

## LOCKER ROOM TALK

by Karen Butler

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### CAST

3 Women, 2 Men. A troupe of actors, able to play many parts, any and all ethnicities.

CHORUS—Woman, older, any ethnicity

ACTRESS—forties, any ethnicity, plays Penelope, Cleopatra, Medea, Bracknell, Hera, Juno, potential rape victim in the manner of Christine Blasey Ford, Inanna, and an actress.

YOUNG ACTRESS—twenties, any ethnicity, plays Rosalind, Aphrodite, Semele, Io, Underworld Queen, and an actress.

ACTOR—forties, any ethnicity, plays Cleopatra, Medea, Bracknell, a Troll, Zeus, Jupiter, The Man, a Pal, and an actor.

YOUNG ACTOR—twenties, any ethnicity, plays Telemachus, Rosalind, Aphrodite, a Troll, Dionysus, Argos, Frat Boy, and an actor.

They all play bonobos and chimpanzees; use several accents, dance and sing a little.

### SYNOPSIS

To overthrow fusty gender stereotypes, toss humor at ‘em. Locker Room Talk, a good-natured skewering of the patriarchy, speculates how women and men fell to disorder. The answer lies back with the ancients who taught Homo sapiens sapiens to think—would they had taught us to think straight! It’s hard to fathom, but the sages—Homer, Ovid, Henry James and their ilk—indulged in common locker room talk, and our world suffers the slings and arrows for it to this day. Alarms blare. How to fix this before too late?

Delving into our ancestral and even animal past, a troupe of rickety actors hurtle through ancient literature, underworld myth, and 19th century novels, knocking against Fate and rickety shibboleths, musing over concocting love, learning, and equality. They play on surges of theatrical absurdism as alarms sound and civilization teeters.

Bonobos and chimps, old dogs and puppy biscuits, modern scholars and mooing cows, trips to the deep underworld—Locker Room Talk, a comedy about a deadly serious subject, is a timely, inventive tugging at the myths of a great civilization, frantically flailing to keep from toppling. The bigger parts are for women; I put my thumb on the scale. Mixed ethnicities are indispensable in this day and age.

In the grand scheme of things, does the human species even matter? Of course we do; we know love.

(All ‘translations’ in this play are written by the author, based closely on various standard translations by reputable scholars, avoiding copyright issues.)

## LOCKER ROOM TALK

Setting: A stage. A stepladder to the side.  
 Blackout. Jaunty music. Lights up. Actors enter, dancing jauntily.  
 Blackout. Music out.

Lights up on:

CHORUS: (*She steps from group, jigs a step here and there, now and again.*) I am the Greek Chorus. This play needs one—the human hourglass is fast losing sand. (*An alarm blares, frightening and sad.*)

In ancient plays, The Chorus commented on the play's action while dancing and singing. Inner music always guides me, (*she dances a step*) and lately, a crazy zaniness has taken over—ya ta ta ta ta ta. Must be my response to the vagaries of our human civilization's teetering to oblivion. We muster up new dance steps, never having been quite so on edge before.

Ah, look. Here comes our protagonist, the Actress, after an important audition.

ACTRESS: (*Angry yet charmingly so*) I didn't get the role!

*She beats a pillow against various parts of the stage.*

CHORUS: (*To the audience*) She didn't get the role.

ACTRESS: Dammit! I didn't get it!

CHORUS: She didn't get it!

ACTRESS: Guess who got it.

CHORUS: (*Trumpeting*) Tum ta ta tum ta ta!

ACTRESS: A man got it!

ACTOR: (*Off-stage*) I got it!

CHORUS: Our other protagonist.

ACTRESS: (*Beautiful, strong rage.*) In this day and age! Producers are dinosaurs! Can't see their own bony nose plates!

(*Reasonably*) Actually the part was written for a man, that's true, but that's because the playwright is a person of meager imagination!

(*Great tragedienne, on stepladder, stage center*) I could have played the dickens out of that role! (*Reasonably*) There's no reason a woman can't play it. In fact, a woman should—

ACTRESS & CHORUS: —this day and age.

(*They shake hands in agreement.*)

ACTRESS: (*Chuckling*) But I can play the maid if I want! Two tiny, lousy scenes! (*She curtsies, becoming for a flash the maid.*) (*New thought*) Actually, one scene is darn good.

But I'm stuck in secondary parts, help, it's quicksand. I deserve the lead once in awhile! 51% of the time. (*Seeing the humor in it*) Heh heh heh.

CHORUS: (*To Audience*) She has accepted the maid's part.

ACTRESS: (*She takes over the stage, the brilliant star, maybe dancing a bit, disproving her words, charming the audience.*) Damn right. I can't afford to turn down paying work; I'm in the arts. And don't get me wrong. I don't mean I need the lead in any splashy, spotlit way.

(*Real, showing her greatness of character.*) I mean I want to be the character driving the action instead of cooing and aaaahing behind the penised-one. I want to be the responsible one, the driver instead of the passenger, the center instead of the side; the problem solver, the connector.

The President.

(*Laughing, enjoying.*) That's only fair, isn't it?

CHORUS: Eminently, this day and age. Women, perhaps, haven't taken enough responsibility on their own shoulders.

ACTRESS: I contain multitudes far too splendid to shove into shallow envelopes.

But you know, I often wonder—some of the fault might be ours! (*Hits herself with pillow.*)

CHORUS: A very good observation. We must take it to heart.

ACTRESS: There I was in the green room, waiting to audition along with the other actors.

ACTOR, YOUNG ACTOR and YOUNG ACTRESS enter, begin their physical warm up.

ACTOR: (*To ACTRESS*) Hey, I hear you're playing the maid. You'll be great!

ACTRESS: What are you playing?

ACTOR: (*On stepladder, expansively.*) The lead. Of course.

YOUNG ACTOR: Of course.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Of course!

ACTRESS: Of course. Why wasn't I even considered for the lead?

CHORUS: Why don't women lead as often as men?

*All dance and sinuously sing the snake charming song.*

CHORUS: For the answer to that, we look to the ancients, the founders of our great Western Civilization. How do they teach us to live, what wisdom do they impart, these great men we study and revere?

ACTRESS: Who, for instance?

CHORUS: Homer, for instance.

ACTRESS: Homer of the wine dark sea?

Actors gather around, paying attention.

CHORUS: That one.

ACTOR: 3,000 years ago Homer, The Odyssey, the start of Western literature? Oh! Great Bard Homer! Rosy-fingered dawn?

ACTRESS: He of the rosy fingers?

CHORUS: That Homer.

ACTRESS: What does that genius have to say? What edict of profundity erupted from him that we still live by centuries on?

CHORUS: (*Setting the scene.*) The first book of —

ALL: (*Trumpeting and dancing*) tum ta ta tum!

