

# *The Odyssey*

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## THE PLAY

### Cast of Characters In Order of Appearance

Odysseus, king of Ithaca  
Man #1, crewman  
Man #2, crewman  
Polyphemus, a Cyclops  
Elpenor, very young crewman  
Eurylochus, crewman who is a nobleman  
Hermes, messenger of the gods  
Circe, witch  
Man #3, crewman  
Teiresias, blind prophet  
Mother of Odysseus, ghost  
Zeus, king of the gods  
Athena, goddess of wisdom  
Calypso, enchantress  
Nausicaa, young daughter of Alcinous  
Queen Arete, mother of Nausicaa  
King Alcinous, king of Phaeacians  
Two men and one woman of the court

### Act I. Odysseus meets the Cyclops.

#### SCENE 1. Ship's deck.

[curtain]

Odysseus, center stage, sits with his head in his hands. After twenty seconds, he slowly lifts his head.

**Odysseus:** I am Odysseus, son of Laertes of Ithaca. [stands and walks to front of stage and addresses the audience] Ithaca is a harsh land but I know of no other sight, other than one's own country, that brings such tears of joy. I have for ten years been trying

to reach my homeland. [pause] But it is a long tale ... [Odysseus back up to center stage and is joined by Eurylochus, Elpenor, and Man #1 and Man #2, who enter from the left.]

**Eurylochus:** [anxiously] Royal master, I plead with you. Let us not sink our anchor in this water. Rather, we should make haste now before the sun sets. We have had such terrible experiences on strange lands.

**Odysseus:** Men, we must not dwell on the past. It is true that the Ciconians nearly ruined us and we were well rewarded to escape with our lives. The joy of our escape, however, is saddened by the knowledge that we lost so many men.

**Eurylochus:** Then, I beg you Odysseus, let us get out of this harbor. Remember the last time we sent a few men to explore the land of the Lotus-eaters? They ate the lotus and forgot all about us. It is better if we do not set foot on this strange land.

**Elpenor:** I am so young. Please, let us sail quickly away from here.

**Odysseus:** [momentarily putting arm around Elpenor's shoulder] You forget that we need supplies. This land is luxuriant. The water is so beautifully clear as it cascades down to the sea. We can easily beach our boats. This harbor is so protected that we do not need to tie up. Come men.

**Eurylochus:** You go, Odysseus. Leave me here with most of the men.

**Odysseus:** I find it hard to deal with you, Eurylochus, you of noble birth, but I will do as you suggest. [to audience] Eurylochus is my brother-in-law. Yes, he is married to my sister and this close relationship gets in the way sometimes. [to crewmen] Come on men, follow me. [exits]

[curtain]

## SCENE 2. Inside cave.

[curtain]

Enter Odysseus, followed by Man #1 and Man #2.

**Odysseus:** Look at the cheeses!

**Man #1:** See the fresh fruit!

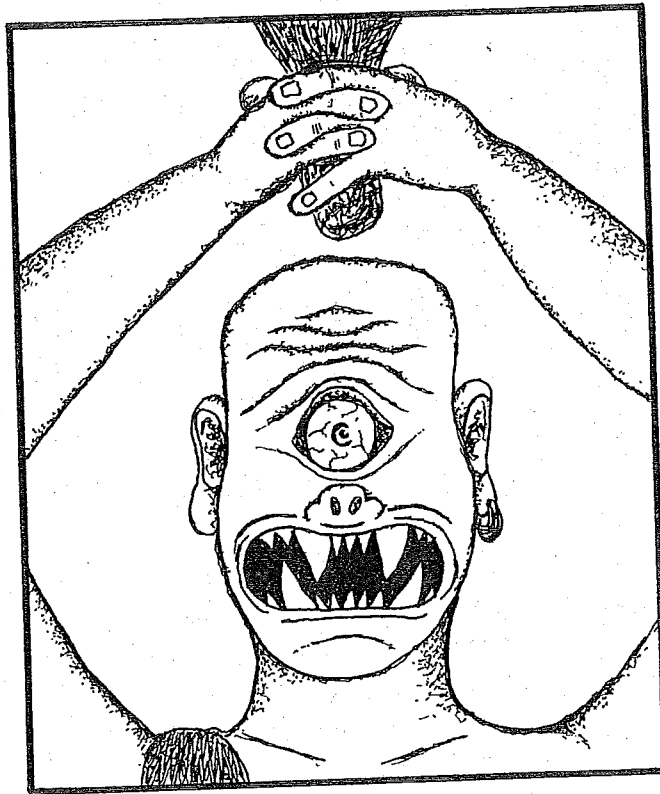
**Man #2:** And see the pails for fresh milk. And the lambs! O, mighty feast! I am so hungry I will indulge myself right now.

