

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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The Odyssey

Story by
Homer

Edit by
Don Fleming

The Odyssey was first presented by Seattle Children's Theatre for the Summer Season.
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The Odyssey
by Don Fleming, after Homer

Cast: There are about 30 characters, but with doubling, the play can be performed with 12 actors, 7 male and 5 female.

Set and Props: Odysseus hall becomes the various locations he goes to in his travels, with some suggestion that we are still in the hall. To get to Penelope's room, the actors must cross through the hall. There are monsters (e.g. Cyclopes) and transformations (e.g. men into pigs), which we suggested, using modern military detritus as puppets and props.

Place and Time: The original SCT production used modern dress, including modern military gear and uniforms. Despite the contemporary feel, there are mythical elements in the story.

Note: The original SCT production was cast with high school aged students. There are mature themes woven throughout the story.

The play runs about an hour.

THE ODYSSEY

By Don Fleming, after Homer

Characters:

AGAMEMNON, Commander of the Greek army
KASSANDRA, princess of Troy

KLYTEMNESTRA, Agamemnon's wife
AEGISTHUS, Klytemnestra's lover

PENELOPE, Odysseus' wife, Telemakos' mother
KLEA, Penelope's housemaid

Penelope's Suitors:

EURYMAKOS
LEIODES
AGELUS
PHEMIUS
ANTINOUS

TELEMAKOS, son of Penelope and Odysseus
ODYSSEUS, Penelope's husband, Telemakos' father

Odysseus' crew:

EURYLOKOS - male
ANTIPHUS - male
SILEA - female
MEDON - female
ADES - female
PISANDER - male

POLYPHEMOS, a Cyclops, son of the god Poseidon
CYCLOPS 1
CYCLOPS 2
CYCLOPS 3

SIRENS, all-knowing spirits

CIRCE, a sorceress
HANDMAIDEN 1
HANDMAIDEN 2
HANDMAIDEN 3

LOTOS-EATER 1
LOTOS-EATER 2
LOTOS-EATER 3

A STYLIZED SETTING. AGAMEMNON ENTERS IN ARCHAIC ARMOR AND TRAGIC MASK. WEEPING BEHIND HIM, LED BY A CHAIN, IS KASSANDRA. HE WALKS STIFFLY ALONG A GORGEOUS RED CARPET, ACKNOWLEDGING NON-EXISTENT CHEERS. KLYTEMNESTRA WAITS FOR HIM, IN MORE RELAXED POSTURE AND COSTUME, BEMUSED AND BITTER, KEEPING HER HANDS BEHIND HER BACK.

AGAMEMNON

I have returned! Agamemnon, lord of all Greece, destroyer of the Trojan empire, returns to his wife Klytemnestra.

KLYTEMNESTRA WALKS AROUND AGAMEMNON AS THOUGH HE WERE A STATUE, LOOKING AT KASSANDRA. AGAMEMNON WATCHES HER AWKWARDLY.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Mmmmmmmmmhmmmmmm. . .and who is this?

AGAMEMNON

Behold Cassandra, princess of Troy, last survivor of that doomed city.

KASSANDRA

Greetings, great Queen.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Ooh, she's nice. And here I was worried about you, thinking you might be all alone over there.

AGAMEMNON SEEMS CONFUSED BY KLYTEMNESTRA'S WORDS AND ATTITUDE. HE RETURNS TO HIS HEROIC POSE.

AGAMEMNON

My great mission accomplished, I have returned! Agamemnon, lord of Greece, conqueror of Troy. Returned to my hearth, home and beloved wife.

KLYTEMNESTRA

It's all right. I've got a friend, too. Come out, Aegisthus.

AEGISTHUS EMERGES, WOLFLIKE.

AEGISTHUS

Hello, general.

AGAMEMNON

Greetings! I have returned, Agamemnon, lord of Greece,
conqueror of . . .

KLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, shut up! We've got something for you.

KLYTEMNESTRA REVEALS A FUNERAL SHROUD.

AGAMEMNON

A funeral shroud? For whom hath this been woven?

KLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, I made it for you. It's all for you.

*KLYTEMNESTRA UNWRAPS THE SHROUD, REVEALING AN AXE AND
A BOW AND ARROWS. SHE THROWS THE SHROUD AROUND
AGAMEMNON AND STRIKES HIM WITH THE AXE. HE BELLOWS
LIKE A BULL AND TRIES TO FLEE, WHILE AEGISTHUS PICKS
UP THE BOW AND FINISHES HIM OFF WITH ARROWS. KASSANDRA
CONTINUES HER LAMENTATIONS. KLYTEMNESTRA KILLS HER,
TOO. AEGISTHUS AND KLYTEMNESTRA LAUGH AS THEY EXIT.
THE LAUGHTER CONTINUES AS THE SCENE BEGINS TO SHIFT TO
THE SUITORS. THE LIGHTS ALSO COME UP ON PENELOPE IN
HER ROOM, WHO IS SITTING ALONE. KLYTEMNESTRA DROPS THE
SHROUD IN PENELOPE'S LAP AS SHE PASSES. THE SCENE HAS
SHIFTED TO PENELOPE'S SUITORS, PARTYING IN ODYSSEUS'
HALL.*

AGELUS

That's what really happened to Agamemnon?

EURYMAKOS

That's the story I've heard.

AGELUS

What happened to her? Klytemnestra?

EURYMAKOS

I think she's on the run. Not everyone in the family was
pleased with what she did.

LEIODES

Agamemnon. Murdered by his own wife in his own house. Sick world. You can't trust anyone.

PHEMIUS

I got it! Ooh, ooh, I got it. Listen:

The Epic of Agamemnon:

Agamemnon returned in great glory.
"I just conquered Troy" was his story.
But Klytemnestra was waiting.
Anticipating.
And I'm sorry: the rest is too gory.

*SUITORS LAUGH AND DRINK. KLEA RUSHES IN FROM
PENELOPE'S ROOM*

KLEA

She's finished it!

EURYMAKOS

The shroud?

AGELUS

The funeral shroud?

EURYMAKOS

Did you see it, Klea? Did you actually see it?

KLEA

I saw it, and she's done!

LEIODES

What's she doing now?

KLEA

Just sitting there.

AGELUS

Here's to Klea!

SUITORS

Klea!

PHEMIUS

The prettiest spy I've ever seen.

PHEMIUS MAKES A GRAB FOR KLEA, BUT SHE EVADES HIM FLIRTATIIOUSLY.

KLEA

Nice talk. I thought you were all here to marry Penelope.

PHEMIUS

Sure. Sure, we all want to marry Penelope. But she hardly ever comes out of her room. So. In the meantime . . .

KLEA WHACKS PHEMIUS.

KLEA

Stow it, Phemius. I'm no "meantime" girl.

LEIODES

Well, only one of us gets to marry Penelope. Maybe you're the consolation prize.

KLEA

Oh, you're all so smart; so clever. But who figured it out? Hm? Klea, that's who. You saw her weaving her heart out all day, and you thought. "Oh, Penelope can't wait to finish weaving his funeral shroud. She's so eager for me." You vain, thick-headed idiots! And this went on for . . . years! While you sponges just kept soaking up the wine.

ANTINOUS ENTERS, UNNOTICED BY THE OTHERS.

But I figured out the truth. She was unraveling all night, just as fast as she wove during the day!

ANTINOUS

So. It's true. You forced her to finish it.

THEY ALL NOTICE ANTINOUS. THEY ARE ALL A BIT INTIMIDATED.

EURYMAKOS

Antinous!

ANTINOUS

The door was open.

KLEA MAKES A GESTURE TOWARDS HER FORMAL ROLE AS A HOUSEHOLD SERVANT.

KLEA

The door of Odysseus' house is always open.

EURYMAKOS GRABS HER AND SHE GIGGLES

LEIODES

We see to that.

ANTINOUS

Where's Telemakos?

PHEMIUS

The puppy? Off sulking.

KLEA

Looking out to sea for Daddy to come sailing home.

AGELUS

Or sniffing out rumors from every piece of riff-raff that drifts by.

EURYMAKOS

Look, Antinous, you're welcome here, but . . .

ANTINOUS

This your house, Eurymakos?

EURYMAKOS (STILL HOLDING ON TO KLEA)

Not yet.

ANTINOUS

Then keep your welcome. Where's Penelope?

AGELUS

In her room. Like always. She never comes down. No matter what we do.

PHEMIUS

I'll show you. Penelope! Come on down. Greet the men who love you.

THE SUITORS BAY UP THE STAIRS LIKE WOLVES HOWLING AT THE MOON, LIKE TOMCATS ON A FENCE.