CHORUS: — (*on stepladder*) Homer's The Odyssey. Here are the book's opening lines, according to Mage Paige's 2018 translation:

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Dancing across the stage*) “Lively Muse, golden child of Zeus, bring forward for a new generation our precious tales of long ago.”

CHORUS: And Finnan Winnie’s 1996 version:

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Dancing across the stage*) Burst yourself forth, starry Muse, Zeus-daughter. Chose your beginning, but sing loud for we listen today as well.

CHORUS: And Wilson Wilson in 1965:

ACTOR: (*Dancing across the stage*) Point to your beginning, Muse, Zeus-sprung, give voice to our tale.

CHORUS: So you see, all of them strike a superior tone and mix spicy gods into the cake. Keep in mind that all these translators are supreme in their field, lest you start disbelieving their words. Odysseus has been off fighting the Trojan War for ten long years, and has then spent a further tortured ten making his goddess-braked way home to—

ACTRESS: Ah. (*She becomes Penelope, putting on a shawl, nods to Chorus, thanking her.*)

CHORUS: You’re welcome. Odysseus is making his goddess-braked way home to—

PENELOPE: Penelope, his long-waiting wife. She’s endured a lineup of suitors—

(*CHORUS, ACTOR, YOUNG ACTRESS becomes Suitor—‘Rhubarb, rhubarb’.*)

PENELOPE: —(*angry, Stage Center*) a lineup of importuning suitors wanting to take her husband’s place in all things, and she has put up with them, because as a woman in 1250 BC, she has little power. She also has to board and feed these suitors, for, as a king’s wife, she possesses great wealth, and Greeks were always welcoming to male strangers.

This intolerable situation has gone on for two decades, twenty long, lank years.

CHORUS: She and Odysseus have a son—

(*YOUNG ACTOR becomes TELEMACHUS. He takes CS, stepladder*)

TELEMACHUS: (*Arrogant*) Telemachus, still wet behind the ears, just out of his teens.

PENELOPE: (*Blazing with love for her son*) So Penelope is the one who raised him, for his father has been gone nearly his whole life.

CHORUS: The suitors drink and carouse, while a silver-fingered bard plays sad music telling of Odysseus’ long, bedeviled journey home from Troy.

CHORUS, ACTOR, YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Singing, taking over the stage momentarily*) Show me the way to go home....

CHORUS: Penelope calls down from her rooms upstairs.

PENELOPE: (*From upstage*) That music drips melancholy, Telemachus. I know you're a boy barely shucked from teenagerdom and you like to listen to your indie pop or whatever 'tis called, but please, dear, I, distraught and undone by lengthy years of missing a husband-gallant am lacking cheer. Think on my spirits and request a tune of livelier pace.

TELEMACHUS: (*Taking the stage, pacing Hamlet-like*) Mo—ther! Who dost thou think thou art? Who gave thee, the lesser-brained semi-human, the right to an opinion? This is, thou well knowest, a world made by and for Men. (*He breaks character.*) Wow! Nasty lines.

(*Back in character.*) This is, thou well knowest, a world made by and for Men. Women are vessels merely, vessels for the getting of more men into the world; necessary vessels, yes, but nothing more. Go back to your quarters and do what you're meant to, what the gods ordain you do—which is to take up your loom and distaff and weave me a cool new cloak!

(*Showing off his oratorical skills, on stepladder, addressing the audience.*) Speech is the business of men, all men, only men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household whilst my father sojourns abroad!

ALL: (*Dancing in rhythm in a line across the stage*) Speech is the business of men, all men, only men, and of Telemachus most of all!

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Drops character.*) Hey. I'm just an actor saying lines here. Men aren't the only bad eggs.

YOUNG ACTRESS: We know that. Don't worry.

ACTRESS: We didn't write those lines: a man wrote them; a respected dead white man.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Makes you think, doesn't it?

CHORUS: That's what society looked like back then.

TELEMACHUS: (*Back in character, on stepladder*) Speech is the business of men, all men, only men, and of me most of all, for mine is the power in this household whilst my father sojourns abroad!

PENELOPE: (*Meeekly obeying.*) Oh, okay, Sonny dear.

ACTOR: (*Cocky.*) That's really what she says! (Then he begins to question.) That's really what she says?

YOUNG ACTRESS: That scene is Homer's?

CHORUS: You mix all the translations together and they come out sounding pretty much like that. It is a close approximation to what Homer said, though perhaps a bit heavy on nasty, age-crusty subtext.

And keep firmly in mind that as in Shakespeare so many centuries later, all characters in Greek plays were enacted by men. They took all the parts and all the money both.

ACTOR: (*Falsetto voice, a man pretending to be a woman, taking over from Penelope, taking shawl which she grabs back.*) Oh, okay Sonny dear.

YOUNG ACTRESS: But The Odyssey isn't a play. It's a long narrative poem.

CHORUS: So I'm taking a little theatrical license here. What do you want from me? I'm the Chorus, not the playwright. All characters in Greek plays—and probably all travelling poets, too—were men.

ACTRESS: Women weren't allowed on the stage?

CHORUS: That's right. Only men. And boys.

ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Building*) Women weren't allowed on the stage?

ACTOR: No. Only men. And boys!

CHORUS, ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Laughing!*) Women weren't allowed on the stage!

YOUNG ACTRESS: So while men were playing Cleopatra well enough—

ACTOR: (*Becoming Cleopatra, doing a good job*) "I have immortal longings in me!"

CHORUS: And Rosalind—

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Becoming Rosalind, doing a good job*) "Sir, you have wrestled well."

CHORUS: And Medea

ACTOR: (*Becoming Medea, a good job*) "You want to see your sons?"

CHORUS: And Aphrodite—

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Becoming Aphrodite, a good job*) “Love is all!”

CHORUS: And Lady Bracknell—

ACTOR: (*Becoming Bracknell, a good job*) “In a handbag?”

CHORUS: Cleopatra could have been played this way—slightly different, and perhaps slightly better?

ACTRESS: (*She becomes Cleopatra, a very good job*) “I have immortal longings in me!”

YOUNG ACTRESS: And Rosalind. (*Becomes Rosalind, a very good job.*) “Sir, you have wrestled well.”

ACTRESS: And Medea (*Becomes Medea, a very good job*) “You want to see your sons?”

YOUNG ACTRESS: And Aphrodite (*becomes Aphrodite, very good job*) “Love is all!”

CHORUS: And Bracknell.

ACTOR: (*As Bracknell, doing a good job.*) In a handbag?

ACTRESS: (*As Bracknell doing a very good job*) Yes, in a handbag.

*Toe to toe. A standoff. They laugh, hug.*

ALL: In a handbag!

ACTRESS: Well, maybe we’ll share Bracknell.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Thank the gods that women have become gutsier about securing employment!

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Teasing*) You can say that again.

ACTOR: But go back. That’s really what it says in Homer? Penelope just meekly obeys?

