

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

***The Search for
Odysseus***

by Charles Way

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Characters:

- Telemachus
- Athene
- Penelope
- Eurymachus
- Odysseus
- Eurycleia
- Alcinous
- Laodomus
- Cyclops
- Achilles
- Calypso
- Arete
- Nausicaa
- Messenger
- Cast/Chorus/Calypso's Helpers

The play can be performed by six actors doubling.

NOT LICENSED FOR PRODUCTION

ACT ONE

Music. ATHENE, Daughter of Zeus, enters dressed as a beggar.

ATHENE Once upon a time in the land of Greece,
 On an island called Ithaca
 there lived a man named ...

CAST Odysseus.

Enter ODYSSEUS.

ATHENE Odysseus was the King of Ithaca, a brave man, a good man and
 when his country called him to war he put on his bronze armor
 picked up his sharpened spear and led his men down to the long
 black ships which lay in wait on the cold tide and his wife wept to
 see him go.

A light rises on PENELOPE who hold a baby in her arms.

PENELOPE My husband.

ODYSSEUS Penelope.

PENELOPE Please do not go.

ODYSSEUS I have no choice.

PENELOPE Your son, your son.

ODYSSEUS I'll be home before he's a year old, I promise.

PENELOPE You promise?

Silence

ODYSSEUS If I don't come back by the time my son has grown his first beard
 then consider me as dead and marry again, if you wish, with a
 younger man.

The cast representing soldiers and people of Ithaca, laugh at this last remark.

PENELOPE You are my husband. How can you joke at a moment like this?

ODYSSEUS Because it won't happen. I'll come home to you and to my beloved Ithaca. I shall see the smoke rising from the chimney and my son will run down to the harbor to greet me.

PENELOPE Not if he's only a year old my husband.

ODYSSEUS *(He smiles)* Within a year the bell will ring out with news of our victory.

A WOMAN Look - Odysseus.

Music. Then as if in the sky above the harbor, a small sparrow is chased and crushed in the talons of an eagle. This may be represented through percussive sound.

A SOLDIER What does it mean Odysseus?

ODYSSEUS It's a good omen my friends. The sparrow represents our enemy, the Trojans. We the Greeks are the eagle. We will crush the enemy in our mighty talons, win the war and be home for supper.

ALL Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS kisses PENELOPE with love and passion and then he holds up his baby son.

ODYSSEUS My son, listen for the bell, then I will come home with my arms full of gold, treasures, beyond your wildest dreams - and all for you.

ATHENE And with these words, brave Odysseus, good Odysseus, set sail for a distant land far across the wine dark sea.

CAST Odysseus - Odysseus.

Exit ODYSSEUS. PENELOPE stands looking out to sea.

ATHENE And his son saw him go but did not understand the meaning of the horizon.

PENELOPE Hush, hush little one, your father will be home soon, home soon,
home soon.

The music continues low and foreboding containing a sense of the war far away.

ATHENE But the war did not last a year or even two, or three, or four, or five,
or six or seven or eight or nine and all the long years Penelope
waited. And her son grew tall, and his name was, Telemachus.

CAST Telemachus.

*Enter TELEMACHUS as a ten-year-old boy. He comes on brandishing a sword, fighting an
invisible enemy. EURYMACHUS, his mother's suitor, watches him from the shadows.*

TELEMACHUS Odysseus the hero and his friend the angry Achilles are in a tight
spot. Back to back they face one hundred Trojans. The Trojans
charge. The swords of the heroes never cease - blood and limbs fill
the air - the Trojans die horrible deaths. *(This he acts out)* At last
there are only two men left standing, Odysseus and Achilles - but
then an arrow flies. *(He falls.)* 'My heel my heel' the hero cries, and
as he dies he calls out. 'Farewell Odysseus, farewell - my friend'.
(As Achilles, he dies.)

EURYMACHUS *applauds.*

TELEMACHUS What do you want?

EURYMACHUS The other lads are playing in the courtyard, why don't you join
them? *(He picks up TELEMACHUS' sword which is wooden.)*

TELEMACHUS Give my sword back.

EURYMACHUS A fine sword.

TELEMACHUS Give it back.

EURYMACHUS I came to talk to you - about your mother.

TELEMACHUS One day, my father will come home and cut your head off.

EURYMACHUS Here, let's play together, you and I. (*He offers TELEMACHUS his sword back.*)

TELEMACHUS I don't want to play with you.

EURYMACHUS Don't be rude, Telemachus.

TELEMACHUS It's my house, I'll be rude if I want.

EURYMACHUS Come let's spar together like Father and Son. (*He throws down the sword which TELEMACHUS picks up.*) Come attack me. (*He walks towards TELEMACHUS who is very scared.*) We're only playing aren't we? (*TELEMACHUS drops his sword. EURYMACHUS then puts his own sword against his throat.*) Understand this Telemachus. I wouldn't let a man live who spoke to me as you have spoken to me. But you are not a man –

TELEMACHUS My father.. .

EURYMACHUS Your father is dead.

TELEMACHUS NO - no.

EURYMACHUS And I will marry your mother.

