

THE ODYSSEY

By Thomas W. Hodgkinson

Based on Homer's *Odyssey*

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Thomas W. Hodgkinson is a theatre critic for *The Sunday Times* and the author of works of fiction and non-fiction.

Many key speeches and action beats in this script are straight translations from Homer.

EXT. THE ISLAND OF ITHACA. GREECE. 1200 BC.

A snowstorm.

TITLE. Superimposed in black over the falling snow.

*Tell me, Muse, the story of a man,
Who sacked the sacred citadel of Troy,
And then embarked upon a sea of troubles.*

The text fades as two figures trudge through the snow. One is hooded and carries a stick. The other, a SMALL BOY, is his guide. Faintly, they can hear the SOUND OF REVELRY.

A palace looms out of the whiteness.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. AN ANTECHAMBER. NIGHT.

The SOUND OF REVELRY is louder now, coming from a nearby room. An old maidservant, EURYCLEIA, addresses the camera.

EURYCLEIA

The best men go to war. And while they're gone, the worst men make the most of it. This palace was happy, when King Odysseus was here. But then he left to fight in the Trojan War. That was twenty years ago. Before some of you were born.

She's addressing a group of frightened GIRLS, who have been brought to the palace for the amusement of the GUESTS.

EURYCLEIA (CONT'D)

And all that time, Penelope has stayed true to him. She has been loyal. Even when the Guests came, all longing to make her their wife, begging and bullying her to take another husband. She refused. And now she shuts herself away. She sees none of them. Just dreams of the day Odysseus will return.

A younger maidservant, MELANTHO, enters.

MELANTHO

Is Eurymachus in tonight?

She's pretty, but with a hard set to her mouth.

EURYCLEIA

I haven't seen him.

MELANTHO

(to the Girls)

They call themselves "Guests".

(MORE)

MELANTHO (CONT'D)

But they weren't invited. And no one's asking them to stay.

(beat)

Take my advice and watch out for Antinous. He's the ruler over this pig-sty. Eurymachus is the only one who stands up to him.

One of the girls, THEANO, is bolder than the rest.

THEANO

But where's Odysseus?

MELANTHO

No one knows.

EURYCLEIA

After the War, he disappeared.

LEIODES (O.S.)

And so will you, if you fail to please the Guests.

LEIODES, the palace drunk, stands in the doorway. He speaks, or rather slurs, in a tone of mocking formality.

LEIODES (CONT'D)

My lord Antinous, the master of this palace, he craves an audience with thee.

(leering)

My ladies. My sweet ladies.

INT. THE GREAT HALL. CONT.

The Girls are herded towards the Great Hall, whose double doors open on a scene of riot. There is SHOUTING. SINGING. Feasting. Fighting. Two men engage in an arm-wrestle. One of them, IRUS, has the build of a wrestler.

At the back of the room, a larger set of doors opens, admitting a swirl of snowflakes. The Small Boy enters with his companion, who draws back his hood to reveal that he is old and blind. It is the STORYTELLER.

He is handed a hunk of bread by the Boy, but as he takes a bite, rough hands seize him. Irus drags him before ANTINOUS, the corrupt-looking leader of the Guests.

ANTINOUS

What's this, then?

Antinous releases Theano, whom he has been molesting.

A GUEST

Another boyfriend for Penelope!

There is LAUGHTER at this.

IRUS

A thief.

SMALL BOY

(correcting him)

A poet.

ANTINOUS

A *liar*, is it?

STORYTELLER

I tend to say "storyteller". Call me old-fashioned.

ANTINOUS

I've got bad news for you, minstrel. The Queen's a recluse. She won't even see me, Antinous, son of Eupeithes, and king of the islands of Lefkas. And I'm sorry to say, we couldn't care less for your skill. We're not the kind of men to sit around, listening to lies.

SMALL BOY

You're making a big mistake.

Antinous regards the boy with disdain.

ANTINOUS

And why is that?

SMALL BOY

Because he's the greatest storyteller alive. When he speaks, you can actually see what he says.

ANTINOUS

(sarcastically)

You mean like magic?

SMALL BOY

Yes.

Antinous pauses awhile.

ANTINOUS

(at length)

You can sing for us, stranger. But you only get one chance. So choose your story wisely.

STORYTELLER

I've already chosen.

The Small Boy places a lyre in the Storyteller's hands. The old man tunes it with expert fingers. Then he PLUCKS A C-NOTE. As the sound resonates, the doors at the back of the room blow open, and another swirl of snowflakes enters. As the Storyteller speaks, visions form of the things he is describing: 3D facsimiles. It is as the Small Boy claimed. By a kind of magic, you can actually see the things he says.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*This is the story of a trickster. A
no one who was everyone. And
everyone knows his name.*

(beat)

Odysseus.

To the amazement of the Guests, there forms a lifelike hologram of Odysseus. The hologram gazes with satisfaction around at his home, glad to see it again.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*Who took Troy with a ploy, out-
kinging Agamemnon, out-axing Ajax,
out-skilling the killer Achilles.*

As he names them, a vision of each of these warriors appears. AGAMEMNON in his splendour. AJAX wielding his axe. ACHILLES in battle fury, displaying his fighting skill.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*For none of these, as fearsome as
they were, could break Troy, could
take back Helen, the stolen Spartan
queen. Except Odysseus, sacker of
cities, way-finder, warrior.*

Odysseus bows to the room.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*Yet even then his sufferings
increased. Monstered and
ensorcelled, he was love-lost,
storm-tossed, a wanderer for years
across the winding whale-roads. The
sea that makes men drunk became his
mistress. While back in Ithaca, his
palace was infected by a blight. An
outbreak of thugs, sights set on
marrying Penelope, his wife.*

There are MURMURS OF CONSTERNATION among the Guests.

ANTINOUS

That's enough, old man.

STORYTELLER

*These rapists and runaways, they
squat inside his home.*

(MORE)

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*Make pigs of themselves, wolfing
down his wealth and howling for his
woman. Such scum. Half-men. Human
dung.*

The Small Boy is grinning.

ANTINOUS

I said, that's enough.

STORYTELLER

(laughing)

Wretches!

(smiling)

Letches!

(snarling)

Leaches!

The ghostly figure of Odysseus attacks the Guests. Jumping up on the table, slashing at this one, skewering that. This disturbs the Guests, although none of them is harmed.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*Drunkards! Draft-dodgers!
Indeterminate of gender! Germs!
Invertebrate worms, slinking into
another man's house, snaking up to
another man's wife! Mucus! Fungus!
Frogspawn! Sputum!*

ANTINOUS

I SAID, THAT'S ENOUGH!

The visions vanish.

Irus advances on the Storyteller, who, notwithstanding his blindness, senses his approach. When Irus makes a grab at him, he steps aside and the big man sprawls. The Small Boy slides the Storyteller's heavy stick to him across the floor. He snatches it up in time to smack the rising Irus in the face, and send him down again. More Guests arise in outrage and pile in against the Storyteller. Soon enough, the old man goes down underneath a rockfall of fists.

INT. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS. LATER.

The Storyteller is unconscious, his face a mess. Melanthe tends to him, while Odysseus' wife, PENELOPE, looks on.

PENELOPE

Odysseus always loved a
storyteller. He liked nothing
better than when there was a feast
in the house. And we would listen
to some storyteller with a voice
like a god.

MELANTHO

He was taunting the Guests.
Praising your husband.

PENELOPE

I wish I'd seen it.

The Storyteller stirs. His lips part. When Penelope leans in to listen, he grabs her wrist, pulling her towards him. He MURMURS something inaudible, before releasing her.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Alright, ladies. This isn't a
public holiday. There's work to do.

Her maids busy themselves with their tasks.

A MAID

(to Melantho)
What did he say?

PENELOPE

(overhearing her)
He says Odysseus is dead.

There is a pause. Then Eurycleia starts to cry.

INT. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS. LATER.

The Storyteller is propped up in bed, having regained some of his strength. In the background, the maids are setting up a great loom for weaving, which will occupy half the room.

STORYTELLER

We had mastered two monsters. Or
that was what we thought.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRAITS OF SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

A rowing boat bobs among the wreckage of a ship. Among its occupants are Odysseus and the Storyteller. The water around them churns and the head of a sea monster, fanged and doglike at the end of a serpentine neck, lurches up out of it into the air. Then it comes lashing down.

At the final moment, Odysseus moves the Storyteller out of the way, and himself is struck a mortal blow by the monster.

Later. The Storyteller has managed to drag Odysseus onto a piece of floating wreckage. The latter's chin is covered in blood. He doesn't seem to be breathing.

CUT TO:

INT. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

The tallest upright part of the loom has been carved to resemble the head of a monster, like the sea monster we have seen. One of the maids fumbles it and it falls, CLATTERING onto the floor. Distressed, Penelope dismisses her maids.

As soon as they're alone, she addresses the Storyteller.

PENELOPE

My father always told me never to trust a storyteller. They pick the word that rhymes instead of the word that's true.

STORYTELLER

Sometimes it's the same.

PENELOPE

You think you're the first person to come through here with news of my husband's death? How much did they pay you?

STORYTELLER

If I were working for the Guests, why would they have had me beaten?

PENELOPE

They knew we'd be having this conversation. They knew that, otherwise, I would never have agreed to see you. Do you see?

STORYTELLER

Not as well as I used to.

PENELOPE

I see you don't.

STORYTELLER

I see. You don't.

(beat)

Let me tell you how we met and where we went. Then you can judge for yourself how much of this you want to believe.

PENELOPE

It's not a question of how much I want to believe. It's a question of how much I do believe.

Penelope positions a stool before the loom.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

You say you sailed with him after the War. But you're not Ithacan.

STORYTELLER

I lived at Troy.

PENELOPE

So he was your enemy.

STORYTELLER

At first.

Later. Penelope has commenced her weaving. As the Storyteller tells his story, he conjures his visions.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*In the tenth tense year of war,
your Greeks were ghosts. Their army
disarmed. Its men unmanned.*

SHOUTS. The CLANG OF STEEL. The sound of CRACKLING FLAMES.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*Odysseus broke the deadlock. He
built a horse from wood and filled
it with warriors. This tricked the
Trojans, who thought the Greeks had
gone. They led this pregnant horse
into their city. The ten-year war
was ended in a night.*

The RUMBLE of collapsing buildings.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*I cowered underground with other
trembling Trojans. And listened, as
the topless towers tumbled.*

Although Penelope and the Storyteller remain visible, the Women's Quarters transform into a wine cellar. Barrels of wine are stacked against the wall. Beside them, a group of Trojans huddles, including a YOUNG MAN, a YOUNG WOMAN, an OLD MAN, and a YOUNG BOY. The Storyteller rises and joins the group. In those days, he could still see.

There is the SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS. Then the door is charged and an armed Odysseus bursts in. He takes a swig from a wineskin and stares at the Trojans blearily. Then, with some difficulty, he takes a piss against the wall.

The Trojans exchange looks, not knowing how to react to this apparition. Even less so when, noticing the barrels of wine, Odysseus makes for them, misses his footing, and sprawls on the floor. With attempted dignity, he picks himself up.

YOUNG BOY

Are you a hero?

Odysseus looks a little surprised. The Young Woman pulls the Young Boy towards her protectively. He moves over to the barrels and pours himself a large cup of wine.

He takes a sip. Meanwhile, the Young Man moves his fingers to his dagger. This isn't noticed by Odysseus, but it is by the Storyteller. After finishing his wine, Odysseus kneels in front of the Young Boy, and answers his question.

ODYSSEUS

Listen to me. I'm going to speak to you like a grown-up. There are no heroes. There never were.

The Storyteller catches his eye, indicating that he's about to be attacked. The Young Man launches forward. Odysseus avoids the blow, disarms his assailant, and wrestles him to the floor. Sobered by exertion, he speaks into his ear.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Take the boy. Find another city. Found one, if you have to.

The Young Man rises, grateful to be spared. He stoops to allow the Old Man to climb on to his back. He takes the Young Boy by the hand. The Young Woman follows behind.

Odysseus starts marking up wine barrels, to distinguish the ones he wants to take as loot. After a while, he notices the Storyteller hasn't departed with the other Trojans.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Why did you help me?

STORYTELLER

You're Odysseus, king of Ithaca, lord of the Western Isles. Tracker, traveller, unraveller of mysteries, sacker of unsackable cities. If anyone's a hero, then it's you.

ODYSSEUS

And you're an idiot.

STORYTELLER

I'm a poet.

ODYSSEUS

That's what I said.

STORYTELLER

Take me with you. I'll make you an even greater hero than you are.

ODYSSEUS

(scornfully)

By singing a song about me? I've done nothing. Nothing that's worth singing about. All I want, all I think about, is getting home.

ANTINOUS (O.S.)
 PENELOPE!

The Storyteller's visions vanish.

Irus steps into the Women's Quarters, followed by Antinous.

PENELOPE
 I suppose you're aware that these are the Women's Quarters, Antinous? Which prompts me to wonder: are you secretly a woman? Or perhaps you were hoping to pass yourself off as an item of household furniture. A stool, perhaps. Or an oaken chest. So you can lurk in the corner and ogle my serving maids.

Antinous inspects the room.

ANTINOUS
 You're looking well, Penelope. It's been so long since we saw you, we were starting to worry you might be losing your bloom.

Irus CHUCKLES.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)
 We heard the news. And we commiserate. We do. But you have to understand, there are a hundred men out there, the flower of Ithaca and the Western Isles, whose happiness lies in your hands.

He adopts a tone of reasonableness.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)
You must pick one of us.

STORYTELLER
 Can I say something?

ANTINOUS
 (scornfully)
 Are you still alive?

STORYTELLER
 If she chooses one of these men, she'll make him happy. But she'll make the other ninety-nine unhappy. So if Penelope were kind, she would postpone this decision for as long as humanly possible. Preserving the greatest happiness for the greatest number for the greatest time. Are you saying she's not kind?

In the distance, a dog is heard BARKING.

ANTINOUS

He's mad, as well as blind. It's the only explanation. He's like that crazy dog in the yard, which growls at me whenever I go past.

He signals to Irus, who grips Penelope by the arm. She struggles unsuccessfully to break free. Antinous speaks in a casual tone, as if this were a normal conversation.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

Marry me, and you can control the succession. Telemachus isn't old enough to take over. But with someone like me to guide him--

The Storyteller's hand moves silently to his stick.

PENELOPE

(furious)

If you were the last man alive, I'd tell the gods I was sorry. I'd say, I can't. Not with him.

ANTINOUS

You need someone to protect you!

EURYMACHUS (O.S.)

There are other candidates.

In the doorway stands another Guest. EURYMACHUS: handsome, charismatic, impeccably dressed. A little too impeccably. His most evident flaw is a limp, which is noticeable as he crosses the room. Irus releases Penelope.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

(to Penelope)

Is it true?

ANTINOUS

Of course it's true.

STORYTELLER

Penelope's not convinced. She thinks somebody bribed me. To sew together some patchwork of a story, of how Odysseus met his death.

PENELOPE

No.

(beat)

No.

(beat)

That's not what I think. I did at first. But having listened to this man, I can see he knew my husband.

(MORE)

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

And if that's the case, he would be loyal to him. He would have no reason to lie. Odysseus is dead. I am a widow now. These are the facts. We will hold the funeral, according to the custom. And then I'll do as you wish. I'll take another husband.

There's a pause, as they absorb this news.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I have just one request. To be given time to weave a death shroud for the service. A covering fit for the passing of a king. If I don't carry out this duty, the women will say I didn't love my husband. Will you grant this, Eurymachus?

EURYMACHUS

Whatever you want.

PENELOPE

And you, Antinous?

ANTINOUS

If you're quick.

With a sneer, he leaves, accompanied by Irus.

Eurymachus and Penelope speak with a new intimacy, uninhibited by the presence of the Storyteller.

EURYMACHUS

He was a good man. A good husband and a father.

PENELOPE

When he was here.

(beat)

You realise, if I don't pick Antinous, he'll seize power anyway?

EURYMACHUS

No one will support him.

PENELOPE

It's not me the Ithacans love. It's Odysseus. And possibly his son.

EURYMACHUS

By now Telemachus will have reached Sparta. He won't be back for ten, maybe fifteen days. I still don't know why he hates me as he does.

PENELOPE

He thinks, by courting me, you're betraying his father.

EURYMACHUS

And is that what you think?

PENELOPE

I knew you before I knew Odysseus.
I always enjoyed your company.

EURYMACHUS

It was hard, when you two married.
But I adjusted. Is that the phrase?
And in time, he and I were friends
again, as we had been before.

PENELOPE

Is that really true?