SUITORS

Penelope!

ANTINOUS

Shut your traps. She doesn't come down, huh? I'm not surprised. I'm going up.

EVERYONE'S A LITTLE STUNNED

AGELUS

But you can't . . .

ANTINOUS EXITS, BRUSHING BY AGELUS AS THOUGH HE WEREN'T THERE

. . . do that.

THE SCENE CONTINUES, AS THE SUITORS BUZZ ABOUT ANTINOUS' RASH MOVE, BUT THE LIGHTS FADE ON IT AND COME UP ON PENELOPE'S ROOM. THE SHROUD IS STILL ON HER LAP. ANTINOUS SPEAKS TO PENELOPE WITH QUIET RESPECT.

ANTINOUS

You finished it.

PENELOPE

Antinous!

ANTINOUS

I stayed away for a long time, Penelope.

PENELOPE

Thank you.

ANTINOUS

But you've finished weaving his burial shroud. Isn't it time, after all these years, to put him to rest?

PENELOPE

You think I didn't try? It wasn't a trick, you know. At least not at first. I thought if I could weave a shroud for him, even with no body to cover, I could put him to rest, as you said. But at night, it came to me that I didn't want to put him to rest, I didn't want him to be dead and I'd unravel the shroud in a frenzy.

ANTINOUS

And things went on like that. Night after night. Year after year. You deserve to live again, Penelope.

PENELOPE

Why did you come here? I don't need another suitor, Antinous.

ANTINOUS

Another suitor? You mean those hounds downstairs? I've known you, cared for you since before you were married. I stayed away while they ate and drank you and Telemakos out of house and home.

PENELOPE

And now?

ANTINOUS

I'm not here to take anything from you. I brought you a gift.

HE TAKES OUT A BEAUTIFUL AND ORNATE NECKLACE, SHINING WITH GEMS, AND LAYS IT ON A TABLE.

PENELOPE

I can't accept it.

ANTINOUS

Accept it. When you accept me.

HE LEAVES IT WHERE IT IS. TELEMAKOS ENTERS THE MAIN HALL, EXCITED, CROSSING TO THE STAIRS. THE SUITORS GREET HIM, MOCKING HIM AND IMPEDE HIS PROGRESS.

SUITORS (OFF)

TELEMAKOS!

PENELOPE

Listen to them! I didn't invite them here. Why won't anyone put a stop to them?

ANTINOUS

He's been gone so long. There's no law left on this island. No leader that people respect. Only one person can put a stop to them.

PENELOPE

He's never coming back.

ANTINOUS

Not Odysseus. You. Ithaka's waiting on you.

PENELOPE

No one can take his place!

ANTINOUS

I know, Penelope. But while you wait for a man you know isn't coming back, we are all of us trapped in limbo. I loved Odysseus. I also love you. With you at my side, I could bring those hounds to heel.

TELEMAKOS ENTERS.

Telemakos. You're getting a beard. You remind me of your father.

TELEMAKOS

I'd like to speak to my mother alone.

ANTINOUS

Of course. Good-bye, Penelope.

PENELOPE

Antinous. Wait for me. Downstairs. I'll come down soon.

ANTINOUS

If you wish.

*ANTINOUS EXITS TO THE HALL. TELEMAKOS SEES THE SHROUD,
THE NECKLACE.*

TELEMAKOS

I haven't seen that one before. What was he doing in your room?

PENELOPE

Antinous? He's an old friend. I haven't seen him since . . . before you were born.

TELEMAKOS

Mom. Someone's here wants to talk to you.

PENELOPE

Who?

TELEMAKOS

I don't know his name. But he says . . .

PENELOPE

A tramp? A beggar?

TELEMAKOS

Yeah.

PENELOPE

And what does he say?

TELEMAKOS

He says . . .

PENELOPE

He says the same thing they all say. He has news about your father.

TELEMAKOS

Yes.

PENELOPE

Gods, every leech in Greece slimes his way here. Another liar. Trading hope for food.

TELEMAKOS

You want him to be dead.

PENELOPE

I want a real life. You live in a fantasy world, Telemakos. Imagining a father you don't even remember, a god pieced together out of stories.

TELEMAKOS

Fine. I'll tell him to go away.

PENELOPE

It's your house as much as mine. Let him in if you want to.

TELEMAKOS

And will you listen to him?

PENELOPE

If you want me to, I'll listen to him. But this is the last one.

TELEMAKOS

All right. Thank you. I'll go bring him in.

TELEMAKOS EXITS PENELOPE'S ROOM, GOES BACK THROUGH THE HALL. THE SUITORS HARRY, OBSTRUCT AND TAUNT HIM AS HE ATTEMPTS TO CROSS TO BRING IN THE BEGGAR. ANTINOUS STANDS APART, WATCHING.

AGELUS

To the man of the house.

SUITORS AND KLEA

Telemakos!

TELEMAKOS

You'd all drink less if you were drinking your own wine.

LEIODES

Telemakos, so rude?

PHEMIUS

Didn't your father teach you how to treat guests?

TELEMAKOS

Someday he'll come back and teach me how to treat you. And then you'll pray for faster legs.

AGELUS

Boy, you've got to learn to enjoy life. You've got the finest house, the best wine, and richest food in Ithaka -- you don't enjoy it.

TELEMAKOS

Agelus, seeing scraps of my food dribble from your drunken maw doesn't increase my appetite

EURYMAKOS

Is it true? Did she finish it?

KLEA

Eurymakos. Don't you trust me?

TELEMAKOS (TO KLEA)

Who trusts a spy? (TO EURYMAKOS) She's coming down. Ask her yourself.

PHEMIUS

Coming down? She's got to choose now.

TELEMAKOS

Look at yourselves. You think she's going to marry one of you?

TELEMAKOS TURNS TO GO. ANTINOUS STOPS HIM WITH THE CALM POWER OF HIS VOICE.

ANTINOUS

Telemakos. I admire the devotion you show to your mother. And the devotion she shows to your father's memory.

TELEMAKOS

Memory!

ANTINOUS

In a world full of harpies like Klytemnestra, your mother is a treasure. But the years roll on . . .

AGELUS (ASIDE)

. . . your wine cellar diminishes . . .

ANTINOUS

. . . and the time is coming for her, for you, for everyone, to move on with their lives. Is that so hard to understand?

TELEMAKOS EXITS

EURYMAKOS

Where you off to anyway, Telemakos? Bringing home another stray?

KLEA RUNS AFTER TELEMAKOS TO SEE WHERE HE'S GONE

KLEA

Oh, gods he is, he's bringing in another beggar to string together more lies.

AGELUS (YELLING AFTER TELEMAKOS)

Try to get one that doesn't stink so bad this time!

ANTINOUS TURNS ON THE SUITORS

ANTINOUS

You bait that man at your own risk.

EURYMAKOS

Man? Telemakos?

PHEMIUS

He's a puppy.

ANTINOUS

That puppy has grown into a wolf. One day soon he'll realize it.

TELEMAKOS ENTERS WITH ODYSSEUS, WHO IS DISGUISED AS A BEGGAR. TELEMAKOS CALLS UP TO HIS MOM'S ROOM.

TELEMAKOS

Come on, come on. Mom! Here he is.

AGELUS

Oh, gods, he stinks worse than the last one.

PENELOPE ENTERS

PENELOPE

Now, now, Agelus. There's always room for another guest.

THE SUITORS TOAST PENELOPE

EURYMAKOS

Shining Penelope!

SUITORS

Penelope!

PENELOPE

Eurymakos. Leiodes.

PENELOPE TAKES A WINE CARAFE, REFILLS THEIR GLASSES AS SHE SPEAKS.

PENELOPE

All of you, please continue to make yourselves welcome.

KLEA HIDES HER GLASS, TAKES THE CARAFE FROM PENELOPE AND CONTINUES THE JOB.

PENELOPE (CONT.)

Oh, thank you, Klea.

KLEA

Ma'am.

PENELOPE

Antinous?

ANTINOUS

I'm not here to drink your wine, Penelope.

PENELOPE LOOKS AT THE BEGGAR, WHO LOOKS BACK.

PENELOPE

Telemakos?

TELEMAKOS

Right. Sorry. This is . . . I'm sorry, I don't believe I caught your name.

ODYSSEUS

Oh, I'm nobo . . . I'm from Krete.

PHEMIUS

A Cretin!

THE SUITORS SNICKER

ODYSSEUS

Well, yeh, heh, that's what they call me. Cretin.

PENELOPE

And how did you hear news of my husband, Cretin?

ODYSSEUS

Your husband, Ma'am? You're Faithful Penelope?

PENELOPE

Is that what people call me?

ODYSSEUS

Sure. The stories twist together, like snakes around a staff. Faithful Penelope and the killer Klytemnestra. Good wife, bad wife.

EURYMAKOS

You've got news, huh?

PHEMIUS

Well, spit it out.

LEIODES

Yeah. Tell us. How did the great Odysseus die?

TELEMAKOS

He isn't dead!

EURYMAKOS

What do you say, Cretin?

ODYSSEUS

If half what I've heard is true, don't see how he could be alive . . .

TELEMAKOS

He isn't dead!

ANTINOUS

Telemakos. I know it's hard to accept. But would you rather everyone kept treating you like a child? Many good men died in Troy. It's been years since the war ended. Everyone who was coming back is back by now.

TELEMAKOS TURNS AWAY FROM ANTINOUS, TOWARD ODYSSEUS.

TELEMAKOS

What do you think?

ODYSSEUS

I think he's right.

TELEMAKOS

Then what's your news?

ODYSSEUS

Rumors . . . I only have rumors. Stories passed along.

EURYMAKOS

Well, we've all heard some of those. Stories come drifting in. . . .

PHEMIUS

Like the trash that washes up on the beach.

ODYSSEUS

Yeah. Like trash.

TELEMAKOS

Did you hear, is it true . . . about the Cyclops?

ODYSSEUS

True?

PHEMIUS

Oh, come on. You come here, hoping to get drunk in exchange for Odysseus stories, and you don't know the one about the Cyclops?

LEIODES

The one eyed monster!

AGELUS

Big as a hundred men!

TELEMAKOS

Tell the Cyclops story.

PHEMIUS

Right. Tell the Cyclops. Fill the kid's head with fantasies.

ODYSSEUS

Ma'am?

PENELOPE

Go ahead, Cretin. Tell the story of the Cyclops.

ODYSSEUS

Well, the way I know it, it was soon after Odysseus had built the horse that wiped out Troy. Their mission accomplished, he and his crew headed for home. They pointed the prow of their ship towards Ithaka and sheared through days and nights and into a red dawn when they sighted a strange island, went ashore to look for food, and found . . .

.

THE SCENE SHIFTS TO THE CAVE OF THE CYCLOPS. TELEMAKOS JUMPS INTO THE ROLE OF ODYSSEUS IN THE STORY.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

A cave!

EURYLOKOS

What are we doing here, Captain?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

We need food.

PISANDER

Why am I carrying wine into a cave?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Careful. That's our best stuff. We'll trade it for food if we have to.

ANTIPHUS

Trade? With who? Odysseus, there's nobody here.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Ades, you're lookout. Stay sharp. Look, Antiphus, an island as fertile as this - somebody's got to live here. And we haven't seen any houses, so . . .

ANTIPHUS

But this place is empty.

PISANDER STUMBLES OVER A VAT.

PISANDER

Hey. Look at this.

SILEA

What is it? What did you find?

PISANDER

I'm not sure.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

It's honey.

PISANDER

Look at all this. This is a huge hoard of food.

ANTIPHUS

Rough stuff. Roots. Pine nuts.

PISANDER

Yeah. But it's food.

EURYLOKOS

Captain, you were right again.

PISANDER

Let's grab some of this and get it on board.

ADES

Quiet. I hear something.

ANTIPHUS

I don't hear nothin'.

SILEA

Keep quiet. If she says there's something, there's something. We just haven't heard it yet.

ADES PUTS HER EAR TO THE GROUND

ADES

It's like a rockslide. But also like footfalls. Whatever it is, it's coming closer. Fast.

ANTIPHUS

I don't see nothin'.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

You're looking in the wrong place.

HE POINTS UP

Look there!

PISANDER

But that's a mountain.

SILEA

A moving mountain. Gods - a walking mountain with one eye!

EURYLOKOS

Captain, let's get back to the ship!

POLYPHEMOS SEES ODYSSEUS AND HIS MEN.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

He's seen us. Too late to run. Stand together. Stand strong.

POLYPHEMOS BLOCKS THE EXIT TO THE CAVE WITH A ROCK

EURYLOKOS

We can't get out!

POLYPHEMOS

Thieves!

THE MEN SHRINK BACK IN TERROR, BUT TELEMAKOS/ODYSSEUS STANDS BOLDLY FORTH.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

We're Greek soldiers, from Agamemnon's army, on our way home from conquering Troy. We request that you show us hospitality, and give us gifts as is the custom and the command of Zeus.

POLYPHEMOS.

You come to a country you know nothing about and tell me the custom? Zeus? Pah. I'm Cyclops. Cyclopes don't care about Zeus. We're stronger than Zeus.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

And I'm sure your courtesy is as great as your strength. We're hungry.

POLYPHEMOS

Me too.

POLYPHEMOS EATS EURYLOKOS

EURYLOKOS

Aahhh!

POLYPHEMOS

Greeks, huh? Well, you Greeks are tough soldiers. (burps) But I think I'll have another one of you tomorrow for breakfast anyway. Hah. Hah.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

(ASIDE to his men)

Give me the wine.

PISANDER

What? Wine?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS
(ASIDE to his men)

I led you into this cave. I'll lead you out. Do what I say.

SILEA TAKES WINE FROM PISANDER, GIVES IT TO ODYSSEUS.

Great Cyclops. You ought to be ashamed of yourself; how do you expect people to visit you if you treat them like this?

POLYPHEMOS

We Cyclopes don't much care for company. We live alone, one to a cave. Nobody will rescue you from here. But I like you, you twiggy little Greek. You're funny: brave, weak and stupid.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

I like you, too, Cyclops.

POLYPHEMOS

Huh?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Since you're not giving us any gifts, let me give you one. Share some of our wine.

TELEMAKOS/ODYSSEUS HOLDS OUT A BOTTLE.

POLYPHEMOS

Wine? What's wine?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Drink. To wash down the man you ate.

POLYPHEMOS

Hah. A trick.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

It's safe. We'll drink first. All of us will drink before you.

ODYSSEUS AND HIS MEN PASS THE BOTTLE, DRINKING IN TURN. POLYPHEMOS TAKES A SIP, THEN DRAINS THE BOTTLE.

POLYPHEMOS

This is wonderful. More!

ODYSSEUS PASSES HIM MORE WINE. POLYPHEMOS DRAINS IT.

Give me more, and then I'll give you the gift you wanted,
little Greek.

PISANDER (ASIDE)

A gift? We'll get out of here yet.

ODYSSEUS HANDS ANOTHER BOTTLE TO THE CYCLOPS

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Here, great Cyclops.

POLYPHEMOS

What's your name?

ODYSSEUS

My name? My name is Nobody.

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody? What kind of name is that?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

It's the name my father and mother gave me. Nobody.

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody. Hah, hah, hah. Nobody. Now I'll give you my gift.
I'll make sure you live longer than any of those cowards
with you. I'll eat you last. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.
Nobody. Hah.

POLYPHEMOS DRAINS THE BOTTLE, CRASHES DOWN.

SILEA

He's asleep.

PISANDER

He's drunk. Now we can kill him. Cut his throat while he's
sleeping!

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

No. We'll never get out of this cave. All of us together
could never move that rock away from the entrance.

ODYSSEUS PICKS UP A BIG SHARP STICK

MEDON

What are you going to do?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

We might escape if he's blind. Help me drive it into his eye. Courage. We'll live to tell this story to our children back on Ithaka. Horsa, Horsa, Haaa!

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS AND HIS CREW DRIVE THE SHARPENED STICK INTO POLYPHEMOS' ONLY EYE.

POLYPHEMOS

Gyaaaaah!

POLYPHEMOS COLLAPSES AND IS STILL, BUT THE GROUND CONTINUES TO SHAKE

MEDON

What is that?

PISANDER

Earthquake!

ADES

No. Worse. More Cyclopes. Three of them.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

They heard his screams.

3 CYCLOPES APPEAR OUTSIDE THE CAVE

CYCLOPS 1

What's wrong?

CYCLOPS 2

Why did you make that noise?

CYCLOPS 3

Who's attacking you?

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody! Nobody's attacking me!

CYCLOPS 1

Nobody? Come on. Tell us who's hurting you and we'll rip him apart.

CYCLOPS 2

We are Cyclopes, stronger than Zues!

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody's hurting me! Tear nobody apart!

CYCLOPS 3

Somebody's tricked him somehow. There must be somebody in there. Let's go in.

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody tricked me! Nobody's here inside my cave!

CYCLOPS 1

Ah, this is useless! He must have a headache or a nightmare.

ODYSSEUS WHACKS POLYPHEMOS WITH THE STICK.