**Odysseus:** No, friends, do not eat anything. We must await our host. Somebody is coming now.

[Polyphemus enters from right]

**Polyphemus:** [voice booming] Foreigners! Who are you? From where did you sail over these high seas? Are you thieves who have cast anchor on our shores?

[Man #1 and Man #2 shrink in terror]



**Odysseus:** We are on our way back from Troy.

**Polyphemus:** What is your name?

**Odysseus:** My name is Nobody. We have been driven here by high winds and did not plan this visit. You know the mandates of hospitality; I ask you, dear sir, to remember them. Keep in mind Zeus is the travelers' god; he guards their steps and he guarantees them their rights.

**Polyphemus:** Stranger, you must be out of your mind to preach to me of fear for the gods. We Cyclopes care not for Zeus or any of the other gods. But tell me, where are your ships? I would like to see them.

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- Odysseus:** [aside to the audience] He is trying to get around me, but I'll outwit him. [to Polyphemus] My ship was wrecked by Poseidon, the earthshaker, but my friends and I managed to escape.
- Polyphemus:** [jumping and screaming] I'll show you. [he bashes the head of Man #2 against the wall]
- Odysseus:** [taking out his bag of wine] Here, my friend, have some of this good wine.
- Polyphemus:** Wine? Let me have it. [drains the bag] There now! I'll take a sleep and deal with you fellows later. [slumps to the ground]
- Odysseus:** [to Man #1] Come, help me. Sharpen this tool. We will poke his eye out with this. [Man sharpens tool, while Odysseus checks door to cave and takes leather pouch away from the giant] Take the poker and together we will stab him in his one eye. [Odysseus and Man #1 hold the tool and jab it into Polyphemus]
- Polyphemus:** [in great rage] Help me! Dear father, Poseidon, save your son. These fools have blinded me. You will pay for this! [shrieking]
- Cyclopes:** [from offstage] What is the matter, Polyphemus? Who is hurting you?
- Polyphemus:** Nobody is hurting me. Did you hear me? Nobody is hurting me.
- Cyclopes:** If nobody is hurting you, we shall be on our way, but do not yell so loudly. It is disturbing the peace.
- Polyphemus:** [stumbles off stage left shrieking] Help me, help me! Nobody has blinded me!
- Odysseus:** [follows Polyphemus to exit and watches] He has positioned himself by the door of the cave so that he might grab us as we leave. Never fear. We will tie ourselves underneath the rams and leave with them.
- [dim lights for a few seconds]
- Odysseus:** We made it. [to audience] We tied ourselves under two of the rams. The giant sat there and felt the tops of each ram. And he talked to them as if they were close friends. I could actually feel the breath of the Cyclops upon me. But let us hurry to the ship. [they walk briskly across stage but stop at left exit]
- Polyphemus:** [offstage] Come back, you fools. Come back. Come back, Nobody.
- Odysseus:** Cyclops! So I am not a weakling even though I may look it. [a great rock comes from off stage and barely misses Odysseus and men]

**Man #1:** Aren't you imprudent to taunt this giant?

**Odysseus:** [shouting] Cyclops, if anyone ever asks you who blinded you, tell them it was Odysseus, son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca.

**Polyphemus:** [from off stage] So the prophecy has come true. I was told that Odysseus would rob me of my sight but I thought it would be a large and handsome man and you are a puny little guy who confused me. But come here, Odysseus, so that I might ask Poseidon, who is my father, to help you on your way home. And he will heal my eye, too.

