

# THE WINE DARK SEA

by Neil Rathmell

## CAST

in order of appearance

Chorus of Fishwives

Zeus

Athene

Hermes

Telemachus

Antinous

Eurymachus

Eurycleia

Dancers

Peisistratus

Nestor

Menelaus

Helen

Servant

Calypso

Odysseus

Eumaeus

Melantho

Melanthius

Gatekeeper

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

**A harbour on a Greek island.**

**Enter the Fishwives. They sit, each carrying out a different task, knitting, cleaning pots, etc. They speak to the audience, as a chorus.**

- FISHWIFE 1**           The men go to sea.
- FISHWIFE 2**           The women stay at home.
- FISHWIFE 3**           The men go fishing.
- FISHWIFE 4**           The women stay at home.
- FISHWIFE 5**           The men go to war.
- FISHWIFE 6**           The women stay at home.
- FISHWIFE 1**           It's always the same.
- FISHWIFE 3**           At home, with the children.
- FISHWIFE 2**           At home, with the grandparents.
- FISHWIFE 5**           At home, alone.
- FISHWIFE 4**           The same old story.

**Pause**

- FISHWIFE 6**           Shall we tell it, the old story?
- FISHWIFE 3**           To keep the children amused until their fathers come home?
- FISHWIFE 2**           **Indicates the audience**
- Them?
- FISHWIFE 4**           Do you think they'll understand?
- FISHWIFE 5**           Whose children are they?
- FISHWIFE 1**           It depends whether you believe what their mothers say.

**FISHWIFE 6** Let's tell them a story.

**FISHWIFE 1** Will they behave?

**FISHWIFE 4** Will they sit still?

**FISHWIFE 3** It's a long story.

**FISHWIFE 2** A good one, though.

**FISHWIFE 1** The story of Odysseus.

**FISHWIFE 3** And Penelope, his wife, who waited twenty years for him to come back.

**FISHWIFE 2** Twenty years?

**FISHWIFE 3** Twenty years.

**FISHWIFE 4** Twenty years is a long time.

**FISHWIFE 1** Twenty years she waited.

**FISHWIFE 6** And never strayed.

**FISHWIFE 2** Unlike some.

**FISHWIFE 3** Where shall we begin?

**FISHWIFE 4** At the beginning.

**FISHWIFE 3** The siege of Troy?

**FISHWIFE 6** Helen?

**FISHWIFE 3** It would take too long.

**FISHWIFE 1** Start where the old minstrels used to start.

**FISHWIFE 2** Homer?

**FISHWIFE 3** Where did he begin?

**FISHWIFE 1** At the end.

**FISHWIFE 6** When the long wait was nearly over.

**FISHWIFE 2** When the baby boy he left behind was nearly a man.

**FISHWIFE 3** When his wife had given up all hope of seeing him again.

**FISHWIFE 4**            When everyone expected her to find another husband and be done with it.

**FISHWIFE 5**            Who could blame her if she did?

**FISHWIFE 2**            Start then.

**FISHWIFE 6**            Yes, let's begin – at the end.

## Scene 2

### Enter Zeus, Hermes and Athene

**FISHWIFE 1** One day, on Mount Olympus, Zeus, the father of men and gods, was talking with Hermes, the messenger, and bright-eyed Athene.

**FISHWIFE 2** Thinking aloud would be more accurate.

**FISHWIFE 1** Would it?

**FISHWIFE 2** I think so.

**FISHWIFE 1** One day, on Mount Olympus, Zeus, the father of men and gods, was thinking aloud.

**ZEUS** I've been thinking. Men always blame us gods for their troubles. But really they shouldn't. If they would only follow their destiny, their lives would be a lot easier. They would still have troubles, of course, but only the ones they were destined to have. The ones we'd planned for them. Not the others. They've only themselves to blame for the others.

### Hermes looks bored, but Athene is interested.

**ATHENE** What do you mean, the others?

**ZEUS** The troubles they bring on themselves by not following their destiny.

**ATHENE** For example?

**ZEUS** Well, look at Aegisthus. He knew perfectly well it was not his destiny to steal Agamemnon's wife while he was away fighting in Troy.

**HERMES** **Suddenly taking an interest.**

That's true. You sent me to tell him. I passed on the message you gave me, which was that he should neither kill Agamemnon when he came home nor steal his wife while he was away. It was all perfectly clear. One of your simpler messages.