POLYPHEMOS

Stop it! Go away.

CYCLOPS 1

All right, we'll go away.

POLYPHEMOS

No!

CYCLOPS 2

What? Who are you talking to?

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody!

CYCLOPS 3

Ah, enough of this. He's crazy. Let's go. Make a little less noise, Polyphemos. Some of us are trying to sleep. The sun's almost up.

THE CYCLOPES LEAVE. POLYPHEMOS ROARS AFTER THEM, AND ROLLS AWAY THE STONE. HE ROARS AFTER THE CYCLOPES.

POLYPHEMOS

No! Come back! Nobody's here. That's his name. That's his name! He stabbed out my eye! Come back and kill him!

POLYPHEMOS STOPS, TURNS, BEGINS FEELING HIS WAY BACK TO THE CAVE

Where are you, Nobody?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Now. Grab some food. Move quietly. I'll distract it. To the ship. Go! Go!

THEY GET TO THE SHIP. ODYSSEUS DISTRACTS POLYPHEMOS

Over here, ugly. You should have known better than to go up against me.

POLYPHEMOS

Hah?

ODYSSEUS DODGES POLYPHEMOS, AND GETS TO THE SHIP

PISANDER

Watch out!

POLYPHEMOS WRECKS HIS OWN CAVE TRYING TO CATCH ODYSSEUS. THE PLACE COLLAPSES AND HE IS TRAPPED, INJURED IN THE RUBBLE

POLYPHEMOS

Nobody! Curse Nobody!

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

I'm no nobody, you damned cannibal! If anyone asks you who put out your eye, tell them it was the ruler of Ithaka, the one who built the horse that tore down the walls of Troy! Tell them it was Odysseus!

CREW (CHEERING)

Odysseus! Odysseus! Odysseus!

POLYPHEMOS

Odysseus. I am Polyphemos; my father is the earth-shaker, The ocean god: Poseidon!

PISANDER

Poseidon!

MEDON

Could that thing really be the son of the sea?

POLYPHEMOS

Odysseus. Odysseus. Odysseus. I pray to you, Father Ocean. As I have respected and honored you, avenge my eye. Punish Odysseus. Throw him into the darkness in which he has left me. If he must return to Ithaka, far off be that bitter day and dark the years between. Let him lose all his companions and return alone, cut off from his family, without even his name. I pray to you, Father!

PENELOPE

Enough!

ANTINOUS

Penelope. Are you all right?

TELEMAKOS JUMPS OUT OF THE STORY. THE SUITORS LAUGH, CRUDELY RE-ENACTING PARTS OF THE STORY.

TELEMAKOS

Did my father really do that?

ODYSSEUS

That's my story.

TELEMAKOS

Do you hear that, mom? He'll make it home. He'll fight and scheme his way here. He can do anything.

PENELOPE

I'm sorry. You'll have to excuse me. I thought I could listen to this, but . . . I'll . . . I'll be back.

PENELOPE EXITS, ANTINOUS MAKES A MOVE TO FOLLOW HER. TELEMAKOS TURNS ON HIM FURIOUSLY.

TELEMAKOS

No! No! You stay here! I'll see to my mother.

TELEMAKOS EXITS. SCENE SHIFTS TO PENELOPE'S ROOM.

TELEMAKOS

What's wrong? What is it?

PENELOPE

It's him.

TELEMAKOS

Who?

PENELOPE

I think I knew when I first saw him. It's him, Telemakos. It's Odysseus. My husband. Your father.

TELEMAKOS

Him? No! No, he's . . . old. Weak. He's just another stinking old . . . why would he lie?

PENELOPE

He's returned alone, cut off from his family, without even his name.

TELEMAKOS

It's not true. It's not him. He can do anything. He destroyed that one-eyed monster. As big as a hundred men. Why would he lie?

PENELOPE

He's trying to find out who his friends are. We've got to go back down. Don't say anything. Please, Telemakos. Whatever happens. Don't say anything. Not yet.

*SIMULTANEOUS SCENE IN THE HALL. FROM THE MOMENT
TELEMAKOS EXITED.*

PHEMIUS

Looks like the puppy put you down, Antinous.

ANTINOUS CROSSES TO ODYSSEUS.

ANTINOUS

You tell a good story, old man.

ODYSSEUS

Thank you.

ANTINOUS GIVES HIM MONEY. POURS A GLASS OF WINE. AND ONE FOR ODYSSEUS. ODYSSEUS TRIES TO AVOID LOOKING ANTINOUS FULL IN THE FACE.

Thank you.

ANTINOUS

I knew Odysseus. Good friend.

ODYSSEUS

Everyone needs friends.

ANTINOUS

That's just the kind of stunt he'd pull. Nobody. Heh. And then, at the end, when he could've gotten away scot-free, he's got to crow a little and screw it all up. You nailed him.

ODYSSEUS

Yes.

ANTINOUS

Listen up. You're in a position to do some good here. At the end of your story—Odysseus has got to die.

HE HOLDS OUT MORE MONEY. ODYSSEUS DOESN'T TAKE IT.

ODYSSEUS

The story is the story.

ANTINOUS CHECKS TO BE SURE PENELOPE AND TELEMAKOS ARE STILL OUT OF SIGHT, THEN HITS ODYSSEUS HARD.

ANTINOUS

No. Actually, the story is what you say it is. You've got a gift, you see. You may be a nobody, but you've got a gift. That woman up there has lived alone long enough. She's grown old, waiting for Odysseus. She's suffered. Ithaka has suffered. It's time for all of us to move on. You see?

HE STICKS THE MONEY IN ODYSSEUS' CLOTHES. PUTS HIS HAND ON ODYSSEUS' SHOULDER. ODYSSEUS STIFFENS WITH ANGER. PENELOPE ENTERS WITH TELEMAKOS. SHE SPEAKS QUICKLY, TO DEFUSE THE CONFRONTATION.

PENELOPE

What happens next?

ANTINOUS SMOOTHLY RECOVERS

ANTINOUS

Penelope. Are you all right?

HE TAKES HER HAND. SHE DOESN'T DRAW IT AWAY.

PENELOPE

I'm fine, Antinous. Thank you. I want to hear what happens next.

EURYMAKOS

Right, Antinous. I think we all want to hear what happens next. Let the man tell the story.

ODYSSEUS

Yes, ma'am. Seemed like Poseidon heard his son's prayer. The skies grew dark, the storm raged cold and rough and blew them past Ithaka, into the west, away from home, day after day, week after week, to the seas where the stories come from. Ship and crew were worn to tatters.

AS ODYSSEUS SPEAKS, THE WIND BLOWS TELEMAKOS AND THE SUITORS BACK INTO THE STORY.

And then the wind died away. The water was glass. In the distance, a strange rock broke the surface of the sea. The crew lay exhausted on the deck.

SUDDENLY ADES RESPONDS TO MUSIC TOO SOFT FOR ANYON ELSE TO HEAR. THE CREW STIRS SLUGGISHLY IN RESPONSE TO ADES.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Ades? What is it?

ADES

Singing . . .

ANTIPHUS

Singing?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Shh. Let her listen.

ADES

My daughter! Sephanie? You have Sephanie?

MEDON

Ades, what are you talking about? Are you all right?

ADES

I've got to go to them. I'll be able to see Sephanie again.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Who's them? Ades, your daughter is back in Ithaka.

ADES

I'm coming!

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Ades, wait.

ADES DRAWS A KNIFE

ADES

Don't try to stop me! Don't anybody try to stop me!

AND SHE JUMPS OVERBOARD

SILEA

Ades! Oh, gods, the Sirens!

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Sirens?

SILEA

We've got to get out of here. Before we hear anything. Get them rowing away from here.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Wait.

PISANDER

What's going on?

MEDON

Sirens. We'll be hearing their song any second now.

SILEA

We've got to get out of range.

ANTIPHUS (STIRRING)

Out of range? Range of what? Who's shooting at us?

SILEA

That's Siren Rock over there.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Sirens. They know everything, don't they? "From the number of hairs on your head to the deepest desires of your heart."

SILEA

Right. Desires you don't know yourself. And they'll use those desires to destroy us. Now . . .

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

They could tell us how to get home. I'm going to ask them.

SILEA

Don't you understand? The bones of dead sailors are strewn all over that crag. You'll dive overboard, like Ades. Or smash the ship on to that rock. Nobody can sail away from his deepest desire.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Tie me to the mast.

MEDON

And what about us?

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Stuff your ears with wax!

ANTIPHUS

What?