PENELOPE: I’ll tell you what it really says, in several translations. (*Center stage*) Penelope—

CHORUS: “guarded” according to Paige—

*(PENELOPE becomes guarded)*

CHORUS: “judicious and prudent”, says Winnie—

*(Penelope acts it out, SR.)*

CHORUS: And “gloriously divine,” translates Wilson,

*(Penelope acts it out, SL.)*

CHORUS: Penelope says to the bard playing the music:

PENELOPE: “You crack my heart, your songs pulse sorrows. My soul and body are hollowed with craving my man, whose fame sends him to the world and keeps him from me.”

TELEMACHUS: *(Center Stage)* Telemachus responds. Wilson says he’s “brooding”— *(acts it out.)*

CHORUS: Paige says he’s—

TELEMACHUS: ‘Acute and confident’— *(acts it out, SR.)*

CHORUS: Winnie says—

TELEMACHUS: “Menacing”— *(acts it out, SL.)*

CHORUS: So though they all had quite different ideas about what the Greek words meant, there was agreement among the translators that all referred to the boy’s mental acuity and state.

Wilson has Telemachus go on to say—this will be hard for us to believe, but this is really what he says:

TELEMACHUS: *(Taking stage, lordly and hammy)* You have work to do, woman. You’ve got a loom. You’ve got a distaff. And get those slaves of yours moving as well. Speaking is reserved only for men, and especially for me, for I am lord here.

YOUNG ACTRESS: *(Dancing, singing, sweetly mocking.)* He is lord here, he is lord here, he is lord here, tra la la!

YOUNG ACTOR: *(He breaks character, speaks to actresses.)* Sorry, ladies. I myself would never talk like that. I wouldn’t dare! *(Chuckles.)*

CHORUS: (*Stepladder CS*) Theater is a safe place. Ideas expressed here broaden, not squelch. (*Barke*) Get your red hot catharsis right here. And keep things moving; the time is nigh.  
Winnie translates this same scene this way:

TELEMACHUS: Get up to your rooms, Mother. Mind your own business, which you well know is weaving, and make sure those serving women of yours do their work as well. When commands must be given, leave that to men, but mainly, to me: The clout in this household is mine.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Dancing, singing, sweetly mocking.*) He is the clout, he is the clout, he is the clout, tra la la!

CHORUS: And here's Paige's take on the situation.

TELEMACHUS: It's men who must discuss and arrange, men and only men, but I over all. For I am supreme here.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Dancing, singing, sweetly mocking.*) For he is supreme—? Sheesh! Grown women buckle under to snotty boys? How does Penelope react?

CHORUS: This is interesting. To Paige's "acute and confident" Telemachus, "guarded" Penelope —

*(They act it out as they speak.)*

PENELOPE: (*CS*) —stunned, leaped upstairs to her servants, (*US*) for her son's considered words struck her soul, and she cried out for her missing husband.

CHORUS: And how does our 'judicious and prudent' heroine react to Winnie's 'menacing' Telemachus?

*(Telemachus acts menacing, Penelope reacting.)*

PENELOPE: (*SR*) Dazed, Penelope scurried upstairs to her quarters. (*US*) She deeply believed in the correctness of her son's words.

CHORUS: And here's Wilson's "glorious" Penelope, reacting to her "brooding" son—

*(Telemachus and Penelope act it out.)*

PENELOPE: (*SL*) Overwhelmed, she fled to her rooms (*US*) and pondered deeply the significant reprimands of her son.

YOUNG ACTRESS: The significant reprimands of her son?

ACTOR: Part of being a man was learning to silence women's public speech, right? She was helping her son become a man.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Says who?

ACTOR: Says Homer!

ALL: Yah! Says Homer! (*They all do a little dance, singsong*) Homer says, yes Homer says, yes Homer says, says who: says Homer!

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Pacing*) 'Get thee upstairs, I'm the ruler here,' that little pipsqueak has the gall to say to the mother who bore and loved him? And she accepts that meekly? Ladies and gentlemen of the jury—this scene sorely needs rewriting!

PENELOPE: (*Stepladder, angrily*) You'll obey me! I'm your mother!

TELEMACHUS: What did you say?

PENELOPE: You heard me.

TELEMACHUS: (*Including Audience*) We all heard you! (He takes the stepladder from her.) That blasted hag thinks she can tell me what to do! I'll show her, I'll...

ALL: (*Marching*) Lock her up! Lock her up! (*Chorus beating drums.*)

Pause.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Making a Time Out sign*) Hmm. Well, anger didn't work very well, did it? Those ancient Greek characters couldn't handle women's equality psychologically. Humans weren't evolved enough at that point. In Greece, women had few rights, little independence and stayed at home, hidden away. It's unlikely they were even allowed in the theater audience!

CHORUS: Unless, of course, they were slave women. Those half-humans were allowed out in public, for who else would fetch and carry? And as late as in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, anyone with a womb—

ACTRESS: Anyone with a womb? Really? That specific?

CHORUS: (*Stepladder, announcing*) Anyone with a womb has no independent status and is not allowed to participate in popular assemblies, like theater. They are vessels merely.

ACTRESS: Yet ball sacks came with the power of speech!

ALL: Ya ta ta ta ta ta, ya ta ta ta ta, ya ta ta ta ta ta ta-a-ah!

YOUNG ACTRESS: The rage which Penelope just experienced, however appropriate, doesn't appear to be the best response. That's because we know by now anger is a stupid road to take—rooting through ancient wrongs. Why cart around old garbage?

CHORUS: Toss it into the compost pile and turn it into art.

ACTRESS: Perhaps a play we can all star in. Let's try that scene another way.

*(Actress becomes Penelope.)*

PENELOPE: *(Her own woman, sassy, strong)* I'm the responsible adult here. The days of shutting myself in my room and weaving are over. I'll determine the music in my own home, and in fact, I'll decide who plays it and who listens to it. And you will stop speaking to your mother so disgracefully. Your actions are ridiculous.

TELEMACHUS: The law says you better weave!

PENELOPE: And who writes the laws?

ACTOR: Men do. *(Aside)* Women as lawyers? You crazy?

ACTOR & TELEMACHUS: *(Marching in place)* Lock her up! Lock her up!

THE WOMEN: *(Rockette dancing, laughing, making jolly fun of the men)* Lock her up! Lock her up!

PENELOPE: You can see it's unfair. Men write the laws. Women aren't allowed to write laws. So I'll no longer follow laws that women haven't helped formulate.

ACTOR: Who said life was fair?

ACTOR & TELEMACHUS: Kill the bitch! *(Chorus beating drum.)*

YOUNG ACTRESS: Hey! Knock it off! Words have consequences.

ACTRESS: That's not working well either, is it? The strong woman induces male-heavy laws.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Let's keep it light, guys. Fun fact: The following really happened in the twenty-first century to Mary Beard, a noted academic and source material for much of this play.

