

The Odyssey

a play  
by

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adapted from the epic of Homer

Men would undertake no works either on land  
or sea if they were not willing to try again  
what they have failed in once.

– Seneca

For my son, for Sam.

Scene One

*Let's begin in darkness – that's as good a place as any.*

*A light from above: Telemachus is revealed, sitting alone with his head in his hands.*

TELEMACHUS

I can't go on.

*A figure moves behind him, pacing in and out of the shadows, her gentle voice cutting through the darkness.*

SERVANT

You can.

TELEMACHUS

No. Not even for one more night. This is destroying me. This has destroyed me. And my mother...

SERVANT

...your mother...

TELEMACHUS

...she won't come out, she...

SERVANT

...she's still waiting...

TELEMACHUS

...she's waiting...

SERVANT

...waiting for her husband, for your father...

TELEMACHUS

...we're all waiting. They're waiting for her to pick a new husband. She's waiting for my father to come back...

SERVANT

...he'll be back.

TELEMACHUS

He'd better hurry. I don't know how much longer she can go on. I don't know how much longer I can go on. I can't go on.

SERVANT

You can.

TELEMACHUS

They're wearing me down...

*...as they've been speaking, noise is rising in the darkness around them: voices and laughter and conversation...*

MERCHANT

...and so I said to her "As for how I made my fortune, my dear..."

*...the lights rise to full, revealing the great hall in the house of Odysseus. A banquet is underway, with five men lounging on the floor and laughing, a raucous and vulgar group of suitors waiting for Telemachus mother to make up her mind. Servants move silently through their midst, refilling drinking bowls and carrying platters of food.*

POLITICIAN

Excuse me for a moment...

*...for the record, the suitors are: A politician, a merchant, a philosopher, a priest, and an athlete.*

ATHLETE

Orphan...

TELEMACHUS

...oh gods...

MERCHANT

"...you're riding on it..."

ATHLETE

...more wine...

PHILOSOPHER

...yes, more wine...

PRIEST

...and what did she say..?

ATHLETE

...orphan..!

MERCHANT

...what do you think..?

POLITICIAN

...Telemachus...

SERVANT

...your gods are with you...

ATHLETE

...you there, missy, more wine...

SERVANT

...yes, my lord...

MERCHANT

...she'd made her own fortune in a similar way...

ATHLETE

...that's fine, thanks...

SERVANT

...yes, my lord...

PRIEST

...how do you mean..?

PHILOSOPHER

...another bowl here...

MERCHANT

...never mind...

SERVANT

...yes, my lord...

ATHLETE

...tell me, bright eyes...

SERVANT

...yes, my lord?

ATHLETE

Do you sing?

SERVANT

No, my lord.

ATHLETE

No?

PHILOSOPHER

Another, I'm sorry, another bowl..?

SERVANT

...yes, my lord...

ATHLETE

...do you dance..?

PHILOSOPHER

...thank you...

SERVANT

...no my lord...

ATHLETE

...would you like to learn?

SERVANT

No, my lord.

POLITICIAN

Excuse me, I'm sorry, have you seen Telemachus?

ATHLETE

Suckboy's over there...

POLITICIAN

...thank you...

*...the politician comes up behind Telemachus and  
puts a paternal hand on his shoulder.*

POLITICIAN

Telemachus.

ATHLETE

Don't you like me?

TELEMACHUS

Senator.

SERVANT

My lord.



POLITICIAN

Tell me, my boy, will your lovely mother be joining us this evening?

ATHLETE

Little tease.

TELEMACHUS

I don't know.

SERVANT

Yes, my lord.

POLITICIAN

Well, perhaps if you were to pass on my proposal to her?

TELEMACHUS

Again, senator?

ATHLETE

I swear, Cupid's buried his arrow deep in my...

POLITICIAN

...what is your opinion..?

ATHLETE

...by the gods...

TELEMACHUS

...of my mother? My opinion hardly matters...

ATHLETE

...I don't believe it...

PHILOSOPHER

...I'm sorry, more wine..?

SERVANT

...pardon me...

ATHLETE

...later for you...

SERVANT

...my lord...

POLITICIAN

...well...

ATHLETE

...suckboy! Orphan! Telemachus!

*The athlete storms over to Telemachus and grabs him.  
Everyone stops to watch.*

TELEMACHUS

Yes?

ATHLETE

Where is it?

TELEMACHUS

Where is what?

ATHLETE

Damn your eyes, where is it?

TELEMACHUS

Have you lost something?

ATHLETE

Have I lost . . . you little bastard...

MERCHANT

...what's the problem?

ATHLETE

The bow's gone.

MERCHANT

The bow?

ATHLETE

Are you blind..?

PRIEST

...oh my...

MERCHANT

...son of a...

TELEMACHUS

...the bow..?

*...the athlete lifts Telemachus up and shakes him,  
gesturing to a bare place on the wall above them...*

ATHLETE

...where is it, you little scab..?

POLITICIAN

...please...

TELEMACHUS

...I assure you...

ATHLETE

...where is it..?

POLITICIAN

...if you'd just...

ATHLETE

...not till he...

POLITICIAN

...think of your proposal, how impressed will his mother be to see you bullying her son?

*The athlete lets Telemachus fall to the floor.*

ATHLETE

Point taken.

POLITICIAN

Telemachus, that bow was the capstone of your dead father's career...

TELEMACHUS

...my absent father...

ATHLETE

...listen you...

POLITICIAN

...please. Telemachus, your father's bow is the property of...

TELEMACHUS

...my father's bow is the property of my father.

POLITICIAN

It is also a trophy of his military achievements performed in the service of the state to say nothing of being a national relic. What have you done with it?

TELEMACHUS

It is in the hands of someone that I think even the state would recognize as a trustworthy caretaker.

ATHLETE

Who?

POLITICIAN

Obviously, it should be kept safe. And if you feel that it's more secure now...

ATHLETE

...what..?

POLITICIAN

...I would like to verify your claim in the morning. As an elected representative of the state, of course.

TELEMACHUS

Of course.

ATHLETE

If there's anything, anything in question . . . that bow is going right back up there on the wall where it belongs.

TELEMACHUS

As you say. I assure you, nothing would give me greater joy than to restore my father's bow to its rightful place here in his house.

ATHLETE

I bet.

POLITICIAN

Thank you, my boy. Now, what do you say to some small entertainment to pass the time?

MERCHANT

Yes, a diversion.

POLITICIAN

An entertainment.

PHILOSOPHER

A song.

MERCHANT

Yes, a song.

ATHLETE

Something bawdy.

PRIEST

Something uplifting.

PHILOSOPHER

A story, yes.

MERCHANT

To while away the...

PRIEST

...while we wait on your mother....

MERCHANT

...your mother...

POLITICIAN

...your beautiful mother...

PHILOSOPHER

...your father's lovely widow...

MERCHANT

...while we wait...

ATHLETE

...wait for her...

MERCHANT

...wait for her to decide which of us...

ATHLETE

...which of us she fancies most...

PHILOSOPHER

...a story...

MERCHANT

...a song...

POLITICIAN

...Telemachus?

*He looks around, but Telemachus has slipped away.*

SERVANT

He has been called to the gate, my lords, to attend to a visitor.

MERCHANT

Doesn't he have enough house guests already?

PHILOSOPHER

Doesn't his mother have enough husbands to choose from..?

PRIEST

...he should be attending to us...

ATHLETE

...she should be attending to us...

MERCHANT

...to his future father...

ATHLETE

...her husband...

PHILOSOPHER

...whoever it turns out to be...

ATHLETE

...whoever wins the prize...

PRIEST

...divine Penelope...

MERCHANT

...she'll make her choice soon...

POLITICIAN

...soon enough...

MERCHANT

...and then he'll have a real father to serve...

ATHLETE

...a real husband to...

PRIEST

...yes...

ATHLETE

...not some ghost.,.

MERCHANT

...some phantom...

PHILOSOPHER

...a memory...

PRIEST

...a myth...

PHILOSOPHER

...a figment...

PRIEST

...a fable...

POLITICIAN

...go and fetch him back, my dear. Tell him his father...



PRIEST

...his fathers...

POLITICIAN

...tell him his father is waiting, tell him...

*...but Telemachus has already returned, the head  
servant whispering in his ear.*

TELEMACHUS

I apologize for my absence, my lord. What do you require?

ATHLETE

More wine!

TELEMACHUS

Of course.

PHILOSOPHER

Entertainment!

MERCHANT

A song!

PRIEST

A story!

MERCHANT

A song!

TELEMACHUS

A story?

MERCHANT

A song...

PRIEST

...yes...

PHILOSOPHER

...a real story...

MERCHANT

...with monsters...

ATHLETE

...and maidens...

PRIEST

...and magic...

ATHLETE

...and maidens...

POLITICIAN

...a story...

MERCHANT

...something we can sink the teeth of our imagination into...

POLITICIAN

...a tale to delight and marvel both gods and men.

TELEMACHUS

Well, the gods smile upon my father's house tonight...

SERVANT

...there's always a first time...

TELEMACHUS

...I have just been informed that a most strange traveler has arrived...

MERCHANT

...a song, before I die of boredom!

ATHLETE

And more wine, before I die of thirst.

TELEMACHUS

I can do both, for the gods have brought a most revered and skillful storyteller, here, tonight, to the very gates of my father's home.

MERCHANT

Well, that's convenient.

TELEMACHUS

Even now, he stands without.

ATHLETE

Without what?

TELEMACHUS

And I have engaged him for your amusement this evening. He awaits your pleasure, gentlemen.

PRIEST

A story...

POLITICIAN

...a story then...

ATHLETE

...and more wine...

PHILOSOPHER

...bring him...

POLITICIAN

...bring him in...

PRIEST

...a story...

MERCHANT

...bring him in, boy. And let him erase the tedious moment we have passed here with you.

TELEMACHUS

As you wish.

*He exits.*

ATHLETE

Little bastard...

PRIEST

...blame the parents...

PHILOSOPHER

...true, true...

POLITICIAN

...absent father...

MERCHANT

...never even knew his father...

PRIEST

...distracted mother...

PHILOSOPHER

...always at the loom...

ATHLETE

...he'll learn respect soon enough when I am...

MERCHANT

...when I am his father...

PHILOSOPHER

...or when I am...

PRIEST

...or I...

ATHLETE

...we'll learn him...

MERCHANT

...one of us...

PRIEST

...teach him discipline...

MERCHANT

...he's had it easy...

POLITICIAN

...too easy...

PHILOSOPHER

...but not for long...

PRIEST

...no...

MERCHANT

...not when he's got a daddy again...

PHILOSOPHER

...but are you so certain?

MERCHANT

Certain?

PHILOSOPHER

Who's to say that he won't come back?

ATHLETE

He won't.

PHILOSOPHER

But how can you be certain.

ATHLETE

I'm certain.

PHILOSOPHER

How certain?

ATHLETE

Very certain.

PHILOSOPHER

How?

POLITICIAN

I expect that what our friend here is trying to say is that, should a miracle occur and the long lost husband and father return home unexpectedly, well, shall we say, certain measures have been taken to ensure that the wife remain a widow, at least until one of us has the opportunity to rescue her from that unhappy...

MERCHANT

...and lucrative...

POLITICIAN

...that unhappy and lucrative condition, yes.

PHILOSOPHER

How?

MERCHANT

Look around you.

POLITICIAN

Influence, wealth, and power fill this room, more than enough to ensure that, should the dead arise, the widow will remain a widow.

PHILOSOPHER

And the husband?

ATHLETE

Dead is dead.

POLITICIAN

Yes, whether on the battlefield or at the city gates, dead is dead.

ATHLETE

Sooner or later.

PHILOSOPHER

And the son?

*The suitors laugh quietly.*

*Telemachus reenters, followed close behind by the Storyteller.*

*Telemachus stands for a moment and then steps to one side to allow the Storyteller to enter.*

*The Storyteller, what can we say about him?*

*He's old, with a wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his face, wrapped in a weather-stained robe.*

*And the robe is a marvel, overhung with ribbons and puppets and cups and swords and feathers and brightly-colored scraps of cloth – all props for his performances.*

*Across his back, over his shoulders, he bears a long curved pole like a yoke. Strung from the pole at varying lengths are masks – masks of gods and men*

*and monsters – hollow-eyed faces gaping out on each side of him, swaying as he walks.*

*And as he walks, he clatters and rattles, like a jester with his bells.*

*At the sight of him, the suitors fall silent. Even the servants stop their work to stare for a moment.*

POLITICIAN

Gentlemen, now there's...

MERCHANT

...there's a storyteller for you...

TELEMACHUS

...and much renowned in his own land, I'm told.

MERCHANT

What is your name.

STORYTELLER

In time, in time my name will fade. But my song, my song shall live on in the minds of men, if the gods are kind.

MERCHANT

Your story, then...

POLITICIAN

...yes...

STORYTELLER

...my song...

MERCHANT

...your song...

STORYTELLER

...song to me...



ATHLETE

...song...

PRIEST

...song...

STORYTELLER

...song to me...

PHILOSOPHER

...song...

STORYTELLER

...song to me, my muse...

*...on the balcony above, Telemachus' mother Penelope  
peeks out from her rooms to listen in...*

PENELOPE

...song...

SERVANT

...song...

STORYTELLER

...song to me, my muse. Start where you will and let me sing  
again the song of the man, the man of many roads and many  
trials, many paths and many pains, song of the man of twists and  
terrors, song...

MERCHANT

...song...

STORYTELLER

...your song to me, song of him heartsore and battered on the  
open sea, cast away on island, reef, and shore...

TELEMACHUS

...song...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus! Song to me of him and of his pains on the twisted road towards home...

PENELOPE

...no...

ATHLETE

...song...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus...

PENELOPE

...no...

STORYTELLER

...song of him and how he fell...

PENELOPE

...no...!

*...she vanishes from the balcony...*

TELEMACHUS

...mother...

*...Penelope enters through the main doors. She is still beautiful, despite the ravages of her frenzied sorrow.*

PENELOPE

...no more of this, no more my son...

TELEMACHUS

...mother, please...

PENELOPE

...oh son, he is so sharp here in my memory and that blade . . .  
oh, that wound, the wound is so deep.

TELEMACHUS

At least you have the memory. I have nothing of him, no father  
but what I have made from your tears.

PENELOPE

Oh, my son . . . I could not let you bear this sorrow. No more  
of these stories, my son. No more...

TELEMACHUS

...it's all I have. It's all I have of him. This, these stories.  
Let me at least have a fable since you're too busy drowning any  
memory of the man in your own sorrow.

*Penelope slaps him.*

*Long silence.*

TELEMACHUS

To your loom a while, mother.

PENELOPE

Son...

TELEMACHUS

...to your rooms, let the men talk.

*Penelope withdraws without another word.*

*The suitors turn their attention back to the  
Storyteller.*

*He looks to Telemachus, raising one eyebrow.*

*Telemachus glances to his head servant, then nods to the storyteller.*

TELEMACHUS

Song to you.

STORYTELLER

Song to me, then.

*He clears his throat and bows his head for a moment. The suitors lean in to listen.*

*Speaking low, the Storyteller raises his head and begins...*

STORYTELLER

...song to me now and so hasten and hear how Odysseus, so mourned, so loved by his wife could be so shamed by the weakness of his only son.

MERCHANT

Oh ho...

ATHLETE

...ho song...

PRIEST

...song to you, Telemachus...

*...Penelope appears again on the balcony above...*

PENELOPE

...son...

STORYTELLER

...song to you, son of your father, too weak to rid his house of the leeches who bleed it white.

*He hauls up the priest and puts a mask on him. The priest capers and mugs to match the story.*

STORYTELLER

Telemachus. Daily and all day he whines and prays. As he fills their cups with his father's wine, he prays...

PRIEST/TELEMACHUS

...Athena...

STORYTELLER

...as he serves them food from his father's stores, he prays...

PRIEST/TELEMACHUS

...Athena...

STORYTELLER

...and as he walks the halls of his father's home, listening to their jeers and taunts, he prays...

PRIEST/TELEMACHUS

...Athena . . . Athena...

STORYTELLER

...Athena...

PRIEST/TELEMACHUS

...Athena, turn your shining eye on my mind and brighten my thoughts...

STORYTELLER

...he prays...

PRIEST/TELEMACHUS

...give me wisdom...

STORYTELLER

...but there is no faith in him and, like his mother, like a woman, he weeps. Unhappy boy, unhappy woman, and most unhappy father, caught between the thunderbolt and the whirlwind...

*...he pulls more masks and props from his robe and moving among the suitors and servants, casting them as performers in his story...*

STORYTELLER

...the wrath of one god is horror enough, but to have those terrible brothers Zeus and Poseidon against you? No matter where he flees, land or sea, Odysseus is hounded without rest...

*...as he speaks, he builds a scene with one of the suitors and one of the servants, handing them two of the godmasks – Athena and Zeus – and setting them in place. And, with the transformation, we are taken there.*

STORYTELLER

But in the home of the gods, Athena goes before her father to plead for him. Athena goes, for none but she would dare question the will of Zeus...

ZEUS

...you dare question the will of Zeus?

ATHENA

My heart breaks for him, father. Alone, abandoned . . . imprisoned on an island with that, that, that nymph..?

PENELOPE

...nymph, you say..?

ZEUS

...so when you say "alone"..?

ATHENA

...he's her slave. Calypso. She sings to him and, and, and, soothes him and he's captive to all her charms.

ZEUS

Doesn't sound too bad.

ATHENA

He weeps, father. He weeps for his wife.

PENELOPE

...oh husband...

ATHENA

...he weeps for his son. This beautiful man weeps for his home and he prays for the day when he might be set free.

ZEUS

Do you want him to come back to his wife or to you?

ATHENA

He prays to you. He praised your name on the battlefield, made his sacrifices and gave thanks when Troy fell.

ZEUS

Yes. He did.

ATHENA

Yes. And now? Is your throne so lofty that his prayers can no longer reach you? Or have you just gone deaf in your later days, when the faithful give you tears instead of their former praises?

ZEUS

Careful, daughter. Be careful and be wise with the words you chew. I am your father.

ATHENA

You are my father. You are the thunderbolt. Even your memory flickers and fades like the lightning, and you forget the faithful.

ZEUS

I have not forgotten him.

ATHENA

Then why are you so set against him?

ZEUS

I am not.

ATHENA

Then..?

ZEUS

...you say he weeps?

ATHENA

Yes.

ZEUS

He weeps for his son?

ATHENA

So many tears, father. You would not think his eyes had so much to shed.

ZEUS

Funny you should mention eyes. We love our children, we gods. Just as much as the mortals. I love you daughter, sometimes more than I love myself.

ATHENA

Sometimes?



ZEUS

We love our children, best we can. You are the apple of my eye.

ATHENA

I know. As his son is to him.

ZEUS

What would he do, were someone to hurt his son?

ATHENA

Nothing would hold him back, not even the wide basin of the sea could contain his rage.

ZEUS

Funny you should mention the sea. I am not set against him, daughter.

ATHENA

Then who?

*Silence.*

ATHENA

Poseidon.

ZEUS

When you speak of a father's rage, think of the sea, think of the whirlwind, think of him. Poseidon.

ATHENA

But why?

ZEUS

We love our children, we love our sons. And you strike deep when you hurt them. An eye for an eye. The monster god does not forget and, like the waves, he likes to play with his victims before dragging them down.

ATHENA

Father...

ZEUS

...no, daughter. No.

ATHENA

Can you do nothing? Are you so powerless against Poseidon?

ZEUS

I can do whatever I please, girl. I am Zeus. But I have children of my own. Would you expect no less of me?

ATHENA

Father.

ZEUS

Daughter, that little island may feel like a prison, but it is the eye of the storm. Let her soothe him for a while before the whirlwind strikes.

ATHENA

Please.

*Long silence.*

ZEUS

I will send to the nymph Calypso. I will command her to let him go. But...

ATHENA

...how soon?

ZEUS

As soon as your uncle can spare the...

ATHENA

...and after he is free?

ZEUS

After he is free, he is free. I will neither help nor hinder him. I have children of my own.

ATHENA

And your children? Will you help or hinder them, should they decide to lend a hand?

*Zeus does not answer, but touches his forehead lightly with his fingertip.*

ATHENA

Thank you, father.

*She kisses his forehead and leaves.*

ZEUS

Daughter...

*...there is light applause from the audience of suitors and the storyteller clears the scene away.*

*He raises a mask up and holds it above his head, beckoning to one of the other suitors to come forward...*

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus. See him now, not lost nor dead but cast up onto a desolate place...

*...he gives the mask to the suitor, transforming him into Odysseus. He then draws one of the servant girls up and gives her another mask...*

STORYTELLER

...most unhappy man, caught in the clutches of that shining goddess, the lonely nymph Calypso.

*...once again, he speaks as he sets the scene: A man standing on the shore, a woman beckoning to him from behind.*

STORYTELLER

She found him there on the shore, in the wreckage of his ship. Her song drew him in, snared his heart for nine long years. But even her songs can lose their magic over time, and Odysseus, his eye turns towards home even as she begs him to...

CALYPSO

...stay...

STORYTELLER

...leave off his mourning...

CALYPSO

...stop playing the lost puppy, whimpering on the shore all day...

STORYTELLER

...all day he weeps, adding his tears to the bitter sea that separates him from wife and home...

*...another stifled cry from above, from Penelope...*

STORYTELLER

...lonely, ensnared by the golden braids of Calypso...

CALYPSO

...stay with me...

STORYTELLER

...she says to him daily...

CALYPSO

...stay...

STORYTELLER  
...and every day...

CALYPSO  
...stay...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave...

CALYPSO  
...leave...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave me...

CALYPSO  
...leave off your weeping...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave me alone...

CALYPSO  
...and stay with me on this my...

STORYTELLER  
...on that her...

STORYTELLER AND CALYPSO  
...on this my lonely isle...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave me alone...

CALYPSO  
...leave off your weeping and come to me, stay with me...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave...

CALYPSO  
...stay...

ODYSSEUS  
...let me...

CALYPSO  
...stay...

ODYSSEUS  
...let me leave...

CALYPSO  
...stay and...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave, let me...

CALYPSO  
...let me make you mine, make you immortal, make you forever...

ODYSSEUS  
...leave me...

CALYPSO  
...no man can deny me, not even you...

ODYSSEUS  
...my wife...

CALYPSO  
...oh please...

PENELOPE  
...oh please...

CALYPSO  
...and no woman, not even yours, can match my grace or beauty...

ODYSSEUS

...Penelope...

CALYPSO

...not even she. You know this is true, for you weep all day on the shore . . . but when the night turns cold? My bed is never empty for long...

*...another cry from above...*

CALYPSO

...and there's few mortal women who can compete with a goddess for the heart of a man.

ODYSSEUS

Her beauty is great, but it is no rival to yours.

CALYPSO

Of course not.

ODYSSEUS

And she is mortal...

CALYPSO

...yes, tell me...

ODYSSEUS

...she will age, even now she ages...

*...Penelope has crept out from above and stands, clutching the rail...*

CALYPSO

...yes...

ODYSSEUS

...she will die...

CALYPSO

...yes, she will...

ODYSSEUS

...but so shall I, so shall I age and die.

CALYPSO

You need not, sweet one. Say the word and I will raise you to my side where neither age nor death can touch you.

STORYTELLER

But he turned, his eyes once again to the darkening sea. And that night in her bed she waited . . . but he did not come.

CALYPSO

Oh, my love...

STORYTELLER

...then, she heard a footstep, quick and light and fleet...

CALYPSO

...oh...

STORYTELLER

...but it was not her lover...

*...another performer is pulled in and given a new mask – Hermes. He enters and spies Calypso lying in bed and immediately covers his eyes...*

HERMES

...yow! Sorry, sorry...

CALYPSO

...hail cousin...

STORYTELLER

...the gods are never strangers when they meet...



CALYPSO

...hail and welcome, Hermes.

*Hermes takes his hand down slowly, blinks a moment.  
Calypso sighs.*

CALYPSO

So rarely you visit. What message do you bring to me, O nimble god?

HERMES

Well just between you, me, and the tent post – there's an uproar upstairs that's sped me here so fast across the great and salty waste to deliver a message of the utmost urgency and haste from Zeus himself who has sent me here to speak with you and deliver his message and request, if not his demand, to silence the complaints and whining of his daughter, the bright-eyed and bushy-tailed Athena.

CALYPSO

I see. And the message..?

HERMES

...the message, yes, exactly, Zeus is not one to tarry in his wishes or desires, as so many mortal women have discovered when they least expected it and if that hasn't caused the gods some trouble having to deal with the thunderbolt's brats from year to year, always voyaging to the Underworld or stealing golden apples or wrestling minotaurs...

CALYPSO

...Hermes. The message.

HERMES

Right. Yes. Straight to the point and let slower thoughts catch up as they may. Absolutely. Hermes. Fleet of foot and twice as quick, when it absotively, posolutely has to be there over...

CALYPSO

...cousin.

HERMES

Let him go.

CALYPSO

Who?

HERMES

Who. Odysseus. Zeus says it's time he went home. Goddesses such as yourself shouldn't be dallying with mortal mongrels.

CALYPSO

You gods . . . you hardhearted, jealous gods, so scandalized when a goddess takes a mortal man...

HERMES

...don't kill the messenger...

HERMES

...oh, but never a word is spoken, never a word, when one of your own goes wandering by the river where the washerwomen let their skirts float up around their fat legs...

HERMES

...easy lady...

CALYPSO

...so now the biggest father of bastards in Olympus says I have to give back the poor wretch he cast away, the one I saved from the dark waters, the one I soothed and loved and wrapped in my braids and my bed these many nights, these many years...

HERMES

...whoa, a little more detail than I need to know...

CALYPSO

...the one I cherish into eternity, even into immortality if he would allow it . . . but now Zeus, he wants him back to please his know-it-all daughter?

HERMES

Athena, yes, she's his favorite and always has been ever since she popped out between his eyebrows and said "I know something you don't know!" He's always doted on her and you know how she can be...

CALYPSO

...yes. And so I have to give up the one thing I love most?

HERMES

That's about the size of it, yeah. Yes.

CALYPSO

Go. Now.

HERMES

What should I tell Zeus?

CALYPSO

Tell him . . . tell him I obey.

HERMES

Oh. Good. Thank you. He'll be so pleased to...

CALYPSO

...shut up, Hermes.

*Silence.*

*Hermes turns to go. He looks at her there, hugging her knees to her chest, staring at the wall.*

HERMES

Thank you, Calypso.

*He goes.*

STORYTELLER

She rose then and went to him, to her love, and she gave him implements and axes and tools, and led him to the place where the strong woods grew. And as he worked, she sang to him one last time...

PRIEST

...song...

PHILOSOPHER

...song to him...

STORYTELLER

...but his ears were closed to her. As he worked to build the decks and gunwales, fashioning a mast strong and tall, a rudder to guide his passage across the shadowed seas...

ATHLETE

...more wine...

MERCHANT

...and here as well...

PENELOPE

...shh...

ATHLETE

...oh ho...

TELEMACHUS

...mother...

MERCHANT

...song to you, lady...