EURYMACHUS

Of course it isn't.

Eurymachus caresses her arm. She lets him. The Storyteller stares ahead with pale unseeing eyes.

After Eurymachus leaves, Penelope moves to an ornamental door at the back of the Women's Quarters. It is covered with strange mechanisms, so it's not clear how to open it. We don't see how she does it. When she returns, she has a cup of wine in her hand. She takes a long drink from it.

EXT. THE BEACH AT TROY. THE END OF THE WAR.

Odysseus takes a swig from a wineskin, mirroring the action of Penelope. His men are rolling barrels of wine up the gangplank. Odysseus glances up to see a figure watching from the shore. It is the Storyteller, his cloak billowing out behind him in the sea breeze.

Later. The Storyteller climbs the gangplank. He is helped over the gunwale by a red-faced man.

ELPENOR

I'm Elpenor. I'm basically a drunk.

He indicates a slim man and a big man.

ELPENOR (CONT'D)

That's Eurylochus and Eurybates.
They're basically a couple.

EURYLOCHUS and EURYBATES grin at the Storyteller.

ELPENOR (CONT'D)

(indicating a black dog)
And this is Korax.

(MORE)

ELPENOR (CONT'D)

(beat)

He's basically a dog.

The men are tired and dirty, but friendly to the Storyteller-- all except Odysseus, who keeps himself apart. Elpenor slaps one of the benches, making it clear that the Storyteller will be expected to row, just like anyone else.

ELPENOR (CONT'D)

And this is where you'll sit.

STORYTELLER

That's pretty basic.

Many of Odysseus' men are played by the actors who play the Guests in Ithaca. So Eurylochus is played by the actor who plays Eurymachus. Eurybates equates to Irus. And so on.

EXT. OPEN SEA.

The Storyteller rows, putting his back into it. Odysseus sits cross-legged on the prow, gazing ahead, brooding. The rower next to the Storyteller is the slim man, EURYLOCHUS. He's shyer than Elpenor, but welcoming in his way.

EURYLOCHUS

I hear you're composing an epic.

STORYTELLER

I'm not sure about that. When I suggested it to Odysseus, he said he'd done nothing worth recording.

EURYLOCHUS

He was probably hung over.

STORYTELLER

Is it true what I've heard? That he can see into the future?

EURYLOCHUS

(smiling)

Is that what you've heard?

STORYTELLER

That's what everyone says. The greatest of the Greeks each had a special power. So with Achilles, it was his skill at fighting. With Ajax, it was his strength. And with Odysseus, it's his ability to see what's going to happen. He can look ahead and evaluate stratagems, see which is to his advantage.

Eurylochus is amused by such enthusiasm.

EURYLOCHUS

He's good at entrail-reading too.

STORYTELLER

Really?

EURYLOCHUS

No!

(after a pause)

He's terrible at it. He can't even predict the weather.

Eurylochus nods at the horizon, where storm-clouds gather.

EURYLOCHUS (CONT'D)

I hope you've prayed to Poseidon.

Later. A terrible storm racks both ships. As Odysseus wrestles with the ropes that reef the sails, we catch a glimpse of a faint silhouette in the sky. It is Penelope in the Women's Quarters at Ithaca. The long threads of her loom equate to the ropes of the ship. When the storm clears, the ship is shrouded in mist. At the prow, Korax juts his head forward, growling. He senses something.

EXT. A ROCKY ISLAND.

They disembark on a rocky, bleak-looking island. Odysseus organises two scouting groups. In his group is a ten-year-old boy named ADRASTUS, who as he walks tosses a knife in the air. Odysseus orders each group to carry a barrel of wine.

ODYSSEUS

Guest-gifts for the locals.

He restrains one of the men about to pick up a barrel, and first helps himself to a brimming cup, knocking it back. Elpenor is sorry to see the wine go.

ELPENOR

I'm telling you it's a waste.

We follow the second group as they explore the island. They're being watched-- by whom or what, we don't know. Visibly nervous, they hear a MUSICAL TINKLING SOUND: uncanny. Eventually, at the height of tension, an oversize sheep appears, the bell around its neck emitting a tinkling sound as it moves. The tension fades. Then the ambush is sprung. We don't see the attackers but from the looks in the men's eyes, they are horrifying. The men don't stand a chance.

Odysseus sweats as he walks uphill. He's not in good shape. Eurylochus and another man are struggling with the weight of the wine barrel. The burly Eurybates takes it from them. As he does so, he touches the face of Eurylochus, his lover, tenderly. Then he proceeds, the barrel under one arm.

Eventually, they come to a great cave in the mountainside. The opening looks like a vertical eye. They hesitate. Odysseus takes a while to catch his breath.

ODYSSEUS

You never know until you go.

He enters the cave, followed by the others.

INT. THE CAVE.

It's dark inside, but they can make out some pens for livestock, and some enormous rounds of cheese. In one corner lies the skeleton of a stag, its antlers intact. Then they hear that uncanny MUSICAL TINKLING SOUND, which grows louder. A flock of outsize sheep enters the cave, driving the men before them into its deeper recesses. They are followed by the shepherd, if that's not too innocuous a word for this monstrous figure. It is a CYCLOPS: the size of twenty men, his Neanderthal torso topped by a fat head centring on a single vertical eye. NB The Cyclops is played by the actor who plays Antinous.

He drops his bundle of firewood with a tremendous CRASH. Then, with an effort, he blocks the entrance with a boulder. The cave is now even darker than before. In the gloom, he kneels and milks his sheep with surprising tenderness. This done, he lights a fire, which blazes up, illuminating the cave. It is only then that he spots Odysseus and his men.

Lolloping towards them with simian speed, he thrusts his hideous face up close, scrutinising with his single eye.

CYCLOPS

Who. Are. You.

Eurybates instinctively moves to protect Eurylochus. Adrastus is about to throw his knife, but Odysseus restrains him.

ODYSSEUS

We owe you an apology. We didn't know this was your home, and we just barged in, and-- I'm sorry, can I just say what superb sheep you have? We Ithacans pride ourselves on our flocks, but I have to hand it to you, these ones are really magnificent.

CYCLOPS

Where's. Your. Ship.

ODYSSEUS

(pleading)

We've been at war. We've seen enough death and destruction for two lifetimes.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

All we want, all we think about, is going home.

(after a pause)

Our ship was wrecked.

Grinning, the Cyclops grabs Eurybates. While the others look on, aghast, he smashes the big man's head against the walls of the cave, and commences to eat him ravenously. Odysseus restrains Eurylochus, who has drawn his sword. Eurylochus lets out a cry, before slumping in anguish.

STORYTELLER

(sotto voce)

Odysseus, use your power.

Odysseus closes his eyes and breathes long and slow, entering a trance-like state. Turns out he does possess a power of forward-projection, of the kind described by the Storyteller.

ODYSSEUS

(finally)

I've got this.

He approaches the Cyclops, rolling the barrel of wine.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Shepherd. You know the best thing for washing down raw meat? Wine.

CYCLOPS

Why?

ODYSSEUS

Why what?

CYCLOPS

What's wine?

ODYSSEUS

It's kind of like water but it tastes better. We brought it to give you as a guest-gift.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Just because you don't observe our laws, it doesn't mean we won't.

The Cyclops pushes Odysseus out the way but can't work the tap on the barrel. In the end, Odysseus has to do it for him. He fills a bucket, which for the Cyclops is the size of a cup. The Cyclops drains it. Then another. And another.

CYCLOPS

(slurring his words)

Best water ever. What's your name? So I can give you a "host-gift".

ODYSSEUS

My name is No-one. I'm No-one.
That's what everyone calls me.

He passes him up another bucket of wine.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

I'm the son of Nobody, from the
city of Nowhere in the country
called Particular.

CYCLOPS

"No-one", eh?

(laughing stupidly)

In that case, my ghost-gift-- I
mean, my host-gift-- is I'll eat No-
one last of all.

ODYSSEUS

You're very kind.

CYCLOPS

Yes, I am very kind, am't I?

ODYSSEUS

You really are.

CYCLOPS

Yes, I'm am. I mean, I'm are.

(beat)

Are I?

With difficulty, he gets to his feet. The cave is spinning.

CYCLOPS (CONT'D)

Wine-- I--

He staggers towards the men for a second helping. But loses his balance and falls. He's out cold. Odysseus and his men find a branch among the pile of firewood. Using their swords, they sharpen its end to a point. It takes all four of them to wield it well. They heat the tip of it in the fire until it glows. As they approach the Cyclops, he vomits in his sleep. Body parts emerge from his mouth, mixed with the wine. His single eye opens blearily and he sees their weapon.

CYCLOPS (CONT'D)

What's that?

ODYSSEUS

It's nothing.

He closes his eye. Then he opens it again.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Now!

The four plunge the sharpened branch into the beast's eye. The tip HISSES AND SIZZLES as it punctures the wet bulb of his eyeball. The Cyclops goes mad, leaping up, wrenching the weapon from his eye, SCREAMING AND BELLOWING, his eyebrow on fire. The men scatter. Blood sprays around the cave. The sheep all start BLEATING furiously in distress. Among this noise, other cyclopes can be heard outside the cave.

SECOND CYCLOPS (O.S.)
What is it, Polyphemus?

THIRD CYCLOPS (O.S.)
What's the matter?

CYCLOPS
No-one has blinded me!

SECOND CYCLOPS (O.S.)
Say that again! It's hard to hear!

CYCLOPS
No-one has tricked me! No-one, the son of Nobody, from Nowhere in Particular. He attacked me with a long piece of nothing.

THIRD CYCLOPS (O.S.)
(whispering)
He's gone mad.

SECOND CYCLOPS (O.S.)
(whispering)
Madness comes from the gods.

THIRD CYCLOPS (O.S.)
(whispering)
Must have brought it on himself.

The two cyclopes can be heard retreating. Odysseus laughs long and loud, his LAUGHTER ECHOING inside the cavern.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

The Storyteller pauses. His bruises have almost faded, suggesting the passing of time.

The maids look shocked by his story. Penelope sits at her task, calmly weaving the death shroud for Odysseus.

STORYTELLER
Could I possibly get a cup of wine?

Eurycleia blanches. But she brings the Storyteller a drink.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
*The longest night I've known.
Sleepless, awaiting dawn.*
(MORE)

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

The mastered monster staggered, sightless, swinging his arms, hoping to catch someone a killing blow. Odysseus had made an antler hat to mock him. Killer-turned-clown. Crowned with horns.

Penelope is weaving an image of the wretched Cyclops, weeping blood, a pair of stag's antlers sticking up over his head. The image takes life, as the Storyteller continues.

INT. THE CAVE.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

The next morning, sheep bellies bleated, bellowing for grass, for grazing. The Cyclops squatted in the entrance, and scratched their backs as they flocked past. His fingers itching for revenge.

The Cyclops tries to feel for the escaping men, but they're tied safely under the outsize sheep, which trot out safely through the cave's entrance. All except Odysseus' sheep, which turns out to be the Cyclops' favourite.

CYCLOPS

What's wrong, my darling? You're usually at the front of the flock. First out in the morning, first home at night. But today you're at the back. Are you sad? Or sick?

He strokes the sheep, squeezing its ears affectionately. Then he moves his hand along its sides, his fingertips coming close to touching Odysseus, who clings on underneath.

CYCLOPS (CONT'D)

You're sad, aren't you? For the loss of my eye. If only you could talk, you could be my eye. You could tell me where he's hiding, this No-one. This wimp. This stinking weakling.

CYCLOPS (CONT'D)

I'd strike him down with one blow. No-one's brains would be no use to him then. They'd paint the wall of my cave.

Breaking off, he starts to sob. Odysseus slips out of his harness and moves close to the monster's ear.

ODYSSEUS

(whispering)

You know who cares?

CYCLOPS
(on reflex)

Who?

ODYSSEUS

No-one!

The Cyclops lets out a roar. He grabs the antlers off his head and flings them at the fleeing men. The hubbub attracts more cyclopes, ravenous for man-flesh. The men run for it, pursued by these lumbering creatures. The sheep run with them, in a stampede.

The chase takes them all down a ravine, where Adrastus falls, but is carried onward by the current. One of the cyclopes trips and rolls head over heels, almost crushing Eurylochus. When they reach the shore, they shout to Elpenor and the other men to cast off. They dive into the water and manage to clamber onto the ship just as the enraged cyclopes reach the water's edge. There's a pause. Odysseus thinks it's all over. The monsters must be afraid of water. But then they too plunge into the sea and start wading out towards the boat.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

ROW!

They make a skin-of-their-teeth escape.

EXT. LOTUS ISLAND.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

*For nine days, we grieved for our
lost companions. On the tenth, we
reached another island. A low-lying
land, shining like a shield upon
the water.*

A bird's eye view swoops over the lagoon-dotted Lotus Island to the gorgeous palace at its centre. From the highest window, a mysterious woman watches.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

*Eurylochus led the reconnaissance,
to learn what the place was like.*

Devastated by the death of his boyfriend, Eurylochus struggles to hold it together, as he leads a scouting party through a beautiful forest, which is set about with lotus flowers. The path opens into a clearing in front of a palace, which is dotted with docile lions and wolves. The men pick their way past these sleepy beasts, and enter.

The palace is decorated with erotic murals. The men can hear shivery, silvery laughter. Beyond the doorways around the hall, female forms flit. Flirtatious. Asking to be chased.

EXT. THE SHIP AT ANCHOR.

Odysseus and the Storyteller relax on board ship. With his knife, Odysseus is whittling something from a block of wood. In the background, Adrastus romps with Korax on the beach. When the Storyteller picks up his lyre, Odysseus lays a restraining hand on the strings.

ODYSSEUS

I let you come on board on one condition, which was that you wouldn't sing.

STORYTELLER

This is an instrumental.

The Storyteller PLUCKS A C-NOTE and lets it resonate. Then he launches into a ROMANTIC MELODY. Odysseus continues his whittling. Zooming in, we see that he's carving a curious abstract shape. At length, the Storyteller stops.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

I'm thinking of calling it "Odysseus' Theme".

ODYSSEUS

When I was a boy, there was a poet who lived in the palace. I grew up on his stories of Perseus and the Medusa, of Theseus and the Minotaur. And all I ever wanted, when I grew up, was to have adventures like these heroes.

STORYTELLER

They're wonderful stories.

ODYSSEUS

They're lies. Don't you see? The reason you get paid, the reason kings want you to perform, is because you persuade people to go to war. And who benefits from these wars? The people who die? Or the kings who take home the gold?

STORYTELLER

The kings die, too.

ODYSSEUS

I went to Troy with a hundred men. Now I have twenty. So you tell me. How is that a triumph?

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

PENELOPE

You're reminding me of qualities he had, which I'd forgotten.

STORYTELLER

Such as?

PENELOPE

Self-pity.

STORYTELLER

He was angered by the difference between war as it was, and war as it gets sung about by poets.

PENELOPE

He knew what war was when he went.

STORYTELLER

You never know until you go.

Penelope is weaving an image of the Storyteller and Odysseus on board ship. We, and they, hear the SOUND OF HEAVY BREATHING-- a man running, out of breath.

EXT. LOTUS ISLAND. THE FOREST.

Eurylochus runs in terror through the trees.

EXT. THE SHIP AT ANCHOR.

Adrastus throws his knife at a piece of driftwood, scoring a perfect hit. It's then that Eurylochus breaks cover. He climbs aboard, in a state. Odysseus slaps his face.

ODYSSEUS

Where are the others?

EURYLOCHUS

Gone.

ODYSSEUS

Dead?

EURYLOCHUS

Worse.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

Then he told his twisted tale. How the men were met by smiling, slow-eyed women. Slim-wristed. Slender-necked. They greeted them tenderly, like the heroes that they were.

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. THE DINING HALL.

Beautiful women with lotuses in their hair lead Eurylochus and his companions into a hall where the table is laid. NB One of the women, ALACASTE, is played by the same actress as Melantho. Several of the others are played by the same actresses as Penelope's maidservants.

ALACASTE

Our mistress told us to make you welcome. She says that the men who conquered Troy are worthy of every reward. They should take what they want, whatever the world affords.

In another room, female hands pour a vial of potion over food. The food is brought into the dining hall. The men tuck in. Each is attended to by one of the women. Alacaste has paired off with Eurylochus, who gestures at fruit bowls.

ALACASTE (CONT'D)

It's the fruit of the lotus.

Eurylochus holds back, sensing a trap. The others drink eagerly and take bites from hunks of meat. As Eurylochus watches, they start to undergo a transformation. Elpenor has pushed his companion's dress up, to reveal her thigh. At the same time, bristles push through the skin of his forearm. His eyes glisten and shrink. His nose flattens and recedes.