ACTRESS: Ms. Beard came up with a beautiful idea. She dared suggest on the Internet:

*(They all grapevine gracefully together across the stage.)*

YOUNG ACTRESS: Let's put a strong woman's face on our money.

YOUNG ACTOR: Of course! We should have done that ages ago. What took us so long?

ACTRESS: An idea whose time has come.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And we could even have a woman President!

CHORUS: A sound idea. But guess what?

*(ACTOR & YOUNG ACTOR become Trolls, stalking/dancing across stage, taking over for a moment, humming a spooky tune.)*

ACTRESS: Enter the Trolls?

TROLLS: Rape her, kill her, lock her up! *(Drum beat, circling her.)*

YOUNG ACTRESS: Because she suggested a woman's face be on the money? That really happened?

CHORUS: That really happened. That's not a playwright making things up. That really happened.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Astonishing.

PENELOPE: Let's try this Penelope scene yet another way.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Wait a minute. This play might be sounding anti-male, and that's not our intention.

CHORUS: Thank you. Certainly not. We're better than that.

ALL: When Homer goes low, we go high!

YOUNG ACTRESS: And here's my chance, so I'm going to grab it. I think most women have been wanting to say this. (Stepladder) None of the men of my acquaintance rape or hit or abuse women.

CHORUS & ACTRESS: That's right!

YOUNG ACTRESS: Not one. I know such men are out there, I know how prevalent and monstrous it is. But most men wouldn't even consider it. Most men are pretty damn fabulous. Hurray for most men. We love you.

WOMEN: We. Love. You!

YOUNG ACTRESS: And another topic which needs addressing: flirting, that joyous flibbertigibbet, has become suddenly problematic. Hello! Flirting is allowed—encouraged, even; come on, everyone enjoys the tickle of a good, hard flirt.

ALL: (*Singing, dancing*) The tickle of a good, hard flirt!

*The Youngers play a scene.*

YOUNG ACTOR: Hey there. Don't you look great!

YOUNG ACTRESS: Thank you. You're not so bad yourself.

YOUNG ACTOR: Would you like to get a cup of coffee, get to know one another?

YOUNG ACTRESS: Thanks, I'm flattered, but I'm on my way to work.

YOUNG ACTOR: So you're saying no?

YOUNG ACTRESS: I'm saying no.

YOUNG ACTOR: Another time then.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Perhaps. So long, handsome.

*(To Audience)* Turn him down if that's your response, but with grace and kindness.

And what you must never do, my fine feathered male friend, is pressure your lady, for then you've lost your savoir faire, sir, and thus, you've lost your lady.

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Stepladder, writhing*) Hey babe, you know you want it. You can't leave me like this! Cock tease! Bitch! You led me on! You shouldn't dress that way! You shouldn't smile like that! Give it to me or else!

CHORUS: (*Leading him off ladder*) Yes. No more of that.

YOUNG ACTRESS: No more of that.

Beat.

CHORUS: Back to the play; we have to keep moving; alarms are sounding. (*Alarms sound*)  
Penelope, you're trying it again.

PENELOPE: Attend, sweet son of heart of mine.

My darling boy, spawn of my soul, respect for women would stand you in good stead in this life.

And ye suitors, ye now must list to me and obey. Respect the high reputation of my husband as you must learn to respect mine own parlous state. Out, damn suitors, out I say.

And male child of my loins, cease commanding me to weave! I'll stay right here and oversee the tutor I hire for you, Telemachus, to teach you some matters!

TELEMACHUS: Stupid bitch. (*Stepladder*) I have a penis and that means I am born with an inability to bear listening to your sort speak, or to understand you deserve equal pay, or to have you gain equality with me in any way. Besides, the gods have decreed that women are secondary.

ACTOR: The gods proclaim it!

TELEMACHUS: The gods must be obeyed!

CHORUS: The responsible female adult brings on the wrath of gods spun from the myths of men.

PENELOPE: Why is it those male gods always end up on the men's side?

ACTOR: Quake and bow low. Enter Dionysus! God of theater!

(*YOUNG ACTOR in Dionysus laurel wreath leaps across the stage.*)

CHORUS: We tell of the god Dionysus. How he was born of Semele—

(*YOUNG ACTRESS become Semele.*)

— a beautiful Theban princess, and fathered by Zeus—

ACTOR: (*Puts on Zeus laurel wreath, walks around Semele, sizing her up.*) —‘when you’re famous they let you do it’—Zeus, king of the gods—who felt entitled to rape the beautiful Semele, and so promptly did.

*(They decorously act this out: he bends her backwards.)*

CHORUS: Pregnant—

SEMELE: —of course—

CHORUS: —she was tricked by Zeus’s perpetually jealous wife Hera—

ACTRESS: (*becoming Hera, wrapped in swirling scarves, otherworldly*): I know a secret way to find out if he really loves you.

SEMELE: You do?

HERA: Ask Zeus to present himself in all his glory to your naked eyes.

SEMELE: Oh, ok. (*Semele kneels before Zeus and implores.*) Please let me see you in all your glory!

CHORUS: He, the Thunder God, for some stupid reason, allows this, and up goes Semele in a slash of lightning.

*(Hera chases a squealing Semele around with a lightning slash. Semele falls to the ground, dead, and is covered with a scarf.)*

CHORUS: But wily Zeus, though mourning a moment his sizzled sweetheart, seizes the fetus from the smoking lady’s womb—

*(Zeus waves the scarf, Semele ‘disappears.’ Zeus wraps scarf around his thigh and turns upstage.)*

—and nurtures it in his mighty thigh, and thus Dionysus was called—

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Leaps from behind Zeus*)—The Twice Born! As I was nurtured by a god, therefore am I also a god, never mind that my mother was a mere human vessel and thus only peripherally involved in my birth anyway. And she was raped, but what are women for? Dionysus am I!

ACTOR: Dionysus, god of wine and drunken revelry, madness, violence, pain, suffering, death, rebirth.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And also god of theater? How can that be?

Beat.

CHORUS: Well, he's also the god of transformation.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Ah. Transformation. Theater. I get it.

ACTRESS: Behold the deus ex machina.

CHORUS: Dionysus, god of wine and roses!

*Dionysus runs heroically around the stage, others following, kowtowing to him, oooh, oooh, oooh.*

DIONYSUS: (*Poses heroically CS, stepladder*) Humans, you puny and corruptible,  
 unable to solve this situation impenetrable,  
 still childish in capabilities developmental.  
 But to you I promise, solved it will get.  
 As soulmates and equals will men see women yet.

CHORUS, ACTRESS, YOUNG ACTRESS: Hurray! (*They begin dancing and singing Can Can, celebrating.*)

DIONYSUS: However, one slight catch is there.

ACTRESS: What's that?