ODYSSEUS GRABS A CONTAINER

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Wax. The wax we use as a sealant. Plug your ears with wax and tie me to the mast! I'll hear the Sirens and learn the way home, and you'll be safe.

ANTIPHUS

We're not going near that rock.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

We're lost! In unknown seas! I'm going home, and I'll do anything to get there. Anything!

ANTIPHUS

That rock is west. Home is east.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Do as I say.

ANTIPHUS

You can't fight all of us.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Yes I can!

ANTIPHUS

But you can't win. Not alone.

SILEA

He's not alone. Come on. Tie him to the mast. Before it's too late.

THE CREW TIE ODYSSEUS TO THE MAST.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

And no matter what I say, don't turn me loose! Don't obey my orders till we're out of range. Silea, you're in command till then.

SILEA

Hurry!

THEY STUFF THE WAX INTO THEIR EARS AND BEGIN TO ROW, WITH FIXED DETERMINED EXPRESSIONS. THE SIREN SONG BEGINS. IT IS HAUNTING, BEAUTIFUL, STIRRING AND EXCITING, AND IT SEEMS TO HAVE WORDS, WHICH ARE FASCINATING BUT JUST OUTSIDE OF COMPREHENSION.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS

Listen to me! Sirens! Tell me the way home. How can we get home?

THE SIRENS SEEM TO SPEAK TO ODYSSEUS THROUGH THEIR SONG. WE HEAR "HELL" and "LOTOS" AND MOCKING LAUGHTER. BUT MOST IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

TELEMAKOS AS ODYSSEUS (CONT.)

What?

*THE SONG VEERS INTO A NEW DIRECTION, CHANGING TONE,
BECOMING MORE DANGEROUS. SOUNDS OF WAR AND BATTLE.*

No. No, that's not true. It's not true. I want to go home!
I don't want . . .

*THE SONG BEGINS TO FADE AS THE ROWERS PUT THE ROCKS
BEHIND THEM. ODYSSEUS YELLS AT HIS CREW.*

Let me go! I need to hear more! Untie me! Let me go to
them! Let me go! Yes, I ordered you to tie me up. Okay. All
right. Now I order you to set me free. I order you! Get the
wax out of your ears and let me go! I'll gnaw through these
cords with my teeth, I'll tear my arms out of their
sockets! You idiots, you rocks, you mindless machines, let
me go! Silea you liar! Don't pretend you can't hear me. You
hear me! I've got to go to them. I don't care about
anything else. I don't care if I never see Penelope or my
son again. I don't want to go home!

SUDDENLY TELEMAKOS DROPS CHARACTER

No!

*TELEMAKOS RIPS OFF THE ROPES TO BREAK OUT OF THE
STORY. BACK TO ITHAKA*

I don't want to hear any more.

AGELUS

Well, I do. What did the Sirens promise him?

PHEMIUS MAKES A RUDE GESTURE

PHEMIUS

I can guess.

TELEMAKOS

No more. Get out.

PENELOPE

Telemakos!

EURYMAKOS

Look, Telemakos, you brought him here.

TELEMAKOS

And now I want him to leave.

KLEA

Ooh, what's the matter, little Telly-makos? Does it bother you that your Daddy liked the siren ladies better than you and mommy?

TELEMAKOS

You're a liar, and you're upsetting my mother.

LEIODES

Easy, Telemakos.

TELEMAKOS

All of you to go. Go!

ANTINOUS

All right. You heard him. Odysseus is dead. This is his house. Get out.

PENELOPE

Antinous.

ANTINOUS

I'll go, too. It's all right.

PENELOPE

No. Telemakos. Let him stay. Let the story go on.

TELEMAKOS

But he's a liar.

PENELOPE

Of course he is. An old, friendless rag of a man like that, he's got to lie to survive. Please, Telemakos.

TELEMAKOS

He's trading hope for food.

PENELOPE

I don't hope that my husband will return. I know that he must be dead, that his bones are rotting now, white in the rain on the dark earth, or tumbling in the groundswell of the sea. But just for now, one last time, let the story go on.

TELEMAKOS

All right. Go on.

ODYSSEUS COLLAPSES INTO THE STORY. RIGHT WHERE HE LEFT OFF. HE'S PLAYING HIMSELF.

SILEA

Captain! Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS

Let me go! Let me go to them!

SILEA

No!

SHE SLAPS HIM

You can't go to them. You'll never get home. None of us will ever get home.

ODYSSEUS

I don't care. You traitor, Silea! I'm your commander. Do as I . . .

SHE SLAPS HIM AGAIN

SILEA

Well, we care. We want to get home.

ODYSSEUS

What was I saying? What was I saying?

MEDON

Odyssues, look at me. What happened to you? What did the Sirens tell you?

ANTIPHUS

Yeah, what did they promise you? It looked like you gave up on home.

PISANDER

And us.

ODYSSEUS

They promised . . . I don't want to talk about it.

ANTIPHUS

And we're supposed to trust you?

SILEA

Did they tell you how to get home?

ODYSSEUS

West. Let the wind blow us into the west.

ANTIPHUS

Ithaka's east.

PISANDER

West leads to the dark side of the world.

ODYSSEUS

That's where we're going. Around the world. Through the underworld, then home. Follow the wind.

PISANDER

Through the underworld? The land of the dead? You're crazy. He's crazy. The sirens have driven him crazy.

ODYSSEUS

Point the ship east and Poseidon will never let us get to Ithaka. We have to go the long way around.

ANTIPHUS

I say we sail east. Come on. You all heard him. He doesn't even want to get home.

ODYSSEUS

That's over. I swear it. Listen to me. You'll never know how much it cost me to find this out. I know what I'm doing. Get your hand of the tiller, Antiphus.

THERE IS A STRUGGLE, WHICH ABATES AS MYSTERIOUS MUSIC AND AN ISLAND APPEARS. THE MEN AND WOMEN ARE AFFECTED DIFFERENTLY.

SILEA

Land? But a moment ago we were in open ocean.

MEDON

I don't like it. There's something wrong about this place.

PISANDER

Look. Smoke rising from the trees.

ANTIPHUS

I can smell it. Someone lives here. Let's go and . . .

SILEA

Careful.

ANTIPHUS

I'm hungry. And thirsty.

PISANDER

It's true. Our supplies were washed overboard days ago.

MEDON

Sure, but let's take it easy. Last time we went in too fast after supplies one of us became food. Remember?

ANTIPHUS

I'm not going to starve here when there's food and drink right over there.

ODYSSEUS

But we can't let hunger and thirst turn us into animals.

SILEA

This smells like a trap.

ANTIPHUS

You stay here and talk in riddles if you want. We're starving.

MEDON

You didn't seem so hungry before you smelled that smoke.

ANTIPHUS

We're going.

SILEA

How can you talk like that? Are you the captain? Did you build the horse that destroyed Troy? Did you get us alive out of the Cyclops cave?

ODYSSEUS

Antiphus. Go.

SILEA

Captain?

ODYSSEUS

You, too, Pisander. Go on. Check it out.

PISANDER

It's not like you. Letting others run the risks.

ODYSSEUS

Go. Be careful.

ANTIPHUS

Come on, Pisander, let's go.

THE MEN LEAVE, HEADING TOWARDS THE FIRE WITH A STRANGE EAGERNESS. ODYSSEUS WAITS FOR THEM TO LEAVE.

ODYSSEUS

You're right, Medon. There's something wrong about this place. We're going to follow them.

SILEA

You're using them as bait?

ODYSSEUS

I would have had to fight to stop them. There's something strange here. Something's luring them in. I feel it, too.

MEDON

They were behaving strangely. But I don't feel any attraction to that smoke.

SILEA

Neither do I.

ODYSSEUS

I noticed that. Come on. Keep out of sight.

*ODYSSEUS AND THE WOMEN DRAW WEAPONS AND FOLLOW THEM.
THE FOREST GROWS DARK.*

CIRCE AND TWO HANDMAIDENS STEP OUT TOWARDS THE MEN.

HANDMAIDENS

Oooh, men.

PISANDER

Women.

CIRCE

I'm Circe. I love men, but they don't often come here.

*THE HANDMAIDENS CARRY BOWLS. THE MEN ARE FLUSTERED BY
THEIR BEAUTY.*

ANTIPHUS

We're, uh, Greek soldiers, from Agamemnon's army, on our way home from conquering Troy. We request that you show us, uh, hospitality, and give us gifts as . . . is . . . the, the . . .

CIRCE

The custom. We will. We will. We humbly beg you to accept our hospitality. Eat. Drink.

THE HANDMAIDENS SET OUT FOOD IN FRONT OF THE MEN

PISANDER

What is this?

HANDMAIDEN 1

Aren't you hungry?