All the men are turning into pigs, their swinish bodies bursting from their clothes. All except Eurylochus, who flees in horror. Pigs clamber over the table, continuing to eat.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE GREAT HALL.

The Guests feast like pigs. One pushes an exploratory hand into the dress of a maidservant. Another fills his cup with wine until it overflows. A third snores, head thrown back.

INT. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

Penelope is weaving, attended by Melantho.

PENELOPE

Your story is sounding increasingly familiar. But I wanted to ask. Why didn't Odysseus lead the reconnaissance? He was relaxing at the ship, while his men risked their lives.

STORYTELLER

He knew Eurylochus was haunted by what had happened in the cave.

(MORE)

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

By letting him lead the scouting party, he restored his focus.

PENELOPE

But why did he need to explore the island? Why not just restock with water, and be on his way?

EXT. LOTUS ISLAND. THE FOREST.

Odysseus and the Storyteller proceed through the forest, accompanied by Korax, who runs ahead.

STORYTELLER

You dismiss storytelling. But you use it. In the cave of the monster, that was a story you told. Achilles would have died in the cave. He lacked your skill with stories.

ODYSSEUS

It's not stories that make me sick. It's war stories. And the way you sing about it, with your beards and your flowing robes.

As they walk, they pass places that were passed by Eurylochus and the others. A swamp, dotted with lotus flowers.

STORYTELLER

You never heard me sing.

ODYSSEUS

I did, in fact. I came to Troy, last year, disguised as a beggar. I saw you perform your long-form poem about the War. Do you want to know what I thought of it?

STORYTELLER

I'm not sure that I do.

ODYSSEUS

It was the most powerful piece of storytelling I ever heard.

STORYTELLER

(pleased)
Are you serious?

ODYSSEUS

I was mesmerised. I've no idea how you bring off some of your effects.

STORYTELLER

You have to believe.

ODYSSEUS

That's all there is to it?

STORYTELLER

If you internalise the emotions,
you externalise them. You create a
suspension of disbelief that's so
strong, it's akin to madness.

ODYSSEUS

You said it.

STORYTELLER

Akin to intoxication, then.

ODYSSEUS

But it isn't true. You present
Achilles as a god, but he wasn't.
As for your emphasis on individual
prowess-- one man doesn't make that
kind of difference. No. For your
poem about me, you'll have to come
up with something different.

STORYTELLER

Such as?

ODYSSEUS

A new kind of story.

STORYTELLER

What did you have in mind?

ODYSSEUS

Let's try the truth.

They walk on in silence.

STORYTELLER

I thought you didn't want to be the
subject of a story.

ODYSSEUS

I said "if". *If* you create a story
about me. It would have to present
my vices as well as my virtues.
Show me as I really am.

STORYTELLER

(smiling)

Right.

ODYSSEUS

The nobody in the somebody.

STORYTELLER

I'll see what I can do.

The tension between them has dissipated.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

I have another question, which is a bit more pressing. How are we going to avoid getting turned into pigs?

They come to the clearing in front of the palace, which is now empty. The palace seems empty too, when they enter it.

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. ENTRANCE HALL.

They can hear someone SINGING in a farther room. Korax GROWLS. Following the sound, they enter a lavishly furnished room. Tapestries hang on the walls, depicting erotic scenes from mythology. On the far side of the room, CIRCE sits at a loom, SINGING as she works.

CIRCE

Welcome to my home.

Odysseus stares: Circe is the spitting image of Penelope. NB Circe is played by the same actress as Penelope. Yet when we saw her earlier, she wasn't. She's a shape-shifter.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

My name is Circe. We haven't met.

The Storyteller looks to Odysseus to respond, but Odysseus says nothing. He closes his eyes and breathes long and slow. Instead of barking, Korax fawns on her.

STORYTELLER

Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

What?

STORYTELLER

Use your power.

ODYSSEUS

I've tried. I've considered twelve different stratagems and they all end the same way.

STORYTELLER

Which is?

CIRCE

The bedroom. It's going to happen, my lord. It's a question of when.

ODYSSEUS

You're not my wife.

CIRCE
No. I'm better.

STORYTELLER
What's going on?

ODYSSEUS
(grudgingly)
She looks a bit like Penelope.

CIRCE
I can see what a man wants. And
make myself into that thing. What
he wants is his wife. Only better.
Isn't it, my lord?

Odysseus points his sword at her.

ODYSSEUS
Where are my men?

She moves the tip of his sword to one side.

CIRCE
They're at the sty. I couldn't have
them messing up the house.

EXT. CIRCE'S PALACE. THE PIG STY.

At the sty, the pigs root in filth. Circe tosses in some
acorns, which they devour greedily. Immediately they start to
transform back into men. Elpenor throws his arms around
Odysseus. Then he sees Circe, and shrinks back.

ODYSSEUS
She won't harm you now.

There is one pig that doesn't undergo a transformation.

STORYTELLER
(sternly)
What about that one?

CIRCE
(with a smile)
That's just a pig.

CUT TO:

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. DINING HALL.

The same pig roasts on a slowly turning spit. The men are
overjoyed to have been saved, but they are more wary now. The
wariest of all is the Storyteller, who profoundly mistrusts
Circe. He watches uneasily as she and Odysseus talk.

CIRCE

Tell me about your wife.

STORYTELLER

Don't tell her anything.

ODYSSEUS

You look like her. But you could never replace her.

CIRCE

Are you sure about that?

ODYSSEUS

A human being is more than just their looks. There's sense of humour. Morality. Memories.

CIRCE

What do you remember about her?

ODYSSEUS

Her eyes. Her hair.

He realises that he's talking about her looks.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Her hard-headedness.

He drains his cup of wine. Circe notices and gestures to one of her maidservants. The cup is refilled.

CIRCE

What did she say when you told her you were going to Troy?

ODYSSEUS

She understood.

CIRCE

She went further than that, didn't she. She said she couldn't love you if you didn't go.

STORYTELLER

You don't have to respond.

Odysseus takes another long drink of wine.

ODYSSEUS

She said she would never have loved me if I wasn't the sort of man who would want to go.

CIRCE

While other women begged their husbands to stay, yours urged you to leave.

ODYSSEUS
It wasn't like that.

CIRCE
What was it like?

ODYSSEUS
She understood I didn't have a choice. Agamemnon wouldn't have taken no for an answer.

CIRCE
She was hard-headed.

ODYSSEUS
Yes.

CIRCE
And a hard-headed woman like her, how do you think she'd behave after her husband had been away at war for ten years? What do you think her attitude would be?

ODYSSEUS
What do you mean?

CIRCE
Say, for example, she heard a report that her husband was dead, how do you think she'd react?

ODYSSEUS
You're relentless.

CIRCE
She would hold your funeral and remarry within days.

ODYSSEUS
You don't know her.

He takes another drink of wine.

CIRCE
You said she was hard-headed.

ODYSSEUS
She is.

CIRCE
So if she thought you were dead, she would remarry.

ODYSSEUS
That's probably true.

CIRCE

She wouldn't hang around.

ODYSSEUS

She'd wait more than a few days.

CIRCE

The thing I wonder about someone who's as hard-headed as you say she is, is whether she's capable of love. Whether she's capable of understanding what love is.

(beat)

In any relationship, there's someone who loves and someone who's loved. Put it another way, in any relationship, there's someone who loves more. Who do you think that is, out of you and Penelope?

Odysseus hesitates.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

PENELOPE

You can leave it there.

STORYTELLER

You want to take a break?

PENELOPE

It's pretty obvious he's going to sleep with her. You already told me he could see no stratagem which didn't end that way. But that doesn't mean I want to hear a detailed description.

The Storyteller rises and heads towards the door. Melanthe examines Penelope's weaving, from which, she notices, the portrayal of the Cyclops has mysteriously disappeared.

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. A DRESSING ROOM.

Odysseus and Circe are alone in a luxuriously furnished chamber. She fills his cup with wine. He smiles, already a little drunk, and continues strumming on a lyre which we recognise as the Storyteller's. He has been having lessons, and now plays reasonably well.

CIRCE

If you return to Ithaca, what do you think you'll find?

ODYSSEUS

The leaves on the olive trees
turning silver in the breeze as I
climb the hill. My dog running out
to meet me.

CIRCE

And Penelope?

ODYSSEUS

Her too.

CIRCE

You think she's faithful?

Odysseus stops strumming.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

You don't think men are eyeing
their chances? Telling her that,
since you've been gone so long,
it's time she married again?

ODYSSEUS

Are they?

CIRCE

What do you think?

He raises his cup of wine.

ODYSSEUS

I need to get home.

CIRCE

You think she'll welcome a drunk?

The cup pauses, halfway to his lips.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

You went to Troy believing the war
was just. It was a lie. Women don't
want to be rescued. It's only men
who think they do.

A look of misery comes over his face.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Everyone who died, died for
nothing.

He knocks back the wine.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

And you feel responsible.

ODYSSEUS

I needn't have built the horse.

CIRCE
You feel sick.

ODYSSEUS
Yes.

CIRCE
You think, when you get home,
you'll stop feeling sick?

ODYSSEUS
Maybe.

CIRCE
You won't, my lord. The reason you
can't sleep, the reason you drink,
it's the same. It's because you
understand only in part.

A bowl of lotus fruit lies on the table between them.

CIRCE (CONT'D)
You see more than other men. But
the things you see are glimpses. A
blur caught sight of in the corner
of the eye. Eat this, and the image
will come into focus. For the first
time, you'll really see.

Odysseus gazes at the bowl on the table. The seeds of the
dissected lotus fruit are like eyes staring back at him.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE GREAT HALL.

The Storyteller descends to the Great Hall, where the Guests
are feasting. A servant hands him some food, which he takes
towards the tables in the hope of finding somewhere to sit.
The first table he comes to is occupied by AMPHINOMUS, the
youngest GUEST. He restrains the old man from sitting.

AMPHINOMUS
Sit somewhere else.

The remark is heard by a waggish Guest, PEISANDER.

PEISANDER
That's Amphinomus. He's a
misanthrope.

AMPHINOMUS
That's Peisander. He's a fool.

STORYTELLER
Amphinomus, son of Polydeuces?
That's a name I remember Odysseus
mentioning. He was friends with
your father, I think.

Amphinomus takes an uneasy sip of wine.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
You're a bit young, aren't you, to
be courting Odysseus' wife?

AMPHINOMUS
Didn't I tell you to leave me
alone? Go on, get out of here.

As the Storyteller moves on, Peisander sticks out a foot and trips him. The old man stumbles and knocks into an irascible Guest named EURYDAMAS. Eurydamas seizes his collar.

EURYDAMAS
What are you, *blind*?

There is LAUGHTER at this.

ANTINOUS
Maybe he's pretending. You remember
how he humbled Irus.

PEISANDER
Let's put it to the test.

Peisander approaches with a cup of wine.

PEISANDER (CONT'D)
You must be thirsty, old man. Here.
Have some refreshment.

He throws the wine in the Storyteller's face. The Storyteller doesn't flinch until the liquid hits him. Then he turns away, blinking and COUGHING, wiping the wine from his face. The watching Guests LAUGH at his distress.

ANTINOUS
Keep hold of him, Eurydamas. There
are things I want to ask.

Eurydamas twists the Storyteller's arm savagely.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)
Why is Penelope taking so long with
her weaving?

Eurydamas gives a further twist to his arm.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)
Have you come to some agreement,
that you'll spin out your stories
for as long as possible?

The Storyteller shakes his head.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)
Are you sure?

The Storyteller lets out a CRY, as Eurydamas wrenches his arm further, straining it to breaking point.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

How do you stop the liar from lying? Do you take away his lyre?

Irus takes the knife from the meat board. He moves close to the Storyteller and presses the flat of the blade against his cheek, so the old man can feel what it is.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

Show us your tongue.

The Storyteller presses his lips together and shakes his head. Amphinomus looks shocked, but does nothing to help.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

I said: *show us your tongue!*

Eurydamas twists the old man's arm harder, and the Storyteller opens his mouth. Irus reaches in with his fingers and the Storyteller bites down, making Irus scream.

As if from nowhere, another figure plunges into the fray. He seizes the knife from Irus and in a moment has it pressed against Eurydamas' neck. It is Eurymachus.

EURYMACHUS

Let him go.

The point of the knife presses into the soft flesh of Eurydamas' neck. Eurydamas glances at Antinous, then releases the Storyteller. Eurymachus catches him as he falls.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Oh, that's brave, Antinous. Torturing the old and blind. What's next on your list?

ANTINOUS

I was thinking: cripples.

Supporting the Storyteller, Eurymachus limps over to the corner of the Hall. He sits him down and fetches a rag to wipe his face. Then he gives him something to eat.

EURYMACHUS

Does Penelope know what kind of future she faces, if she marries a man like that?

STORYTELLER

She knows what he's like.

He massages his arm, his forehead furrowed in pain.

EURYMACHUS
Does she mention me?

STORYTELLER
Sometimes.

EURYMACHUS
What does she say?

STORYTELLER
Nothing I can repeat.

EURYMACHUS
(approvingly)
Loyalty is the most important
quality in a man. It can't be
bought. It can't be taught.
(beat)
But what does she say?

STORYTELLER
Nothing of interest.

Eurymachus smiles.

EURYMACHUS
You want to know the strange thing
about Penelope? I have absolutely
no idea at any given moment what
she's really thinking.

In the background, a dog BARKS.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)
Odysseus' best hunting dog, back in
the day. Old now. And neglected,
since the arrival of the Guests.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE COURTYARD. CONT.

Piles of melting snow decorate the yard. In the corner, on the dung heap, lies Argus, the ancient hunting dog. Guards look on, as Eurymachus and the Storyteller approach. One of them calls out a warning.

GUARD
I wouldn't go near him, if I were
you. He'll have your hand off.

When Eurymachus tries to give him something to eat, Argus growls at him fiercely. But when the Storyteller tries, the old dog wags his tail and allows himself to be stroked. Eurymachus eyes the Storyteller with suspicion.

STORYTELLER

Odysseus said there was no way you could have married Penelope. Her father, Icarius, was an athlete. He decreed that anyone who wanted to marry his daughter had to beat him in a race.

EURYMACHUS

And because of my leg, I would never have stood a chance?

The Storyteller doesn't reply.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Did Odysseus tell you how he won that race? He was quick, but he wasn't as quick as Icarius. He kept him up the night before, telling him stories. Icarius was drinking, while Odysseus wove his tapestry of deceit. The next day, Icarius was in such bad shape, he could barely stand, let alone compete in a race. Odysseus trotted to victory.

STORYTELLER

You could have done the same, if you'd thought of it.

There's a CLATTER as Leiodes staggers into the yard, drunk as usual. NB Leiodes is played by the same actor as Elpenor.

LEIODES

O lord and master of mine, I crave a word with thee.

EURYMACHUS

What is it, Leiodes?

LEIODES

The sentinels are in position. And the other men know their orders.

He breaks off. Relying on the Storyteller's blindness, Eurymachus has pressed a finger to his lips. Now he draws it across his throat, forbidding Leiodes from saying any more.

EURYMACHUS

When Odysseus married, he rebuilt the palace for his bride. He designed their bedroom around an ancient olive tree. And he fitted a secret mechanism to the door, which no one but he and Penelope would know how to open.

STORYTELLER

It sounds ingenious.

EURYMACHUS

But what does that tell you about Odysseus? What does it say about his attitude to his marriage?

STORYTELLER

That he knew there were people like you, waiting in the wings?

EURYMACHUS

He felt unworthy.

STORYTELLER

And you don't.

EURYMACHUS

I didn't say that.

STORYTELLER

You think Penelope loves you?

EURYMACHUS

No one knows what Penelope is really thinking.

Glancing upwards, Eurymachus spies Melanthe at an upper window of the courtyard, signalling for his attention.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, you must excuse me.

Catching Leiodes' eye, he again places a finger to his lips. Then he leaves. The Storyteller gazes somewhere near where he takes Leiodes to be.

STORYTELLER

Eurymachus must have faith in you, to entrust you with this mission.

LEIODES

Wassat?

STORYTELLER

The stationing of the sentinels.

LEIODES

I know those cliffs better than anyone. The way I've placed them, they'll see Telemachus as soon as he enters the straits.

STORYTELLER

And who are the other men?

Leiodes realises he's being pressed for information. With a sneer, he nudges Argus's flank with his boot. Argus turns on him, growling, in response to which Leiodes grabs the old man's stick, and strikes at the dog. The Storyteller tries to stop him but is knocked to the floor. Leiodes stands over the dog and beats him repeatedly with the stick, until he lies still. The drunken man breathes heavily.