**ZEUS** We go out of our way to warn them and then they blame us when things go wrong.

**HERMES** It's true. I told him. I said, if you kill Agamemnon, there's only one thing's going to happen. He's got a young son called Orestes and Orestes is going to grow up and when he grows up he's got no choice but to kill his father's murderer. You. I told him.

**ATHENE** Zeus.

**ZEUS** Yes, Athene?

**ATHENE** There is one man who could complain that we had given him more troubles than he deserved.

**ZEUS** Really? Who?

**ATHENE** Odysseus.

**ZEUS** Ah, Odysseus! He's always been your favourite, hasn't he? You were hardly ever here on Olympus when they were fighting the war in Troy. Always dashing off down to help Odysseus out of some scrape or other.

**Hermes grins until Athene gives him a threatening look.**

**ATHENE** He deserved my help and now he deserves yours. It's twenty years since he went away. Nine years at Troy, eleven years coming back, only to find himself trapped on an island, held captive by the nymph, Calypso. He's been there seven years now. Why won't you help him? What's he done to offend you?

**ZEUS** It's not me he's offended. It's Poseidon.

**HERMES** You should always keep on the right side of Poseidon. You'd think Odysseus would know that.

**ATHENE** What's he done to offend Poseidon?

**ZEUS** Blinded his son.

**ATHENE** I didn't know he'd blinded Poseidon's son.

**HERMES** Polyphemus, the Cyclops. Odysseus put his eye out and he only had the one.

**ATHENE** I didn't know Polyphemus was Poseidon's son.

**HERMES** One night of passion with the nymph Thoosa, daughter of Phorcys. It didn't last.

**ATHENE**

Zeus, you must do something. Odysseus has done nothing to offend you. He follows his destiny, as a man should. Why won't you help him?

**ZEUS**

**After some thought.**

Seven years did you say? That's long enough. Poseidon's had his revenge. Now his will must give way to mine. Hermes, come! I want you to take a message to Calypso.

**Exeunt Zeus, Athene and Hermes.**

### Scene 3

- FISHWIFE 1** The men went to war.
- FISHWIFE 2** And the women stayed at home.
- FISHWIFE 4** Some of them were faithful to their husbands.
- FISHWIFE 2** And some were not.
- FISHWIFE 3** Clytemnestra was not.
- FISHWIFE 4** She took up with Aegisthus.
- FISHWIFE 2** And when Agamemnon and his men returned...
- FISHWIFE 5** They killed them.
- FISHWIFE 6** But that's another story.
- FISHWIFE 1** Penelope was faithful to Odysseus.
- FISHWIFE 5** Even though she had to wait longer than most.
- FISHWIFE 2** Telemachus was just a baby when his father went away.
- FISHWIFE 3** He grew up not knowing whether his father was dead or alive.
- FISHWIFE 4** So, while Zeus sent Hermes with a message to Calypso...
- FISHWIFE 5** Athene went down from Mount Olympus to find Telemachus...
- Enter Athene from one side, Telemachus from the other. Athene does not wear a disguise, but Telemachus sees her as Mentos.**
- FISHWIFE 6** ... disguising herself as an old friend of the family.
- ATHENE** Telemachus!
- TELEMACHUS** **Looking round.**
- Mentos!
- Goes to shake Athene's hand.**
- It is Mentos, isn't it?

**ATHENE** You've changed more than I have in the five years since we last met. The difference between fifteen and twenty is greater than the difference between forty-five and fifty. A few more grey hairs, a few more wrinkles. But you! How you've grown! I might have taken you for your father when he was your age.

**TELEMACHUS** I never knew him.

**ATHENE** You will.

**TELEMACHUS** **Shaking his head, sadly.**

I don't think so. The rest of the fleet came home long ago. He's dead. I know he is.

**Enter Antinous and Eurymachus, talking as they come in.**

**ANTINOUS** So what difference does a few more weeks make? Or months, come to that? Make the most of it while you can, Eurymachus.

**EURYMACHUS** Well, that's fair enough up to a point, Antinous. But say she chooses you in the end.

**ANTINOUS** It's only a matter of time.

**EURYMACHUS** Well, yes, but you won't be too pleased if everything's gone and she's not worth a bean, will you?

**ANTINOUS** Listen, Eurymachus. We could stay here for another five years, all hundred and fifteen of us...

**EURYMACHUS** A hundred and fifteen? Is it really that many?

**ANTINOUS** Eurymachus, it could be two hundred and fifteen, three hundred and fifteen, four hundred and fifteen. It doesn't matter. Odysseus was rich. Penelope is rich. You and I are going to be rich!

**EURYMACHUS** Right!

**ANTINOUS** There's enough wine in the cellars to last a hundred years, enough sheep in the fields for a thousand banquets, enough servant girls in the palace to keep you and me happy for - about a fortnight.

**Eurymachus grins**

Penelope will be somebody's wife one day, yours or mine or somebody else's. Sooner or later she's going to have to face

up to the fact that Odysseus is dead and she's going to have to find another husband. It's only a matter of time.

**EURYMACHUS**

Right!

**ANTINOUS**

Come on! I'm hungry. Let's see what they've got for breakfast at the palace.

**They pass Telemachus and Athene on their way out.**

Morning, Telemachus!

**Exeunt Antinous and Eurymachus.**

**ATHENE**

Who were they?

**TELEMACHUS**

Antinous and Eurymachus, two of the men wanting to marry my mother. Our house has been over-run with them for the last three years, all wanting to take Odysseus's place.

**ATHENE**

Does your mother encourage them?

**TELEMACHUS**

**Shakes his head**

She still clings onto the belief that my father is alive. But that's just folly. How could he be alive after all this time? Her own parents are always on at her, wanting her to marry again.

**ATHENE**

If Odysseus comes back...

**TELEMACHUS**

He won't come back.

**ATHENE**

He might.

**TELEMACHUS**

Better dead than see what's happening in his house now.

**ATHENE**

Listen to me, Telemachus. I'm an old friend of your father's and I'm going to give you some advice. You should do two things.

**TELEMACHUS**

What?

**ATHENE**

Tomorrow, call an assembly in the city and when everyone is there, tell these men to go.

**TELEMACHUS**

They won't take any notice. They'll just laugh at me.

**ATHENE**

Tell them anyway. Second, find yourself a ship, man her with twenty oarsmen and set out to find news of your father.

**TELEMACHUS** Me?

**ATHENE** Go to Pylos first and speak to Nestor. See what he can tell you.

**TELEMACHUS** But...

**ATHENE** Then go to Sparta, where Menelaus lives with Helen. Menelaus was the last to return from Troy. He may have more up-to-date news than anyone else.

**TELEMACHUS** Can I do this?

**ATHENE** **Looking at him intently**

Yes, Telemachus, you can. Believe me. You are no longer a child. You can do it, Telemachus. You can do it.

**Telemachus stands in thought, while Athene steps back.**

**FISHWIFE 1** The goddess spoke and the next minute she was gone, vanishing like a bird through a hole in the roof.

**Telemachus looks round and reacts as though Athene is not there.**

**FISHWIFE 2** But her words worked on his brain as a goldsmith's hammer works on gold.

**FISHWIFE 5** They left their mark.

**FISHWIFE 3** And he was left with a strange feeling of elation.

**FISHWIFE 6** A feeling of power, which he had never felt before.

**FISHWIFE 2** Almost as though he had been touched by a god.

**TELEMACHUS** Yes!

**FISHWIFE 4** He said.

**TELEMACHUS** I'll do it!

**Exit Telemachus, followed by Athene**

#### Scene 4

**FISHWIFE 3** And there was felt in Ithaca the first faint stirring of some long-expected change.

**FISHWIFE 5** Like the melting of the snow in spring, when the streams come down from the mountains with a new bounce in their step.

**FISHWIFE 6** But no one knew what it was.

#### **Enter Antinous and Eurymachus**

**ANTINOUS** What's this about an assembly in the city?

**EURYMACHUS** Search me.

**ANTINOUS** It had better be important.

**EURYMACHUS** Probably just some boring political stuff.

**ANTINOUS** Mmm... Perhaps we should go, just in case.

**EURYMACHUS** Do we have to?

**ANTINOUS** Come on!

#### **Exeunt Antinous and Eurymachus**

**FISHWIFE 2** Everyone gathered in the city square.

**FISHWIFE 1** All the lords and nobles.

**FISHWIFE 4** All the citizens of Ithaca.

**FISHWIFE 3** But no one knew who had called the assembly.

**FISHWIVES** **Ad lib**

Who's called the assembly?

Don't know.

No idea.

Search me.

**FISHWIFE 3** Until Telemachus stepped forward.

#### **Enter Telemachus**

**FISHWIFE 6** And the crowd fell silent.

**TELEMACHUS** **Addressing the audience**

I, Telemachus, have called this assembly of citizens to protest about a great wrong which is being done in the house of Odysseus.

**Enter Antinous and Eurymachus, followed by Athene.**

I do so on the advice of an old friend of Odysseus, Mentos, chieftain of the seafaring people of Taphis.