PISANDER

What is it?

HANDMAIDEN 2

Lick up the honey, stranger . . .

HANDMAIDEN 3

. . . and ask no questions.

ANTIPHUS

Honey?

PISANDER TASTES IT

Honey. PISANDER

Yes. It's good. HANDMAIDEN 3

Sweet. HANDMAIDEN 1

And rich. HANDMAIDEN 2

*THE MEN BEGIN TO EAT, WITH INCREASING ENTHUSIASM AND
DECREASING RESTRAINT AND DECORUM*

CIRCE AND HANDMAIDENS
Taste the honey sweet and strong
While we mix it with our song
You went to war, you travelled far,
Now find out what you really are:
Stubby legs and rooting snouts
Vile hogs from filthy louts

You have more? PISANDER

We have more. HANDMAIDENS

*THEY POUR MORE HONEY INTO THE BOWLS. THE MEN STICK
THEIR FACES INTO THE BOWLS TO EAT FASTER.*

Feed them. Feed them! CIRCE

Eat. Eat. HANDMAIDENS

More! ANTIPHUS

Yes. CIRCE

PISANDER

By the gods, this is good!

ANTIPHUS

By the gods, Pisander, you're such a pig!

PISANDER

A wha?

ANTIPHUS

A piiiiiiiiiiiiii!

ANTIPHUS

Me a pig! Look at yoooooooooo!

THE MEN HAVE BEEN TURNED INTO PIGS. THEY RUN AND SQUEAL IN PANIC.

CIRCE

Yes. Look at yourselves. Pigs. That's right, you're pigs now.

HANDMAIDEN 2

Isn't it nice?

CIRCE

Get them in the sty with the others.

THE HANDMAIDENS BEGIN TO HERD THE PIGS, BEATING THEM WITH SWITCHES.

PIGS

Squeeeeee!

HANDMAIDEN 1

What?

HANDMAIDEN 3

You don't like being pigs?

CIRCE

Rejoice. You've found your true nature. Pigs you are and pigs you stay. Eat slops until your dying day.

HANDMAIDEN 1

What if they have friends?

HANDMAIDEN 3

More men, who come looking for them?

HANDMAIDEN 2

Ooh, I hope so.

HANDMAIDEN 1

We can feed them more honey.

HANDMAIDEN 3

Or pork.

PIGS

Squeeeeee!

ODYSSEUS EMERGES FROM THE FOREST, KNIFE DRAWN. SILEA AND MEDON TACKLE THE HANDMAIDENS.

ODYSSEUS

Turn them back!

CIRCE

Who are you?

ODYSSEUS

Back into men! No. No singing, and no honey.

CIRCE

So strong. You must be Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

You know my name?

CIRCE

Who hasn't heard of Odysseus?

THE HANDMAIDENS ARE HELD BY SILEA AND MEDON, BUT THEY FOCUS ALL THEIR ENERGY ON ODYSSEUS.

HANDMAIDEN 3

Destroyer of Troy.

HANDMAIDEN 1

Leader of Men

HANDMAIDEN 2

Beloved of Women.

CIRCE

Beloved of me. Put down your knife. Or stab me now.

ODYSSEUS

Turn them back.

CIRCE

Let's be friends first.

HANDMAIDEN 1

I'll draw a bath.

HANDMAIDEN 2

I'll make up a bed . . .

HANDMAIDEN 3

. . . for the hero.

ODYSSEUS

Circe, how can you expect me to be friends with you when you just turned all my men into pigs?

CIRCE

Let me tend to you, Odysseus

HANDMAIDEN 3

We'll take the stiffness from your limbs. . .

HANDMAIDEN 1

. . . wash you . .

HANDMAIDEN 2

. . . annoint you with oil . . .

ODYSSEUS

You're pathetic, Circe. Without your tricks, without your drugs, you're nothing. No island witch is going to make us forget our homes and families. Set them free!

THE PIGS SQUEAL AGREEMENT

CIRCE

Really? I think they're much nicer this way.

ODYSSEUS

Turn them back!

CIRCE

All right. All right. I'll turn them back. For a kiss. What are you afraid of, Odysseus? Kiss me.

ODYSSEUS

You think I don't know what you hunger for, Circe? What the kiss of a witch can do? You're a parasite, feeding on the men you trap!

CIRCE

And what do you hunger for? Hm? So long from home? One kiss, what's the harm?

ODYSSEUS

Turn them back first. Then you get your kiss.

CIRCE

How do I know?

ODYSSEUS

I'll swear it.

CIRCE

I'll restore them. But you must swear to live with me and be my love forever.

ODYSSEUS

I vow. On the day that I leave you, let me go straight to Hell.

CIRCE

My kiss will hold you to that vow, Odysseus. Come here.

THEY APPROACH EACH OTHER. THE MEN EMERGE FROM PIGDOM AS THEY DO SO. MEDON AND SILEA RELEASE THE HANDMAIDENS. ODYSSEUS MOVES WITH SOME RELUCTANCE, BUT ONE OF THE HANDMAIDENS USES A LOVE POTION.

ODYSSEUS

AAAAH!

THE DRUG TAKES EFFECT AND HE SEES CIRCE SOMEWHAT DIFFERENTLY. IRONICALLY, AS SHE APPROACHES HIM TO KISS HIM, SHE BECOMES EVER MORE HIDEOUSLY UGLY.

O Circe, my mistress, you are perfect, divine.
No crystal's so clear or bright as your eye.

ODYSSEUS (CONT.)

No skin so smooth, no lips so red,
And I shall love you till I'm dead.

CIRCE

That's better.

BUT EVEN HER VOICE IS CHANGED, AND WHEN THEY KISS, IT LOOKS MORE LIKE A PREDATOR FEASTING ON A DYING ANIMAL THAN ANYTHING ROMANTIC. THE CREW, PIGS NO LONGER, REACT WITH ALARM. WITH A SUPREME EFFORT OF WILL, ODYSSEUS BREAKS AWAY.

No! Impossible.

MEDON

Captain! Are you all right?

ODYSSEUS

Get back to the ship. We're leaving.

CIRCE

But you promised. You swore to stay with me. You can't leave.

ODYSSEUS

I swore on the day I left you, I'd go straight to Hell. I'm not breaking my vow.

TO HIS CREW

Come on. Let's go to Hell.

THE SCENE SHIFTS TO ITHAKA. TELEMAKOS GETS UP AND WALKS OUT WITHOUT A WORD, TO PENELOPE'S ROOM.

PENELOPE

Excuse me a moment.

SHE FOLLOWS TELEMAKOS UP. ODYSSEUS REMAINS MOTIONLESS.

SCENE. PENELOPE'S ROOM. TELEMAKOS AND PENELOPE.

PENELOPE

Telemakos . . .

TELEMAKOS

Marry Antinous. I'll get rid of him, whoever he is. He can go lust after all the dream-witches he wants.

HE HANDS THE NECKLACE TO HER

PENELOPE

I know he's not the father you imagined. How could he be?

TELEMAKOS

Maybe I'm not the son he hoped for, either.

SHE LOOKS AT THE NECKLACE

PENELOPE

He's telling these stories for a reason. He needs us.

PENELOPE PUTS ON THE NECKLACE, WRAPS UP A BOW, ARROW AND AXE IN THE FUNERAL SHROUD

How do you defeat enemies more powerful than you? Troy, Cyclops, Witch, Suitors? Get your friends behind you. Make your enemy think you've given up. And strike while they celebrate.

SHE HANDS THE SHROUD TO TELEMAKOS

Get ready, Telemakos.

MEANWHILE. INSIDE THE HALL.

EURYMAKOS

So, Antinous. You still think that little crybaby is a threat?

ANTINOUS

He'd kill you just to prove he's no crybaby. Here's a deal. Whoever marries Penelope, the rest of us take care of Telemakos on the honeymoon. As a wedding present. What are you, shocked? You think he's going to just let you take over this house? Lord it over Ithaka like his Daddy did?

EURYMAKOS

I'm in.

LEIODES

Yeah. Me too.

AGELUS

Me too.

PHEMIUS

All right, all right. I swear. The kid goes.

KLEA

Oh, good. I never liked the little whiner.

ANTINOUS (TO ODYSSEUS)

You. You're doing all right, Cretin. But let's wrap it up, okay. The hero has got to die.

ODYSSEUS

Yes. Of course. You're right.

*PENELOPE RE-ENTERS, WEARING THE NECKLACE. TELEMAKOS
BEHIND HER, CARRYING THE SHROUD*

ANTINOUS

You're brave, Penelope, to listen to these stories. It's hard for me to hear about Odysseus' struggles and pain. I can only imagine what you must feel.