Indiscreet with adrenaline, he answers the question.

LEIODES

The other men are cut-throats.
Killers. They'll fall on Telemachus
as he comes up through the pass.
Penelope likes Eurymachus the best
out of the Guests, but her son will
refuse. He'll block the marriage.
Eurymachus knows this. But with
Telemachus out of the way--

So saying, Leiodes leaves, executing a bow for the watching guards, who applaud halfheartedly. In pain, the Storyteller moves to the body of Argus and kneels beside him. The dog doesn't move. The Storyteller embraces him, pressing his face into the matted fur of the lifeless animal.

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. A DRESSING ROOM.

His eyes fixed on Circe's, Odysseus takes a bite of the lotus fruit. Gradually, the wall paintings start to come to life.

Curled up on an armchair, a cat blinks. Then it trots out of the room. The palace is littered with Odysseus' men, who have coupled with maidservants. Everyone sleeps, including the erotic figures on the walls, although they are animated, as we can see when one of them turns over in her sleep.

EXT. CIRCE'S PALACE. THE COURTYARD.

The cat pauses in sunlight. Korax barks and the cat vanishes. Adrastus, cross-legged in the courtyard, restrains him. Both walk away from the palace. As they walk through the forest, Adrastus throws up his knife, so it spins in the air, and he catches it by the handle. At the same time, he ages visibly. He starts as a ten-year-old and finishes as a teenager, played by a different actor, still spinning the knife.

EXT. LOTUS ISLAND. THE CLIFFS.

The Storyteller PLUCKS A C-NOTE and lets it resonate.

STORYTELLER

*This is the story of a trickster. A
no one who was everyone. And
everyone knows his name.*

He breaks off at Adrastus' approach.

ADRASTUS

Is it true what they're saying? Has she offered him immortality?

STORYTELLER

I've heard that rumour.

ADRASTUS

What is *immortality*?

STORYTELLER

If he marries her, he'll never die.

Adrastus thinks about this for a moment.

ADRASTUS

But he doesn't love her.

STORYTELLER

Of course not.

ADRASTUS

Then why don't we leave?

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. ENTRANCE HALL.

The palace is in a state of erotic sleepiness. Men and women lie here and there about the Entrance Hall, in the aftermath of a party. Figures on the walls reach out to the Storyteller as he climbs the stairs. He hesitates before a doorway. Then enters a dimly lit dressing room. On the far side, a doorway gusts with silk. The Storyteller again hesitates. Then he moves forward, drawing aside the curtains.

INT. THE BEDROOM.

The bedroom is even darker than the dressing room. On the bed, which is in disarray, lies a discarded lyre. There is a GURGLING SOUND, like the sound of water running down a plug-hole. Faint at first, but growing louder as the Storyteller moves towards the balcony. He draws open the door shutters and dazzling sunshine pours over him from outside.

EXT. THE BALCONY.

Naked, among cushions, Odysseus lies asleep.

Squatting astride him is a hideous creature: flabby, tentacled. One tentacle is wrapped around his thigh. Another terminates in a tapered end that vanishes into his mouth. The GURGLING SOUND is linked to the movement of the creature, which is settling itself upon him.

The Storyteller steps back in horror. The doors KNOCK against the frame. The creature turns and sees the Storyteller.

Their eyes meet and we can see flashing over its face intimations of all the women it has been, including Penelope.

The force of light increases. The Storyteller is blinded. He tries to run. Sliding off Odysseus, the creature gives chase, skittering across the floor. It catches the Storyteller as he reaches the door. A tentacle snags his ankle. Gets a grip. And then drags him back, SCREAMING, into the room.

INT. THE DUNGEON.

The Storyteller is manacled to the wall. His eyes are pale, as white as ivory. His sight has been taken.

STORYTELLER

The men who died at Troy, they were lucky. You should have died, on the same day as Achilles, that time you and Ajax fought over his body. Any arrow could have made your name.

But now you're no one.

(shouting)

YOU'RE NO ONE? DO YOU HEAR?

INT. THE BEDROOM.

In disgust at his own addiction, Odysseus throws the bowl of lotus fruit against the wall, where it smashes. From under a cushion he brings out the abstract wooden carving, which he has been working on all this time. With infinite care, he scratches at it with a knife. Eventually he pauses.

He slides off the bed and picks up some of the fallen fruit. He eats, and a tremor runs through him, bringing peace of a kind. He staggers back towards the bed. But before reaching it, collapses. Circe enters the room. Kneeling by Odysseus, she checks his breathing. Her eye falls on the carved figure on the bed. She picks it up and knows what it means.

Odysseus sleeps with her, but he doesn't love her.

INT. THE DINING HALL.

A party is in full swing. Elpenor pours wine all over his face, ROARING WITH LAUGHTER as if this were a witticism. Another of Odysseus' men rides a lion through the room.

INT. THE BEDROOM.

Odysseus lies back, his head resting on the belly of a wolf. Here and there are the paraphernalia of chemical refinement.

Circe passes a shallow marble dish to Odysseus. It contains a purple powder. Odysseus regards it with a look of fear.

CIRCE

You never know until you go.

INT. THE DINING HALL.

Elpenor dances, grinning, spinning round wildly on the spot. He is red in the face, sweating. Spinning. Spinning. The other men and women CLAP in time to the MUSIC.

INT. THE BEDROOM.

Circe and Odysseus rub powder into their tear ducts. This kicks off a string of hallucinatory sequences.

FLASH

We are treated to a 30-second tour of the history of weaponry. From stones and spears to the bow and arrow. Then we see the Wooden Horse, which Odysseus created to take Troy. And on to the cannon and the Gatling gun. The atomic bomb. And from there to a drone, which flies over Lotus Island.

FLASH

Elpenor leans out of a high window. Exhausted from the dancing. Overweight. Sweatily wasted. The evening air soothes him. Glancing up, he sees a way to climb on to the roof.

FLASH

A 19th century schoolmaster in an old-fashioned schoolroom, wearing a mortar board with a tassel, points at a blackboard with a piece of chalk. His face is grey with chalk dust and he speaks in a pedantic, school-masterly voice.

SCHOOLMASTER

So after Odysseus and Ajax rescued the body of Achilles, there was a public debate as to which of the two heroes should be permitted to keep the armour as a reward. The great, god-made armour he had been given by his mother Thetis, and which had been forged in the fires of Hephaestus. The Greeks decided to give Achilles' shining armour to Odysseus, and Ajax lost his reason. Thinking he was killing Greeks, he slaughtered a flock of sheep.

The classroom of schoolboys start BLEATING like sheep.

FLASH

Ajax is covered in blood, surrounded by dead sheep. He's LAUGHING like a mad man, crying at the same time.

AJAX
(through his tears)
Why did they pick him?

When we look again it's not Ajax but Eurymachus who sits amid the scene of slaughter. It's Eurymachus covered in blood.

EURYMACHUS
(through his tears)
Why did she pick him?

FLASH

Elpenor stands on the edge of the roof. Gazing up at the night sky. It's beautiful, spangled with stars. He holds out both his arms triumphantly and then executes a swan dive off the roof. We fall with him. From a distance of fifty feet, the stone ground below rushes up to meet us.

FLASH

Odysseus and Circe sit astride an outsize sheep, which carries them into a cave. In the background we see the drone in the sky, watching them. In the darkness of the cave, they become aware of the Cyclops, who's manacled to the rock. He RATTLES his chains and RAGES, wrestling to break free. They come to a passage, which descends through the rock.

ODYSSEUS
Where are you taking me?

CIRCE
To learn the truth. About your past
and also of your future.

The passage comes out through an ornate gateway, which is divided into two. On one side, it's made of horn, as is clear from the fact it's adorned with the curving horns of deer. The other side is adorned with elephant tusks. On both sides, the gates are hung with jewelry made of horn or ivory. As the sheep carries Odysseus and Circe out through the gateway made of ivory, Odysseus plucks off an ivory ring and slides it onto his finger. It has a sharp point in the centre.

EXT. THE UNDERWORLD.

They descend into a valley. The sky is white, dotted with black stars. There is a misty lake, on the shore of which stands Richard Westmacott's statue of Achilles. Circe hands Odysseus a spade and he digs a trench. Then, after pouring a libation, he draws his sword and cuts the throat of the sheep. The blood gushes out, filling the trench. A ghostly figure emerges through the mist, rising out of the water of the lake. It is an old man, blind and crazy-looking.

CIRCE
 (sotto voce)
 The prophet Teiresias.

TEIRESIAS
 Odysseus! Most unlucky and
 cleverest of men! We know why
 you've come to the Underworld.
 You're here to know.

TEIRESIAS (CONT'D)
 No leaving here without knowledge,
 so stay and hear. Once I've slaked
 my blood-thirst, I'll tell you what
 you're longing to learn.

Odysseus sheathes his sword and steps back. Teiresias kneels and cups the blood to his mouth. The drink brings strength. His white eyes shine. Colour floods into his cheeks.

TEIRESIAS (CONT'D)
 It wasn't Troy that was sacked. It
 was Greece. It was you. While your
 men camped on the beaches, their
 homes were savaged. Their women
 ravaged or irresolute. Each ship
 that sailed for Troy launched a
 thousand Helens. And now your
 palace is packed with brats and
 braggarts. And a slattern smiles.
 Penelope is flattered. In her
 dreams, she sleeps with all of
 them. Do you hear, o hero?

As he speaks, Odysseus becomes increasingly distressed. He draws his sword and pushes Teiresias away with the point.

ODYSSEUS
 He's a liar!

CIRCE
 Are you sure of that?

They're interrupted by the approach of a woeful spirit. He's naked except for a bath robe, which is drenched in blood.

ODYSSEUS
 Agamemnon! What happened to you?

Agamemnon stoops to drink the blood.

AGAMEMNON
 My wife is what. Clytemnestra, my
 beloved. I conquered the world for
 her and brought it back. And she
 bathed me. Threw a robe around my
 shoulders.

(MORE)

AGAMEMNON (CONT'D)

Then picked up an axe behind my back, and swung it three times. The bitch. That blade bit. I slipped and slid in the blood. And as I died, blood sprayed from my mouth. She threw back her head. Shook and shuddered with delight. She took my blood on her face like the soil takes the spring rain.

While Agamemnon talks, Odysseus nervously rubs his thumb against his ivory ring. In the background, other figures are emerging from the water: ghastly, like a zombie horde.

AGAMEMNON (CONT'D)

And all for another man. A non-man, never my match in anything.

Among them we can see the ghosts of men and women, butchered soldiers, children who died in infancy. They all make for the trench of blood and crouch in order to drink.

AGAMEMNON (CONT'D)

Don't trust your wife, Odysseus.
Don't tell her the whole truth.

One ghost pushes the others out the way and stoops to drink deeply of the blood. He is handsome but haunted-looking. He glances at Odysseus and registers him for the first time.

ACHILLES

Odysseus, sacker of cities?

ODYSSEUS

I have a reputation for trickery, but don't let that fool you.

They smile and embrace.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

So how does it feel, to know the name of Achilles will be remembered forever, as the greatest warrior who ever lived?

Achilles laughs scornfully.

ACHILLES

My name! I'd rather be a no one, crawling on the surface of the earth, than a famous corpse. Some serf or grunt, who slogs his guts out at the plough. Better to be a slave among the living than a king among the dead.

He notices Circe.

ACHILLES (CONT'D)
You brought your wife?

ODYSSEUS
(correcting him)
Circe. A shape-shifter.

ACHILLES
Does she have other powers?

ODYSSEUS
If I marry her, she promises to
make me immortal.

Achilles grips his shoulder.

ACHILLES
If she can grant immunity from
death, then take it, man.

Odysseus measures these words. Meanwhile, among the ghosts,
the spirit of Ajax is on his hands and knees, trying to scoop
what remains of the blood in the trench. It's running out.

ODYSSEUS
Ajax! I'm glad to see you.

Ajax pretends not to hear.

ACHILLES
He hasn't forgiven you for winning
the contest for my armour. He
thought he was the better man.

ODYSSEUS
He was.
(to Ajax)
You were.

Ajax growls threateningly.

CIRCE
Odysseus, we need to leave. The
blood is running out.

The ghosts start to fight among themselves in their
desperation to get at what's left of the blood.

CIRCE (CONT'D)
Look out!

Odysseus turns to find Ajax advancing. Before he can draw his
sword, the big man has seized him. He's crushing him, and at
the same time leaning in at his neck, vampire-like, opening
his mouth in order to sink his teeth into Odysseus' throat.
Odysseus manages to get his left hand free and swipes it
across Ajax's forehead.

The raised point of his ivory ring cuts into the skin, causing a curtain of blood to descend over Ajax's face. Ajax cries out and releases Odysseus. The other ghosts move in, attracted like sharks by the blood. Ajax tries to fight them off but he's surrounded.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Odysseus!

Odysseus turns to see Circe surrounded by ghosts. He draws his sword and comes to her rescue, slashing and stabbing. Among the ghosts he fights are the spirits of Eurybates and the other men who died on the island of the Cyclops. He's taken aback to come face to face with Elpenor.

ODYSSEUS

You here too?

ELPENOR

Forgive me, my lord.

Odysseus stumbles. His sword is knocked from his hand. The ghosts move in on him. Nearby, Circe is also attempting to fight them off. She's outnumbered. Terrified.

CIRCE

Odysseus! Help me!

The ghosts continue to pile in on Odysseus. He seems to give in, as one of them sinks its teeth into his arm.

ODYSSEUS

No.

The ghosts pause in their vampiric business, bemused. Circe, who has been seized from every side, has the same experience.

CIRCE

What do you mean, no?

ODYSSEUS

This isn't happening.

FLASH

Circe and Odysseus are alone, surrounded by mist. The ghosts of the dead have disappeared. It's just the two of them.

CIRCE

How did you know?

ODYSSEUS

There are two gateways to the Underworld, the gate of horn and the gate of ivory. True visions pass through the former. Through the latter, false ones, dreams, insubstantial phantoms.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

We entered the Underworld through
the gate that was made of ivory.

He takes off his ivory ring and tosses it away.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

Also I felt well.

(beat)

I haven't felt well in years.

The mist dissipates, revealing the landscape around them.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

(amazed)

This is my home.

CIRCE

Many years from now. In one of a
thousand possible futures.

They enter the courtyard of the palace at Ithaca. It's deserted apart from an old man raking leaves. It is Odysseus in extreme old age. After a while, an elderly Penelope appears in the doorway to scold him.

ELDERLY PENELOPE

Will you come on inside? You're
going to catch your death.

ELDERLY ODYSSEUS

(aggressively)

Don't talk nonsense, woman.

Elderly Penelope tut-tuts before retreating into the house. Elderly Odysseus continues raking, but then stops. There's something wrong. He tries to call but no sound comes out. He sinks to his knees. Then topples forward and lies still. The fallen leaves blow this way and that around him.

CIRCE

If you stay with me, you won't just
live. You will never grow old.

Odysseus considers before making his reply.

ODYSSEUS

You can see for yourself what this
island is like. It's a small place.
Rocky. Unprepossessing. We like to
say that it's good for goats. Yet
for me, there's nowhere else that
means anything.

(beat)

It's the same with Penelope. You
could change yourself into someone
younger. Cleverer. More beautiful.
It wouldn't make a difference.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

(beat)

Penelope is my home.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

PENELOPE

He still slept with her.

MELANTHO

Have you noticed the way, if a man sleeps with someone other than his wife, no one judges him? He just says, "Yes, but I never really loved her." Or he says, "I'm a man. What did you expect?" But if a woman does the same, the world calls her a whore.

PENELOPE

I wonder why that is.

STORYTELLER

He never really loved her.

PENELOPE

He's a man. What did I expect?

She continues her weaving. In the background, we see Theano occupied in a task. Her face is bruised from a beating.

INT. CIRCE'S PALACE. THE BEDROOM.

Odysseus lies sprawled on the bed, beside a similarly sleeping figure whom we assume, at first, to be Circe. His eyes open and he reaches for some lotus powder in a bowl, which he pushes into his gums. The drug arouses him, and he turns to caress Circe. But when the sleeping figure stirs, we see it is not Circe. It is another Odysseus.

The second Odysseus grips his wrists, as the door bursts open and female figures hurry in. They grab Odysseus and press a damp cloth to his mouth, until his struggling ceases.

INT. THE DUNGEON.

Odysseus is chained to the same wall as the Storyteller. He goes through the stages of drug withdrawal.

Time passes.