DIONYSUS: (*He gets a kick out of this*) It will take another 2,000 years!

ACTRESS: 2,000 years!

CHORUS: And even then, we'll have a lot of hard work to do. Female subjugation is deeply ingrained.

YOUNG ACTRESS: But how did it get so deeply ingrained?

ACTRESS: It's obvious—men did it!

CHORUS: No. Come on now. It takes two to tango.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Homer got his ideas about treating women appallingly from somewhere.

CHORUS: Let us explore together the ancient dramas of our animal past.

*Actors jump around like monkeys for a moment.*

ACTOR: Isn't it clear it started with our ape nature and male strength? It's obvious from our behavior we came out of the animal tradition of the strongest bullying the less strong. Females were beaten.

CHORUS: And still are.

*All step forward, in top hats and canes, dancing and singing rhythmically.*

CHORUS: Women being second and obliged to give in came to seem so natural that we haven't drawn attention to it—

YOUNG ACTRESS: *(dancing, singing)* Haven't drawn attention to it!

YOUNG ACTOR: *(dancing, singing)*—haven't even seen it—

YOUNG ACTRESS: *(dancing, singing)* Haven't even seen it!

YOUNG ACTOR: *(dancing, singing)*—It's become the norm.

ALL: *(Big finish) (dancing, singing)* It's become the norm!

*Dancing and singing stop.*

ACTOR: Maybe there's a good reason. Maybe it should be the norm.

*ALL stop and stare at him.*

YOUNG ACTRESS: Yet now that we have seen it, we can't unsee it. We have to fix it.

ACTRESS: Do we have time?

*Alarm sounds.*

ACTOR: Well, going back to our roots, aren't we really apes?

CHORUS: It's complicated. (*Stepladder*) Homo sapiens sapiens, that's us, close cousins of two branches of the monkey clan, share 99% of our genes with both the bonobos and the chimpanzees, which initiates an intriguing puzzle—which branch, if either, did we evolve with?

ACTRESS: Introducing—the bonobos! (*Holds picture.*)

*(All except Chorus become bonobos, making monkey gestures and noises.)*

CHORUS: Bonobos, Pan paniscus, don't do things the way most primates do. They are matriarchal, gentle, intelligent, cooperative.

*(Minuetting gracefully with one another throughout, acting out the words.)*

Unrelated females band together as they are the ones who leave their home tribes as adults and join other bands. As they form tight bonds with other females, they easily overcome male aggression.

Mothers and sons bond strongly as well, and this also serves to defuse male aggression.

Interestingly enough, the brilliant way they've come up with to settle disputes—is sex!

*(All hoot happily!)*

When, for example, bonobos come upon a large patch of fruit—

*(Whoops of joy as Bonobos find fruit.)*

—if tensions rise over feeding priority—

*(They act this out.)*

—the bonobos will decompress with a quick round of—

*(Bonobos grab a scarf and all hide behind it, making appropriate sounds.)*

—genital-to-genital rubbing, tongue-kissing, oral sex, face-to-face intercourse, and they've even been known to make sex toys.

*(Chorus removes scarf and bonobos blow kisses at one another.)*

They're sexually open to everything: males with females—

ACTRESS: Wait just a minute. Did you say Bonobos make sex toys?

CHORUS: You think we're the only monkeys who figured that one out?

*(Bonobos dancing elegantly.)*

Rubber balls if they can get them. Plant material or rocks if they can't. As I was saying, they're sexually open to everything—

*(They act out the words.)*

males with females,  
 males with males,  
 females with females,  
 juveniles with adults.  
 It's a loving free for all.  
 And the end result of all this scrumptious screwing is—

BONOBOS: *(Swaying together)* We rarely fight, we share the fruit, we all live happily ever after.

ALL: *(Blowing kisses at each other and the audience.)* Ya ta ta ta ta....

CHORUS: Did humans perhaps trip down the same magical path? Sadly, though according to the New York Times, bonobos are a seriously endangered species.

YOUNG ACTRESS: I often have the feeling we are too.

CHORUS: Yes, our clock is ticking. *(Alarm sounds)* And now let's take a look at the chimpanzees, Pan troglodytes. *(Photo.)*

*(Actors shift and become chimps and noisily act this out. They carry on boxing matches throughout.)*

Chimps are male dominant,  
 pay little attention to females though males mate with every one of them,  
 practice infanticide,  
 are violent,  
 but form firm family bonds and are intelligent, strong, and good in circuses.  
 They're also endangered.

ACTRESS: And we humans? Which branch do we most resemble?

CHORUS: How to portray being human? Homo sapiens sapiens, complicated creatures, perched on the knife edge of both heaven and hell. Which branch do we most resemble? We now go to the year 8,000 BC. Things moved slowly back then, and nothing much would change for over 5,000 years. Take a look at human life back in history.

ALL: (*Kneeling*) Oh, Great Mother!

Great Mother is a scarf over the stepladder. Actors stand as they speak, swaying together. ??

ACTOR: Great Mother, from whose womb all humankind arise!

ACTRESS: We thank you for the successful trade routes we have established with neighbors near and far.

YOUNG ACTOR: We particularly like the sweet figs that have come from our friends to the south.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And we ask your blessing on our theater play which opens tonight, on the theme of sisterly love, and we give thanks for the multitude of theatrical talents you have bestowed upon us.

ACTOR: The scenery is spectacular, with colors never before seen, and the story—well, the story is a racketsy comedy about a serious and timely situation.

ACTRESS: We are so grateful that we can spend our days and nights in peaceful communion with each other, with our neighbors, and with the stars in your glorious night sky.

ALL: We thank you for our wonderful lives.

CHORUS: But humans are clever. Too clever.

(*Striking Great Mother off the set*) Don't bet on the bonobos just yet. Things slowly changed around the fifth century BC, solidifying by 1200 BC, which we now call The Iron Age.

YOUNG ACTOR: Ho ho ho, look at what I have discovered.

YOUNG ACTRESS: A rock?

YOUNG ACTOR: Yeah, but it has iron in it!

ACTOR: And I have discovered iron smelting!

YOUNG ACTOR: And when iron can be smelted,

ACTOR: —weapons can be made,

CHORUS: —and Homo sapiens loves weapons.

All box, throw punches at one another. Drum beats.

YOUNG ACTRESS: With weapons came warriors, with warriors came patriarchal war gods,

who put their foot on women's necks and kept it there.

ACTRESS: Some male gods, going against nature, even decided they had made everything, all by themselves, and in making everything, had made women later and lesser.

ALL: (*Singing, dancing*) Lesser and later, lesser and later, woman are lesser and later! Ooh!

CHORUS: That, clearly, is a lie. It takes two to tango.

ACTOR: As early as 1754 BCE, male rule was entrenched.

CHORUS: (*Stepladder*) The Code of Hammurabi!