PENELOPE

...shh..!

STORYTELLER

...and he fenced his craft in with woven sticks and rods, a bulwark against the waves, and Calypso, ever singing, she brought him her bedclothes for his sail...

MERCHANT

...get on with it...

PHILOSOPHER

...we've seen ships...

PRIEST

...yes...

PHILOSOPHER

...we know how they're made...

MERCHANT

...song...

POLITICIAN

...set him on his way before we fall asleep...

STORYTELLER

...and when the sweet and childlike Dawn had smeared her pale fingertips across the sky, his ship was ready for the voyage home. The goddess launched him from her island, her song filling his sail and carrying him out across the waves towards the deepening seas. She sang him on...

CALYPSO

...my love...

STORYTELLER

...but he kept his hand on the rudder and his back to her . . . and never once did he looked back...

PENELOPE

...Odysseus...

*...on the balcony above, she sits down to listen further...*

CALYPSO

...my love...

*...she trails off, staring out at the empty sea.*

Scene Two

*The storyteller hands out more masks, bringing in suitors and servants to make the boat and the wind and the sea from his props...*

STORYTELLER

For nine days he sailed on and on...

PRIEST

...and on...

PHILOSOPHER

...and on...

STORYTELLER

...and on he sailed towards...

PRIEST

...towards some interesting plot or episode, I hope...

MERCHANT

...on with it, on with it...

STORYTELLER

...but as he made his way across the broad face of the waters, the whirlwind, the earthquake, the destroyer of men and the enemy of Odysseus, Poseidon...

ATHLETE

...Poseidon...

POSEIDON

...what's this..?

STORYTELLER

...Poseidon looked down, the tiny raft had caught his hateful eye...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...the great god saw him there...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...Poseidon...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus, vulnerable and exposed, clinging to his makeshift  
raft on the...

POSEIDON

...on my waters..?

PENELOPE

...Odysseus...

ATHLETE

...Poseidon...

POSEIDON

...you dare, you dare to dip your cursed hands in my waters once  
again?

STORYTELLER

Around Odysseus, the sea began to boil and froth with the rage  
of the god...

ODYSSEUS

...uh oh...



STORYTELLER

...and the crude craft to which he pinned his hopes began to buckle beneath him. The rudder was wrenched from his hands and the sail was ripped from the mast, caught and savaged in the teeth of the wind...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...and as the deck splintered below him and the bitter wine of Poseidon flowed in...

ODYSSEUS

...Penelope...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus fixed his eye on a distant island and leapt into the mouth of the sea...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

PENELOPE

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...he beat his way through the waters, every stroke a blow against the spiteful god above...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...but not even he, not even Odysseus could withstand the grudge of the monster god, and with both his hands, Poseidon...

POSEIDON

...and with both my hands I shook the clouds and rattled them in the sky, crushing them together above your head...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

POSEIDON

...and I twisted them tight, wringing out all my rage and rain to fall on you and fill your gaping eyes and gasping mouth...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

TELEMACHUS

...no...

POSEIDON

...and I stirred my great trident across the face of the deep and churning the waters around you into a great and terrible whirlpool...

ODYSSEUS

...Penelope...

POSEIDON

...and you screamed and flailed against me but there was no escape now...

ODYSSEUS

...Penelope...

STORYTELLER

...and summoning all of the thin and feeble breath that remained in him, Odysseus...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

PENELOPE

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus, he spread his arms wide and clutched at the brief  
and flickering stars above...

POSEIDON

...no...

ODYSSEUS

...and he cried out...

ODYSSEUS

...Zeus...

POSEIDON

...no...

ODYSSEUS

...Zeus...

STORYTELLER

...and with a flash...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

PENELOPE

...oh husband...

ATHENA

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...the bright one, Pallas Athena, brainchild of Zeus...

POSEIDON

...no...

STORYTELLER

...in a flash she was there, borne on the back of her uncle  
Hermes...

POSEIDON

...no...

STORYTELLER

...and she caught his flailing hand and drew him back up out of  
the depths...

ATHENA

...his cold arm in my hands, so cold...

ODYSSEUS

...so cold...

ATHENA

...the life draining from him...

PENELOPE

...no...

ATHENA

...I drew him close...

POSEIDON

...no...

ATHENA

...I swept the chill waters from him and I...

POSEIDON

..she...

ATHENA

...I...

ODYSSEUS

...she...

STORYTELLER

...she...

POSEIDON

...no...

ODYSSEUS

...and Athena drew me out of the whirlpool and onto a small piece of planking that had escaped the maw of the depths...

POSEIDON

...Athena...

ATHENA

...and...

STORYTELLER

...and while the rage of the god pursued after...

ATHENA

...I...

ODYSSEUS

...she...

STORYTELLER

...she held the might of Poseidon at bay and Odysseus...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus...

ATHENA

...Odysseus, he clung to that splinter while I...

ODYSSEUS

...while she...

STORYTELLER

...while she funneled the storm behind him, guiding his little craft toward the island he had spied...

POSEIDON

...no...

ATHENA

...and the god whipped up his rage tenfold, but his fury served only to speed him on...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus, guided by the focused force and fury of the god, Odysseus crossed the waves, and so great was Poseidon's rage that it propelled him past the shore and upstream on a river, deep into the heart of the island where, finally...

ODYSSEUS

...finally...

STORYTELLER

...finally, he came to rest against a warm and grassy shore, while the distant storm still boiled on the horizon...

POSEIDON

...Odysseus, Odysseus...

STORYTELLER

...and mumbling a prayer...

ODYSSEUS

...Athena...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus rolled into the deep, soft caress of the reeds and fell asleep.

*The storyteller moves to one of the serving girls and draws her out, placing a mask strewn with green ribbons in her hands.*

### Scene Three

*The servant looks down at the mask for a moment.  
Then she lifts it to her face and begins to speak as  
the scene is played out behind her.*

#### NAUSICAA

I am Nausicaa, daughter of Alcinous, son of the terrible lord of the wind and sea. I am Nausicaa, princess of Phaecia, daughter of noble Alcinous and beautiful Arete. I am Nausicaa and both my father's wisdom and my mother's kindness ebb and flow within me.

I am Nausicaa, offspring of the whirlwind and the waterspout.

I am Nausicaa. The blood of Poseidon flows within me.

I am Nausicaa, young and beautiful but not yet wed to man nor god.

I am Nausicaa, and this is my story.

One night as I lay sleeping, Pallas Athena whispered to me, telling me to rise up in the morning, to go down to the river and wash myself, as though I were preparing for my wedding day.

Is he coming? Finally and at last will I have a man of my own?

In the morning I woke, gathered my maids to me, and went to the river.

The river was bright under the sun, and my maids and I dipped our hands and feet into the cool waters. I watched the light shimmer and drift on the surface of the river and gently cupped my hands around it dashing it against my face, my neck, my breasts. The water fell from my face and again I lifted the sun up in my hands, this time drinking deeply of the rich warm light. My maids were wading on the bank, splashing and laughing. Then one of them gasped, one of them screamed. I turned and he



NAUSICAA (*continued*)

was there, standing among the reeds. His body was brown and sleek, and his hair fell around his shoulders, strewn with leaves and mud and even so, even so he was there and I could not take my eyes from him. He was so beautiful and so lost.

At last, he is here. The one I have waited for.

My maids huddled together afraid. But I am Nausicaa and I fear neither man nor god.

I spoke with him, persuaded him to return with us to my father's house where my father welcomed the stranger and sent the servants to prepare a feast.

The stranger was bathed and given fine oil for his skin and hair. He came to the feasting hall gleaming, the bright light streaming off of him like a god.

Is it him, has he finally come?

Is it you?

I longed to soothe the sorrow from him, like the water, like the waves, when they rinse the sand from some castoff scrap of driftwood on the shore, washed clean and polished by the wind and sea.

I am Nausicaa and I wanted him, and like that scrap of driftwood carried home and set upon the mantle. I wanted him for my own, for my own, to run my hands over his smooth curves, to explore his twists and turns.

During the feast my father beckoned to the stranger to tell his story. This is what he said...

*...one of the suitors is given the Odysseus mask, and he rises to take up the tale. And as he speaks, the others join in to perform the story he tells.*

ODYSSEUS

To you, shining children of this island, I praise your kindness and hospitality. I can think of nothing so wonderful than a land of joy where the people are at peace, a land like yours...

NAUSICAA

...his voice, it was beautiful. Beautiful and sad and we all leaned in close to listen...

ODYSSEUS

...when you're a soldier, there is no sweeter sound than the word "home". I have known little kindness in my travels, none that could rival what you and your family have shown me here today.

Only one other, King Aeolus, only he showed me such kindness. He gave me and my men safe harbor at the start of our long journey. Before we set sail, that king so beloved of the gods, into my hands he placed a sack tied tight with silver cord.

Mindful of the precious treasure it contained, I used the sack as my pillow, resting my head each night on the swollen gifts of Aeolus.

But it didn't take long before their whispering greed got the best of my men.

SAILOR ONE

"See what secret riches the king gave to our captain?"

SAILOR THREE

"How lucky he is, loaded down with gifts and plunder..."

SAILOR ONE

"...yes, while we go home empty handed?"

ODYSSEUS

Nine nights of mutinous whispers and, when we were but a day from our journey's end, they could stand it no longer. While I slept, they made their move. Up on the deck, greedy fingers fumbled with the silver cord and they leaned in close to see what precious treasure I had hidden from them.

Of all the gods, our father Zeus most favored Aeolus and had given him mastery of the winds, from the mightiest storm to the faintest puff of breath in your lungs – all of it answered to him.

And he in turn gave me a some of this power, a bag of winds for my own to command should the sea breezes fail us on our journey home.

When I awoke, neck sore and aching, I found the traitors on deck, battling the mighty winds that their greed had set free and were now carrying us far off course.

We were but one day from home when they opened the sack, less than a day . . . another few hours and dawn would have shown us her happy shores.

For days we struggled against the kindness of Aeolus as his mighty winds sent us spinning far off course and into the hands of the nightmare god who hunted us, Poseidon.

ALCINOUS

Poseidon?

ODYSSEUS

I know this is his house. I know you share his blood. I do not know why your terrible father has fixed his hate upon me. Perhaps when you hear my story, you can tell me. Or send me away if you dare not risk his wrath.

ALCINOUS

I will hear your story.

## ODYSSEUS

Many thanks, noble king.

I began the journey home with many men and many prizes, with victory in our hearts and the wealth of the Trojan empire in our ships. On the ninth day of our voyage, three of our ships were lost to storm.

Eighty-one men drank deep the bitter wine of Poseidon on that day.

Only one of the ships, my own, escaped and we pulled hard at our oars for the wind had grown fierce. Yet the waves rebelled against us, forcing us far off course.

For nine days we were battered on the open sea before land came into view. Had I known, had I but known. I would have risked nine more days against a single hour on that island.

*The Storyteller draws out other suitors and servants, setting them in motion around him. One he sets up as Odysseus. The others he sets into motion around the hero, some as his soldier-sailor followers and others as goats.*

*They move and circle Odysseus as the next scene begins.*

Scene Four

*The Storyteller and Odysseus face the audience while  
the goats and sailors circle them...*

STORYTELLER

...it was an island of monsters...

ODYSSEUS

...the cyclops...

STORYTELLER

...cruel, brutal shepherds...

GOATS

...baa...

STORYTELLER

...who live under the eye of that everlasting evil...

ODYSSEUS

...Poseidon...

SAILORS

...Poseidon...

STORYTELLER

...it was here they came...

SAILOR ONE

...land ho...

ODYSSEUS

...we landed in a low harbor, by a shore that led up to rolling  
hills and green fields...

GOATS

...baa...

SAILOR ONE

...captain, permission to go ashore..?

GOATS

...baa...

SAILOR ONE

...captain, the men are hungry...

GOATS

...baa, baa...

SAILOR TWO

...we'll feast well tonight...

*...the goats freeze and turn to look at them.*

GOATS

Baa..!

*...they take off, the sailors and Odysseus in pursuit...*

ODYSSEUS

...after them...

*...the goats run for a cave and hide inside, the sailors and Odysseus follow...*

GOATS

...baa, baa...

SAILOR TWO

...look captain...

ODYSSEUS

...wineskins...

SAILOR THREE

...cheese...

SAILOR TWO

...milk...

ODYSSEUS

...nice place...

SAILOR ONE

...if you're a goat...

SAILOR FOUR

...look at this.

*They gather around a large area on the floor, strewn with reeds.*

SAILOR TWO

What is it?

*Odysseus holds up a teddy bear about the size of a grown man...*

ODYSSEUS

It's a bed.

SAILOR FOUR

Why would somebody build a bed so big?

*Pause.*

SAILOR ONE

Uh oh.

*There is a booming sound from outside. The goats get restless and begin bustling around the cave...*

GOATS

...baa, baa...

SAILOR TWO

...what's...?

ODYSSEUS

...hurry, back to the ship...

*...he runs for the mouth of the cave, but a huge shadow falls across the entrance and he turns...*

SAILOR TWO

...whoa...

ODYSSEUS

...hurry, back inside...

SAILOR THREE

...hide...

SAILOR TWO

...where..?

ODYSSEUS

...quick, over here...

*...they hide throughout in the cavern...*

*...one of them hides behind the goat pens...*

GOATS

...baa, baa...

SAILOR FOUR

...shhh...

*...Odysseus ducks behind a low rack...*



ODYSSEUS

...hurry...

*...one of the sailors jumps into a large barrel,  
there's a rattle from within...*

SAILOR ONE

...eew...

ODYSSEUS

...what is it..?

SAILOR ONE

...bones, it's bones...

ODYSSEUS

...goat bones..?