**Odysseus:** I am certain even the earthshaker will not heal your eye.

**Polyphemus:** Great father Poseidon, grant that Odysseus will never reach his home in Ithaca. But if he should get home, grant that he will find much trouble in his home. [again sends rock across the stage]

[curtain]

## **Act II. A year with Circe.**

Beach on the island of Aeaea, home of the witch, Circe.

[curtain]

Enter Odysseus, from left.

**Odysseus:** [looking over his shoulder at left entrance] Come men, shake off your doldrums. We may be miserable, but we are not down yet. [enter three men from left] East and west means nothing to us here. I climbed the peak yonder and saw that we were indeed on an island. We are surrounded by a vast sea. Where the sun comes from and where he sets we do not know.

**Elpenor:** O, woe! I want to go home. I am so young.

**Odysseus:** Do not lose heart, Elpenor. I saw a wisp of smoke coming from the center of the island which of course means that some humans are about.

**All men:** [crying] We don't want anyone; we can't forget the past.

**Odysseus:** But we must forget the past. It is true that we were almost home and I don't like to fix blame, but I did not open the bag of winds given to us by King Aeolus. It was some of you men who out of jealousy opened the bag thinking it was full of gold and precious gems. And the very wind that escaped from the bag brought us here.

Had you not opened the bag we would be home by now, as King Aeolus had gathered all the winds that would be harmful to us and put them in that bag. But come, let us rally our courage.

**Man #1:** Royal master, do you want to repeat the problems that we had when we landed near the home of the Laestrygonians?

**Man #2:** Yes, remember that dear Odysseus. From out of nowhere they appeared and threw great boulders at us, sinking ships and killing men.

**Odysseus:** We must take chances or we shall never see our homeland, our sweet homeland that is so dear to all of us. Come, be brave, put on the spirit of adventure. I now command you. [to Eurylochus] Eurylochus, you are of noble birth, so you will help me. We'll shake lots in this bronze helmet. The loser will take two men and investigate the island and the others will stay here with the winner. [they shake lots; Eurylochus loses and reluctantly exits left; dim lights for twenty seconds; when lights are brightened, Odysseus and Eurylochus are standing right front]

**Eurylochus:** My lord Odysseus, we followed your orders. We found a castle and could hear sweet singing coming from inside. My men gave great shouts and a beautiful woman came out. She invited us in. All the men went in, but suspecting a trap I stayed outside. The men never came back.

**Odysseus:** We must go and find out what happened to the men.

**Eurylochus:** My king, I do not wish to accompany you. You will be lost to us forever and you will not be able to rescue a single man. Leave me here.

**Odysseus:** Very well, Eurylochus, stay where you are, eat, drink and rest your bones, but I shall go. It is my plain duty.

[Eurylochus exits right]

**Odysseus:** [walks slowly from left to right, pausing now and then] I must find my men.

**Hermes:** [enter from left] Where are you off to now, my good fellow? Why are you wandering around this countryside alone when your friends are groveling in Circe's pigsty? I suppose you hope to free them but with your luck more likely you will end up in the pigsty yourself.

**Odysseus:** Who are you? Is this Circe you mention, the same Circe who turns men into animals?

**Hermes:** I am Hermes, sent here by Zeus. Yes, Circe is the witch who has it in her power to turn men into animals. The sad part is that they continue to think like men but have the bodies of animals. As I said, Circe has turned your men into pigs. However, I have been sent to the rescue and will see you through. [he hands a small amount of parsley to Odysseus] Here, take some of this herb, moly, and when Circe tries to turn you into a pig, she will not be able to do it. Eat it now.

**Odysseus:** I am speechless and thankful. [Hermes exits left and Odysseus, eating the parsley, continues his walk across the stage] I wonder what I am really up against here. Now that I've eaten the moly, of course I am not going to be intimidated by this Circe person. Hermes is right. It would be my luck to land on her island! She is notorious!