INT. THE DUNGEON. WEEKS LATER.

Odysseus is himself again.

ODYSSEUS
I have a favour to ask.

STORYTELLER
Just one?

ODYSSEUS
When you tell my story, can you
play down this episode?

The Storyteller starts to LAUGH. They LAUGH together.

STORYTELLER
I've been thinking about your
request. That I should introduce a
new reality into storytelling.

ODYSSEUS
I got it back to front. We don't
need to introduce reality into
storytelling, but to introduce
storytelling into reality.

STORYTELLER
If by that you mean be creative
about our escape, then I agree.

ODYSSEUS
I mean more than that.

STORYTELLER
I know.

ODYSSEUS
She has her magic. We have ours.

STORYTELLER
You mean yours. You've improved a
lot since we came to the island.

ODYSSEUS
How many months has it been now?

STORYTELLER
Don't you mean years?

The vast double doors are unbolted and flung open, flooding the dungeon with sunlight. Odysseus cowers, dazzled by the brightness. The blind Storyteller is unaffected.

EXT. THE GARDEN.

It's an outdoor table in a sunny glade beside a cliff-edge. Fathoms down, the sea seethes. There are four places at the table. At three sit Circe, Odysseus and the Storyteller. The fourth seat is occupied by the Storyteller's lyre. A maid offers wine to Odysseus. Significantly, he refuses.

CIRCE

To reach Ithaca, there are two challenges you must face. The first is the song of the Sirens. Your storyteller's skill is strong, but compared to theirs, it's like the barking of a dog. Anyone who hears them forgets everything he knows. The only thing he'll think about is hearing more. And he will leap overboard and swim in search of the Sirens. And he will be consumed.

ODYSSEUS

What's the second challenge?

CIRCE

You'll come to a set of straits. An explosion of rocks and surf. There's no way round. But on one side, under the surface, squats Charybdis. A living whirlpool, she sucks the life from anything she touches. No escape from her, if your ship dips into her orbit.

ODYSSEUS

And on the other side?

CIRCE

A woman. Once famous for her beauty. But so haughty, so high and mighty, envious Aphrodite laced her pool with poison. She bathed. And now there has been a horrible transformation. In place of legs, six necks, six hissing snake-heads, which crane and plunge out of her cave, each terminating in flashing rows of teeth. The monster, Scylla.

STORYTELLER

Is it possible to pass this test?

CIRCE

It's not impossible.

EXT. THE BEACH.

The ship is ready to embark. Odysseus is on the beach, bidding farewell to Circe.

CIRCE

If you make it home, I'll transform your appearance, to whatever shape you need.

(MORE)

CIRCE (CONT'D)

So you may pass unrecognised in
your own country. And test
Penelope.

ODYSSEUS

I won't be doing that.

CIRCE

You wouldn't be you, if you didn't.

(beat)

But at the same time, I shall be
testing you. You told me once that
people are made of more than their
appearance. So the only way for you
to be changed back, to regain your
original form, is if your wife
gives you a kiss.

(beat)

But without being told.

ODYSSEUS

Why should I believe anything
you're telling me?

CIRCE

Have I ever lied to you?

ODYSSEUS

Ceaselessly.

CIRCE

I said I would help you overcome
the past. Did I keep my word?

ODYSSEUS

You showed me things no other man
has seen. But there's one thing you
never revealed.

CIRCE

What's that?

ODYSSEUS

Yourself.

Circe reaches in the folds of her cloak. She brings out the
wooden carving Odysseus has worked on. She hands it over.

CIRCE

There is no me.

ODYSSEUS

(taking it)

I don't believe that.

CIRCE

I'm a projection of your desire. No
more, no less.

(MORE)

CIRCE (CONT'D)

When you leave, a part of me will
die. To be born again when other
travellers come.

The Storyteller calls from the ship.

STORYTELLER

We'll miss the wind!

ODYSSEUS

Thank you for letting me go.

CIRCE

I didn't, my lord.

He reaches and strokes her face. She sheds a tear.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Don't be fooled. This is a response
designed to touch your heart.

(beat)

I don't feel. I've often wondered
what it must be like.

He starts to wade out into the surf. She calls after him.

CIRCE (CONT'D)

Good luck with love!

(beat)

It doesn't bring everyone the
happiness they deserve.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. PENELOPE'S BATHROOM.

Penelope's maidservants pour steaming water into a bath, then
leave. Penelope enters and starts to disrobe.

EXT. THE COURTYARD.

Leiodes crosses the yard, a key in hand. He unlocks the door
to an outhouse to reveal it is filled with barrels of wine.
With relish, he prises the top off one of the barrels.

INT. THE STAIRCASE TO THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

Eurymachus climbs the stairs, and sees steam coming from the
trellis holes in the wall of the bathroom. Placing his face
to the wall, he tries to spy on Penelope in the bath.

INT. THE OUTHOUSE.

In order to reach the wine of the half-full barrel, Leiodes
has to reach down into it. He does so, precariously.

INT. THE STAIRCASE TO THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

The holes are too small for Eurymachus to be able to see. He rises to the door to the marital bedroom and examines its design. There are many mechanisms, any of which looks as if it could be the one that opens it.

INT. THE outhouse.

A pair of hands grabs hold of Leiodes and tips him over, so he descends headfirst into the barrel. The hands hold him firm as he struggles, drowning him in the wine.

INT. THE STAIRCASE TO THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

Halfheartedly, Eurymachus tries a couple of the mechanisms to see if they'll open the door. Without success. After a while, he notices Melantho watching him.

EURYMACHUS

I was looking for you.

MELANTHO

I don't mind that you don't love me. As long as you desire me. So long as, after you're married, I still get to see you.

EXT. THE SHIP AT SEA.

On deck, Adrastus practises his knife-throwing. He throws his blade at a target he has set up. Each time, he scores a hit. Meanwhile, Eurylochus plays backgammon with another of the men, Perimedes (played by the same actor as Eurydamas). Another group of men leans over the stern, watching some dolphins, which curve and swoop through the wake.

Odysseus STRUMS on the Storyteller's lyre.

ODYSSEUS

So hollow-hearted Circe was defeated. Defied by his refusal to be deified. And she entreated him to reveal what it was, this thing that bound him to his woman.

As he speaks, Odysseus conjures the ghost of Circe on the one hand, and Penelope on the other. He's learning. But for now, his visions are weak. They have a tendency to flicker.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

And he replied, "There is no name for it. And yet we know."

STORYTELLER

I've told you, you must believe.

ODYSSEUS

*"There is nothing better than when
a man and a woman live together in
oneness of spirit."*

A steadier vision of Penelope touches his face.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

"What she thinks, he thinks."

Odysseus reaches for her hand. His hand closes over it. And for a moment, it has substance. He actually grips it. He glances at the Storyteller in triumph.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

"What he feels, she feels."

Smiling, the Storyteller picks up the refrain.

STORYTELLER

*"It gives joy to their friends and
infuriates their enemies."*

ODYSSEUS

*"And no one knows it better than
the two of them."*

After Odysseus falls silent, the Ghostly Penelope vanishes. He lays down the lyre and looks out over the water, which has become becalmed. Yet a current is drawing them on.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

When I was at Troy, on the beach at night, I could feel her changing moods. It was as if I could see her emotions, like patterns on the surface of the sea.

The ship's sail flaps, slack in the dying breeze.

The men are at their oars. Adrastus hands out pieces of wax, which they knead in their hands until the wax softens.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

(calling out)

However we suffer, whatever we say,
you're not to release us.

(to Eurylochus)

You just keep tightening the ropes.

As each of the men puts wax in his ears, the soundtrack reduces in volume, until finally it's reduced to SILENCE.

With heavy ropes, Eurylochus is binding Odysseus and the Storyteller to the mast of the ship.

They are back to back, Odysseus facing forwards, the Storyteller backwards. We can see the mouth of Odysseus move, but we can't hear what he's saying. As Eurylochus pulls the ropes tight, we glimpse Penelope pulling tight the threads of her tapestry.

The water around the ship mists and shifts. Sinuous shapes become apparent, suggesting the contours of naked women.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

The old nurse, Eurycleia, is in a corner of the room, bent over some needlework. Penelope has already begun a depiction of her husband's encounter with the Sirens.

PENELOPE

So it was his idea that his storyteller should hear it too.

STORYTELLER

Yes.

PENELOPE

For a singer to hear the song of the Sirens-- didn't he fear the effect it would have on you?

STORYTELLER

I had to hear it. If I hadn't, it would have haunted me.

PENELOPE

One thing I've noticed. It's a dangerous business, sailing with Odysseus. None of his men survived.

STORYTELLER

Except for one.

PENELOPE

That's true.

STORYTELLER

You've asked me many questions. Now I want to ask you something.

(beat)

When did you stop loving him?

PENELOPE

I don't think I'll be needing you anymore today, if that's alright. I've made a lot of progress. And I find it helpful to stop when I know I could still go on.

STORYTELLER

Was it when Eurymachus made his intentions clear?

PENELOPE

You really want to know?

STORYTELLER

In my story, I've tried to show the whole man, with his vices as well as his virtues. But you've only commented on the negative. You've attacked him at every turn.

PENELOPE

There's been a lot to attack.

STORYTELLER

And a lot to praise.

PENELOPE

You want me to say what I really think of my husband? Very well. I think him a fool. I think him vain and vulnerable to flattery. I think him childish. Volatile, facetious, pompous. Self-indulgent.

STORYTELLER

You don't have to go on.

PENELOPE

I will. I think him the most brilliant man I ever met. Brilliant, and with the bravery to be kind. I think him a man. Do you want to know what I loved about him the most? What I loved most, more than any other quality, was his trickery. For him, nothing was simple. Nothing was straightforward. He would always look beyond, and go one better. He never trusted anyone. Not even me.

STORYTELLER

Is that really true?

She glances at Eurycleia, who is engrossed in her work.

PENELOPE

I always knew, if he came back, it would be in disguise. So he could test people in the palace, and see if they were loyal. Including me. He had his insecurities, like anyone. But then, you have to understand, I am the same.

(MORE)

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

We're the same person, he and I. So ask yourself: could he fool me? I always knew, and he would have known, that if he came back in disguise, I would recognise him as soon as he walked through the door. The moment he opened his mouth, I would know it was him. But being who I am, I wouldn't reveal it. Not to him, or anyone. And yes, since you want to know. It would hurt, to find myself being tested. I would be angry about that. So how would I respond? In the same way as he would, if he were in my place.

STORYTELLER

You mean if he came back, for example, disguised as a storyteller?

Eurycleia bends more intently over her work.

PENELOPE

If he came back with his appearance magically transformed. In the form of an old blind man, and provoked the Guests deliberately to beat him up, because he knew it was the only way he could get to see me. Just so we're clear, I'm speaking hypothetically--

STORYTELLER

Yes of course. But hypothetically, what would you do?

PENELOPE

I would listen to his story. And at every stage, I would find a way to provoke him. I would criticise his conduct. I would question his motivations. I would let him believe I was turning towards another man. Because, trickster though he was, I could match him in this. I knew Odysseus as well as I know myself. And he knew me. He would know what I was doing. He would realise. If he had come back, to take revenge on the men in his house, who had abused his servants and oppressed his wife, we wouldn't have to agree on any plan. Each would know, without being told, what the other was intending. There would be no need for words.

The soundtrack cuts to SILENCE. Penelope and the Storyteller continue to talk, but we can't hear what they're saying.

EXT. THE SHIP AT SEA.

This scene also plays out in SILENCE.

Odysseus and the Storyteller writhe in their bonds, caught between ecstasy and agony as they listen to the song of the Sirens. The ropes cut into their flesh. Blood oozes out.

The footage is interspersed with that of Eurymachus and Melanthe having sex, passionately but without love.

EXT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. COURTYARD.

This scene also plays out in SILENCE.

A young dog sniffs around the entrance to an outhouse. Coming out from under the door is a trickle of wine, which he licks at. Then, with a paw, he pushes the door. It swings open to reveal a gruesome scene. A barrel of wine has overturned and the floor is soaked in red liquid. Among it sprawls the body of Leodes, his lifeless eyes staring.

EXT. THE CLIFFS AT ITHACA. SUNSET.

Sound is restored with the noise of WAVES BREAKING ON A SHORE. The surface of the sea reflects a golden sunset.

In the distance, a ship approaches. A SENTINEL on the cliff top hares off in the direction of the palace.

EXT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. A CORNER OF THE GREAT HALL.

EURYMACHUS

Where was it when you saw it?

SENTINEL

Passing the headland. Shall I tell the men?

Eurymachus hesitates.

EURYMACHUS

Do you believe in the gods? Do you think they care what we do?

SENTINEL

They care only whether you offer them the best parts of the bull at the sacrifice.

EURYMACHUS

Do you know how Zeus took power in Olympus? He castrated his father, Cronus, with a sickle. And afterwards, he was so horrified by what he'd done, he threw the sickle away. And it landed in the sea and formed the island of Scheria, the farthest of the Western Isles.

SENTINEL

My lord.

EURYMACHUS

All of which, it goes without saying, is aetiology. Which is another word for nonsense. No one knows anything about the gods, whether they reward our good deeds and punish the bad, or if it's the other way around.

SENTINEL

Shall I tell the men?

EURYMACHUS

Tell them.

(calling after him)

And find the priest. Tell him to pick out two of our finest bulls.

EXT. THE HARBOUR AT ITHACA. THE BLUE HOUR.

The ship approaches harbour. When it's close to docking, TELEMACHUS leaps ashore onto the small beach that occupies the crook of the port, lapped at by the water. He picks up a handful of wet gravel and holds it to his mouth, inhaling. He is glad to be home.

And the locals are glad to see him. Above all, to judge by appearances, a broadly smiling man, the TAVERNER, who offers him wine. NB Telemachus is played by the same actor who plays the older version of Adrastus.

TAVERNER

At home, I have something special.
To welcome you back.

TELEMACHUS

My mother will want to see me.

TAVERNER

There's always time for one.

As the two men approach the tavern, they are watched by the Small Boy who first brought the Storyteller to the palace. Once they have gone inside, he sets off at a run.

EXT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. DUSK.

Five MURDERERS depart by the main gate.

INT. THE TAVERN.

There's a fire going. The Taverner's handsome, effeminate young son is serving. The other men in the tavern are muted. They know about the death of Odysseus, but they're not sure if Telemachus knows. The Taverner is all smiles.

TAVERNER
Tell us about Sparta.

TELEMACHUS
Menelaus is a good man. And kind. A generous host.

TAVERNER
And Helen?

TELEMACHUS
(blushing)
What do you want to know?

TAVERNER
You saw her?

TELEMACHUS
Of course.

TAVERNER
And?

TELEMACHUS
She was pleasant.

The Taverner roars with laughter.

TAVERNER
We're talking about the most beautiful woman in the world. The cause of the Great War. Come on. Give us something more.

TELEMACHUS
She was a gracious hostess.

TAVERNER
But what did she look like?

Telemachus blushes again.

TELEMACHUS
It was hard to look at her. Her beauty was blinding.

The Taverner grins in delight.

TAVERNER
That's good.

TELEMACHUS
She looked like she was made of
gold.

The Taverner signals to his son to refill Telemachus' cup.
The boy does so, giving Telemachus a come-hither look.

TELEMACHUS (CONT'D)
I should be getting home.

TAVERNER
Not yet, not yet. I want to hear
more about Helen.

Later. Telemachus staggers out of the tavern, clearly the
worse for wear. Then he returns indoors to collect his bag
and spear. Then he staggers out again.

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN PASS. NIGHT.

The normal route from the harbour to the Palace goes via a
pass in the hills. On the higher side of it, in the shadow of
trees, wait the Murderers. One keeps watch on the path.

MURDERER ONE
Run through the plan again.

MURDERER TWO
There is no plan.

MURDERER ONE
Don't you think we ought to have a
plan?

MURDERER THREE is eating an apple. He spits out some pips.
He's calmer than the others and more menacing. You sense he's
done this sort of thing before.

MURDERER THREE
You want to know the plan?

MURDERER ONE
Yes.

MURDERER THREE
There are five of us and one of
him. That's the plan.

MURDERER FOUR
Eurymachus said to make it bloody.
So it looks like, whoever killed
Leiodes, is responsible.

MURDERER TWO
Some people are saying--

He breaks off nervously.

MURDERER THREE
What are they saying?

MURDERER TWO
They're saying it was you.

Murderer Three takes satisfaction in this.

MURDERER THREE
Is that what they're saying?