*...the sailor pokes his hand up, holding a skull  
like a hand puppet...*

SAILOR ONE

...I don't think so, captain...

SAILOR TWO

...uh...

*...he's at a loss, all the good spots have been  
taken, he moves around the cavern but keeps getting  
waved off by the others who got there before him...*

SAILOR TWO

...captain..?

ODYSSEUS

...hide...

*...with nowhere else to go, the sailor dives for the bed, pulling the monstrous teddy bear over on top of himself...*

ODYSSEUS

*...idiot...*

*....the sailor pokes his head out...*

SAILOR TWO

*...what..?*

SAILOR FOUR

*...shh...*

ODYSSEUS

*...by the gods...*

*...Polyphemus, the cyclops, enters, all tooth and eye. He stalks about the cavern, swaying his massive head this way and that, peering into the gloom and sniffing the air.*

*His face is blank, idiotic.*

*He nods dumbly and goes to the mouth of the cavern, drags a huge stone door into place, and lets it drop with a crash.*

*He moves about the cave, laying out wood for a fire. Once it is burning, the monster crouches down and stares into the flames.*

*Odysseus steps forward out of the shadows and faces him.*

*The monster stares at him silently and, after a long moment, he grunts.*

ODYSSEUS

Gracious host, we are sailors, soldiers homeward bound from the great wars of Troy, we are some of that happy band who served the mighty Atrides Agamemnon.

*Odysseus waits for recognition but the monster stares dumbly, obviously a half-wit. After a moment it grunts again.*

ODYSSEUS

And so now we return home in glory and triumph from our victories there.

*The monster blinks and scratches itself, no comprehension in its eyes.*

ODYSSEUS

Guided by the gods, our ship strayed into your harbor and we give thanks to them for bringing us so safely into your hospitality. Truly, travelers and strangers are the happy children of Zeus.

*The monster grins, suddenly crafty.*

POLYPHEMUS

Zeus? We serve a more potent father here. Typhoon is our God. And hurricane. And misery without end. We worship not the sparkle that flickers and vanishes as it is swallowed by the storm. No, Poseidon – he that guides all that flows over the earth and under the seas, that terrible lord of the water and the wind – he is our only master. Let the feeble lightning flicker as it might, for it soon fades when the hungry thunder rolls...

*...with a howl, the monster catches up one of the hiding sailors...*

SAILOR FOUR

...captain...!

ODYSSEUS

...monster...

*...Odysseus runs forward to save him, but Polyphemus easily throws him back.*

POLYPHEMUS

...wait your turn, midget...

SAILOR FOUR

...no...

*...the monster devours him, suddenly and horribly.*

*Finished, he throws his head back and howls in triumph.*

*Polyphemus sits back down by the fire, laughing and licking his fingers.*

*Odysseus steps forward and sits down opposite him, just out of reach.*

POLYPHEMUS

Well, what do you want now? Mercy?

ODYSSEUS

No, I do not hope for any mercy in this place.

POLYPHEMUS

No, no mercy, not here. What's your name?

ODYSSEUS

I am called No One.

POLYPHEMUS

Really.

ODYSSEUS

It's what they call me, my father and family and friends. Even my enemies. No One is my name, monster, see that you remember it when I seek my revenge.

POLYPHEMUS

Oh, you're brave, I'll give you that. And I'll give you a reward for your bravery: I'll eat you last. I'll eat No One when all your friends are gone.

*His leans back on the bed, his chuckles giving way to a skull-splitting yawn.*

POLYPHEMUS

Good night, No One.

ODYSSEUS

Sleep well, monster. May your gods be with you.

POLYPHEMUS

They are. He is. Even now.

*Polyphemus breathes easy, settling in and drifting off.*

*Odysseus rises quietly and starts to move towards him.*

*Polyphemus speaks suddenly, still sleeping.*

*Odysseus freezes.*

POLYPHEMUS

It's bigger than you think, that rock. Too big for No One and his friends to move by themselves, should something happen to me. Take your revenge if you want and then live here in the dark, gnawing on my rotting corpse when the goats run out. Think it over. I'll see you and your friends at breakfast.

*He cuddles up with his monstrous teddy bear, arms clutching the sailor beneath who goggles with fear. The monster's chuckles soon turn to snores and he falls asleep...*

ODYSSEUS

...Athena, send wisdom to deliver us...

SAILOR TWO

...Athena...

ODYSSEUS

...Athena...

SAILOR ONE

...rescue us from the cruel trap we're in...

SAILOR THREE

...save us...

ODYSSEUS

...Athena...

*...eventually the sailors all fall asleep, except for Odysseus who sits staring into the fire. Then . . . he raises his head, inspiration dawning.*

*He gets up quietly and moves about the cavern, collecting each of his men. What follows is a comic pantomime they enact silently, all the while trying not to awaken the sleeping monster...*

*...Odysseus gathering them together and, through gestures, communicating his plan and overcoming their fear and objections...*

*...the sailors and their captain searching the cavern for a weapon, finally bringing out a long pole...*

*...their attempts to find a method of silently sharpening it...*

*...laying it in the fire and baking the sharpened tip, trying not to burn the place down in the process...*

*...playing rock-paper-scissors to decide who will hold down the monster...*

*...each taking up their position at the legs and arms of Polyphemus...*

*...Odysseus standing over its head, positioning the spear over the monster's single eye...*

*...Odysseus nodding a cue to each of his men and they each grabbing a limb.*

*...the monster jerking awake, blinking its eye and mumbling...*

POLYPHEMUS

...what..?

*...he freezes, seeing Odysseus standing over him with the smoking tip of the spear inches away from his eye.*

ODYSSEUS

Tell Poseidon...

POLYPHEMUS

...no...

ODYSSEUS

...tell him that No One did this to you...

POLYPHEMUS

...don't...

*...Odysseus strikes, grinding the spear into the socket of the monster's skull...*

POLYPHEMUS

...father..!

*...the monster howls and breaks free, clutching its face and stumbling through the cavern. It finally stops, whimpering and panting and rocking.*

*From without we hear the sound of approaching voices and a pounding on the stone door.*

CYCLOPS ONE

What's the matter Polyphemus?

CYCLOPS TWO

Are you drunk again?

POLYPHEMUS

Brothers, I am attacked and tortured here, murdered even...

CYCLOPS ONE

...who is murdering you?

CYCLOPS THREE

Who would dare?

POLYPHEMUS

No One, brothers. No One has blinded me.

*...laughter from the other cyclops...*

CYCLOPS TWO

...well, you tell no one to leave you alone...



CYCLOPS THREE

...ask no one nicely...

CYCLOPS ONE

...surely you can make no one your friend again...

CYCLOPS THREE

...good night, Polyphemus...

CYCLOPS TWO

...sleep it off, you old drunkard...

CYCLOPS ONE

...get some shuteye...

CYCLOPS THREE

...no one will still be there in the morning...

CYCLOPS ONE

...good night...

POLYPHEMUS

...wait, brothers...

CYCLOPS TWO

...good night, Polyphemus...

CYCLOPS ONE

...kiss no one good night for us...

*...they move off laughing, leaving Polyphemus alone  
to stumble through the cavern with outstretched  
hands...*

POLYPHEMUS

...No One, No One...

ODYSSEUS

...no one is here, monster . . . but you're not alone...

*...the sailors laugh, the monster howls...*

POLYPHEMUS

...No One...

*...the monster casts about for a while, finally giving up the search.*

*He crouches low by the fire, brooding...*

POLYPHEMUS

...No One did this to me...

*...the night drags on. As daylight approaches, the goats start to make noise and wander around the cyclops...*

GOATS

...baa, baa...

POLYPHEMUS

...bugger off...

*...the sailors and Odysseus crouch down and throw the monster's wool blankets across their backs, disguising themselves as goats...*

GOATS AND SAILORS

...baa, baa, baa...

*...Polyphemus has had enough, grumbling and stumbling to the stone door and opening it just enough to let the goats (and sailors) out one by one...*

SAILORS

...baa, baa...

*...as they pass through, the monster feels their backs and mutters to itself...*

POLYPHEMUS

...No One...

GOAT

...baa...

POLYPHEMUS

...No One is here..?

SAILORS

...baa, baa...

POLYPHEMUS

...No One...

*...the sailors are free and they run for their ship, laughing. The cyclops howls in rage and blindly tries to follow, falling flat on its face.*

POLYPHEMUS

No One!

*Odysseus stops and turns back to taunt the cyclops.*

ODYSSEUS

No One is here, monster.

POLYPHEMUS

I curse you forever, No One.

ODYSSEUS

At least get the name right. I am Odysseus, Odysseus!

POLYPHEMUS

Odysseus...

ODYSSEUS

...so cast your blind curses on the wicked god who brought  
Odysseus to you.

POLYPHEMUS

Poseidon..!

ODYSSEUS

...farewell monster...

*...he and the sailors make their escape, leaving the  
cyclops wailing and wandering the shore...*

POLYPHEMUS

Poseidon . . . father . . . wind and thunder and hurricane fall  
on the head of Odysseus, bury him beneath your waters, let his  
miserable bones tumble and scrape across the sandy deeps.

Poseidon, Poseidon, hear me father, hear your son...

*... from above comes the distant sound of  
thunder . . . then silence.*

*The performers lay their masks aside and settle in,  
looking to the Storyteller to guide them into the  
next scene.*

Scene Five

*The Storyteller speaks softly to the suitors and servants – even Penelope has crept down to listen in, standing off to one side...*

STORYTELLER

...for nine days they rowed on across the dark waters, with no end in sight...

PRIEST

..like this story...

MERCHANT

...get on with it...

ATHLETE

...skip ahead...

MERCHANT

...give us another monster...

ATHLETE

...or the girl, what's her name...

PHILOSOPHER

...Calypso...

PRIEST

...no...

MERCHANT

...no, the young one...

POLITICIAN

...the princess...

ATHLETE

...nausea...

STORYTELLER

...Nausicaa...

ATHLETE

...that's her, let's hear how Odysseus spent his nights in her house...

PENELOPE

...no...

MERCHANT

...no, skip all that, give us another monster...

PRIEST

...like the cyclops...

ATHLETE

...no, let him have a little slap and tickle, first...

PRIEST

...then the monster...

MERCHANT

...no, monster first...

PRIEST

...structurally, that's unsound...

MERCHANT

...gods...

PRIEST

...no, to have one monster episode follow another...

MERCHANT

...are you a priest or a critic..?

ATHLETE

...there's a difference..?

POLITICIAN

...gentlemen...

PHILOSOPHER

...come on, come on...

ATHLETE

...skip ahead...

MERCHANT

...what's next, old man?

ATHLETE

Who does he meet next?

MERCHANT

Monster or maiden?

STORYTELLER

Both, actually.

*They all look to him, waiting their cues.*

STORYTELLER

For nine days they crawled across the glassy deep, until they came under the shadow of the island Aeaëa, where the witch Circe makes her home. Wearied and hungry, they made camp. The sailors grumbling while their captain went off to hunt and scout the land.

*As he speaks, the Storyteller draws members of his audience to create the next scene . . . four sailors sulking around a campfire. Odysseus steps into the camp and sits down, apart from the other men, staring into the fire.*

SAILOR ONE

How's the hunting, captain?

*Silence.*

SAILOR ONE

Captain, the men are hungry.

ODYSSEUS

As am I.

SAILOR ONE

Captain...

ODYSSEUS

...the game here is too crafty, too crafty and too wise. They saw my snares a mile off, spotted my every hiding place, stayed just out of range of my spear.

SAILOR ONE

But there is game, Captain?

ODYSSEUS

Go. Go and hunt and see for yourself how easy it is to stalk the clever beasts on this bewitched island.

SAILOR ONE

Captain.

*He turns and gestures to the others. They stand and go off into the trees, leaving Odysseus alone to fume. After a while, he nods, dozing as the fire flickers and dies out.*

*A voice in the darkness startles him awake with a staccato patter of words...*



HERMES

...certainly are taking the long way home, aren't you grandson?

*Hermes moves forward out of the shadows and paces around Odysseus, eyeing him critically.*

HERMES

Look at you dragging your feet, even with my speedy blood flowing through your veins, wandering here and there wherever the winds and the gods will send you, leaving women behind like so much flotsam in your wake – or is it jetsam, I can never remember – but that's not the point now is it, what with everything you're up to I'm not going to be a bit surprised if you end badly – when you end badly, I should say – because even with Athena's shining eye on you and my expeditious intervention, you'll find yourself in the house of the dead soon enough if you don't watch your step and mark my words, because she's got you now and there's not a damned thing you can do about it whether you know it or not and I know you don't but the point is that once she gets a hold of you, you'll spend and end your days rooting and snorting, either in her pig pen or in her bed, and she'll have the last laugh.

ODYSSEUS

Who?

HERMES

Listen, quickwit, the faster you catch up, the faster we can all go home. You're going to have to get a lot quicker on the uptake if you're going to get the better of the witchqueen.

ODYSSEUS

Which queen?

*Long pause. Hermes sits down, rests his chin on one hand and looks at Odysseus.*

HERMES

You hear that? That was a pause. About seventeen thousand years ago, when I was a little younger than you are now, I had to stop for a moment and catch my breath after a quick bit of footwork done on behalf of the beautiful Aphrodite who paid me for my services with a kiss so sweet that it gave me pause for a moment . . . and the time I took then to savor the sweetness of her kiss was nearly half the amount of time I took just now to ponder the abject stupidity and ignorance demonstrated by your question and I still had plenty of time left over to regret my own involvement in the sluggish mortal bloodline of your family.