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Stepladder, holding photo of engraved stone slab*) Behold the code of law from Mesopotamia around 1754 BCE, which, incidentally was engraved on a large stone phallus, so this tells us what was important to them. The Code asserts that social order and justice are dictated by the gods. And everyone's worth is set in stone. We'll show you some examples:

CHORUS: A female commoner's life is worth—

Actor evaluates Actress on stepladder.

ACTOR: Thirty shekels!

CHORUS: Thirty shekels for a female commoner's life.

ACTOR: A slave-woman is worth twenty! (*He evaluates Young Actress.*)

CHORUS: Twenty shekels for a slave woman. Not quite as much as for a "free" woman.

ACTOR: And for one eye of one male commoner— (*He evaluates Young Actor.*)

CHORUS: Wait for it—One eye of one male commoner is worth—

ACTOR: Sixty shekels!

CHORUS: Sixty shekels, for only one eye! While a whole female is worth only half that!

ACTOR: So say the gods!

YOUNG ACTOR: The gods say it.

CHORUS: But Hammurabi and Homer weren't the only sages denigrating women. Let's now jump to Ovid, the great poet, born in 43 BC, author of world famous *Metamorphoses* which speaks of sex and love, seen through a rather peculiar lens. What did he, the most famous poet of his time, even to this day world-renowned, say about women?

ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTRESS: Moo! Moo!

YOUNG ACTOR: What?

CHORUS: Well, it's not quite true. That's what Ovid had the women say.

ALL: Ya ta ta ta ta. (*Dancing, singing, announcing.*)

CHORUS: Step right up, ladies and gents, and listen to our very serious tale.

Now Jupiter—

Oh. Note the switch here. The author Homer was Greek, and the author Ovid was Roman, so Zeus ruled for Homer, whereas in Ovid's Latin he's turned into Jupiter.

ACTOR: —So Jupiter, (*ACTOR becomes Jupiter and struts around with lightning slash & wreath*), arrogant sky god, used to having his royal way and therefore completely untamable, is walking through the forest one day when he catches sight of—

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Becoming Io.*) Io.

JUPITER: Hey baby, I'll bet a good looking nymph such is yourself is just dying to let me get your panties off. I am "Jupiter," you know, god above all gods.

IO: Bug off, asshole. (*She takes off.*)

CHORUS: And off she runs, somehow unaroused by pure male arrogance. Calling after her, he promises her his 'scepter of heaven!'

JUPITER: But Babe, I got this ‘scepter of heaven,’ and I promise I know just how to wield it.

IO: What do you take me for?

JUPITER: (*He shrugs*) A vessel.

CHORUS: Nobody puts off all-powerful Jupiter that easily.

JUPITER: If you don’t give in the usual way, I’ll just have to sprinkle a little fairy dust over everything and cause the sun to go early to her bed so that I can get into yours.

CHORUS: The sky god turns all to blackest night.

IO: (*Stage center stepladder*) And in the darkness, he rapes me.

JUPITER: (*Pushes her aside*) I got what I wanted and that’s what counts. Nymphs are a dime a dozen.

CHORUS: And here comes Jupiter’s wife suspicious Juno—and she’s suspicious because well she knows her husband’s wayward proclivities.

(*Actress becomes Juno, wreath.*)

JUNO: How strange! It was bright mid-day, then suddenly it’s night.

Ah hah! I recognize the work of my husband. And the reason he likes night is to hide his latest paramour from my sight—or so he thinks.

But he’s a little dumb, our Jupiter.

Doesn’t he realize I’m bound to get a little suspicious when at bright mid-day, the moon of a sudden replaces the sun?

And when I mistrust, there’s always a reason.

So I, clever Juno, whose chariot is peacock-drawn, will set a husband trap.

(*To Jupiter*) Hello, Darling; just thought I’d drop by. What have you been up to?

CHORUS: (*To Audience*) But Jupiter, well aware of his wife’s keen nose, is one step ahead of her here. Right before Juno arrived, Jupiter did this:

JUPITER: (*To Io*) Presto chango! I metamorphose you into a cow!

IO: Moo!

CHORUS: But wary Juno is not fooled. Why is her husband hanging around this heifer,

which, it must be admitted, is pure white and gleamingly lovely in that way young cows can be? Or that young women turned into cows might be.

JUNO: I now bait my trap. Why husband dearest, what a sweet white heifer. Where on earth does she come from?

JUPITER: What, that old bovine? Beats me.

JUNO: I think she's lovely, her gentle, ivory curves, her clover-sweet breath. Give her to me, sweetie, as you care nothing for her.

CHORUS: Jupiter hears the trap snap.

JUPITER: Damn! I was just getting set for a second helping. I'm not ready to give that cow away.

*(He paces one way.)* But if I don't, it will look suspicious,

*(He paces the other way)* and Juno may figure out that I'm an unfaithful lout.

*(To Juno)* Okay, she's yours, lamikins.

JUNO: Thank you, sweetie pie. And just to make sure no one tries to steal her away from me, I'm putting hundred-eyed Argos on watch duty.

*(YOUNG ACTOR becomes Argos with peacock feathers.)*

ARGOS: Hundred-eyed Argos, at your service, oh goddess mio.

CHORUS: Poor bewitched Io thinks she might speak to watchful Argos, explain her plight and thus gain his help. She starts to raise her arms to heaven to bewail her noxious fate, but—she has no arms! She opens her mouth to cry to brutal infinity, but what comes from her gaping maw?

IO: Mooooo. Moooo.

CHORUS: She weeps bitter tears, but no words can she muster.  
Dark Jupiter has silenced her.

IO: (Plaintive) Moo.

CHORUS: Jupiter, however, is not all bad.

JUPITER: It's not something I feel often, but I now feel guilty—I can't stand my sweet little lover's distress at being turned from a charming nymph into a plodding cow. So here's what I'm going to do. (Stepladder) I'm going to have Argos killed.

CHORUS: Which he does.

ARGOS: (*Dies.*) Oof!

JUNO: You wretch! You've killed star-eyed Argos.

I will take his hundred eyes and put them in peacocks' tails where they will shine forever.

And furthermore, I will blaze demons into the soul of that stupid cow.

I'd rather blame her than my (she yells at him) good-for-nothing, wayward, round-heeled, hot-sceptered husband!

CHORUS: Meanwhile, demon-drenched Io ran to the river to throw herself in, groaning and suffering.

IO: Please Jupiter, kill me. I can no longer stand this life. (Beat) I mean, 'moooooo!'

CHORUS: Jupiter took pity on sweet Io, and turning to his jealous wife, he said—

JUPITER: (*To Juno*) "Come to my arms, resplendent wife of mine. You know you're the only one worthy of me. Let's turn that little cow back into a nymph. She means nothing to me—a moment's tickle, nothing more. As I often say, nymphs are a dime a dozen.