Their attention is caught by a hiss from MURDERER FIVE. Murderer Three draws his sword. Someone is approaching. But it turns out the person isn't approaching from below. He's approaching from above. It is the Storyteller, moving slowly in the near-darkness, feeling his way with his stick. He reaches the pass. Then he calls out in a quavering voice.

STORYTELLER
Is anyone there?

There's no sound in response. He turns off the path and moves hesitantly into the deeper darkness of the trees.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
You can't hide from the blind. I can sense three of you. No, four.

In a moment, there's a blade at his throat.

MURDERER THREE
Silence, you fool.

STORYTELLER
It was Eurymachus. He sent me.

MURDERER ONE
With a message?

STORYTELLER
A kind of message.

Murderer Five returns to his watch-post.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
Eurymachus has asked me to start working on a poem about him. An epic. A long-form story about his life and times. He thinks what happens tonight could be one of the big set-pieces.

MURDERER ONE
 (speculatively)
 The Eurymachey.

STORYTELLER
 That's it. He suggested I be
 present, to give the account
 credibility. Some real
 verisimilitude.

Murderer Three is suspicious of this explanation.

MURDERER THREE
 You can stay. As long as you stay
 silent.

Quietly, the storyteller brings a lyre out of his bag. He
 PLUCKS A C-NOTE, which draws a grimace from Murderer Three.
 He strums it more gently, so it barely makes a noise.

STORYTELLER
*This is the story of a son.
 Telemachus.*
 (speaking softly)

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
*The only heir to Odysseus' disused
 throne. This dissolute adolescent
 deserved to die for insulting brave
 Eurymachus. But if his throat was
 cut, it had to be cut discreetly.
 So six assassins were sent--*

MURDERER THREE Five.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
 Six sounds better.
 (beat)
*They crouched like Furies, waiting
 for their prey. But then--*

He TWANGS the strings of the lyre discordantly.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
*A dissonant note. A blind man
 stumbled by.*

MURDERER THREE
 What's this?

STORYTELLER
*An old telltale or professional
 mumbler, fumbling in the dark. To
 say some nonsense about being sent
 by Eurymachus. All lies, of course.
 His real motive was different.*

MURDERER TWO

What was his real motive?

STORYTELLER

Murder.

(beat)

To kill the killers. To butcher those with butchery on their minds.

(beat)

How do you like my poem? It's coming along, I think.

The Storyteller gazes ahead of him sightlessly, with an appearance of benevolence. Murderer One and Murderer Two exchange looks. They start to LAUGH. Murderer Three is less amused. He raises his hand against the Storyteller.

MURDERER THREE

You're asking for another beating.

He attempts to strike him but the Storyteller moves aside. Murderer Three looks down to discover the handle of a dagger protruding from his stomach. The other Murderers come to his aid. The Storyteller strikes one to the floor with his lyre, which breaks. He uses a shard of it to stab another in the eye. Another he strangles with the strings.

Within a moment, all the Murderers are dead. The face of the Storyteller, who hasn't suffered a scratch, is impassive.

EXT. ITHACA. BELOW THE MOUNTAIN PASS.

Telemachus trudges uphill, SINGING raucously. He passes the spot where, moments before, there was a violent struggle.

Nothing is amiss. The night is quiet apart from the HOOT of a scops owl. Hearing SOMEONE APPROACHING, he levels his spear. It is the swineherd, EUMAEUS, and the Small Boy.

TELEMACHUS

Eumaeus! It's good to see you.

The portly Eumaeus takes a moment to catch his breath.

EUMAEUS

(panting)

No words. Follow me.

INT. THE SWINEHERD'S HUT.

To enter the hut, they pass the surrounding enclosures where the pigs live. Inside, the place is lit by a fire, which is tended by Theano, Penelope's maid from the palace. Eumaeus throws a sheepskin over a stool for Telemachus.

EUMAEUS

New girls were brought while you were away. This one had the bad luck to attract the attention of Antinous.

There is an immediate mutual fascination between Telemachus and Theano. Each finds it hard to look at the other, and hard not to look. The Small Boy sits down by the fire. Eumaeus offers Telemachus a cup of wine. He refuses.

EUMAEUS (CONT'D)

So what did you learn?

Telemachus glances at Theano, then at Eumaeus.

TELEMACHUS

A rumour from years ago. Menelaus said, on his journey home, he was shipwrecked. In a strange land, with even stranger customs. And while he was there, he heard a story about my father. That he was held prisoner on an island, in thrall to an enchantress.

He glances at Theano again, who blushes.

EUMAEUS

Theano, you should be in bed.

She gestures at the Small Boy.

THEANO

And him?

EUMAEUS

He can stay.

The Small Boy grins. With a last look at Telemachus, Theano goes out and lies down in a sleeping area outside the main room of the hut. Nearby we can hear the MUFFLED GRUNTS of the pigs. The swineherd lowers his voice.

EUMAEUS (CONT'D)

There have been developments in your absence. Your father--

Telemachus looks at him sharply. Eumaeus raises a palm.

EUMAEUS (CONT'D)

He's close at hand.

TELEMACHUS

You mean you've seen him?

He realises Eumaeus is looking over his shoulder. Telemachus turns, to see the Storyteller in the doorway. He is reaching out his arms to Telemachus. There are tears in his eyes.

INT. THE PALACE AT ITHACA. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS. DAWN.

It's early but there's a grey light in the room. Penelope is at her loom, at work on the shroud. On closer inspection, it's clear she isn't weaving it. She is unweaving it. With elaborate care, she is unpicking the tapestry she has woven by day. The shroud has been a ruse to play for time.

A CREAK makes her pause. Is someone spying on her? She dismisses the thought and continues.

INT. THE STAIRCASE TO THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS. CONT.

Melantho descends the stairs. At the bottom, Antinous waits. Their eyes meet. She gives him a meaningful nod. With a grim expression, Antinous starts to climb the stairs.

INT. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS. CONT.

Antinous' hand appears on Penelope's shoulder.

ANTINOUS (O.S.)
(softly)
We think it's time you showed
yourself to your Guests.

INT. THE GREAT HALL. SOON AFTERWARDS.

Antinous rouses the Guests, who sleep around the hall, some on tables and benches, others in alcoves.

ANTINOUS
Wake up! The Queen of Ithaca has
something she wants to say.

The Guests awake to this vision: Penelope entering the hall, pale, still in her nightgown, which is more revealing than she would like.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)
We don't yet know who was
responsible for the death of
Leiodes. What's clear is that
Ithaca is sliding into lawlessness.
Which is why, Penelope believes,
the time for action is now. The
people need a king. Odysseus'
funeral will take place at noon
today. And by sundown, she will
have chosen another husband.

There is a pause, as they wait for her to speak.

PENELOPE

My Guests, you have been unbelievably patient. You've waited years, without a word of complaint. And I have felt flattered. Because I always knew it could only be my character you were interested in. Any beauty I had was lost to me the day my husband set sail for Troy. Yet something may be salvaged if I can find another husband to replace him. The question is: how? I have decided there must be a contest, as there was for my first marriage.

(beat)

This time, an archery contest.

ANTINOUS

What's this?

There's a ripple of LAUGHTER, whose origin is traced to the Storyteller, reclining in an alcove at the back of the room.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

This was never agreed on.

EURYMACHUS

What's the trouble, Antinous?
You're afraid you'll lose?

ANTINOUS

It's Eurymachus. He put her up to it. Everyone knows he's the best archer in Ithaca. I've heard he even out-skilled Odysseus.

Eurymachus is pleased: he believes that Penelope has favoured archery because she knows about his particular skill.

EURYMACHUS

Your voice has taken on a strange, girlish quality. There has been no conspiracy. The greatest fighter the world has ever known was brought down by an arrow. And the archer in question was the lover of the world's most beautiful woman. Why shouldn't archery be the method by which the man is chosen?

As he speaks, however, something makes Eurymachus grow pale. He has seen Telemachus among the crowd.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

(with faked warmth)

Telemachus! Welcome back!

The handsome young man acknowledges this with a sardonic nod, as he moves across the room to greet his mother.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

I was worried about you.

TELEMACHUS

(sardonically)

And why's that?

EURYMACHUS

You were gone for many days. The sea can be treacherous.

Telemachus embraces Penelope.

TELEMACHUS

Whatever my mother wishes, I shall support, according to my duty as her son. Let her set the terms of the contest. And to anyone who feels it isn't to their advantage, my advice is: get practising.

This is aimed at Antinous, who responds with a painful smile. Telemachus escorts Penelope from the room, as the Guests fall to talking among themselves.

IRUS

(sotto voce)

What will we do?

ANTINOUS

We may win, Irus. Did that possibility never occur to you?

IRUS

(sotto voce)

But if we don't?

Antinous shrugs.

ANTINOUS

Where is it written that the husband of Penelope has the divine right to rule Ithaca?

EXT. OPEN GROUND NEAR THE PALACE.

Eurymachus places a stone on a wooden stake. He retreats to a distance and drops to one knee, before firing an arrow. Then he approaches the target, to see which part of the stone he hit. His attention is caught by the Sentinel.

SENTINEL
 (out of breath)
 The men you sent. They were found
 among the trees beside the pass.

EURYMACHUS
 Telemachus?

The Sentinel shakes his head.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)
 Antinous, then.

SENTINEL
 Some of the men are saying it was
 Odysseus. That he made the journey
 back from the Land of the Dead.

EURYMACHUS
 You mean his ghost?

The Sentinel nods. Eurymachus lowers his eyes.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)
 I don't know why it is, but
 increasingly I have the feeling of
 being hunted or haunted. To me the
 shadows look long, even when the
 sun is at its height.
 (beat)
 I don't trust the old man.

The Sentinel says nothing.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)
 But if Odysseus were alive, where
 would he be hiding? Somewhere on
 the island, biding his time? In
 some chamber of the palace?

SENTINEL
 You think he's alive?

EURYMACHUS
 I'm frightened.

SENTINEL
 The contest favours you.

EURYMACHUS
 So who knows what Antinous is
 plotting? And where are the other
 Guests? Why aren't they practising?

SENTINEL

The storyteller is performing in the Hall. He's telling the Guests how King Odysseus died.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GREAT HALL. CONT.

The tables have been pushed against the walls. In the centre, the benches are arranged to resemble the benches of a ship. Some Guests are seated. Other take their seats. All have a distracted air, as if hypnotised. The Storyteller STRUMS a lyre. He PLUCKS A C-NOTE, which resonates.

STORYTELLER

We sailed for seven days and seven nights, slipping through the fingers of the sea. We proffered prayers to Poseidon, as stores ran low. Our spirits swung with the swell. We were haggard, hell-haunted, nearing we knew not where. Knowing we had one fear left to face. Not knowing how.

Oars have appeared in the hands of the Guests. Spray whips against their faces. The room melts away and they're out in open sea. Odysseus addresses them from the prow.

ODYSSEUS

We owe the gods a death-debt. What better day to pay it than today? Did we lose our nerve in the battle-charge at Troy? Trapped in the cave of the Cyclops, did we give up hope? And for anyone who survives, this ordeal may give them strength for greater trials to come.

Eurylochus raises an apologetic hand.

EURYLOCHUS

On one side of the straits, there's a whirlpool?

ODYSSEUS

That's right.

EURYLOCHUS

And on the other, a terrifying, six-headed monster?

ODYSSEUS

Yes.

EURYLOCHUS

And there's no other way round? We
have to go through?

ODYSSEUS

I'm afraid so.

EURYLOCHUS

(after a pause)

So what's this plan of yours?

BLACK-OUT:

INT. THE HULL OF THE SHIP.

The screen is entirely black.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

*Since Circe stole my sight, my
light had strengthened. It had
extended. Past, present and future
blended. Time ended. I could see
whatever was past, and what was
still to come. The present was all
around me like a sea.*

MUFFLED SOUNDS, and shades of light, gradually become
apparent. There is SCUFFLING. SUPPRESSED BREATHING. The men
are hunkered down in the restricted space of the hold.

ODYSSEUS

(sotto voce)

When you feel the drag of the
whirlpool, you keep the tiller
jammed, like this.

The Storyteller feels for Odysseus' face. He passes his
fingers over his features, as if for the last time. It's a
gesture of love. Odysseus grips his shoulder.

STORYTELLER

If I die, you must finish the
story. Do you promise?

ODYSSEUS

You're not going to die.

STORYTELLER

Do you promise?

ODYSSEUS

Whatever you say.

STORYTELLER

And none of your special effects.

ODYSSEUS

I don't know what you mean.

STORYTELLER

You rely too much on rhyme.

ODYSSEUS

Is that a crime?

(beat)

You have to let the words have
their way.

STORYTELLER

(smiling)

Whatever you say.

EXT. THE STRAITS OF SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

The ship approaches. Viewed from a distance, it looks deserted of men. It's a peaceful scene. There's no sign of any whirlpool. The cliffs on either side are steep, but the water calm. At least, it's calm until the ship gets closer, drawn on by the gentle breeze. Then a current stirs on the right side of the straits. It becomes circular. The whirlpool of Charybdis becomes apparent, growing stronger all the time. The tiller turns, manipulated by the Storyteller from within. The ship steers towards the left-hand side of the straits.

INT. THE HULL OF THE SHIP. CONT.

As the ship proceeds, Odysseus peers out through a hatch in the hull, scanning upwards for the cave of Scylla. All he can see is the craggy face of the cliff. Then, far up among the rocks, what looks like a snake emerges. It's followed by five others, which extend infinitely, silently, as they unravel down towards him. They are the monstrous heads of Scylla. Odysseus moves aside, afraid of being seen.

There's a pause. Then the boat lurches to a halt, its progress blocked by one of Scylla's heads. Odysseus gives the signal. His men open the porthole hatches and fire grappling hooks, with ropes attached to them, at the cliff. Some catch on spars of rock. The ropes take the strain, preventing the ship from being drawn into the whirlpool.

EURYLOCHUS

(sotto voce)

And now?

ODYSSEUS

(sotto voce)

We have to hope she's hungry.

EXT. THE STRAITS OF SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS. CONT.

Scylla's six terrifying heads prowl around the ship, sniffing for an entrance. On deck, manoeuvred by pulleys and ropes, a decoy man rises from among a pile of fishing nets. It is a kind of scarecrow. His head is built around a three-pronged grappling hook, whose rope extends down his body and leads to the mast, around which it is securely bound. It's essentially a large scale fish-hook, with the decoy man as bait. Scylla's heads home in, surrounding him. One rises, jaws agape, about to take a bite. Then she hesitates.

INT. THE HULL OF THE SHIP. CONT.

There's a creaking. The pull of Charybdis is growing ever stronger. Will the ship take the strain? Otherwise there's no sound. No evidence of Scylla.

SOMEONE (O.S.)
(sotto voce)
Has she gone?

Korax WHINES. Adrastus tries to silence him but the dog BARKS. A baleful eye appears at each of the portholes. Then they disappear. There's a pause, and-- BANG! One of the heads has smacked down on the deck. BANG! Another crashes into the side of the ship like a battering ram. The wood splinters, starting to give. And again. And again. One of the hooks pulls loose from the cliffs. Korax is BARKING like mad.

A VOICE (O.S.)
Release the ropes!

ODYSSEUS
First we have to catch her!

EURYLOCHUS
I'll go.

ODYSSEUS
Eurylochus, wait!

EURYLOCHUS
I've gone.

He has raised the hatch and is climbing through it.

EXT. THE STRAITS OF SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

Scylla is so intent on battering the ship, she hasn't seen Eurylochus. The whirlpool has grown broader and deeper. The ship is leaning in the direction of the centre, from which emerges a GROANING SOUND. Struggling to retain his balance, Eurylochus runs to the scarecrow and pulls the grappling hook loose from the decoy. He brandishes it like an axe.

EURYLOCHUS

Scylla! Over here!

All six of Scylla's heads rear up, homing in. At the same time, Odysseus emerges from the hold, sword in hand.

ODYSSEUS

Scylla! Over here!

Three of the heads turn their attention to Odysseus. Then more men emerge from the hold, including young Adrastus, brandishing his knife.

Each signals to get the attention of a head. Six single-combats take place, the crucial one being that between Eurylochus and the monster. She strikes at him and misses. He strikes back with the hook and misses. She seizes him in her jaws. He's done for. But before he goes, he plunges the hook into the side of the monster's mouth.

EURYLOCHUS

This is for Eurybates!

She rears back in pain. The other heads break off their battles to commiserate. Then regroup for another attack.

ODYSSEUS

Cut the ropes!