*Odysseus looks at him blankly.*

HERMES

Since we're a little low on time and I've got better things to do than sit here and listen to the grass grow between your ears, I'll cut to the chase: You're in a bad place. There's a witch on this island who didn't meet a man she never liked. She's got your men already and they're beyond saving – although they are well fed so that counts for something – and you're probably just stupid enough to think you can rescue them all on your own, but the fact of the matter is no man can resist her charms and I don't mean her looks, although she is pretty easy on the eyes now that you mention it, which is something, if you think about it for a second which I don't have time to give you so I'll keep moving – Circe, that's her name and she's more than you can handle with your little pigsticker there...

*...he produces a small bundle of white flowers...*

HERMES

...no, no, no, no if you're going to face her down you need some of this to even the odds. Take it. It's moly, moly garlic as some call it, or white moly – or holy moly if you're inclined to dabble in bouts of anachronistic cultural reference – yes, this little flower's got more than enough power to keep Circe from working her spell on you.

ODYSSEUS

Thank you.

HERMES

Don't thank me yet, because that little corsage of yours only gets you partway home, no, once she's shot her wad and realized you've been eating your spinach, you're going to have to put your thing down toot suite. Circe is probably going to be less impressed by your speed than I am. But you'll get her attention at least and I expect she'll be inviting you over for a slumber party before you know it, so keep in mind that besides trying to kill her, the only thing more certain to piss off a goddess is to turn her down. There are worse ways to die. But before you close your eyes and think of Ithaca, make her promise first to put the pro in your quo once the quid is a go.

ODYSSEUS

What do I do?

HERMES

She asks you for something, give it to her. It's not wise to shun a goddess. But let's make sure that you get what you want in return.

ODYSSEUS

What do I want in return?

HERMES

All the pork rinds you can eat? Oh, I don't know, how 'bout your men set free safe passage home? Get a move on, I don't have any more time to waste playing the deus to your machina.

ODYSSEUS

Thank you.

HERMES

Uh, don't forget the flowers.

ODYSSEUS

Sorry. Thank you.

*Odysseus moves off.*

HERMES

Oh, anytime . . . nitwit.

*Odysseus moves through the trees towards Circe's palace. As he enters, he is overrun with pigs – they nuzzle his hands and lick his fingers and rub against his legs in welcome.*

ODYSSEUS

Poor bastards.

CIRCE

I've always been well known, always, for the loving care I give to my pets.

*Circe is there, in the firelight, seated at the head of a table piled high with refreshments.*

CIRCE

Come, come and sit with me awhile, stranger. Drink and eat your fill and tell me your story.

ODYSSEUS

Lady, I apologize from my intrusion.

CIRCE

No . . . no, no apology. No apology. This is a lonely, lonely place and I've only my pets to keep me company. You have travelled hard, long roads and no rest. So rest, rest here and tell me your story.

*Odysseus sits beside her. She fills a bowl with wine and sets it before him.*

CIRCE

Here's a vintage given me by Bacchus, the winegod himself.  
Sweeter than any mortal memory and sure to soothe your aches and  
pains after so weary a journey. Drink, drink your fill.

ODYSSEUS

Thank you. I haven't found many hospitable places in my travels,  
and certainly no hostess so full of grace and beauty.

CIRCE

Flatterer. Drink, drink.

*He drinks deeply.*

ODYSSEUS

A fine draught, lady . . . very sweet.

CIRCE

Isn't it?

*She rises to refill his bowl, humming softly to  
herself...*

CIRCE

...ercheo nun supheonde,  
ercheo, ercheo...

*...she turns back to him, and her smile falters.*

ODYSSEUS

My lady?

*She holds out her hand at arm's length, palm out,  
singing louder now, terrible and cruel, circling  
Odysseus first clockwise and then counter  
clockwise...*

CIRCE

...ercheo nun supheonde,  
ercheo, ercheo  
nun supheonde,  
met allôn  
lexo hetairôn,  
ercheo nun supheonde,  
ercheo, ercheo...

*...during this, Odysseus waits, patient and silent,  
following her movement with his eyes.*

ODYSSEUS

A very pretty tune, Circe.

*He stands quickly and swipes cleanly at her throat  
with his spear. But she slides under the point and,  
before he can respond, she throws her arms around  
him. She clings to him, nuzzling and kissing him,  
whispering and murmuring...*

CIRCE

...tell me, tell me your name . . . who are you, no man can  
resist, none can resist my power, tell me, tell me your name.

ODYSSEUS

I am Odysseus.

CIRCE

They told me you would come, come to me at last, at last, stay,  
stay with me, share my island, Odysseus. Share my secrets and my  
bed. Odysseus, oh, stay, stay Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

And if I do..?

CIRCE

...if you do...

ODYSSEUS

...if I do, what will you share with me?

CIRCE

All that I am. More, more than mortal man has ever dreamed, Odysseus. I will open the magic of my world to you, the wild magic and the pleasures of my bed. I will share it all with you, with you. Come to bed and see.

ODYSSEUS

How can I?

CIRCE

How can you, how can you resist?

ODYSSEUS

How can I rest in your arms..?

CIRCE

...I will show you how...

ODYSSEUS

...how, when my men know only torment and transformation?

CIRCE

Oh, Odysseus . . . is that all you want? Is that what you will trade?

ODYSSEUS

Yes. That is what I want.

CIRCE

You men, you bargain so easily. You have it. Now to bed...

ODYSSEUS

...they will be safe, while in your house, while on your island..?

CIRCE

...they will be safe, yes, you have it Odysseus . . . now come to bed...

ODYSSEUS

...all of them...

CIRCE

...yes, yes...

ODYSSEUS

...all of us, for as long as we are here.

CIRCE

Yes. Forever.

ODYSSEUS

And no harm will come to me while we are here? I will wake tomorrow morning in my own skin?

CIRCE

If not in mine. You will wake in my bed, yes, safe as you are now, beautiful man.

ODYSSEUS

I have your word?

CIRCE

If I have you.

ODYSSEUS

For one night.

CIRCE

For one year of nights.

*Pause.*



CIRCE

No? Not even for your men?

ODYSSEUS

You'll grant us safe passage home? After?

CIRCE

Even if I could, is any man worth crossing the will of Zeus or Poseidon? No, not even if I could. No, I would not. Not even for you, Odysseus. But I can tell you who can. There is one, only one who can give you the wisdom to see you home in safety.

ODYSSEUS

Who?

CIRCE

A year of nights?

ODYSSEUS

Yes.

CIRCE

I want your word.

ODYSSEUS

You have it.

CIRCE

Good, good . . . now come to bed.

ODYSSEUS

Who is it, Circe? Who can help me home? Tell me.

CIRCE

I shall, sweet one, I shall . . . in a year. Now, come to bed.

ODYSSEUS

Free my men first.

*Circe smiles and steps away from him and sings in a low voice once more. As she does, the pigs come in, drawn by her spell. She moves among them, touching them lightly with her fingertips and her voice.*

*One by one, they are transformed back into the men they were. They gather around Odysseus, embracing and weeping over their deliverance.*

*Circe stands off from them, watching silently.*

SAILOR TWO

Oh, captain...

SAILOR THREE

...captain...

SAILOR FOUR

...kill her...

SAILOR ONE

...the witch...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

SAILOR FOUR

...kill her before she...

ODYSSEUS

...listen to me, you're safe. There is no harm or peril in this house.

SAILOR TWO

Captain..?

SAILOR THREE

...not safe, not for a minute...

SAILOR ONE

...never trust a witch...

SAILOR THREE

...no...

ODYSSEUS

...listen, we will be here for some time, in this lady's house and protected by her promise. Her promise to me, you understand?

*The sailors mutter.*

CIRCE

Men of my beloved: Your captain has bargained for your deliverance so do not fear, do not fear. Circe is your hostess now and you are safe from her. Come and sit at her table, it will always be ready for you.

*The men reluctantly gather round the table and sit, muttering.*

*Circe catches Odysseus' hand as he passes and draws him away. They stand for a moment, watching the men feast.*

CIRCE

Come to bed. Your pigs are free. Let them feed at Circe's table while you pursue other appetites in her bed.

*...she draws him close, embraces him, kisses him lightly, and leads him off.*

PENELOPE

Oh husband...

*...the sailors sit and eat. They eat and drink and eat and drink, as the months pass.*

*Through all of this, we might see Odysseus pass through the room from time to time, unnoticed, with Circe trailing after. Other times, they embrace, lost in each other and oblivious to the sailors.*

*But the sailors, we see them go from reluctant guests, to comfortable residents, to bored inhabitants...*

SAILOR TWO

...I'm saying, enough's enough...

SAILOR ONE

...more than enough...

SAILOR TWO

...that's what I'm saying...

SAILOR FOUR

...and saying and saying and saying...

SAILOR THREE

...and saying...

SAILOR FOUR

...and not getting anywhere but in the way of me maintaining the single most long standing consistently drunken state in the history of the world.

SAILOR TWO

It's time we were heading home.

SAILOR ONE

It is.

SAILOR TWO

I don't know about you, but I've got a wife who might still be young enough to look at.

SAILOR FOUR

If you hurry.

SAILOR THREE

How long's it been?

SAILOR ONE

About fifteen, twenty minutes, I reckon.

SAILOR THREE

Not that, chubbknuckler. How long since we've been sitting here waiting for the captain to finish his business and move on?

SAILOR FOUR

Twenty-three minutes.

SAILOR ONE

A new record, that.

SAILOR THREE

No, it's been weeks...

SAILOR ONE

...months...

SAILOR TWO

...practically a year.

SAILOR FOUR

Well, never let it be said of the captain that he did things halfways.

SAILOR TWO

It's time to move on.

SAILOR ONE

Yes.

SAILOR TWO

With or without the captain.

SAILOR THREE

I don't know, mutiny...

SAILOR TWO

...mutiny's on a ship. On land, we're just exercising our right to organize the democratic process for the workingman. It's been, it has been eleven months, three weeks, six days and . . . approximately . . . thirty-seven minutes. It's time. To go.

SAILOR THREE

My farm's probably gone to seed by now...

SAILOR ONE

...I wonder if mom and dad are still up at the old place..?

SAILOR FOUR

...I put up that cask for her wedding...

SAILOR TWO

...little Eurynomus, he's probably married some girl...

SAILOR FOUR

...most likely vinegar by now...

SAILOR TWO

...got a boy of his own...

SAILOR THREE

...will she remember me..?

SAILOR TWO

...I wonder what he looks like....

SAILOR ONE

...prove to that old priest he was wrong about me...

SAILOR FOUR

...see how big that tree I planted on the hill out back has gotten...

SAILOR ONE

...I bet that old bitch is finally dead by now...

SAILOR TWO

...so. In or out?

*Pause.*

SAILORS

In.

SAILOR TWO

That's right. If he wants any more adventures, he can have them on his own. We're going home.

*They sit a moment in silence.*

*They start eating and drinking again. This is, perhaps, a conversation they have had before. Eventually, they fall asleep at the table.*

*Odysseus enters, followed close by Circe.*

*He stands for a moment, watching over his sleeping men.*

CIRCE

Come, come back, come back to bed.

ODYSSEUS

They're ready to abandon me, after only...

CIRCE

...almost a year now, beloved, a year of nights.

ODYSSEUS

Give or take. They're going to go on without me. Can you blame them?

CIRCE

Come back...

ODYSSEUS

...no. Not tonight.

CIRCE

You promised.

ODYSSEUS

Not tonight. It's a snare. You're a snare, drawing tight around me. Just one night, and then another, and then another...

CIRCE

...come to bed and I will draw tight and snare you again and again. Come to bed, one last time . . . then I will tell you.

*Odysseus turns to look at her. She walks backwards from the room, holding his eyes with hers. After a long moment, he follows.*

*The men stir and awaken one by one, yawning and stretching and picking up their feast from where they left off.*

SAILOR FOUR

And another thing...

SAILOR ONE

...another thing...

SAILOR FOUR

...all I'm saying is, all I'm saying...



SAILOR THREE

...all he's saying...

SAILOR ONE

...all you're saying...

SAILOR FOUR

...all I'm saying is this: Any city stupid enough, any country stupid enough to have a city as their capital where the men are so easily, so stupidly taken in by such a feebleminded ruse...

SAILOR ONE

...it was a brilliant strategic move...

SAILOR FOUR

...it was crap. I'm saying, all I'm saying is . . . if I'm standing guard and someone wheels up a big wooden horse? I'm going to look for a trapdoor...

SAILOR TWO

...yes...

SAILOR FOUR

...at least knock on it, check for an echo, see if it's, I don't know, hollow or something...

SAILOR ONE

...yes...

SAILOR FOUR

...not on my watch, pal...

SAILOR ONE

...yes...

SAILOR FOUR

...because, you know, it might be a trick.

SAILOR TWO

A stratagem.

SAILOR FOUR

Yes. In a time of war. And if I don't? Well, then I deserve to have my city sacked and plundered, my women raped...

SAILOR TWO

...ravished...

SAILOR FOUR

...whatever. I deserve it. A big wooden horse? Made of wood? I open the gates, I deserve what I get. Whatever I get. And then some.

SAILOR TWO

True.

SAILOR THREE

Yes.

SAILOR ONE

I still say it was a masterful stroke of strategy.

SAILOR FOUR

It was a stupid trick.

SAILOR ONE

They'll sing songs about it someday.

SAILOR FOUR

Maybe. Maybe they will, but they're stupid too.

SAILOR TWO

But the Trojans...

SAILOR FOUR

...the Trojans are all wax and no wick...

SAILOR THREE

...yes...

SAILOR FOUR

...because, because...

SAILOR TWO

...because you're drunk.

SAILOR FOUR

Maybe . . . but that doesn't mean I'm not right. That's all I'm saying.

*Odysseus enters and sits down with them at the table. Circe follows, standing behind him.*

SAILOR FOUR

Captain?