[Odysseus stands motionless while lights dim and brighten again]

**Odysseus:** Circe, Circe. Come outside. I would like to meet you.

**Circe:** [entering from right] Come in, sweet man. I would love to have you visit.

**Odysseus:** I will sit out here and talk with you.

**Circe:** Very well, give me a moment while I bring some refreshments. [exits left]

**Odysseus:** [to audience] We know what she is up to.

**Circe:** [enters from left, carrying golden cup and vial of magic potion] Please, drink some pottage from my golden cup. [she turns slightly so Odysseus cannot see her drop a magic potion into the cup]

**Odysseus:** Thank you, my fair lady. [he drains the cup]

**Circe:** [touching him with a wand] Off with you to the pigsty.

[Odysseus rushes at her with a sword and she falls to his feet]

Who on earth are you? What woman gave birth to such a man? I am amazed to see you take my potion and suffer no magic change. [pause] Please be gentle with me.

**Odysseus:** How can you expect me to be gentle with you? You, who have turned my friends into pigs.

**Circe:** I have no evil intentions toward you. Do you suspect a trap? Have no fear.

**Odysseus:** Could any honest man in my position bear to be happy while his men are imprisoned? Give my men their liberty and let me set my eyes upon them.

[Circe leaves stage and returns with the men; they weep for happiness, each one hugging the other]

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**Circe:** I know as well as you, all you have gone through both on the seas and at the hands of monsters and evil persons on land. You are tired and sorely depressed. Stay here awhile and be refreshed. [Circe and men stand quietly in background]

**Odysseus:** [center front, talking to audience] I agreed to stay awhile and one day passed another. Soon a whole year had gone by, and my men became restless. One of my men even said "Master, if you are ever going to escape and get back to your old home in your own country, it's high time you thought of Ithaca again." This was enough for me and I approached Circe.

**Odysseus:** [backing up to center stage] Circe, I beseech you to help me go home. I am eager now to be gone and so are my men. They constantly beg me to take them home.

**Circe:** Kingly son of Laertes, Odysseus, the sharp-witted, I am not going to imprison you in my house against your wishes. But before I send you home you must make a journey to Hades to consult the soul of Teiresias, the blind prophet. You needn't be afraid of him. He still has his wits about him, although he is the only one in all of Hades that does.

**Odysseus:** This news breaks my heart. Tell me, Circe, who is to guide me. No one yet has sailed a ship into hell!

**Circe:** Don't worry about it. The North Wind will blow you across River Ocean and you should then beach your ship and walk into Hades. When you come to a spot where a branch of the River Styx pours thundering streams around a pinnacle of rock, you have found the right place. Dig a deep hole and pour in your libations to the gods. Now be off. [exits]

[men come from upstage and join Odysseus downstage]

**Man #1:** [enters breathlessly from left] Sir, we have a problem. Elpenor just fell off the roof ...

**Man #2:** Master, we must give Elpenor a proper burial.

**Odysseus:** Right now, we have no time. Circe said we must go. So come men. Circe said that we must first go to Hades.

**Men:** No, no. This isn't right. [much crying]

**Odysseus:** What is your problem?

**Man #3:** It is Elpenor. How can we leave him? He not only lost his mortal life but unless we give him a proper burial his soul will wander. He will not be able to go to the Elysian Fields. [more crying]



**Odysseus:** I understand but we have no time right now. We will give him proper burial when we return as Circe says we must do after visiting Hades. Come, we must go quickly.

[curtain]

### **Act III. Hades.**

Enter Odysseus, followed by three crewmen.

[curtain]

**Odysseus:** [to audience] We sailed past the River Ocean without incident, and finally came to rest at the foot of the pinnacles described by Circe. [backs up to center stage] Dig the hole here men. Make a deep trench. [men dig trench] From Hades will come the souls of the dead. Come, pour into the trench the blood of sacrificed sheep. [Odysseus' hands are stretched upward as he prays, while the men pour a liquid into trench] Gods, please hear your worthless servant. I promise when I return to Ithaca I'll sacrifice the best heifer in my palace and heap the pyre with presents. And to Teiresias I offer the finest sheep I own. [looking around] Stand back men. Here comes a ghost. [to the ghost, who earlier has leaned over and drunk from the trench] Elpenor, what are you doing here?