JUNO: I shouldn't let you get away with it, but I will; I hate to see cows suffer.

IO: (*Stepladder*) And I was turned back into a nymph. But for a long while, I was traumatized, because of course, I'd not only been raped, but had become pregnant by potent Jupiter. And I was timid about speaking in case what came out of me was—

ALL: Mooooo!

(*Pause.*)

CHORUS: Yet don't think misogynistic behavior stops with the ancients. We skip quickly ahead to the 1890s—

(*ACTOR puts on top hat and becomes—*)

CHORUS: The great Henry James!

We ask our players to act out the following words with which Mr. James portrays how women speak.

ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTRESS: (*They split the lines between them, stepping forward then back*):

mumble,  
 slobber,  
 snarl,  
 whine,  
 moo,  
 bray like an ass,  
 bark.

CHORUS: Nor is Henry James fond of women's vocal timbre:

ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Again.*)

thin,  
 nasal,  
 twangy,  
 sniffing,  
 snuffling,  
 whining,  
 whinnying.

CHORUS: All this from the man many call The Master.

YOUNG ACTOR: And male opinion is often still the same today. Don't believe me? Listen to the Internet. Daily, it accuses women of being shrill, strident. Women stridently whinge or whine.

ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Singing, dancing*) Women whinge or whine, ho! Women whinge or whine, ho! Women whinge or whine!

CHORUS: While we figure out how to deal with attitudes so mean, pejorative, and outdated, let's dance!

ALL: The Cow Dance!

CHORUS: Grab your partner. Everybody dance!

*All la la la and dance to Turkey in the Stram, and at the end of each stanza—*

MEN: Men call themselves the big brains.

WOMEN: And the ladies said mooooo!

*All la la la and dance to Turkey in the Stram, and at the end of each stanza—*

MEN: In the beginning was the word!

WOMEN: And the ladies said moo!

*Turkey in the Straw.*

MEN: I think therefore I am!

WOMEN: And the ladies said moo!

*Turkey in the Straw.*

MEN: To be or not to be!

WOMEN: And the ladies said moo!

*Turkey in the Straw.*

MEN: Give me liberty or give me death!

WOMEN: And the ladies said moo!

*Turkey in the Straw.*

MEN: We hold these truths to be self-evident!

WOMEN: And the ladies said moo!

*Turkey in the Straw.*

MEN: Men came up with democracy and physics and moon landings. Men created the world and everything in it in our image.

WOMEN: (*Slowing down, big finish!*) And the ladies finally said, 'We're in this dance together, so Mooove over, men!'

*All dance to ending phrase of Turkey in the Straw.*

CHORUS & YOUNGERS: And now, Woman and Man, let's fix this mess!

CHORUS: Thunder and lightning. Blackout. (*There is no blackout.*)

But first, a quick interlude: Having Sex While Female.

*Actor and Actress waltz together, as do the Youngers, elegant, smiling.*

CHORUS: An exploration of illustrative scenes from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Western literature, all famous and long-lived, all with the same theme: If you stray outside the narrow frame of societally sanctioned sex, you will suffer and your audacity will be paid for with your death— if you are a woman.

ACTOR: (*French accent, SR*) The year 1856!

ACTRESS: (*French accent, SL*) Flaubert a Frenchman, writes Madame Bovary.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*French accent, CS*) Emma Bovary has an affair to escape the dullness of her life and marriage.

YOUNG ACTOR: (*French accent, CS*) Her lover, Rodolphe, will not marry her.

ALL: She kills herself with arsenic. (*Young Actress mimes taking poison.*)

CHORUS: Everybody dance the Heartbreak Dance!

*French music—Frere Jacques.*

*ALL dance forward & back elegantly.*

*Women dance forward & back heavily while men continue elegantly.*

*Women say 'oof!' while hitting themselves in gut.*

ACTOR: (*Russian accent*) 1863.

ACTRESS: (*Russian accent*) A Russian, Tolstoy, (whose name, by the way means 'plump'), writes Anna Karenina.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Russian accent*) Anna has affair to escape sanctimonious, high-falutin' husband.

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Russian accent*) Her lover, Vronsky, will not marry her.

ALL: She throws herself under train.

CHORUS: The Heartbreak Dance!

*Russian music—Black Eyes*

*ALL dance forward & back elegantly.*

*Women dance forward & back heavily while men continue elegantly.*

*Women say 'oof!' while hitting themselves in gut.*

ACTOR: (*English accent*) 1891!

ACTRESS: (*English accent*) An Englishman, Thomas Hardy, writes *Tess of the D'urbervilles*.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*English accent*) This one is slightly more complicated. Tess, a peasant, is raped by Alec, wealthy kinsman. She will not marry him. She marries her beloved Angel Clare instead—

YOUNG ACTOR: (*English accent*) —and both of them admit to having had sexual knowledge in their pasts.

YOUNG ACTRESS: She forgives him his dalliances.

YOUNG ACTOR: But he cannot forgive hers! (*Even though it was a rape.*) So he dumps her.

YOUNG ACTRESS: She struggles to make ends meet.

YOUNG ACTOR: Angel finally forgives her and comes to claim her.

YOUNG ACTRESS: Too late! She has accepted the wealthy Alec. Distraught and furious, she stabs Alec to death.

ALL: She is caught and is condemned to death.

CHORUS: Heartbreak Dance!

*English music—Green Sleeves*

*ALL dance forward & back elegantly.*

*Women dance forward & back heavily while men continue elegantly.*

*Women say 'oof!' while hitting themselves in gut.*

ACTOR: (*American accent*) 1905!

ACTRESS: The American, Edith Wharton, writes *House of Mirth*.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*American accent, acting all this out*) Lily Bart, a socialite (*strikes a pose*), impoverished (*plays impoverished*) must find a mate before her sell-by date, which is fast approaching (*paces worriedly*). She flirts (*becomes flirty*) with all—

YOUNG ACTOR: (*American accent*) —the wrong men (*twirls his mustache*) and scares other men off (*acts highly respectable*) with her slightly racy reputation (*reacts to that*) and her gambling debts (*shoos her away*).

YOUNG ACTRESS: As she slides down the social scale, it becomes vitally important to her to repay her financial debts, and this she manages to do. But regaining her reputation after her sexual peccadilloes?

YOUNG ACTOR: No one will marry her!

ALL: She overdoses with a sleeping draught.

CHORUS: Heartbreak Dance!

*American music—Oh Susanna.*

*ALL dance forward & back elegantly.*

*Women dance forward & back heavily while men continue elegantly.*

*Women say 'oof!' while hitting themselves in gut.*

ACTRESS: (*English accent*) And lest we wax repetitious, we will end in—

ACTOR: 1915!

ACTRESS: when the Englishman Somerset Maugham writes *Of Human Bondage*.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*English accent*) Waitress Mildred entices our hero, Philip Carey, into supporting her while she plays around.