The men below slice through the ropes holding the ship to the cliff. It starts to move, sucked into the vortex. The rope around the mast is now attached to one of Scylla's heads, so when the ship is dragged to the farther side of the straits, Scylla is being dragged out of her cave. Charybdis increases the force of her vortex. Deep in the whirlpool, we catch a glimpse of teeth and a ravenous gullet. On deck, Adrastus is confronted by one of Scylla's heads. Taking careful aim, he throws his knife-- and misses. The blade glances off the sclerotic skin. The head homes in and swallows Adrastus whole. The whirlpool is starting to erode away the base of the cliff, causing rocks to tumble. Some men release a rowing boat at the back of the boat. As it hits the water, they jump in and start to row, while others leap in from above. Some of Scylla's heads have got tangled in the ropes with the grappling irons, which swing through the air with a lethal trajectory. Korax is BARKING furiously from the gunwale. Awaiting his moment, he leaps onto one of Scylla's heads and sinks his teeth in. The head rears back and Korax is dislodged. He falls into the water and is swept away. By now Odysseus has dragged up the Storyteller from the hold. A rope swings past and he grabs it, letting himself be lifted into the air by one of Scylla's heads, and taking the Storyteller with him. Meanwhile, the ship is circling ever closer to the vortex, pulling Scylla further from her cave. One of her heads doubles back and glares at Odysseus and the Storyteller, who are suspended from her neck. At the crucial moment, Odysseus drops into the rowing boat, which is passing underneath.

More of the cliff crumbles and Scylla is dragged from her cave, just as the ship disappears into the gaping maw of Charybdis. We catch a glimpse of the host body. It has the torso of a woman, beautiful from the face to the waist, from which sprout the horrible necks and heads. Then, with six unearthly female SHRIEKS, this hybrid is dragged down and disappears. In the process of swallowing Scylla, the vortex of Charybdis is simultaneously defeated. It ceases whirling. But the sea still churns. The men in the rowing boat are safe. Or so it seems. With a last effort, one of Scylla's heads rises from the water, rears up and comes crashing down. Odysseus moves the Storyteller out of the way and himself is struck. The rowing boat is shattered.

The head disappears, causing a last great suction as it goes, dragging down with it all the surviving men, apart from Odysseus and the Storyteller. They are left clinging to a broken spar of wood. The sea is calm. A current carries them out of the straits into open sea.

EXT. ITHACA. NEAR THE PALACE. MIDDAY.

It is the funeral of Odysseus. There is a pyre. Musicians LAMENT. The people of Ithaca WAIL. Telemachus and Penelope stand on a raised platform built into the pyre. Penelope is holding the death shroud she has been weaving. It is folded. All we can see is the top section, which shows Odysseus and the Storyteller hearing the song of the Sirens. She places the shroud on the body that is to be burned. Its face is concealed by a death-mask in the likeness of Odysseus. She steps back. Telemachus holds up a torch, showing it to the people. They LAMENT louder. On higher ground, apart from the others, stands the Storyteller: thoughtful, remembering.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRAITS OF SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

We have seen this moment before. The few surviving men are in the rowing boat. The sea churns. With a final effort, one of Scylla's heads rises from the water and comes lashing down. Yet it is heading not for the Storyteller but for Odysseus. The Storyteller senses it and moves to push Odysseus out the way. So in the event, it is the Storyteller and not Odysseus who is struck by Scylla. The boat breaks into smithereens.

EXT. ITHACA. NEAR THE PALACE.

Telemachus touches the torch to the pyre and it catches fire. He and his mother descend. As the flames lick round the body, the top section of the death shroud unfolds and we see that what is beneath it is blank. It is not the shroud that Penelope has been weaving, but a substitute.

EXT. OPEN SEA.

Odysseus is clinging to a piece of wreckage. With his free hand, he grips the unconscious Storyteller. He climbs out of the water, dragging the Storyteller with him. The Storyteller regains consciousness, but he's very weak.

Later. The weather has changed. The sky is white and overcast. It is cold. Both men are unconscious.

When Odysseus wakes, he turns and looks at the Storyteller, afraid that he has died. He touches his face and the Storyteller's eyes open. His face is grey. He's close to death. But peaceful and accepting of his fate.

STORYTELLER

When the Sirens sang to you, what did you hear in their song?

ODYSSEUS

What do you mean?

STORYTELLER

They sing to everyone whatever will mean the most. This differs from man to man.

ODYSSEUS

They said they knew me better than I knew myself. They knew everything that had happened to me. They said that they understood.

The Storyteller closes his eyes.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)

What did you hear?

The Storyteller's voice is faint as he replies.

STORYTELLER

To me, they sang about singing, about storytelling.

It is increasingly painful for him to speak.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

They said that whatever happens, however bad things get, the solution is the same. You tell a better story.

ODYSSEUS

You must have liked that.

STORYTELLER

When you get home, Circe said you can take whatever shape you need.

Odysseus nods. The Storyteller sighs. Death is taking him.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
You'll make a good me.

Odysseus touches the Storyteller's face again but there's no response. Out of the winter sky, snowflakes start to fall. He puts his arms around the old man for a final embrace.

Later. It's snowing hard. And it's no longer Odysseus embracing the Storyteller. His appearance has transformed. What we see is the sight of two identical Storytellers: one alive, embracing the other, who is dead. Finally the living Storyteller (a transformed Odysseus) releases the dead Storyteller. The body floats away among the falling snow.

EXT. ITHACA. NEAR THE PALACE.

The pyre is blazing. The Ithacans LAMENT. Penelope is looking at the Storyteller and he's looking back at her. Her look says: *I know you better than you know yourself. I know everything that has happened to you. And I understand.*

After a while, he leaves, heading for the palace. A watchful Eurymachus notices him slipping away.

INT. THE GREAT HALL. LATER.

The Storyteller helps Eurycleia and Theano take down the weaponry from the walls of the Hall. They are laying the swords and spears on a blanket. Then they freeze as they hear SOMEONE APPROACHING. It is Eurymachus. He moves to the table and pours himself a cup of wine. He drinks.

EURYMACHUS
Shall we pour a libation? No, not today. Do the gods deserve our worship? That's the question.

He waits for their answer. None comes.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)
When they take the best men and leave us with the worst. Standing out there just now, I couldn't bear it. The thought that Odysseus was gone. That I'd never see him again or hear his voice.

He glances at the Storyteller.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)
It's strange, but you remind me of him. I don't know what it is but there's something about you. You loved him. Perhaps that's it.
(MORE)

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

And so did I.

(beat)

But I also hated him. Why did I hate him? It isn't easy to say, but I think it's because he was a lot like me. Except that he was better.

Neither of the maidservants has moved a muscle since Eurymachus came into the room. He's toying with them, delaying the moment he'll say what's on his mind.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

(casually)

The real question, though, is what on earth you're all doing here.

There is a pause.

STORYTELLER

It was Penelope's request. She's afraid the weapons are being damaged by smoke.

EURYMACHUS

You'll have to do better than that.

There's another pause. Then Theano dares to speak.

THEANO

Eurymachus, what are you saying? You of all people should know the kind of woman she is. Penelope is concerned that after the archery, there will be a brawl. How do you think Antinous will react, if he doesn't win? This is why she asked us to remove the weapons. For the same reason that no one will be allowed to take weapons into the contest. Is that so surprising? Or is it exactly the kind of thought or forethought you would expect from a woman like Penelope?

Eurymachus looks at Theano. She meets his gaze.

EURYMACHUS

I never have any idea what Penelope is really thinking.

(beat)

This is her request?

THEANO

Her request.

EURYMACHUS

(at length)

Carry on, then. Who am I to
contradict the orders of Penelope?

And with that, he leaves them to it.

INT. THE GREAT HALL. EARLY AFTERNOON.

The Guests queue up to enter the Hall. Two servants act as gate-keepers, collecting their weapons in turn. Irus pushes past, carrying two large amphorae.

IRUS

More wine for the feast.

Once everyone is in, the doors are shut. At one end of the Hall there is a raised platform, into which twelve axes are fixed in settings. They crisscross the lines in such a way that a channel is created by their curved blades, through which, in theory, an arrow might be fired.

Penelope and Telemachus are seated on the balcony that looks down on the Guests, who are taking their seats in the Hall below. The Storyteller reclines casually beside the fire that occupies the centre of the room. He strums on his lyre, playing a familiar ROMANTIC MELODY. Antinous rises.

ANTINOUS

Silence!

The Storyteller continues playing.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

Are you deaf, as well as blind?

The Storyteller falls silent.

TELEMACHUS

Antinous, how dare you give orders
to my servants? You're not the
master here. Until my mother
remarries, that's me.

He is standing on the balcony, looking down on the room.

ANTINOUS

It's a shame your father isn't here
to teach you some manners.

TELEMACHUS

So now you're wishing my father
were alive? I never thought there
would be anything we could agree
on. Now be seated. Or are you deaf,
as well as blind?

He speaks with such authority that Antinous is taken aback. Glancing around, he finds no support from the other Guests.

TELEMACHUS (CONT'D)

There lies the challenge. Whoever can fire an arrow down the line, without touching the axes, shall be king in Ithaca. He will marry my mother. There will be no dispute.

EURYDAMAS

What if no one succeeds?

EURYMACHUS

Don't second-guess the gods, Eurydamas. If there's a man among us who is worthy to marry Penelope, the gods will guide his arrow.

Telemachus gestures at his mother.

TELEMACHUS

You see the prize. There is no one to compare with her in Greece-- not in sacred Pylos, not in Argos or Mycenae, nor here in Ithaca or anywhere on the mainland.

A servant brings forward the bow of Odysseus. Another brings a quiver crammed with arrows. The youngest Guest, Amphinomus, is the first to step forward. He looks up at Penelope.

AMPHINOMUS

My father told me, when I left for Ithaca, that I should return with Penelope as my bride, or not at all. So if I fail in this challenge, may I perish. And the other Guests, too. If I can't marry her, the idea of anyone else doing it torments me.

He is shaking as he stoops to pick up the bow. It takes several attempts before he can fit the arrow to the string. Then he drops to one knee. Takes aim as well as he can. When he fires, the arrow strikes the first of the axes, deflecting off at an angle. Pale, Amphinomus returns to his seat.

TELEMACHUS

Who's next?

There's a pause. Peisander takes a long drink of wine and approaches the platform. He seems strangely cheerful.

PEISANDER

I had a dream last night. Do you want to know what I dreamt?

(MORE)

PEISANDER (CONT'D)

I dreamt that we were feasting in this hall. I was clowning about and making everyone laugh.

He LAUGHS, as he remembers.

PEISANDER (CONT'D)

But then I noticed that the food you were eating was soaked in blood. And it was only your mouths that laughed. Your eyes were full of tears. So I tried harder, because I wanted your eyes to be laughing too.

(laughing harder)

But the more I tried, the more your eyes were weeping. And the room was awash with blood like an abattoir.

His LAUGHTER breaks over the silence of the room, until it finally dies out. He takes the test and fails.

And so it goes. One by one, the Guests try and fail.

Finally, only Antinous and Eurymachus remain. Antinous goes first. When he fails, he struggles to disguise his anger. At the back of the room, Irus surreptitiously lifts the lid of one of the amphorae he brought in, which is filled with weapons. Now it is Eurymachus' turn. He comes forward and climbs the platform. He looks up at Penelope.

EURYMACHUS

I don't want to cast doubt on Penelope's beauty, but it has occurred to me that some of the men here may have been motivated by their desire to be king in Ithaca. That's not the case with me. I've loved this woman all my adult life. When I look at her, I have a sense of the man I want to be.

He picks up the bow and fits an arrow to it.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

I call on Apollo to guide me. May this arrow fly as straight and true as my love is for Penelope.

He focuses in on the target. He fires.

His arrow passes the first eleven axe-heads without touching them. But as it passes the last, the fletching brushes the blade, which slightly alters the arrow's flight before it strikes the wall beyond. There is an UPROAR from the Guests, who don't know if Eurymachus has succeeded. A servant checks.

After a pause, he shakes his head. Again there is an UPROAR, which subsides at the sight of EURYMACHUS' raised palm.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Penelope, you set the challenge. I call on you to judge the winner.

Penelope hesitates. The silence grows. And then into it, comes the sound of music. It is the Storyteller, playing his ROMANTIC MELODY. He seems to be playing absentmindedly. But eventually he notices that everyone is looking at him.

STORYTELLER

Might I be allowed a turn?

This absurd idea-- a blind man competing in an archery contest-- provokes LAUGHTER from the Guests.

ANTINOUS

This man is mocking us again!
Someone throw him out!

Silence falls as Penelope rises.

PENELOPE

Every man in the room is entitled to a try.

EURYMACHUS

Are you saying that, if he succeeds, you'll marry him?

PENELOPE

Is he likely to succeed?

There is a pause.

ANTINOUS

Let him have a go, if he wants to make a fool out of himself.

PEISANDER

He's drunk, that's what it is. As men grow older, they can't cope with so much wine.

Peisander, who is drunk himself, takes the Storyteller by the hand, and leads him up to the platform.

PEISANDER (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the final candidate for Penelope's hand in marriage.

He spins the Storyteller round, before abandoning him, so in theory the old man has no idea which way to face. Peisander makes his way to the far end of the line of axes. A nearby Guest gestures, asking what he thinks he's doing.

PEISANDER (CONT'D)

(with a grin)

It's the safest place to stand.

The Storyteller's blind eyes stray through the room, up to the balcony, and down again. He seats himself on the stool, facing in the wrong direction, which stirs more LAUGHTER from the Guests. But then, with practised ease, he picks up the bow. In one movement, he draws an arrow from the quiver and fits it to the string. Then turns and lowers himself onto one knee, his white eyes staring down the line. At the other end, Peisander stoops to look along the channel.

The Storyteller fires his arrow. It flies past all the axes without touching them and drills into the eye of Peisander. Peisander's body arches back. Then he slumps.

There is silence.

Telemachus kisses his mother and she retreats with the other women into the Women's Quarters. Telemachus stays on the balcony. He has a bow, several arrows, two swords. The Storyteller empties the quiver, which contains only four arrows, onto the floor. Then he turns to the Guests.

STORYTELLER

You dogs! You never thought I would return from Troy. So you broke into my house. You abused my servants. And you tried to force my wife to marry against her will. But now death surrounds you.

Eurymachus is very pale.

EURYMACHUS

Who are you?

STORYTELLER

You have two choices. Leave and live. Or stay and die.

The Guests exchange glances.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

This is your chance to leave.

ANTINOUS

If anyone takes a step towards those doors--

STORYTELLER

Amphinomus, you should leave. Go back to your father.

Amphinomus hesitates.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Tell him Odysseus has returned to his ancestral home. And everything will be forgiven. But leave.

ANTINOUS

This man is an impostor. We always said he wasn't blind. But that doesn't mean he's Odysseus. And even if he is, there's a hundred of us and only one of him.

Eurydamas has edged his way around behind the Storyteller.

STORYTELLER

Ninety-eight of you. Leiodes is dead. And now Peisander too.

Eurydamas raises his knife to attack. TWANG! An arrow flies through the air and takes him down. It was fired by Telemachus on his balcony.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Ninety-seven. And two of us.
(to Amphinomus)
Leave!

ANTINOUS

He's a conman.

Antinous takes a sword from Irus' secret store. He hands it to Amphinomus.

ANTINOUS (CONT'D)

Make up for your failure in the contest. Show us you're a man.

Amphinomus hesitates. But he doesn't have it in him to walk away. He emits a BATTLE CRY and charges at the Storyteller. An arrow from Telemachus hits him and he falls into the fire that blazes in the centre of the room. His clothes catch fire as he rises, SCREAMING, and falls again, onto the sheepskin rugs that line the floor. The flames start to spread. As the room bursts into flames around him, the Storyteller kneels, holding the bow crosswise in front of his body, in the way he would hold a lyre. He plucks the string and emits a C-NOTE, which resonates. Then he launches into a familiar refrain.

STORYTELLER

This is the story of a trickster.

He fits his first arrow to the bow and takes down a Guest. Three Guests attack. The Storyteller's second arrow and another from Telemachus take down the first two.

The third Guest reaches the Storyteller, who with a third arrow from the floor stabs him in the face, sending him down.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
*A no one who was everyone. And
 everyone knows his name.*

He fires his final arrow.

EURYMACHUS
 ODYSSEUS!

It's a cry of recognition, which also supplies the name required. The Storyteller is now weaponless but a sword is flung towards him by Telemachus. It spins through the air, blade flashing, the handle coming round for the Storyteller to catch it, and swing it into an attacking Guest.