ODYSSEUS

It's time to go. It's time to go home.

SAILOR FOUR

But we just sat down to lunch.

SAILOR TWO

It's supper actually.

SAILOR FOUR

But we just sat down to supper.

ODYSSEUS

We leave in the morning. Get the ship ready.

*Odysseus looks at him. The sailors rise and leave, hiding food in their pockets and grumbling.*

*Circe stands silently. She is crying.*

*Odysseus does not turn around.*

ODYSSEUS

Haven't you had your fill of us? Of me?

CIRCE

A year of nights.

ODYSSEUS

One more then, one more damned night, witch. You have your night, so tell me what I need to know. Who is it, who has the wisdom to guide us safely home past the wrathful eye of the gods?

CIRCE

Tiresias. The prophet, the seer. Tiresias is the one you seek. He is the only one, the only one who can see the path you must take to reach your home.

ODYSSEUS

Tiresias? And where is he now? Is he hiding under your bed? Waiting under your pillow for our bargained year to be over?

CIRCE

He is dead. If you seek his council, you must travel to the land of the dead to speak with him.

ODYSSEUS

How?

CIRCE

Well, you could die. There are other paths, hero. I can tell you how to find them. You need not die to see death.

ODYSSEUS

What are they?

CIRCE

Come, come to bed and bargain one last night with me. Share a little death with me before I share a greater one with you tomorrow.

*She holds a hand out to him and, after a moment, he rises and follows.*

*After a long moment, two of the sailors sneak back in to steal some more food. They watch Odysseus leave and then look at each other.*

SAILOR FOUR

And you always look a gift horse in the mouth. That's all I'm saying...

*...the other nods somberly. They exit.*

*Then, under the hands of the storyteller, the scene shifts and change.*

Scene Six

*Odysseus stands, with Circe to one side and his men to the other. Slowly, they begin to move, tracing a winding pattern around Odysseus – speaking to their audience, to each other, and to anyone else who might be listening in.*

ODYSSEUS

And in the morning, I wake to find the ship repaired and stocked for the journey, with my men waiting for me on deck. The sacrifice is bound and waiting beside them.

*During this, the Storyteller calls out one of the actors (perhaps the athlete?) and kneels him down next to the actor playing Odysseus, placing a calf mask over his face and a bell around his neck.*

CALF

Moo.

ODYSSEUS

She does not bid me farewell, she does not weep and cling. She points to the west, to the barren shore of Hades' kingdom.

The sea is flat and bleak behind me – a black mirror, a pale shroud of sky stretched tight above it. There's no sound, no wind, not even the lapping of the water against the side of the ship.

Even the sea is dead here, even the wind, even the sky.

The men stay behind in the ship. My feet scrape against the sand, my eyes against the sky.

There's no shadow, no light. The sand, the sea, the sky. The sky, it looks so close. Unthinking, I reach up to touch it.

We're such children, the living, wandering on the borderlands of the dead.

*He moves forward with a spear in one hand, leading the calf by a length of rope in the other...*

CALF

Moo.

ODYSSEUS

Stop complaining...

CIRCE

...spill the blood...

ODYSSEUS

...that's what the witchqueen said...

CIRCE

...spill the blood...

*...as she speaks, shadows appear at the edges and slowly wander around him, whispering while the sacrifice whimpers and lows...*

SHADOWS

...blood...

CIRCE

...and dig a circle to catch it...

ODYSSEUS

...yes...

CIRCE

...a trench to catch the living blood, still warm...

SHADOWS

...so warm...

CIRCE

...it will call to them...

SHADOWS

...blood...

ODYSSEUS

...yes...

CIRCE

...calls and keeps you safe...

SHADOWS

...yes...

*...the sacrifice is made, the calf dies with one  
clean gesture from Odysseus.*

*He moves to stand in the center of the ring of blood  
as the whispering dead appear.*

SHADOWS

Blood...

ODYSSEUS

...by all gods...

SHADOWS

...what, what, what have you come for?

ODYSSEUS

I don't know.

*The dead move in, like a dark wave...*

ODYSSEUS

...stay back...



*...the dead move out, leaving one ghost to stand  
with its back to him, its hands across its face.*

ODYSSEUS

Oh, speak to me, speak to me...

*...the shade dips its finger into the blood and  
holds it to its lips...*

ANTICLEIA

...shhhh...

*...the shade turns away but Odysseus steps  
forward...*

ODYSSEUS

...no, stay and speak to me, please speak...

*...the shade stops and turns back, circling him and  
speaking softly...*

ANTICLEIA

...child of that full heart...

ODYSSEUS

...tell me your name, sweet spirit...

ANTICLEIA

...daughter of kind Autolycus...

ODYSSEUS

...what..?

ANTICLEIA

...seduced...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

ANTICLEIA

...seduced...

ODYSSEUS

...who are you..?

ANTICLEIA

...ravished by Sisyphus, cunning Sisyphus...

ODYSSEUS

...tell me your name...

ANTICLEIA

...wed to Laertes...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

ANTICLEIA

...mother...

ODYSSEUS

...mother...

ANTICLEIA

...mother of the hero of Troy...

ODYSSEUS

...tell me your name...

ANTICLEIA

...my boy, my wonder, you already know my name...

*...the shade raises her face and Odysseus moves to embrace her, but she raises her hand to hold him off.*

ANTICLEIA

Oh, my boy, my son . . . wandering, even now? Oh, my son, I would have never wished it, never wished to see you here wandering among the whispering dead.

ODYSSEUS

Mother...

ANTICLEIA

...wandering even now, as when you were a boy . . . we could never find you, always wandering, wandering . . . but I wandered farther than you, my son, in the end. You should not be here, Odysseus, my boy, my wanderer. You should not have come.

ODYSSEUS

Mother...

ANTICLEIA

...your wife weeps and your son is waiting . . . poor woman, poor child . . . you should not have come here...

ODYSSEUS

...mother...

ANTICLEIA

...go, I cannot bear to see you, my child, my boy, not in this place...

ODYSSEUS

...mother . . . mother . . . how . . . when did you die..?

ANTICLEIA

...no, my boy . . . I cannot bear to say...

*...and she is gone, swallowed up by the shadowy wave of ghosts.*

ODYSSEUS

Mother?

*A figure rises out of the shadows and stands before him.*

ODYSSEUS

What do you want of me?

*Another shade steps forward, then a third. Odysseus turns in a slow circle, facing them all in turn.*

ODYSSEUS

I know you, old ghosts . . . I know you.

*One of the shades steps forward.*

AGAMEMNON

Master of battle.

ODYSSEUS

Agamemnon, mighty king.

AGAMEMNON

Oh, Odysseus, you tactical man, hear me.

ODYSSEUS

Speak on.

AGAMEMNON

Never, never put your trust in woman...

*...before Odysseus can answer, one of the other shades steps forward...*

ACHILLES

...shhh...

ODYSSEUS

...no, I am not worthy to speak with you, Achilles – you who won so noble a death for himself.

ACHILLES

As if it matters now how I died.

ODYSSEUS

You were no coward.

ACHILLES

Perhaps not...

*...the third shade steps forward but does not dip  
his finger in the blood. Odysseus faces him...*

ODYSSEUS

...Ajax, my old enemy...

ACHILLES

...but I'm dead now...

AGAMEMNON

...look to your house, hero....

ODYSSEUS

...what do you mean..?

*...the shades move around him, whispering,  
tormenting...*

ACHILLES

...death is death...

ODYSSEUS

...but the stories live on...

AGAMEMNON

...still, she might yet be faithful, your wife...

ODYSSEUS

...my wife..?

ACHILLES

...each one is the same as any other...

ODYSSEUS

...Ajax, speak to me...

AGAMEMNON

...but who knows what suitors she has entertained..?

ACHILLES

...one death...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

ACHILLES

...the same as any other...

ODYSSEUS

...no, my brothers...

ACHILLES

...especially here...

ODYSSEUS

...leave me alone...

AGAMEMNON

...look to your house...

ODYSSEUS

...will you not speak to me, Ajax? Is your grudge against me so strong that now, even in death, you cannot spare a word of comfort?

*Silence.*

ACHILLES

Death is death...

AGAMEMNON

...look to your house, look to your...

ACHILLES

...death...

ODYSSEUS

...stay a while longer, my brothers of battle. Speak more of your wisdom to me...

*...but the shades are gone.*

*Odysseus bows his head.*

*When he raises it, another ghost stands before him holding its finger to its lips.*

TIRESIAS

Shhh.

ODYSSEUS

I do not know you, spirit. Leave and let some more familiar shade come to speak with me.

TIRESIAS

Suit yourself, hero. I thought you came to these dismal outskirts to hear what my blind old eyes saw on the road ahead. But if you'd rather gossip with the chattering dead instead...

ODYSSEUS

Wait! I did not know you, noble prophet. Wait and speak with me. The witchqueen...

TIRESIAS

...Circe...

ODYSSEUS

...yes, she sent me here to seek your counsel. She told me that you could see all in this world or any other, everything that has happened and everything that is to come.

TIRESIAS

I see.

ODYSSEUS

Do you?

TIRESIAS

No. I am blind.

ODYSSEUS

She told me that even the ways of the gods were not hidden from your eyes.

TIRESIAS

Did she now?

ODYSSEUS

Yes.

TIRESIAS

Well that was big of her.

ODYSSEUS

Please, I have been traveling for so long. The great god Poseidon bars my way. Tell me what secret way I can take to escape his notice.

TIRESIAS

I do not know.

ODYSSEUS

But...



TIRESIAS

...think, Odysseus. He's a god. All they do is watch, watch and wait.

ODYSSEUS

But how will I get home?

TIRESIAS

Why, have you forgotten the way?

ODYSSEUS

No, but...

*...Tiresias holds up his palm to silence him. Then his eyes flutter and close, his jaw hangs slack and he slumps to one side almost panting with the effort to speak...*

ODYSSEUS

...noble prophet..?

*...Tiresias' eyes suddenly snap open and stare at Odysseus. From deep within his trance, he begins to speak, like a phonograph winding up. And as he speaks, he slowly closes his outstretched hand into a fist...*

TIRESIAS

...when . . . you're a . . . soldier . . . there is . . .  
no . . . sweeter . . . sound . . . than the word . . . home...

ODYSSEUS

...please, will I ever see Ithaca again?

*Silence, Tiresias opens his hand again...*

TIRESIAS

...the . . . nightmare god...

ODYSSEUS

...Poseidon...

TIRESIAS

...yes . . . his fury is . . . so dark . . . he will . . . make  
it a . . . rough crossing . . . for you and . . . your men . . .  
before you get there.

*Odysseus considers this, pacing within the circle of  
blood. The eyes of Tiresias, now gifted with sight,  
follow him.*

ODYSSEUS

But we will make it home?

*Silence, Tiresias opens his hand again...*

TIRESIAS

...not . . . quite.

ODYSSEUS

But...

TIRESIAS

...there . . . is an island . . . a place not so . . . very far  
from . . . your . . . destination...

ODYSSEUS

...Ithaca...

TIRESIAS

...yes . . . the sun shines so very . . . bright . . . on that  
place . . . warm and . . . safe and . . . so . . . close  
to . . . home...

ODYSSEUS

...home...

TIRESIAS

...warn them . . . soldier . . . warn . . . your men . . . the  
sun is so . . . warm and . . . so . . . bright . . . on  
that . . . island . . . but Helios . . . his anger . . .  
burns . . . far brighter . . . against . . . those who . . .  
steal that which he . . . loves . . . so . . . much...

*...silence.*

ODYSSEUS

How can I save them from this fate?

TIRESIAS

You can warn them . . . soldier . . . warn them . . . warn  
those . . . fools you . . . travel with . . . not to feast  
on . . . the . . . cattle of the sun . . . you can warn  
then . . . but you can not . . . save them . . . and you  
never . . . could . . . they . . . have . . . their own  
debt . . . to pay . . . to . . . an . . . angry god . . . or  
they will soon . . . in . . . time...

*...he lowers his hand and slumps forward. After a  
long moment, he raises his head and opens his eyes,  
blind once more.*

ODYSSEUS

This is fated to happen?

TIRESIAS

It . . . could come to pass.

ODYSSEUS

But it might not?

TIRESIAS

It has already happened. If not, I would not have seen it.

ODYSSEUS

But...

TIRESIAS

...don't give it another thought. You'll have troubles enough of your own by then.

ODYSSEUS

Noble prophet . . . will I ever see my home again? Please, I must...

*...Tiresias holds up his open palm once again...*

TIRESIAS

...your path . . . is so . . . twisted . . . I see . . . more suffering . . . ahead . . . for you...

*...Odysseus puts his face in his hands at the news...*

TIRESIAS

...raise your head . . . soldier . . . the path is hard but . . . it is not . . . more than you . . . can brave...

*...silence, Tiresias starts to lower his hand...*

ODYSSEUS

...please tell me, will I ever...

*...Tiresias raises his hand again...*

TIRESIAS

...I see a . . . broken man . . . traveling alone . . . in a stranger's ship . . . coming home...

ODYSSEUS

...thank the gods...

TIRESIAS

...it's a cursed . . . house . . . Odysseus . . . invaded  
by . . . preening spiteful men . . . plotting over . . . your  
riches . . . your wife . . . and your son...

*Long silence, Tiresias does not let his hand fall  
but it wavers somewhat.*

ODYSSEUS

What else do you see?

*Silence.*

TIRESIAS

Blood . . . blood and treachery . . . they're . . . waiting  
for . . . you . . . they're waiting for you . . . and . . . they  
want . . . blood...

SHADOWS

...blood...

TIRESIAS

...blood...