**Elpenor:** [big sigh] My royal master, the sharp-witted Odysseus, it was the master of some evil power that was my undoing. I fell off the roof, as you know, but because no one had time to weep for me or to bury me, I wander around. I beseech you, my prince, when you return to Aeaea, please give me a decent burial so that my soul can find rest. Raise a mound for me on the shore of the blue-gray sea, and on my barrow plant the oar I used to pull when I was alive.

**Odysseus:** [stretching his sword out above the blood in the trench] My dear Elpenor, I will do all of this. Nothing shall be forgotten. [Elpenor backs offstage left and a woman approaches the trench and sits down; Odysseus motions to her but she does not seem to see him; enter Teiresias, the blind prophet, who bends down and drinks from trench; he then approaches Odysseus, but does not cross the trench]

**Teiresias:** [holding a golden rod in his hand] Son of Laertes, Odysseus of the lively wits, what are you doing here? What possessed you to forsake the sunlight and come to this unhappy place? Take a step back from the trench so that I can drink the blood and prophesy the truth to you. [he leans over and drinks from the trench] My lord Odysseus, you wish your troubles were over and that quickly and without mishap you would be reunited with your family. But this is not to be. Your journey will be made hard. I doubt that the earthshaker will forgive you or in any way ease up on his relentless pursuit. But do not give up hope. You can reach home but not with comfort.

You must keep a tight rein on your men and specifically warn them about harming the cattle on Hyperion's island. If the cattle are in any way hurt, your ship will be destroyed, and if you do escape, you will arrive home in sorrow, upon a foreign ship and your men will be dead.

**Odysseus:** Teiresias, I cannot doubt that what you say is true. This is what the gods have declared for me. But there is another matter I do not understand. Over there sits my dead mother, or at least her soul is there. She sits in silence by the blood and says not a word to her son. What can I do to have her speak to me?

**Teiresias:** There is a simple answer, my friend. Any ghost you allow to drink the blood will talk to you. Without this, they will leave you and retire. [exits left]

**Odysseus:** [backing off from trench and replacing sword] Come, my mother, drink of the blood. [his mother drinks of the blood and immediately speaks to her son]

**Mother:** My child, how did you come to this drab and dingy place, you that are still alive?

**Odysseus:** I was forced by necessity to consult the blind prophet. But tell me. Why did the Fates send you here? How did death overcome you?

**Mother:** I died of a broken heart when you did not return from Troy.

**Odysseus:** [reaches out to touch his mother; twice she withdraws] Mother, why do you withdraw from me when I try to touch you?

**Mother:** My child, my child! You have so many sorrows. This is not a trick. You are only obeying the laws of our mortal nature. We no longer have sinews. Our bodies are not real. When you do arrive home, remember me to your dear wife and most beloved son. Goodbye my son.

**Odysseus:** [hands outstretched] Mother! Mother! [weeping]

[curtain]

#### Act IV. Scylla and Charybdis.

On board ship. Odysseus and three crewmen are on deck.

[curtain]

**Odysseus:** [downstage center, talking to audience] From the rushing waters of the River Ocean my ship passed into the open sea and without mishap reached the island where Circe

lived. I immediately sent men to get Elpenor's body so that we could now give him the proper burial. While here, Circe gave me instructions as to how to deal with the dreaded singing Sirens, and Scylla and Charybdis. I listened carefully and it was a good thing that I did so. The Sirens would sing so beautifully that we would be tempted to join them. We should go to any lengths to avoid Scylla, the evil monster with dog heads attached to snake-like appendages and Charybdis, a whirlpool who sucked up ships!

[lovely singing in the background; the singing grows louder]

**Odysseus:** Quickly men, bind my hands to the mast. Hurry. I know I must be tied up or I will want to join them. Tie me tighter. [Odysseus throws himself against the mast and the men tie him] Put wax in your ears. Quickly get wax in your ears so that you do not hear them. [men hurry to get wax in their ears, the Sirens are louder] I cannot stand the strain. Beautiful voices! Let me loose. Men, let me loose. [he struggles to free himself of the bonds] I must hear those maidens. Take the ship ashore.

**Man #1:** [tying him tighter] We do only what you told us to do. I can't hear what you say Odysseus, but you struggle so fiercely, we should tighten you up.

**Man #2:** Forgive us, Odysseus, but you must not give in to this temptation.

[singing gradually fades and men untie Odysseus]

**Odysseus:** Thank you, men. You did just the right thing. [pause] But what is that cloud in the distance? [a terrible roar—the roar of an angry sea] Men, do not be frightened. We have met trouble before. Do exactly as I say. Strike those oars. Give it all the energy you have. With luck we can slip by without disaster.

**Man #1:** Master, where shall I steer the ship?

**Odysseus:** Give a wide berth to that smoke and surf you see. Take a middle course. Don't hug these cliffs, or before you can stop her the ship may take it into her head to make a dash over there and you'll wreck us.

**Man #1:** Odysseus. Help us! [terrified screaming] Save us! Scylla has snatched two men already! Help us! [loud groaning]

**Odysseus:** While I was busy watching Charybdis, Scylla got the best of us. Don't go near the edge of the ship. Stay in the center. Keep rowing, faster, faster.

**Man #2:** No, no. [great screams of terror, as he is grabbed by a huge arm]

**Odysseus:** Gods of Olympus, help us, help your mortal creatures. [pitiful sound] And we can't seem to get by Charybdis either. Men, row faster, we must get out of here. [pause; Odysseus looks carefully out at sea] Men, come here. Listen carefully to me for a moment. We are almost to the island of the sun god and Teiresias warned me repeatedly to keep clear of it. So row past it.

**Eurylochus:** Odysseus, you are one of those hard men whose spirit never gets low and whose body never gets tired. You must be made of iron to even suggest that we not stop for rest on this island. Let us rest here, cook our supper on the shore and sleep. We won't stray and in the morning we will get on board and put out to open sea.

**Men:** [applause] Yea! Yea!

**Odysseus:** I do not have the energy nor the inclination to fight you, but I ask every man to give me his solemn promise that if he comes across a herd of cattle that he will not touch any of them.

**Men:** Of course, we solemnly swear.

[thunder and lightning]

**Odysseus:** [walking to front of stage] Well, as you might have guessed, my men upset the sun god by eating the cattle. The storms kept raging and we were forced to stay over a month on the island, but as food ran out they became more restless and eventually gave in to temptation. Hyperion called upon all the gods to punish me. We put to sea. A terrible storm broke my ship in two. I managed to cling to a gigantic log and for nine days drifted until I landed on the island of Ogygia, the home of Calypso. All the other men aboard died.

[curtain]

## Act V. The gods help Odysseus.

### SCENE 1. Meeting of gods on Mount Olympus.

[curtain]

**Athena:** Father Zeus and you other merry gods who live forever, I have become convinced that it does not pay for kings to be kind, generous, and just. Look at Odysseus, that poor fellow! Today, not one of his subjects in Ithaca gave him a thought. No, he is left to languish on an island in misery. The enchantress, Calypso, has had him in her clutches for seven years and she sees that there is no escape. Not that he

could reach Ithaca in any case, for he has neither ship nor crew to carry him so far across the sea. Has he found no favor in your sight? Why so much bitterness against him, father Zeus?

**Zeus:** Nonsense, Athena, my daughter. How could I put the good king Odysseus out of my mind? He is not only the most learned of men but he is also the most benevolent. It is Poseidon, the earthshaker, who is so against him on account of Polyphemus whom Odysseus blinded. Poseidon has been after Odysseus ever since but he stops short of killing him. At this council of gods let us put our heads together and figure out a way to get the poor fellow home. Poseidon cannot possibly hold out against the united will of the gods.

**Athena:** Father of ours, if it is really the pleasure of the blessed gods that the wise Odysseus shall return to Ithaca, let us send our messenger, Hermes, to the isle of Ogygia to tell Calypso that she must now set Odysseus free. My heart just aches for him.

**Zeus:** My child, I never thought I would hear such words from you. Why do you show such grief? But never mind. Hermes, come here.

**Hermes:** Yes, Father, gatherer of the clouds.

**Zeus:** Hermes, since you are the messenger, go at once to Calypso and tell her Odysseus must be set free. On the journey he shall have neither gods nor men to help him. His trip will be difficult and not without mishap, but he will eventually arrive on the island of the Phaeacians, those most respected kinsmen of ours, who will see that he is speedily escorted home in one of their special ships.

[curtain]

## SCENE 2. Isle of Ogygia.

Odysseus sits on the ground, downstage left, in front of the curtain. Enter Hermes, followed by Calypso.

[curtain]

**Calypso:** Hermes, what brings you here? I am honored. Tell me what is on your mind and I shall gladly do what you ask of me, if I can and if it is not impossible. But first let me offer you some hospitality. [Odysseus stays seated and motionless]

**Hermes:** [accepts cup from Calypso] This is very good nectar. Really delicious! Very well, I will be frank. It was Zeus who sent me. He says you have the King of Ithaca here who

has been dogged by misfortune. On the way home from the Trojan War, he was caught up in wind storms. He even lost all his loyal followers. And now Zeus bids that you let him off without delay.

**Calypso:** [trembling and obviously upset] How cold-blooded you gods are. Odysseus was driven to this island by wind and waves and I rescued him. Does this not count? If Zeus insists that Odysseus must leave, let him be gone across the dismal water. But he must not expect me to transport him. I have no ship, no oars, no crew to carry him so far across the sea. Yet I do promise to give him directions and send him on his way.

**Hermes:** Then send him off at once and so avoid provoking Zeus or he may be annoyed and punish you some day. And so, dear Calypso, I take my leave. [exit right]

**Calypso:** [to the audience] I must look for Odysseus. I believe I will find him at the seashore. He always sits for hours gazing out to sea, no doubt thinking of his home in Ithaca. There he is. [she moves toward him and puts her hand on his head] My unhappy friend, as far as I am concerned you may leave this island. I am ready with all my heart to help you do it. But you must be up and doing. Fell some tall trees and make a big boat. I shall fill it with provisions. I'll also give you clothing and send you a wind.

**Odysseus:** For years I made the mistake of trusting you. I have no confidence in you at all. Are you sure that you are not plotting against me?

**Calypso:** [she strokes his head again] Odysseus, what a villain you are to even suggest such a thing. It shows the sly manner in which your mind works. On the falling water of Styx, the greatest and most solemn oath the gods can take, I swear I hold no secret plan for your downfall. Come, let us go. [they move to center stage]

**Odysseus:** I must leave as soon as possible, for if I am away from home much longer, no one will recognize me, not even my poor wife or my son.

**Calypso:** I see you mean to leave more quickly than I desire. Even so I wish you happiness.

**Odysseus:** I long to see my home and celebrate the happy day of my return. What if the powers that be wreck me at sea? I will endure that too, for in my day I have had many bitter experiences at sea. So let any new disaster come.

[dim lights for twenty seconds]

**Odysseus:** [to audience] It was a joyous day when I left. I followed the stars as Calypso had told me to do, but Poseidon spotted me when he was on his way back from Ethiopia. He was furious and decided to really finish me. He gathered the clouds together and grabbed his trident, stirring up the sea in his great wrath. Eventually, I lost my boat and had only a raft. Poseidon sent a mighty wave and I was tossed off the raft.

Knowing that my only hope was swimming to shore, I started in slow, deliberate strokes. I finally made it, with just the energy to cast myself upon the sand and sleep.

[curtain]

## **Act VI. Odysseus meets Nausicaa.**

### **SCENE 1. Beach on Scherie.**

[curtain]

Odysseus is sleeping off to the left, in front of the curtain. Princess Nausicaa, daughter of King Alcinous of Phaeacia, is playing ball with her three maids. The girls are laughing and making playful squeals. Odysseus sits up and rubs his eyes.