PENELOPE

Can you, Antinous? Do you know how I want this story to end? Listen to me, all of you. When he finishes the story, I'll choose one of you in this room to be my husband.

SUITORS

At last! Choose now! Choose me!

PENELOPE

But first, let's hear about Hell.

ODYSSEUS

Ma'am?

PENELOPE

Some of us may be going there soon. We might as well visit now.

ODYSSEUS

Cold, quiet place. Stinking of despair. They sailed up the dripping river Styx by black beaches. Spirits of the

ODYSSEUS (CONT.)

breathless dead whispering everywhere, swimming in the dark, thirsting for the blood of life.

SPIRITS

Blood!

ODYSSEUS

While his crew cowered on board, Odysseus caught sight of a shade that drew him on to that dark shore.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Blood!

ODYSSEUS

Penelope! It can't be.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Blood! Give me a taste.

ODYSSEUS

Penelope!

KLYTEMNESTRA

Give me a taste, Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS CUTS HIMSELF WITH HIS KNIFE.

ODYSSEUS

Gah!

KLYTEMNESTRA DRINKS.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Ah!

ODYSSEUS

You're not . . .

KLYTEMNESTRA

Don't you recognize me, Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS

You're Agamemnon's wife. Klytemnestra!

KLYTEMNESTRA

Oh, it's nice to be remembered.

ODYSSEUS

How did you die? Did Agamemnon make it home?

KLYTEMNESTRA

My son killed me. Yes.

ODYSSEUS

What?

KLYTEMNESTRA

The answers to your questions.

ODYSSEUS

Your son killed his own . . .

KLYTEMNESTRA

He killed his mother. He was avenging his father's death.

ODYSSEUS

Then you . . . you killed Agamemnon?

KLYTEMNESTRA

I killed Agamemnon. Oh, even saying it feels good. He was such a fatheaded ox.

ODYSSEUS

He was your husband. He was my commander.

KLYTEMNESTRA

And you did your duty and obeyed him. Killing Trojans who had never harmed you. Using that clever horse trick to burn the place to the ground, and leave every man, woman and child dead or enslaved.

ODYSSEUS

I didn't ask to go to war.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Really? From what I've heard you were pretty good at it though, weren't you? Killing. The blood of one man is on my hands. The blood of a whole country is on yours.

ODYSSEUS

That was war. What you did was murder. You were his wife!

KLYTEMNESTRA

War is murder. Killing is killing. Death is death. You think the word "wife" keeps you safe? Listen to what I've come to tell you, Odysseus. Your house is full of people who don't want you back. Penelope weaves your funeral shroud as we speak, and prepares to promise your bed to another man.

ODYSSEUS

You're lying. You're saying this to torment me.

KLYTEMNESTRA

Right about the torment. Wrong about the lie. The dead don't lie, Odysseus. You really think Penelope is still gazing patiently out to sea? Male vanity never ceases to amaze. Hah. You saddled Penelope with a fatherless son and left her to waste her youth in loneliness. Over the years, love curdles, doesn't it?

ODYSSEUS

Why? Why are telling me these things?

KLYTEMNESTRA

To torment you. Because I hate heroes. Men who feel virtuous while they stick steel into flesh.

ODYSSEUS

You're full of poison, Klytemnestra. Poseidon's poison. Nothing's left of you but hate, suspicion and bloodlust.

KLYTEMNESTRA

That's all there is to any of us. Heroes like you and my dear departed husband just dress it up in pretty clothes and call it honor and glory.

ODYSSEUS

Hell becomes you, Klytemnestra. You're home here. But my home is Ithaka. Whatever my absence has done, I'm returning to face it. However Penelope's changed, I love her.

KLYTEMNESTRA

What a good little boy. Go home, Odysseus. And Penelope will be waiting for you, like I waited for Agamemnon. Wearing her best dress, and carrying an axe.

ODYSSEUS

No. No, that can't be true.

KLYTEMNESTRA

The dead never lie, Odysseus. I thought we'd covered that. Thanks for the blood.

THE SCENE DISSOLVES INTO ITHAKA

EURYMAKOS

Next you'll tell us he made it back from the underworld.

ODYSSEUS

A man so long a castaway, how could he come home? It was a bad end Agamemnon made, bleeding to death in his own house, blood-stained floor and brain-spattered walls. How could one man, coming home weary and alone, without weapons, defeat a houseful with murder on their minds?

LEIODES

Stick to stories, Cretin. We'll ask the questions.

AGELUS

Hey. I think you got the wrong idea about us. We're suitors, see. Not murderers.

ANTINOUS

I grieve for Odysseus, Cretin. But what else can you do for the dead? No one comes back from the other side.

PENELOPE

Except in stories, Antinous. Stories don't have to get stuck in limbo or hell. In stories, people can be more than hate, suspicion and bloodlust. They can achieve love and loyalty and forgiveness.

TELEMAKOS

So let this story go on to the end.

ODYSSEUS

They sailed back into the land of the living, on the far side of the world. Odysseus told them they were on their way home. But even the stars were strange, and it was hard to believe. On they sailed, food gone again, weak. Then Poseidon's cruel current brought them to one more trial: the land of the Lotos-eaters.

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos

MEDON

What is it? What is this plant?

LOTOS-EATER 1

Food.

LOTOS-EATER 2

Rest.

LOTOS-EATER 3

Happiness.

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos.

PISANDER

Thanks, guys, but the last time we took a handout we turned into pigs.

LOTOS-EATER 1

This time you'll turn into happiness.

MEDON REACHES TENTATIVELY FOR THE LOTOS.

ODYSSEUS

Don't eat it!

MEDON

It can't be more dangerous than starvation.

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos.

MEDON

I'll test it on myself. I'm not going to stand by and see us die off, one by one.

ODYSSEUS

Don't eat. And that's an or--

MEDON TAKES A BITE OF THE LOTOS. SHE BECOMES A GLASSY-EYED ZOMBIE OF HAPPINESS.

SILEA

Medon, are you all right?

MEDON

Yes.

PISANDER

We'll gather some to take on board. We'll make it home yet.

MEDON

We're not going home.

PISANDER

What?

MEDON

Rest.

LOTOS-EATER 2

Happiness.

LOTOS EATERS

Lotos.

ODYSSEUS

What about our children?

LOTOS EATERS

Lotos.

ODYSSEUS

What about home? Wives, husbands, parents, brothers, sisters, Ithaka? What were we fighting for?

LOTOS EATERS

Lotos.

ODYSSEUS

Medon, don't you care about your family?

MEDON

I haven't seen them in a long time. I hope they're as happy as I am.

PISANDER

I'm in. Give me a bite.

ODYSSEUS

Pisander.

*PISANDER TAKES A BITE OF THE LOTOS. SHE BECOMES ONE OF
THE LOTOS-EATERS.*

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos.

PISANDER

Lotos.

ANTIPHUS

Pisander, pass me some of that.

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos.

ODYSSEUS

Antiphus.

ANTIPHUS

What? They're happy.

ODYSSEUS

You'll forget about home.

MEDON

No. I remember everything.

PISANDER

Me too.

MEDON

But without pain.

ANTIPHUS

I'm done taking your orders, Captain. I'm done with all of
it.

ANTIPHUS BITES THE LOTOS

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos.

ODYSSEUS

Silea. I can't sail the ship alone.

SILEA

How can it be bad to get rid of pain?

ODYSSEUS

How can it be good to care about nothing? There's more to life than pleasure.

SILEA

For years and years we've known only suffering, fear, hate and death.

ODYSSEUS

And friendship. Loyalty. I'd lay down my life for you, Silea.

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos.

ODYSSEUS

Get back on board. Right now. I order you.

ODYSSEUS DRAWS HIS KNIFE. SILEA TAKES THE LOTOS BUT DOES NOT BITE. ODYSSEUS DROPS THE KNIFE

Please.

SILEA HOLDS THE LOTOS OUT TOWARDS ODYSSEUS

SILEA

You deserve rest more than anyone.

ODYSSEUS

You think I don't want rest? But I won't be a slave to a plant! I will do what's right, whether or not it's easy. Silea, Look at them. What kind of life is that?

SILEA

Odysseus. When the sirens sang to you, and you begged to go to them, what were they promising you?

ODYSSEUS

What does that matter now? I'm grateful to you for stopping me.

SILEA

What did they promise you?

ODYSSEUS

War. War. Blood. Killing. To fight again. The glory of destroying Troy again. All the things I thought I hated. But when they showed it to me, I wanted it more than anything. To go back and fight it all over again.

SILEA

They're addicted to a plant. You're addicted to struggle. Good-bye, Odysseus.