STORYTELLER
*Whose mind gave birth to death. A
 brood of blood.*

As the Storyteller fights, he speaks in poetic style, so what follows is at the same time a battle and a performance. And as before, his words conjure visions. They begin with drops of blood, which fall from the ceiling, hitting the floor to the dismay of the Guests. Some blood-drops land in the fire with a HISS. Others spatter faces. The Storyteller goes on the attack, the blows of his sword in time with his words.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
*A hatch. A latch unlatched. And
 doom descended. That ten-year war
 was ended in a night.*

A hatch seems to open in the ceiling of the Hall, as if from the Wooden Horse. A rope descends and down it come the ghosts of Odysseus' men. Mighty Eurybates. Elpenor, swigging from a wine-skin. Then stern Eurylochus. And finally young Adrastus, his throwing knife raised in his hand.

Telemachus pauses at the sight of Adrastus, his doppelgänger. Their eyes meet, as, with a look that says *pay attention*, Adrastus throws his blade. It lodges in the chest of a Guest behind the Storyteller. This stops him, since he thinks he is hit. By the time he realises that the dagger isn't real, the Storyteller wheels with flashing sword and smites him.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
In chaos, every category dies.

Out of arrows, Telemachus draws his sword, and with a YELL, jumps the balustrade. He lands on the floor of the Hall and launches into the fray. The fighting enters its most intense phase. Telemachus and the Storyteller absorb attack after attack. They back each other up, split, and reunite.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)
*Innocent and guilty. Living and
 dead. Real and imagined.*

Guest after Guest goes down. The Storyteller and Telemachus are remorseless. Their every movement results in a killing blow. Irus and Antinous are hanging back, letting others risk their lives. Irus glances up to see the ghost of Eurybates, his doppelgänger, standing over him, set to strike him with his sword. He strikes. The ghostly sword passes through him harmlessly. Some Guests have reached the axes that were used in the contest. They try to loosen them so they can use them in the fight, but they're fixed in the ground.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Past.

With his sword he slices through the long wooden handle of one of the axes. As it falls, he catches it, and, turning, buries it in the body of an oncoming Guest.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Present.

He slices through the handles of two more axes, and wielding one himself, tosses the other to Telemachus, who catches it. Father and son fight in natural synchronicity.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Future.

The Storyteller and Telemachus both land killing blows simultaneously. There's a moment as they register this.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

You can't escape.

Some terrified Guests try the doors out of the Great Hall.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

You won't be saved.

To their horror, they find them locked.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

The beast has been released. The monster from the cave.

Now the flames have caught on the hangings on the wall and the Great Hall is an inferno. In the midst of it all stalks the Storyteller like an avenging angel.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

What monster? You.

Antinous peeps around a pillar to find himself confronted by the horrifying face of his doppelgänger, the dreaded Cyclops. He SCREAMS in terror. The Cyclops screams back.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

It was always you.

The Storyteller is carving a path, pulling aside tables to reveal cowering Guests, whom he instantly dispatches.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

You are the monster. You are the cave. You, the mangling hands and man-killing teeth. The mad and ogling eye, it's you.

From among the flames, Irus emerges and attacks the Storyteller fiercely, beating him back, smiting down on his defending blade. But with a twist of skill, the Storyteller disarms him. Irus ducks under his blade and gets his hands around the Storyteller's throat. The Storyteller's hand tightens like a vice around Irus' wrist, until he's forced to release. He keeps turning the arm until, with a JOLT, it breaks, causing Irus to emit a HOWL OF AGONY.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

It's you.

Irus, white with pain, begs for mercy. The Storyteller has none. He dispatches him. And at this act, a drift of imagined pigs floods the room. They barge among the legs of men, and SQUEAL in terror, adding to the terror of the Guests.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*We've seen the inside of the cave.
We've been the sheep and the pigs.*

Among the pigs, on all fours in the hope of avoiding detection, crawls Antinous, searching for an exit. He tries one door. Locked. He tries another, with the same result. He crawls on, until he comes to a pair of boots. He looks up to see the Storyteller, his face black and bespattered with blood. Yet at this moment, he seems oddly distracted.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

We've been with the woman who contains all living women.

His eye has been caught by one of his self-created visions. It's Circe, in the form of Penelope, who is standing amid the slaughter, gazing at him wistfully.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

(calling to her)

It isn't you!

Taking advantage of the diversion, Antinous unsheathes a dagger and stabs the Storyteller in the leg. The pain drags the Storyteller back to the present. He strikes Antinous in the face, knocking him away. Then, with a grimace, he grasps the blade that still sticks out of his thigh. With a GASP, he eases it out of the flesh, and tosses it away.

He grasps the cowering Antinous by his ears. Excruciatingly, he raises him by them, while Antinous ineffectually attempts to prise away his vengeful fingers. The Storyteller places his face inch-close to that of Antinous.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

It's me.

He slaps Antinous hard across the face.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

It's me.

He strikes him again, the other way.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

It's me.

He keeps striking him, with each phrase he utters.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

*I've been to the Land of the Dead.
I've seen the men I knew and heard
what they said. Live.*

Antinous' face is a mask of blood. The Storyteller strikes him again, breaking his nose. And again. And again.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Above all, live.

Antinous is unconscious. The Storyteller keeps hitting him.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

This is the song of the Sirens.

Antinous' identity is being erased.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

The Storyteller's tale.

He hits Antinous' lifeless face again.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

Live.

He's slowing down now.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

(trailing off)

Live.

He hits him one last time. Then staggers. The blood still oozes from the wound in his leg. With gritted teeth, he regains his balance. There is no remorse in his face at the death of Antinous. He releases the corpse, letting it fall to the floor at the same time as Telemachus arrives at his side. They have the same thought at the same time: Eurymachus.

Eurymachus makes his way around the perimeter of the hall, keeping out of sight as best he can. The place is a mayhem of smoke and shadows. He hears the voice of the Storyteller echoing in his ears.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

Live.

(beat)

Live.

Living is all Eurymachus is thinking about, but there's no way out. All the doors around the hall are locked. He reaches the balcony and tries to jump and catch hold of it. It's too high. He tries again. Fails again. With a last effort, he tries, and this time succeeds. His fingers catch on the balcony, and he lifts himself up out of reach.

The Storyteller and Telemachus emerge from the smoke. Looking up, they see Eurymachus. He climbs over the rail and starts HAMMERING on the door to the Women's Quarters.

EURYMACHUS

Penelope!

INT. THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS. CONT.

Penelope and her maidservants cluster in the farthest corner of the room. Eurymachus can be heard HAMMERING with his fist on the door onto the balcony, calling out.

EURYMACHUS (O.S.)

Penelope!

Penelope doesn't move. But Melanthe does. She bolts across the room, knocking over the free-standing loom as she goes. She reaches the door and unlatches it and Eurymachus falls into the room. On all fours, he scrabbles across the floor towards Penelope and throws his arms around her legs.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

I claim the ancient right of suppliants, placing myself under the protection of Zeus.

The Storyteller and Telemachus arrive behind him.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Zeus is the god of suppliants. Zeus is the god of guests. Zeus will hear my prayer.

He looks up at Penelope. Her face reveals nothing. There is a pause. Then, strangely, Eurymachus starts to LAUGH.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

I still don't have any idea what you're really thinking.

His LAUGHTER tails away.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Say something.

PENELOPE

You have no suppliant rights. You have no rights as a guest. You lost them when you joined that rabble. When you slept with my servant, while saying you loved me.

In the background, Melantho is SOBBING.

EURYMACHUS

I never loved her.

(beat)

I always loved you.

Outside the window, the CLASH OF STEEL can be heard.

STORYTELLER

The remaining soldiers are being rounded up. There's no one left.

Footsteps can be heard TRAMPING up the stairs. Eurycleia opens the other door to reveal the sturdy Eumaeus at the head of a troop of armed locals. Realising all is lost, Eurymachus releases Penelope's legs. He slowly straightens up.

EURYMACHUS

I understand.

(to Penelope)

For the first time, I think I have some idea what you're thinking.

(to the Storyteller)

I can at least display in the manner of my death the dignity that was too often lacking in my life.

Noble words, but he doesn't mean them. With a lurch, he wrests Telemachus' sword from him, and then thrusts him away. Whirling round, he faces the Storyteller. There's a strength now in his desperation, an unhinged forcefulness.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Come on, old man. This is a contest we should have had years ago.

Eumaeus takes a step forward, but the Storyteller signals to him to stay back.

The two men circle, then set to with their swords. Eurymachus is a skilful fighter. And the Storyteller is injured. His leg is soaked in blood. Eurymachus notices him limping.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

Now you know what it's like.

STORYTELLER

You promised you would protect my family. You swore an oath.

EURYMACHUS

I thought you were dead.

STORYTELLER

You wanted me to be.

They fall to fighting again. At first, because of the Storyteller's wound, and his opponent's willingness to use dirty tricks, the single-combat goes the way of Eurymachus.

EURYMACHUS

I should have known you from that first performance in the hall. You always had a gift for insults.

STORYTELLER

I meant every word.

Owing to the righteousness of the Storyteller's cause, and his distilled determination, the tide of the fight turns. Things start to go his way. At one point, Eurymachus trips and falls, sprawling on the floor. The Storyteller allows him the time to rise to his feet again.

EURYMACHUS

(panting)

Zeus is the guest-god. If I'm killed now, he will have his vengeance.

STORYTELLER

I was sent by Zeus. I am his vengeance.

There's a pause. Eurymachus seems to be struggling to catch his breath. But it's a performance. Abruptly, he charges the Storyteller, letting out a BATTLE-CRY. He catches him off-guard and the two men go down. It's only after they're both down, with Eurymachus lying on top of the Storyteller, nose to nose, his eyes blazing, that the look in his eyes changes. He realises he's hit. The end of a sword is sticking out of his back. He blinks. Lets out a MOAN. The Storyteller pushes him off and struggles to his feet. Eurymachus lies where he fell. Despite his pain he manages to smile. Then grimaces.

EURYMACHUS

I suppose, when you tell this story, you'll tell it to your advantage.

A shudder of pain passes through him.

EURYMACHUS (CONT'D)

You'll present yourself as some
kind of hero.

STORYTELLER

I'll tell it however I choose.

Eurymachus is done. His eyes close. He lies still.

Letting out a wail, Melanthe rushes forward to MOURN him. Two of Eumaeus' men move in to escort her away. The Storyteller turns to Penelope. She goes to him.

He is exhausted, covered in blood. Everyone watches. All except one. Unnoticed at first, Eurymachus rouses himself from his swoon for a final attack on the Storyteller. Seizing his sword, he raises it high in the air to bring it slashing down. Something flashes past. It is a dagger, which buries itself in his stomach. It was flung by Telemachus, who has absorbed the lesson he was taught by the ghost of Adrastus. Eurymachus falls. And this time, he stays down.

The Storyteller sags, his wound seeping blood. Penelope holds him up. She looks into his eyes, seeing her husband in the old man before her. She kisses him on the mouth. At the kiss, a shudder runs through the Storyteller. He drops. It seems it might be because of loss of blood. But a transformation is taking place. His body lengthens and strengthens. When he straightens up, it is not the Storyteller standing before them but Odysseus. Odysseus and Penelope embrace.

ODYSSEUS

From now on, if there's ever any
question about who I am, it'll be
easy to check. You'll just have to
look for the scar.

PENELOPE

There has never been any question
about who you are.

Telemachus is included in their happiness. As are the loyal servants, including Eurycleia and Theano.

INT. THE GREAT HALL. THAT NIGHT.

A feast is in progress. It is very different from the feasts to which the palace has become accustomed over the previous years. These are good people: decent men and women feasting together. Among them is Eumaeus. And the Small Boy, who is accompanied by a faithful hound that looks a lot like Korax. Odysseus is seated with Penelope on one side of him, and Telemachus on the other. The sideboards are weighed down by bread and meat. Theano pours wine into the cups of Odysseus and Penelope. Then she also fills the cup of Telemachus. Their eyes meet and they smile at each other.

MUSICIANS PLAY in the background. Odysseus rises to his feet. The room falls silent. He is wearing fine clothing and his face is radiant. There is a bandage around his leg.

ODYSSEUS

To leave is easy. Someone tells you stories about wealth and fame. And you're gone. In search of glory. It's the young man's story. But you have to come home in the end. You have to come back to who you are. That's the old man's story. And it's more complicated. To restore order where chaos has crept in. To bring back justice. I should never have left. I am to blame for everything that has happened.

There is silence at this. Then Penelope speaks up.

PENELOPE

That's not the story you've been telling me. That's not my story. I married a man who went to war because he had to. A man who won that war. And then fought his way home, overcoming every obstacle, sometimes weakening, but never giving in. Learning. Getting better at what he was good at. That's the man I married and the one who has returned. You think you've changed but you haven't. You're a stronger version of who you used to be.

EUMÆUS

We know you had to go to war.

EURYCLEIA

We knew you would return.

SMALL BOY

You're a hero.

ODYSSEUS

No.

SMALL BOY

Yes.

ODYSSEUS

There are no heroes.

SMALL BOY

Yes. There's you.

PENELOPE

You're my husband.

TELEMACHUS

You're my father.

EUMAEUS

You're our king.

PENELOPE

Odysseus, sacker of cities.

ODYSSEUS

(smiling)

I have a reputation for trickery,
but don't let that fool you.

PENELOPE

(quoting)

This is the story of a trickster. A
no one who was everyone.

ODYSSEUS

I never felt the Storyteller had
that right. I'm not sure. But for
an opening, I don't know. I was
thinking maybe something more
simple. Like: *Tell me, Muse, the
story of a man.* What do you think?

PENELOPE

That could work.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GREAT HALL. LATER.

There is music. People dance around the fire in the middle of
the room. The star of the show, who attracts most attention,
is the serving girl Theano. Telemachus stands at the edge of
the dance floor, enraptured. Odysseus and Penelope are still
seated at the table. Eurycleia approaches. She smiles.

EURYCLEIA

Welcome back.

Theano takes Telemachus' hand, and draws him, protesting,
onto the dance floor. He starts dancing with her, rather
badly. Others join them until everyone is dancing. Everyone,
that is, apart from Penelope and Odysseus. They rise and make
for the door. Eumaeus notices. He is about to call out, but
Eurycleia stops him. They let them go.

INT. AN ANTECHAMBER. CONT.

Odysseus and Penelope kiss.

ODYSSEUS

I can't believe you tested me.

PENELOPE
I can't believe you tested me.

INT. THE STAIRCASE LEADING TO THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS.

Walking up the stairs, Odysseus touches the wall with his fingers, to reassure himself that it's not a dream.

PENELOPE
Yes, you can.

ODYSSEUS
Yes, you can.

They pause outside the door to the marital bedroom. It is covered in its confusion of false latches and mechanisms.

ODYSSEUS (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I left.

PENELOPE
I'm sorry I stayed.

From his cloak, Odysseus produces the wooden carving he was working on during his time on the island of Circe. He turns it a certain way in his hands, and for the first time we see that it is a semi-abstract representation of a horse. He hands it to Penelope.

ODYSSEUS
You didn't stay.

PENELOPE
You didn't leave.

She moves aside a disguised panel to reveal a lock. She inserts the head of the horse into it. It turns easily and the door opens, to reveal an extraordinary bedroom.

INT. THE MARITAL BEDROOM. CONT.

It is a cross between a bedroom and a tree-house. The branches of an ancient olive tree wind up through the room and comprise major parts of its furniture. Among them, in the centre, is the marital bed. It is covered in the tapestry Penelope has been weaving throughout the story. It is not a death shroud, as it turns out, but a bedspread.

We can see depicted the adventures of Odysseus. And among them, there is a representation of what is happening now.

Odysseus reclines on the bed. Penelope does likewise.

PENELOPE
(reciting)
There is no name for it.

ODYSSEUS

(reciting)

And yet we know. There is nothing
better than when a man and a woman
live together in oneness of spirit.

PENELOPE

(reciting)

What she thinks, he thinks.

ODYSSEUS

(reciting)

What he feels, she feels.

(wryly)

I miss the Storyteller.

PENELOPE

You're the Storyteller now.

They reach out and touch each other's faces. Each runs their fingers over the familiar contours of the other's features, as if "seeing" with their hands.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

As welcome as the sight of land to
men, whose ship has been destroyed
by wind and waves, when they make
it to shore, a few of them, stunned
survivors, happy to be alive--

EXT. OPEN SEA.

We enter the world of the Storyteller's simile. Shipwrecked, Odysseus and Penelope cling to a spar of wood, under a cloudless sky. On the horizon, they spy an island.

They clamber ashore onto a pristine beach.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

That was how glad Odysseus and
Penelope were. And they held on to
one another. And they swore they
would never be parted again.

END.