ODYSSEUS

...they'll have it, they'll have it.

TIRESIAS

Yes . . . they will...

*...silence.*

*Odysseus looks at him, but does not speak.*

TIRESIAS

No . . . you don't die . . . at least . . . not by . . .  
hands . . . such as those . . . no . . . no . . . when your  
own . . . death . . . comes to you . . . it will be . . .

TIRESIAS (*continued*)

a . . . silent . . . creeping thing . . . without . . . pain  
. . . or malice . . . as it takes you...

ODYSSEUS

...when, when will it come for me?

*Silence.*

TIRESIAS

...there . . . is a man . . . I see . . . old and . . .  
haggard . . . dying far . . . far . . . from the . . . sea  
and . . . without even the . . . memory . . . of the . . .  
taste . . . of salt . . . on his lips . . . and far . . .  
far . . . from . . . his . . . home...

*...Tiresias lowers his hand, finally. A sigh  
shudders through him and he opens his blind eyes  
once more.*

ODYSSEUS

You are truly the greatest prophet that ever lived.

TIRESIAS

Keep it to yourself. Let an old man rest. Last thing I need is  
to spend eternity doing parlor tricks and group therapy sessions  
for the tourists.

ODYSSEUS

Thank you, Tiresias.

TIRESIAS

Oh, don't thank me. You're not home yet. But once you get there?

ODYSSEUS

Yes?

TIRESIAS

Then the fun really starts...

*...and he is gone.*

ODYSSEUS

And I would have stayed...

CIRCE

...you would have stayed...

ODYSSEUS

...for years and years...

CIRCE

...years...

ODYSSEUS

...to hear them all, to listen and learn from the dead. But behind the prophet rose such a horde of murmuring, chattering ghosts, each more terrible than the one it followed, and I was afraid...

CIRCE

...so you turned back.

ODYSSEUS

I did. And they swarmed for the blood I left behind...

SHADOWS

...blood...

ODYSSEUS

...their terrible voices now, calling to me...

SHADOWS

...Odysseus...

SHADOWS

...stay...

ODYSSEUS  
...they called out...

SHADOWS  
...speak to us...

ODYSSEUS  
...calling to me...

SHADOWS  
...Odysseus stay and speak...

SHADOWS  
...soldier...

ODYSSEUS  
...and I ran for the ship...

SHADOWS  
...Odysseus stay...

CIRCE  
...Odysseus...

ODYSSEUS  
...and then we were back on the sea, bound for your shore once  
again...

CIRCE  
...you came back to me.

ODYSSEUS  
...I came back.

CIRCE  
Oh lover...

ODYSSEUS  
...and now...



CIRCE

...and now?

ODYSSEUS

And now I'm going home.

*Circe looks at him for a moment, then kisses his cheek.*

*Odysseus nods and then turns away from her, gathering his men to him.*

Scene Seven

*With the help of the storyteller, Odysseus and the men get ready to start out on their final voyage, the voice of Circe in their ears.*

CIRCE

Listen to me my love, you must make a gentle path from this shore...

STORYTELLER

...Circe whispered to him, her breath hot against his ear...

ODYSSEUS

...go on.

CIRCE

Listen well, listen to me, for there are terrors out there, not far off...

STORYTELLER

...and she spoke of Scylla...

CIRCE

...the most hideous of creatures, she hides on the cliffs waiting her chance to swoop down and snatch sailors from the passing ships...

ODYSSEUS

...but we are not sailors...

CIRCE

...yes...

ODYSSEUS

...we are soldiers and we have faced monsters before.

CIRCE

Not like this one. She has all the power of a god and a double measure of that divine vicious rage.

ODYSSEUS

If I've learned anything on this trip, it's to give the ladies a wide berth.

CIRCE

Not too wide, lover, not too wide, for there is doom to the other side as well...

STORYTELLER

...and she whispered on of the terrible Charibdys...

CIRCE

...a mouth gaping in the depths of the sea, boiling with rocks and fire, ravenous for ship and sailors, swallowing up all who stray too close...

STORYTELLER

...Charibdys, Scylla...

CIRCE

...and once you're safely past...

STORYTELLER

...she said...

CIRCE

...I said to you: "Listen to me."

ODYSSEUS

I heard you.

CIRCE

You didn't, I know. I could see that you would find some way to listen to their song.

STORYTELLER

The sirens.

CIRCE

Yes. The sirens. Yes.

ODYSSEUS

I heard what you said.

CIRCE

You didn't.

ODYSSEUS

No. I didn't. I had my blind promise and prophecy. I would not die. I was safe from everything. Even...

CIRCE

...even them, yes, even that...

ODYSSEUS

...even opening my heart to the song of the terrible ladies of the rocks...

CIRCE

...you didn't listen...

ODYSSEUS

...and when I left, you wouldn't look at me.

CIRCE

How could I? How could I? How could you?

*She bows her head and after a long moment removes her mask. The face below is etched in sorrow; this story is taking it's toll.*

*Odysseus and his men are on their ship now, rowing hard for home.*

ODYSSEUS

And I shouted down to my men: "Heave the oars, we're almost home now."

SAILORS THREE AND TWO

And we shouted back, full of strength and joy...

ODYSSEUS

...you all looked so young, ready for anything...

STORYTELLER

...and he walked among them as they rowed, hinting of the trials that were waiting for them, warning them

ODYSSEUS

...keep your heads down, stay on course...

SAILOR FIVE

...we will, captain...

STORYTELLER

...and then they passed among the cliffs...

SAILORS FOUR AND TWO

...you warned us not to slow or falter or...

SAILOR THREE

...or try to pick our way through the smaller rocks and brittle shoals...

ODYSSEUS

...and I said, "Don't break pace, don't look up..."

STORYTELLER

...but one did, screaming...

SAILOR FOUR

...and then another...

ODYSSEUS

...and another...

SAILOR THREE

...no, no...

ODYSSEUS

...and I told you to keep on...

SAILOR FOUR

...by the gods...

CIRCE

...Odysseus...

PENELOPE

...husband...

ODYSSEUS

...keep on you fools...

STORYTELLER

...and down she came in all of her horrible splendor...

SAILOR ONE

...no...

SAILOR FIVE

...no, no...

ODYSSEUS

...she was all hooks and striking, like a fisherman's lure dancing in the current...

STORYTELLER

...and she tore six men from their seats, bearing them up in her terrible barbed hands and swooping back to her cliffs to feast...

SAILORS

...oh, gods, no, save us...

ODYSSEUS

...I could hear you, but there was nothing...

STORYTELLER

...nothing but the slow drag of the deep green wine around us,  
pulling faster than their oars could go...

ODYSSEUS

...keep to the middle...

SAILOR FOUR

...we can't hold the channel, captain...

ODYSSEUS

...no...

STORYTELLER

...no, they were caught in the unrelenting draw of a colossal  
boiling maw...

ODYSSEUS

...and I could hear the grinding rocks, pounding in the mouth of  
the Charibdys...

STORYTELLER

...Charibdys...

ODYSSEUS

...pull, men, pull for home...

STORYTELLER

...but they were six men short...

SAILOR THREE

...and you joked in the horrible sound and stench of it...

ODYSSEUS

...yes, I said...

SAILOR THREE

"...if the tornado is the mouth of Poseidon..."

ODYSSEUS

...yes...

SAILOR FOUR

"...then this stinking pit must be his asshole..."

ODYSSEUS

...yes...

SAILOR THREE

"...but we don't have time for romance, so pull on..."

STORYTELLER

...and the men grinned into their labors and pulled harder against the sea...

ODYSSEUS

...I couldn't help wondering if this was where I would lose you all...

STORYTELLER

...but the men never broke pace, they never lost heart...

ODYSSEUS

...you never lost heart...

SAILORS

...never...

ODYSSEUS

...this is...



CIRCE

...Odysseus...

ODYSSEUS

...this is it...

STORYTELLER

...and they teetered on the brink of that horrible whirling mouth...

ODYSSEUS

...by the gods...

STORYTELLER

...when he stole a glance over the side...

ODYSSEUS

...I had to see the...

STORYTELLER

...Odysseus saw...

ODYSSEUS

...I saw the rotted wrecks, the corpses and skeletons swirling, tumbling together in that cauldron of hideous black and green...

STORYTELLER

...and then they pulled away once again, making fast beyond the twin terrors that flanked them and towards the last of the shoals and reefs that fringed the archipelago of the witchqueen...

ODYSSEUS

...Circe...

SAILOR TWO

...you wouldn't tell us why...

ODYSSEUS

...of course not...

STORYTELLER

...no, he wanted to be the only one...

ODYSSEUS

...I wanted to protect you...

STORYTELLER

...he wanted...

SAILOR ONE

...you wanted to hear, you wanted to have them all to yourself...

ODYSSEUS

...I...

SAILOR ONE

...their song, for you alone...

ODYSSEUS

...I suppose I did...

SAILOR FOUR

...that's why you cut up that hunk of wax...

ODYSSEUS

...yes...

SAILOR THREE

...and made us plug our...

ODYSSEUS

...plug your ears with this...

STORYTELLER

...he told them to keep their heads down, never to look or listen until they had rowed past the sirens...

ODYSSEUS

...not until we were well past the cliffs, men...

SAILOR FIVE

...past the songs...

ODYSSEUS

...yes, that's right, and tie me tight to the mast...

SAILOR FOUR

...how's that..?

ODYSSEUS

...tighter...

STORYTELLER

...and they did, leaving him alone to listen to the sirens and their terrible, maddening, beautiful, horrible song...

...the sirens appear, beautiful and terrible all at once, like the song they sing...

SIRENS

...deur' ag' iôn, poluain' Oduseu,  
mega kudos Achaiônn, nêa katastêson,  
hina nôiterên op akousêis.  
ou gar pô tis têide parêlase nêi melainêi,  
prin g' hêmeôn meligêrun  
apo stomatôn op' akousai,  
all' ho ge terpsamenos  
neitai kai pleiona eidôs...

SAILOR FOUR

...you were soaking wet when we pulled you free...

SAILOR THREE

...soaked to the skin...

SAILOR FOUR

...tears and sweat and piss...

ODYSSEUS

...so beautiful, my brothers...

SAILOR TWO

...pardon..?

ODYSSEUS

...so beautiful...

SAILOR FIVE

...but we couldn't hear you...

ODYSSEUS

...so beautiful...

SAILOR THREE

...and you collapsed into a deep sleep...

ODYSSEUS

...so beautiful...

SAILOR TWO

...and we laid you down on the deck and sailed on...

ODYSSEUS

...take me back, let me hear that song again...

*...the scene ends in tableaux – Odysseus deep asleep, with his men standing over him.*

## Scene Eight

*Odysseus rises, like a sleepwalker, leading us all the way back to Phaecia where he continues his story for Alcinous. Arete, and Nausicaa.*

### ODYSSEUS

We made landfall on the sweetest place I'd ever seen. An island untouched by man, blessed by the gods, saturated with natural luxuries – pure streams leaping with crystal fish, orchards heavy with fruit, lush fields and herds of cattle roaming heathy and fat and free for the taking – all basking under the warm smile of Helios.

The sun god had made that place, a cup to catch all his pleasure. And we fortunate, we fools, we perched ourselves on the rim of his goblet and thought we were glad.

There is no heart happier than that of a soldier headed for home, and the men sang as they made camp in the golden afternoon light.

I did not sing. My mind was still swamped beneath the slow song of the sirens. I wanted nothing but to sleep and drift on those sweet voices...

But before slumber washed over me once more, I spoke to my men. I warned them, the words of Tiresias ringing in my ears, I warned them: "This land is blessed by Helios. Touch not that which the hot love of the sun protects. Stick to your sea rations and be content. Give thanks to the gods and be content."

And then I slept.

And then I woke, the song of the sirens swept away by a most fearful horror.

My men, they did not listen. Who can blame them?

SAILOR TWO

Why chew salted meat when the fresh fat roams so sweet and free  
all around us?

Who could blame them?

SAILOR THREE

We were hungry, happy, and headed for home.

ODYSSEUS

They wanted to give thanks, to sacrifice.

SAILOR FOUR

And why not?

ODYSSEUS

Why not?

SAILOR TWO

Why not celebrate, why not feast, why not sacrifice?

ODYSSEUS

Who could blame them?

So they took up their bows. And when they were done butchering  
the blessed cattle of the sun, they wrapped the bones in the  
choicest cuts, setting them aside for sacrifice.

SAILOR THREE

We sang praises...

SAILOR TWO

...we poured out libations and prayers...

SAILOR THREE

...we gave thanks to all the gods...

SAILOR FOUR

...most especially to Helios who had so blessed us.

ODYSSEUS

Fools.

SAILOR FOUR

And then we set the meat on spits...

SAILOR TWO

...and then...

SAILOR THREE

...and then laid it over the fire to roast...

ODYSSEUS

...and then...

SAILOR FOUR

...and then...

SAILOR TWO

...and then the meat...

ODYSSEUS

...yes...

SAILOR TWO

...it began to scream.

ODYSSEUS

I awoke to those screams, so horrible to hear. The air was thick with them as thick as smoke and the smell of roasted meat.

"What have you done?"

All through the night, my men prayed while their hideous feast screamed as it burned and blackened over the flames. The men

ODYSSEUS (*continued*)

begged and pleaded to the gods to save them. But the gods don't save those who steal from them.

The men were frightened and who could blame them?

SAILORS

No one.

ODYSSEUS

No one but the gods.

We set sail the next day, under a sunless sky. The clouds gathered and all the wrath of the gods poured down upon us. Our ship was shattered, scattering us into the sea where we foundered and gasped until, one by one, each of my men slipped away and left me alone, clutching a stray bit of wreckage.