**ANTINOUS** Never heard of him!

**EURYMACHUS** **To Antinous**

Where's Taphis?

**TELEMACHUS** **Seeing Athene**

There he is! My father's friend!

**He waves to Athene. She smiles.**

**Antinous and Eurymachus look round. It is obvious that they can't see Athene.**

For more than three years, the house of Odysseus has been over-run by dogs.

**ANTINOUS** Woof! Woof!

**Eurymachus laughs**

**TELEMACHUS** These dogs, like hounds scenting a poor rabbit gone to earth, have made their home at our gate.

**ANTINOUS** Mmm! What's that smell?

**Eurymachus laughs**

**TELEMACHUS** But they don't just stay at the gate. They come inside and eat our food and drink our wine and pester our serving girls. When they first came as suitors for my mother's hand, I was too young to turn them away and now they are too many for me. There are now more than a hundred of them.

**ANTINOUS** A hundred and fifteen actually.

**Eurymachus laughs**

**TELEMACHUS** What can one man do against so many? Citizens, I appeal for your help. Tell your sons to give up their pursuit of my mother and leave her in peace to wait for my father's return.

**ANTINOUS** Tell your mother to make her mind up and choose a husband before she gets too old.

**TELEMACHUS** **To Athene**

You see! You see how they insult me! What can I do?

**He turns away, his head in his hands.**

**ATHENE** Why don't you leave him alone, Antinous?

**ANTINOUS** **Thinking it was Eurymachus speaking**

What?

**EURYMACHUS** I didn't say anything.

**Antinous turns away again**

**ATHENE** You're just a coward. You wouldn't dare speak to Odysseus like that.

**ANTINOUS** **Turning on Eurymachus**

I'm not a coward.

**EURYMACHUS** I didn't say you were.

**ANTINOUS** Yes, you did.

**EURYMACHUS** No, I didn't.

**ANTINOUS** **Pushing him**

Yes, you did.

**EURYMACHUS** **Pushing him**

No, I didn't.

**ANTINOUS** **Twisting his arm up his back**

Yes, you did.

**EURYMACHUS**

**In pain**

All right! All right!

**Antinous releases Eurymachus. Telemachus resumes his speech.**

**TELEMACHUS**

Until now, I have been forced to walk blindly towards manhood, without a father to guide me and teach me how to be a man. But this man's god-like words have opened my eyes at last and now I see what I must do. Citizens of Ithaca, I ask you to give me a fast boat and a crew of twenty men to sail with me to seek news of my father.

**ANTINOUS**

Don't stay away too long or you'll miss your mother's wedding.

**Eurymachus laughs.**

**TELEMACHUS**

**Reacting angrily**

But to Antinous and Eurymachus and all the rest of my mother's suitors, I say this. Before long, Zeus himself will bring a day of reckoning and you will pay me with your lives.

**A crash of thunder**

**FISHWIFE 1**

Zeus in heaven heard Telemachus's words and sent an omen.

**FISHWIFE 2**

Two eagles flew down from the mountain top, sailing down the wind on outstretched wings.

**FISHWIFE 3**

Everyone looked up in fear and dismay.

**FISHWIFE 4**

Everyone wondered what it portended.

**FISHWIFE 5**

Because the eagles looked like death itself, hanging over the city.

**FISHWIFE 6**

Then the eagles swooped away over the rooftops and out of sight.

**FISHWIFE 1**

There was silence for a long time, until one old man spoke up.

**FISHWIFE 2**

This is an omen...

**FISHWIFE 1**

He said...

**FISHWIFE 2**

... and it bodes ill for those young men who want Penelope for their wife.

**FISHWIFE 3** Odysseus...

**FISHWIFE 1** He said...

**FISHWIFE 3** ... is close at hand.

**FISHWIFE 4** Even now

**FISHWIFE 1** He said...

**FISHWIFE 4** ... he is sowing the seeds of destruction for these arrogant young men.

**FISHWIFE 5** And their destruction

**FISHWIFE 1** He said...

**FISHWIFE 5** ... will bring disaster to many others who live under the clear skies of Ithaca.

**Pause**

**ANTINOUS** Cobblers!

**Eurymachus laughs**

Two eagles, that's all it was. Death and destruction?  
Cobblers!

**Eurymachus laughs**

The day Penelope chooses a new husband is the day we leave the house of Odysseus - all but one of us. Until then, we're staying.

**Exit Antinous.**

**Eurymachus stands smirking until he notices that Antinous has gone, then hurries off after him.**