TELEMACHUS NO! (*EURYMACHUS removes the sword.*) My father is alive. He will come home and sweep you from the house like so many dead leaves.

EURYMACHUS Perhaps it would be better for your mother if he were dead. Have you thought of that? Or are you too young to understand? Love can grow cold you know.

A bell rings.

TELEMACHUS The bell. There must be some mistake. (*pause*) It still rings.

PENELOPE enters.

PENELOPE Telemachus. The war. The war is over. (*She embraces her son.*)

TELEMACHUS *(turns to EURYMACMUS)* NOW, now we shall see. My father will have your head.

Enter EURYCLEIA.

EURYCLEIA My lady. A messenger is at the gate.

PENELOPE Let him in, let him in - no wait. Give him food and drink. We must not forget ourselves.

EURYCLEIA Yes my lady.

PENELOPE It doesn't seem possible and yet the bell still rings. Is it really true do you think?

TELEMACHUS It must be. It has to be. *(They embrace again.)*

Enter EURYCLEIA.

EURYCLEIA The poor man will not eat. He will not drink but begs to see you now.

PENELOPE Then let him in, no wait - let him bathe and give him clean clothes..

TELEMACHUS Mother.

PENELOPE Yes - let him in - let him in.

EURYCLEIA exits momentarily and she and the MESSENGER enter.

MESSENGER My lady, I see by your smile the news has younger legs than me.

PENELOPE It's true then.

MESSENGER As true as I stand here. The war with Troy is over!

PENELOPE Good. And - did we win?

MESSENGER (Laughs) Aye. Troy is no more than dust. Its men are dead, the women and children sold into slavery.

PENELOPE nods, unsure how to react.

TELEMACHUS My father?

MESSENGER Your father is safe and well. I saw him set sail for home in his own ship with twenty trusted men.

TELEMACHUS *(Punching the air)* Yes! Yes!

MESSENGER Brave Odysseus. We all rejoice to speak his name. Not a single Greek would be home yet but for him. Your husband's wits have saved us all.

TELEMACHUS How? Tell me everything in every detail. Mother?

PENELOPE Yes - go on.

MESSENGER Odysseus of the nimble wits is what we call him now for he devised a plan so clever, so full of cunning. Under his orders we made it seem as if the war had broken all our hearts. For ten years we had camped outside the city walls of Troy and won nothing but wounds and grey hairs. Great warriors like Achilles had been killed, so our giving up was not hard for the Trojans to believe. One morning as they awoke they found the field of battle empty, our camp fires out, our ships gone. They cried out in joy, 'The Greeks have fled, we have defeated them!', not knowing that all our soldiers armed and ready to kill were hiding on an island just a few miles away. The Trojans came out of the city and danced in and out of our empty tents. 'Here camped the merciless Achilles, there the clever Odysseus'. Now gone it seemed, all gone except an offering that we had made to the Gods and left behind.

TELEMACHUS What kind of offering?

MESSENGER A horse. A huge wooden horse. It was made from sawn firewood, and its belly was a cavernous womb large enough to hold twenty soldiers armed to the teeth. Your father was among them.

TELEMACHUS Inside the belly of the wooden horse.

MESSENGER The Trojans in their joy pushed the horse through the gates of their mighty city and for the first time in ten years, after all the wasted blood of the battlefield, by one trick we too were inside. All night the Trojans drank and danced and when at last they fell asleep your father, your husband, glad to be free, led out his men with stealth. He slew the sentry with one silent blow.

TELEMACHUS Yes!

MESSENGER Opened the gates of Troy from the inside and the whole of our army, bristling with knives and swords poured in under cover of darkness.

TELEMACHUS And then.. .?

MESSENGER *(Pause)* And then the moon hid her eyes. No tongue can describe the terrible slaughter of that night.

TELEMACHUS How many did my father kill?

PENELOPE Telemachus!

TELEMACHUS My father is a soldier, and a hero amongst men. They should call him a God.

MESSENGER Aye many of the common soldiers do for he has brought us home and we are glad.

PENELOPE Messenger. Thank you. Where is the fleet that brings my husband home?

MESSENGER There was a storm just a few miles from the coast of Troy which scattered the fleet, so each ship will make its way alone. Your husband's ship was among the fastest. The first mast on the horizon should belong to him and you.

PENELOPE Eurycleia, bring the Messenger some food now. He will stay with us tonight.

ME'SSENGER My lady, I will resist. I have a son who was just a few days old when the war began. I haven't seen him for ten years, and I've another day's walk to my farm, before I do.

PENELOPE May the Gods bless you.

MESSENGER And your house.

Exit MESSENGER.

PENELOPE Ten years? Why not ten months, ten days, ten minutes?...

EURYMACHUS goes to comfort her.

TELEMACHUS Leave her alone.

PENELOPE Telemachus, go and prepare to meet your father. Go on.

Exit TELEMACHUS.

EURYMACHUS I'm glad the war's over Penelope.

PENELOPE Yes. Perhaps you should leave before my husband comes home.

EURYMACHUS Are you ashamed?

PENELOPE No.

EURYMACHUS Then I'll stay and greet him.

PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT