told me to.

CHARON

(moving DIONYSOS off the oar and thrusting it at him)

Take it in your hands, blubbertub.

DIONYSOS (grumbling)

What you have to go through . . .

CHARON

(demonstrating)

Grab the oar like this and pull.

DIONYSOS

(trying it ineffectually)

Grab the oar . . .

CHARON

Shiver me timbers, but you're weak as a beached beluga. Get that fat cooking!

DIONYSOS

But I've never rowed a day in my life!

CHARON

It's easy. As soon as you start, you'll hear a beautiful melody to help you keep the time.

DIONYSOS

Who's going to sing?

CHARON

The wondrous Frog Swans.

DIONYSOS

What the hell's a Frog Swan?

CHARON

An amphibian who sings while he croaks.

DIONYSOS

Full speed ahead, me salty dog -- give me the beat.

CHARON (rhythmically)

Oom-pah-pah, oom-pah-pah.

(As DIONYSOS rows to the beat of CHARON's rhythmic calls, the FROGS appear, dancing around the boat and singing their song in a very different rhythm. Not knowing whose rhythm to follow, DIONYSOS gets increasingly confused as he rows.)

FROGS

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
 Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
 Once tadpoles swimming
 Along on our backs,
 Now we can't stop,
 Hippity-hop,
 Singing and dancing our watery two-step.
 Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

Give us a taste of soothing wine,
 Sweet-tasting sips of the grape divine.
 Pickled, we'll worship
 At Bacchus's shrine.
 Thus we will find
 True peace of mind,
 Hipping and hopping our bibulous frog trot.
 Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

My rump is developing horrible cracks.

FROGS

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

There's nothing much worse than a froggie who yaks.

FROGS

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

Maybe I'll cut off their legs with an ax,

FROGS

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

Cook them in garlic and eat them as snacks.

FROGS

Try if you dare, you blustering bloat,
 You'll never subdue the frog in my throat.
 The Muses adore
 My deep croaking note,
 Because of the reeds
 I grow for the needs
 Of pipes and of lyres for Pan and Apollo.
 Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

My poor blistered bum won't survive these attacks.

FROGS

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

What a boring refrain -- zip your lip and make tracks!

FROGS

Not on your life, we'll sing our song
 As loud as we like as we swim along.
 We'll frolic all day
 In a deep-diving throng.
 In rain or in sun
 We always have fun,
 Splishing and splashing our nautical leapfrog.

DIONYSOS

Now you've got me repeating your quacks.

FROGS

You're terribly flat, our tummies churn.

DIONYSOS

That's nothing compared with my swelling stern.

FROGS

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

DIONYSOS

Too bad I'm fresh out of barbecue racks.

FROGS

Skip all the threats, we'll never stop!

DIONYSOS

(trying to hit the FROGS
 with his oar)
 You can't beat me, I'll row till I drop!
 Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!

FROGS

We'll triumph at last, despite your smacks.

DIONYSOS

Oh no you won't, you little fly-traps!

I'll croak and I'll croak
 Till my throat is sore,
 Take a deep breath
 And then croak some more!
 I'll croak you a tune
 Till your eyes bug out,
 Then grab you all fast
 And feed you to trout!

DIONYSOS (Cont.)

Brekekekex ko-ax ko-ax!
 I'll bundle you up in big gunny sacks!
 Ko-ax ko-ax ko-akity-ax,
 Ko-akity-akity-akity-ax!

(DIONYSOS scat-sings
 badly on the word "ko-
 ax" until the FROGS
 can't stand it anymore,
 put their webbed hands
 over their ears, and run
 out screaming.)

DIONYSOS

Take that, you buggers!

CHARON

Coming ashore, coming ashore. Drop the hook, matey.
 Everybody out. We hope you enjoy your stay in Hell, or
 wherever your final destination may be.

(DIONYSOS tries to sneak
 away without paying.)

CHARON

Whoa there, buster, where's your fare?

DIONYSOS

(giving him some coins)
 Highway robbery!

CHARON

(changing the sign on
 the boat and calling as
 he exits)

All aboard for the Elysium Express, making stops at the
 Isles of the Blessed, the Isles of the Fortunate, the Isles
 of the Sickeningly Virtuous . . .

(END OF SCENE)