The words of Tiresias kept me afloat. I knew I would not die. And, at last, I lurched my way to the shore of Ogygia, that lonely island where the nymph Calypso waited.

*With the help of the Storyteller, the scene begins to shift...*

STORYTELLER

...and, having come full circle, the hero left off his winding tale. The king and queen of Phaecia were kind.

ALCINOUS

I will help you hero, if I can.

STORYTELLER

He gave Odysseus a ship manned with his finest sailors, provisions enough to last the voyage.

ODYSSEUS

The king was kind. His wife was wise, she kissed my cheek and wished me godspeed...



ARETE

...hurry home, soldier. Your wife is waiting...

ODYSSEUS

...although their daughter seemed distracted and self involved, as the young so often are...

NAUSICAA

...will he speak to me, my mother kissed him, didn't he notice me, can he really be leaving, is this really how it ends, what about *my* story..?

STORYTELLER

...and so on Odysseus went, a battered soldier headed for home in a borrowed ship...

ODYSSEUS

...home...

STORYTELLER

...but Poseidon was keeping watch and none on the sea escape his notice. He saw Odysseus borne homeward...

ODYSSEUS

...home...

STORYTELLER

...borne on the kindness of Alcinous and laid to rest, still sleeping, on the shore of Ithaca...

*...the Storyteller sets up two actors with god masks, placing a bowl in between them and floating a little boat in it.*

*Zeus and Poseidon look down on the boat, arguing.*

STORYTELLER

And, while he slept, the terrible god of hurricane and whirlpool raged...

POSEIDON

...brother, thunderbolt, lightning and fury . . . why do you allow the insignificant to thwart the will and power of we above?

ZEUS

What is it this time, Poseidon?

POSEIDON

This time? It's not this time. This is still last time.

ZEUS

Yes?

POSEIDON

Commander of the clouds, am I to be mocked by every mortal who does his bit for Zeus and country?

ZEUS

Who is it this time that's mocking you?

POSEIDON

This time? Who is it always? Odysseus, Odysseus...

ZEUS

...ah, yes...

POSEIDON

...that damned man, even now he thumbs his nose at me.

ZEUS

He's sleeping.

POSEIDON

He's on his way home.

ZEUS

He's already there. See how they lay him sleeping on the shore.  
He's already home.

POSEIDON

Not quite. You know I would never dare defy your will.

ZEUS

No. You wouldn't.

POSEIDON

And even though this wretch has shown me, shown all of us  
nothing but scorn and defiance. You know how I held my rage in  
check.

ZEUS

I know.

POSEIDON

Though you decreed he be allowed to safely return home, I swore  
I'd make it a hard journey for him, if for nothing else but for  
the sake of an eye for an eye.

ZEUS

What do you want?

POSEIDON

A more fitting homecoming.

ZEUS

What would you have me do?

POSEIDON

Destroy him, ravage him, leave him wandering blind in despair  
like my Polyphemus. Teach him to give the gods the respect we  
deserve.

ZEUS

If a mortal doesn't give you respect, you're free to give him what he deserves in return. You know that. I won't stop you from teaching him a lesson.

POSEIDON

No, no you won't...

ZEUS

...but there's other eyes, brighter than mine, that light his twisting path. You want to spank him? Fine. Just make sure your paddle is big enough to handle the one who has watched over him for so long.

*Poseidon fumes until, with an impatient gesture, the ship is destroyed.*

*Zeus stifles a yawn.*

ZEUS

Only innocent sailors.

POSEIDON

They played their part.

ZEUS

And so you spend your massive wrath on everyone, except the one who has offended you most?

POSEIDON

I take some small comfort in the knowledge that sorrow will never be far from his heart.

ZEUS

Nor will wisdom, look there...

*...and we shift to find Odysseus, lying unconscious on the shore.*

Scene Nine

*Coming up the beach towards Odysseus is an old man herding a pack of swine. The pigs rush forward and snuffle around Odysseus and his booty...*

ODYSSEUS

...Circe, set them free...

*...the pigs squeal at his stirring and scamper around him.*

*Odysseus wakes with a start, surrounded by swine. He sits among them, unmoving, as the old man approaches.*

ODYSSEUS

Pigs.

SWINEHERD

You don't bother them, they won't bother you.

ODYSSEUS

Fair enough.

SWINEHERD

Don't like pigs?

ODYSSEUS

Some of my best friends used to be pigs. Until their own folly got them butchered.

SWINEHERD

Well, that's the way of pigs and friends. If you don't expect too much of them, they won't expect too much of you. A soldier is it?

ODYSSEUS

What gave me away?

SWINEHERD

My boy is in the army. Was in the army.

ODYSSEUS

I'm sorry.

SWINEHERD

Don't be. He was a captain, with men to lead. We were sad to see him go. But proud too. He did Ithaca proud.

ODYSSEUS

I'm sure he did . . . what did you say?

SWINEHERD

He was a soldier, like you.

ODYSSEUS

No . . . Ithaca?

SWINEHERD

Don't know the name? It's fame has reached all the way to Troy. And they say that Troy is a healthy jaunt from Greece.

ODYSSEUS

Ithaca...

*...he kneels and puts his forehead to the ground.  
After a long moment, he rises.*

ODYSSEUS

Thank you.

SWINEHERD

For what?

ODYSSEUS

For this, for Ithaca, for shielding me from the wrath of Poseidon and your father, for giving me your wisdom all through the terrible trials I've faced so that I could hear you say that I was home.

*The swineherd, Athena, smiles and drops the disguise.*

ATHENA

What gave me away?

ODYSSEUS

I've learned how to spot a goddess when I meet one.

ATHENA

And have you learned to know wisdom when you hear it?

ODYSSEUS

I'm . . . starting to.

ATHENA

Good, then listen: Your home is overrun with the worst of men. They vie for your wife's hand, emptying your wine cellars, pantry, and stockyards while they wait for her to make up her mind.

ODYSSEUS

Inconstant woman.

ATHENA

No, she has been faithful. Each night you slumbered in the beds of Circe and Calypso, her bed was empty, her pillow soaked with tears. But your son . . . if she gives in, finally, it will be for his sake.

ODYSSEUS

He was so small when I left him. Must be nearly a man by now.

ATHENA

Nearly so, but he cannot take the final steps on his own. He needs his father to show him the path. And soon.

ODYSSEUS

I will not rest another night until I am with them again.

ATHENA

You needn't wait. You shall sleep in your own bed tonight.

ODYSSEUS

Lead me to him, bright one, lead me to her, lead me home and let me rest.

ATHENA

You will have to wait a while longer. Your wife can stand to weep an hour or two more. But your son, he would not wait, so I have brought him to you. Look...

*...Telemachus approaches, carrying a long thin bundle with him. At the sight of him, Odysseus rushes forward and sweeps him up in his arms.*

*They stand, quiet, gripping each other tightly under the kind gaze of Athena.*

STORYTELLER

There are no words that can describe this.

*Silence.*

ATHENA

Now father, now son . . . leave off your embrace and turn your hearts to the task at hand, for there are still some chores to be done at home. And Telemachus has brought the broom that will sweep them trash away.

*Telemachus hands the bundle to Odysseus.*



TELEMACHUS

Father, I kept it at the ready, waiting for your return.

*Odysseus unwraps the package, pausing for a moment  
once he sees what is inside.*

ODYSSEUS

Lead on, bright one. I am ready now.

ATHENA

Wait, master of tactics. The suitors, their spies are everywhere. The minute you set foot through the city gates, word of your arrival will speed ahead and beat you home.

ODYSSEUS

So be it. Let them tremble while they wait for me to come.

ATHENA

They will not tremble. They have long anticipated your return and they are prepared. You will not come within sight of your home before you are killed.

ODYSSEUS

I'm a soldier. I'll not skulk and hide.

ATHENA

It was a wooden horse, wasn't it?

*Pause.*

ODYSSEUS

Yes.

ATHENA

You will not hide, soldier. You will be hidden. That is, if you'll be ruled by me?

ODYSSEUS

You have led me this far.

ATHENA

And you, Telemachus? Will you also stay the course and not stray nor slip? Yours is the greater challenge and the worse temptation, for I shall send you on ahead of your father. Will you keep silent and endure the insults of the suitors for a little while longer?

TELEMACHUS

As best I can, I will.

ATHENA

I will be there to lend you strength, as best I can. Now, return to your father's house and speak not a word of what has transpired. Not to anyone. Not even your mother, especially not her, for she will not be able to stay silent in her joy and all my plots will fail. So, go and wait. Your father is coming home.

TELEMACHUS

How will I know him?

ATHENA

You will know him when you see him.

TELEMACHUS

Father...

ODYSSEUS

...my son. I'll be home soon.

*Telemachus embraces Odysseus once more, and then departs.*

*Athena turns to Odysseus.*

ATHENA

Now man, I shall hide you away from their eyes...

ODYSSEUS

...and the bright eyed goddess shook all of my self from me, winding my strength in the loose folds of poverty and weakness, lining my face with wrinkles, stripping me to the skin to drape me in rags like a common beggar...

*...as he speaks, Athena unwraps the long bundle that Telemachus brought, revealing a bow – the bow of Odysseus – which raises much muttering from the suitors.*

*She lays the bow across his shoulders, hanging masks and trinkets and props from it.*

*There is a momentary shift in the performance, a ripple, an outburst from the suitors...*

ATHLETE

...it's the bow...

MERCHANT

...son of a bitch...

PRIEST

...shhh...

ATHLETE

...he gave it to...

PRIEST

...shhh, I want to see what happens next...

*...the suitors settle back and the performance continues.*

*And it is the Storyteller now who plays Odysseus – perhaps for the first time...*

ODYSSEUS/STORYTELLER

...the transformation complete, Athena sped on ahead to lend her counsel and support to my son, while I followed slowly after, plotting my revenge.

*The storyteller stands before them as when he first entered, perhaps holding the mask of Odysseus over his face.*

MERCHANT

What is this?

ODYSSEUS

And I came to the gates of the city and passed through unrecognized, along the twisting streets until at last I found the great doors of my own house.

POLITICIAN

Telemachus, this is in very poor taste.

*But the "Telemachus" they are speaking to drops his mask to reveal that he is one of the suitors.*

PRIEST

Very poor taste.

*Odysseus takes the bow from across his shoulders and removes the props from it.*

ODYSSEUS

The gatekeeper asked me my business and I told him I was a storyteller wandering here and there. He would have sent me away, but my overanxious son came out as we were talking and knew me at once by the mark of Athena upon me.

*He continues to speak, bending the bow in his hands, stringing it for battle.*

ODYSSEUS

And he led me into the great hall, where I found the decadent swine rooting and snuffling through the best of my cellars and larder.

POLITICIAN

This is no longer amusing.

*The head servant, as Athena, has moved to stand to one side of the Storyteller, Telemachus to the other.*

ODYSSEUS

And I could have destroyed them all, then and there, each and every last one of you . . . but I am a soldier and I never send a soul down to the dead without my name on their lips...

*...the bow is strung...*

PHILOSOPHER

...by the gods...

ODYSSEUS

...yes, by the gods...

*...Athena hands Odysseus an arrow, he notches it and bends the bow, sighting down his outstretched index finger...*

ODYSSEUS

...yes, I am among you now, so speak my name and wait on the swift slaughter that I bring for you...

*...he lets fly, burying the shaft deep into the suitor's breast.*

*Athena darts forward and hands him another which he notches as before, walking forward into the crowd...*

*...the suitors and servants scramble as he walks among them, firing at will...*

*...the last of them rises up in front of him, unafraid and defiant. Odysseus notches one more arrow handed to him by Athena and faces the remaining suitor.*

ATHLETE

I am not afraid of you. Lay down your bow. Face me as men do, if you dare. I am strong. I am brave. Do you fear me, old man? I am no fat diplomat or frail poet. I have won many contests against men stronger than you. I am not afraid.

ODYSSEUS

I don't have time for a wrestling match. The hour is late and I would to bed.

ATHLETE

Odysseus. Come to me, Odysseus . . . come, coward and let me crack what's left of your spine. You know death so well, don't you recognize it when it is before you?

ODYSSEUS

The prophet told me I would die one day, but not tonight and not so close to the shore.

ATHLETE

Are you sure that's what he said, Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS

Ask him yourself...

*...and with that he lets the final shaft fly.*

*He steps back, leaning on the bow.*

*Telemachus comes forward, but Odysseus holds his hand up for a moment, eyes closed.*

*He opens his eyes, straightens up, and lays the bow  
at Athena's feet.*

ODYSSEUS

No more, great goddess. I thank you, but . . . no more.

ATHENA

No more, soldier.

ODYSSEUS

I have no words, none that can frame my gratitude for your...

*...he trails off.*

*Penelope is there.*

*Long silence.*

*She moves to him, standing for a moment.*

PENELOPE

Oh husband...

*...they embrace.*

*After a long moment, she pulls away.*

*Pause.*

*She slaps him once, twice.*

*He kneels in front of her, clutching her waist, and  
weeps.*

*Finally, she raises his up and kisses him tenderly,  
wiping his cheeks.*

*She takes him by the hand and leads him up the stairs.*

*Telemachus stands a moment.*

*Athena approaches, holding his father's bow in her hands.*

*He considers it for a moment, then nods.*

*She lays it across his shoulders.*

*She gathers up the masks and puppets and props scattered around the chamber, hanging them from the bow.*

*She stands back to look at him and then kisses him once, on the forehead.*

*With one last glance to the goddess, Telemachus leaves.*

*Athena looks about the chamber, spies a mask that has been forgotten and picks it up.*

*It is her mask, it is the face of Athena.*

*She turns it over in her hands.*

*She looks up and smiles at us as the lights fade.*