- Odysseus:** [to the audience] Alas, where have I been cast ashore? Who are these folks? Some savage tribe or kindly people? And what is this shrill cry in my ears, as though some maidens were at play? Can these human beings talk as I do? I must find out. [Odysseus creeps closer; he sees the girls and bursts upon them, sending all, except Nausicaa, running to hide in terror]
- Nausicaa:** Sir, you have frightened my maids. Just who are you to be so bold?
- Odysseus:** Mistress, I beg your mercy. Are you a goddess or are you one of us mortals who lives on earth? If so, lucky indeed are your father and your gentle mother. But about me? Only yesterday, after the nineteen days at sea that it took me to come from Ogygia, I was tossed and almost drowned upon these shores. Take pity upon me. I beg you to direct me to the nearest town and please give me some linens to wrap around myself. And in return may the gods grant you any desire.
- Nausicaa:** Sir, your manners being excellent, proves to me that you are no rascal. I will tell you who we are and I will show you to the city. The country and the city you will see belong to the Phaeacians. I myself am the daughter of King Alcinous, who is the head of our state. [turns toward her maids] Stop, my maids. Why are you cringing at the sight of this man? Don't tell me you take him for an enemy, for there is not a man on earth who would dare to set hostile feet on Phaeacian soil. Don't you know that we are under the protection of the gods and that all travelers are protected by gods? Hurry up, give this guest food and drink, and while he bathes, please fetch him some clothes. [maids exit right]
- Odysseus:** Please excuse me while I wash off the brine. [he steps offstage to the left]
- Nausicaa:** Listen, my dear maids, while I tell you what I have been thinking. This man is here because of Olympian powers. When I first met him, I knew there was something special. I do believe he is here at the direction of Zeus. Last night I dreamed about this. In my dream I was told to gather up all my clothes and the clothes of my brothers and come here today to wash them. My father the king provided a cart to bring us here and my mother filled the cart with food.
- Odysseus:** [enters wearing a splendid cloak] Thank you, my dear maiden for this magnificent cloak.
- Nausicaa:** Say not a word, sir, but come. It is time to start our journey to the city. I will direct you to my good father's palace where you will meet the nobility. But this is how we might do it. I believe you are a man of understanding and will realize why I must give you these instructions. While we are in the country, walk along with my maids, but once we are near the city I want you to drop back and not be seen with us. It would not be good for anyone to see me with you. They would say "Oh, there is Nausicaa. Who is that man with her? Is it her husband-to-be?" I do not want to cause talk. So



you stay in a pleasant grove of trees that I will point out to you. When you think we have had time to arrive home, you walk into town and ask the way to King Alcinous's palace.

[curtain]

**SCENE 2: Palace of King Alcinous.**

King Alcinous and his wife are seated on thrones. Three others from the court stand nearby.

[curtain]

**Odysseus:** [enters and walks to front of stage] It was hard for me to do but I walked straight into the palace and knelt before the king and queen. Athena had made me bold. [turning toward Queen Arete and King Alcinous] I seek refuge with your lord.

**King:** Stand up my good fellow. You have obviously come from afar. [to a servant] Have a feast prepared. Let us get comfortable.

**Odysseus:** I beg you to arrange to have me taken to my own country. I long to see my wife and son. I have had to live through many a long day of hardship since last I saw them.

**Queen:** Listen to this poor creature.

**King:** [to a waiter] Mix a bowl of wine and fill the cups of all the company in the hall, so that we may now make an offering to Zeus, who watches over all those who deserve respect, and I am sure that this man does. Now, I ask you all, should we give this man safe passage home? [cheers and ayes from the group] But tell us sir, who are you?

**Odysseus:** [walks toward front of stage] I am Odysseus, son of Laertes of Ithaca. It is a harsh land but I for one know of no other sight, other than one's own country, that brings such tears of joy to one's eyes. I have a long tale to tell ...