SILEA BITES THE LOTOS

ODYSSEUS

No!

LOTOS-EATERS

Lotos!

THE SCENE SHIFTS BACK TO ITHAKA.

ANTINOUS

That's the end of your story, isn't it?

ODYSSEUS

It's all I know.

ANTINOUS

He couldn't sail the ship alone. He died at sea.

ODYSSEUS

Everyone dies.

PENELOPE

Then the time has come to end this.

PENELOPE BRINGS OUT THE SHROUD

I will make my choice, you fine young men of Ithaka.

THE SUITORS CHEER

TELEMAKOS

No. Please.

EURYMAKOS

Quiet, Telemakos.

AGELUS

Who are you to tell your mother if she can marry or not?

EURYMAKOS

Choose!

LEIODES

Choose now!

PHEMIUS

Choose me!

PENELOPE

When my husband left, he told me, "No one knows what will happen in war. I've heard the Trojans are tough. And the sea has taken sailors beyond count. Don't wait for me forever. If I'm not home when a beard starts to darken our son's chin, marry again. Go to some other man's house, some other man's bed, and let Telemakos be master here." The time has come. I'm wearing the dress I wore on my wedding day. On that day, Odysseus did a trick. Maybe some of you remember it. You would have been young boys, of course.

PENELOPE TAKES THE SHROUD FROM TELEMAKOS, UNWRAPS THE AXE, THE ARROW AND THE BOW. SHE SETS THE AXE UPRIGHT.

He shot an arrow through the hole in the axe head.

SHE LIFTS THE BOW, WHICH IS UNSTRUNG

No one has bent this bow since he left. I'll marry the man who can do his trick.

EURYMAKOS

What if more than one of us makes it?

PENELOPE SMILES

PENELOPE

I wouldn't worry about that, Eurymakos. I'd worry about less than one of you making it.

LEIODES

Give me that!

LEIODES TRIES TO STRING THE BOW

PHEMIUS

Come on, put your back into it!

AGELUS

Really Leiodes, can't you even string the bow?

LEIODES THROWS THE BOW AT AGELUS

LEIODES

You try!

AGELUS STRAINS

Come on, put your back into it!

EURYMAKOS

Stop it. We look like babies. Can't even string the hero's bow. Give it to me.

EURYMAKOS TRIES TO STRING THE BOW, BUT FALLS TO THE FLOOR.

PHEMIUS

Ha! Bow, one, Eurymakos, nothing!

EURYMAKOS

It's another of her tricks! How do we know that this is Odysseus' bow? How do we know it can be strung?

ANTINOUS COMES FORWARD

ANTINOUS

Give it to me. I remember this. It is his bow.

PENELOPE TAKES THE BOW AND HANDS IT TO ANTINOUS. HE LOOKS AT THE NECKLACE AND SMILES. SHE SMILES AT HIM, TOO. ANTINOUS ATTEMPTS TO STRING THE BOW WITH GREAT CONFIDENCE, BUT HE BEGINS TO STRAIN. THE SUITORS ALL BEGIN TO LAUGH. HE THROWS THE BOW ON THE FLOOR. IT LANDS BEFORE ODYSSEUS.

PHEMIUS

Ha, ha, that's right, give it to the old beggar! I'm not touching that thing again. It nearly killed Eurymakos.

PENELOPE RUSHES TO ANTINOUS. UNNOTICED BY THE SUITORS, ODYSSEUS PICKS UP THE BOW. HE FITS THE BOW INTO A NOTCH WHICH HAS BEEN CUT INTO THE TABLE, DESIGNED FOR THIS PURPOSE. USING THE SUPERIOR LEVERAGE THUS PROVIDED, HE STRINGS THE BOW AND SLOWLY FITS AN ARROW TO THE STRING, ALL UNNOTICED BY THE SUITORS.

PENELOPE

Antinous, are you all right? I'm sorry, I thought you'd be able to . . .

AGELUS

Nobody is going to even string that bow. Everyone knows Antinous is the strongest of us all. Come on, Penelope, come up with a different contest.

PHEMIUS

Even if we could string it, nobody could make that shot.

HE CROSSES TO THE HOLE, SQUINTS THROUGH IT.

That arrow would barely fit through here. Hey, look, everybody. I'm the Cyclops. Gar, Gar.

PHEMIUS POSES BEHIND THE HOLE IN THE AXE HEAD, LOOKING THROUGH IT WITH ONE EYE. ODYSSEUS KNOWS A CUE WHEN HE HEARS ONE. HE DRAWS THE BOW AND LOOSES THE ARROW IN ONE SMOOTH MOVEMENT, SENDING AN ARROW THROUGH PHEMIUS' EYE, KILLING HIM.

LEIODES

Gods!

EURYMAKOS

Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS

Get out of my house. You've drunk my wine, eaten my meat and plagued my family for far too long.

AGELUS

We thought you were dead. We offered your wife an honorable marriage.

ODYSSEUS

Yes. I've seen your honorable offers. Get out!

*AGELUS DECIDES THIS IS A GOOD IDEA, BUT EURYMAKOS BARS
AGELUS' ESCAPE*

EURYMAKOS

Don't go. You saw what happened to Phemius. If we let him survive, he'll hunt us down one by one.

THE SUITORS DRAW THEIR KNIVES

AGELUS

You can't kill us all, Odysseus.

LEIODES

Not all alone.

TELEMAKOS

But he's not alone.

TELEMAKOS PICKS UP THE AXE, AND KILLS LEIODES

Not anymore.

*ODYSSEUS KILLS AGELUS. ODYSSEUS FACES OFF AGAINST
EURYMAKOS, WHILE TELEMAKOS STRUGGLES WITH ANTINOUS.*

ODYSSEUS

You yellow dog, courting my wife while you twisted her maid to serve you. You thought I'd never make it back. Your last minute has come. You die in blood.

ODYSSEUS KILLS EURYMAKOS.

KLEA

Eurymakos!

*KLEA STRIKES AT ODYSSEUS. HE KILLS HER. SHE REACHES
FOR EURYMAKOS' BODY AS SHE DIES.*

Eurymakos.

ANTINOUS OVERPOWERS TELEMAKOS. HOLDS HIM HOSTAGE.

ANTINOUS

That's enough.

ODYSSEUS DROPS HIS WEAPON.

ODYSSEUS

Don't hurt him.

ANTINOUS

What's the matter? You sacrificed your crew easily enough. Why not a son you barely know?

ODYSSEUS

Antinous, please . . .

ANTINOUS

You know why I didn't recognize you? I still half thought you were a hero. The way I remembered you. But you've become a sneaking con man; a beggar, a cretin, a nobody.

ODYSSEUS

Telemakos. I love you. There wasn't a day, a minute that . . .

ANTINOUS

Shut up. One more word and I slit his throat. No more tricks. You want to be a hero? His life for yours.

ODYSSEUS

All right.

ODYSSEUS SPREADS HIS ARMS, TAKES A STEP FORWARD, LIFTS HIS HEAD, CLOSES HIS EYES. ANTINOUS SHOVES TELEMAKOS DOWN AND ATTACKS ODYSSEUS.

TELEMAKOS

No!

TELEMAKOS JUMPS ON ANTINOUS. ANTINOUS THROWS HIM OFF. PENELOPE RUSHES TO TAKE CARE OF TELEMAKOS. ODYSSEUS KILLS ANTINOUS.

I'm all right.

PENELOPE TAKES OFF THE NECKLACE, STANDS TO FACE ODYSSEUS.

These men have families. They'll come after us.

ODYSSEUS

We'll make peace. I'll stand trial. These men called themselves suitors, but they were murderous thieves. Everyone has a right to defend his home.

PENELOPE

You are right, Odysseus. Ithaka's been lawless so long. People thirst for peace. For laws. For ordinary life.

ODYSSEUS

So do I. Penelope. We've been apart ten times as long as we've been together. But . . .

PENELOPE

I'm older.

ODYSSEUS

So am I.

PENELOPE

And I've spent so long hardening my heart . . .

ODYSSEUS

So have I.

PENELOPE

Are you really home? Have you really come back alive from the Cyclop's cave, from Circe's kiss, from the land of the dead?

ODYSSEUS

I'm no ghost.

PENELOPE

And have you escaped the Siren song? Are you really back from the war?

ODYSSEUS

Penelope, this is a homecoming more bitter than I'd feared, but sweeter than I hoped. The frenzy I felt when I heard the Sirens' song is nothing—nothing to the joy I feel now. I was almost without hope, and you guided me home. I am a shipwrecked sailor who has caught sight of land. I will never let you go.