YOUNG ACTOR: (*English accent*) They fall in and out of each other's orbits several times—

YOUNG ACTRESS: —she becomes a prostitute—

ALL: — and of course dies, probably of syphilis.

CHORUS: One last time!

*English music—Country Gardens.*

*ALL dance forward & back elegantly.*

*Women dance forward & back heavily while men continue elegantly.*

*Women say 'oof!' while hitting themselves in gut.*

CHORUS: These are the great men, and an occasional woman, we've been taught to revere.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And did revere until the scales fell from our eyes.

CHORUS: But, without this plot—

ACTRESS: —without this double standard—

YOUNG ACTRESS: —without this lack of social and financial standing for women,

WOMEN: —just where would Western literature be?

CHORUS: And let's not even begin to think about opera!

ALL: Ya ta ta ta ta ta....

CHORUS: So how will we fix this mess?

## ACT 2

*Spooky Music a la Hall of the Mountain King*  
*Strobe lights, smoke, drums beating.*  
*The actors enter, spooked.*

CHORUS: Step right up! Let's do this quickly! This scene is set at the entrance to hell!

*An alarm sounds.*

ACTOR: What?

ACTRESS: How did we get here?

ACTOR: What are we doing here?

CHORUS: To put it bluntly, we have a patriarchy problem to solve.

*(She dances spookily, speaking ritualistically)* Something was out of whack all over the land.

ACTOR: Patriarchy problem?

CHORUS: Well, we have problems by the bucket: racism, colonialism, tribalism, authoritarianism, capitalism, communism, fossil fuelism—

YOUNG ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTOR: Climate change!

CHORUS: Climate change. Plastics! But let's start with just one, shall we? And I choose the patriarchy—

YOUNG ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTOR: The patriarchy will do.

CHORUS: —the man/woman problem, as old as the Garden of Eden.

(Dancing spookily, speaking ritualistically) Something was out of whack all over the land.

YOUNG ACTRESS & YOUNG ACTOR: (*In cascades, dancing spookily*) Out of whack, out of whack....

CHORUS: Wait. First, let's get the casting straight. (*To Actor & Actress*) It's karma that you two play the villains in this next scene. (*To Young Actors*) You younger two play all the secondary characters.

YOUNG ACTOR: Secondary parts? How is that equality?

YOUNG ACTRESS: Well, it makes sense. We're still learning.

CHORUS: You are watching your elders mistakes and learning from them. Besides, playing all the secondary parts means you play lots of roles, gives you stretch, which is always good for Homo Sapiens sapiens.

ACTOR: But...

ACTRESS: But I don't think I'm as guilty as he is. He's bullied me for centuries.

YOUNG ACTRESS: It takes two, my friend, to tango.

CHORUS: (*Humming and dancing to spooky music*) Step into the underworld, the place to meet your shadow and sacrifice yourself.

ACTOR: We're really in hell?

ACTRESS: When things are a mess, we're in hell.

ACTOR: Wait. Time out. I'd like to remind us all that lots of things work well right now, world-wide.

YOUNG ACTRESS: What, for instance?

ACTOR: Traffic lights. Everybody—well, mostly—stops at red lights. Stop signs; we obey them. Airline pilots and traffic towers communicate well world-over. Weather reporting. We all get along together in these areas.

ACTRESS: And you know how when a small child accidentally falls down a well? The whole world holds its breath until she's rescued.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And the world held the U.S. in its arms in the several days after 9/11, before we screwed up and alienated everybody.

CHORUS: So we know we can do it. And we have to hurry. The time is nigh for Homo sapiens to fix itself, or Mother Earth is going to climate change us to smithereens. The time is past nigh.

ACTOR: If you're so smart, show us how to get out of hell.

YOUNG ACTOR: Show us all how.

CHORUS: Hey! I'm a Chorus, not an Oracle.

But I always start with the ancients. We need an old myth, a myth about going To Hell and Back!

ACTOR: What will that show us?

CHORUS: Sacrifice. We'll find out how we must sacrifice in order to grow up, be adults, equal, loving adults.

ALL: To Hell and Back!

CHORUS: The myths of journeying to the underworld, making a sacrifice, and coming back into the light are so ancient and numerous in the history of humanity, it's clear they have something vital to teach us.

ACTOR: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Homer!

CHORUS: Dante.

*Stepladder Center Stage.*

ACTRESS: (CS) Demeter and Persephone.

ACTOR: (CS) Orpheus and Eurydice

YOUNG ACTOR: *(CS)* Inanna, Queen of the Sky.

YOUNG ACTRESS: *(CS)* She's the earliest edition of the story To Hell and Back that we can find.

YOUNG ACTOR: Sumeria, 1900 BCE.

*CHORUS begins drumming.*

ACTRESS: *(CS, Becoming Inanna)* Inanna went to the Land of No Returning, where her sister—

*YOUNG ACTRESS becomes Queen.*

YOUNG ACTRESS: —the Queen of the Underworld, was mourning the death of her Underworld husband.

CHORUS: Yet the very act of stepping into the Land of the Dead puts one in mortal danger—

*Chorus swings a hook back and forth.*

ACTRESS: *(Acting this out)* —and Inanna was instantly stripped to her bare soul, killed, and hung on a hook to dry. Ahhh!

YOUNG ACTOR: *(Becoming underworld guide with a flashlight)* But an underworld guide managed to get her off the hook, revitalized, and out of the underworld, on one condition.

ACTRESS: That she sacrifice someone to go in her place.

CHORUS: No problem there.

ACTRESS: She willingly sacrificed her husband back on earth.

ACTOR: *(He becomes husband, examining his fingernails)* 'Hey baby, ya been gone or somethin'?

ACTRESS: Because he hadn't mourned her one little bit. So she sacrificed him.

ACTOR: Ahhh! *(He's hung on hook.)*

ACTRESS: But then she, being soft-hearted and remembering that she loved him—

ACTRESS, YOUNG ACTRESS, CHORUS: —remembering that she loved him—

YOUNG ACTOR: —and with the help of an Underworld Guide—

ACTRESS: — (*freeing husband from hook*) got him off the hook and out of hell, too.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And what this ancient tales shows us is—

ALL: If we make a proper sacrifice, and learn the proper lessons, we can make it out alive!  
Ya ta ta ta ta ta...

ACTOR: Okay, problem solved. Let's go home.

CHORUS: Not so fast.

ACTOR: We really have to do this? I have a bad feeling here.

CHORUS: I see no way out.

ACTOR: But we're in a hurry.

CHORUS: So let's get this over with.

ACTOR: The Land of No Returning means death. We go there to kill something, right?

CHORUS: Something in all of us. Not just you. All of us. We all have some lessons to learn.

ACTOR: So, ah, the death we're mythologizing here is the patriarchy?

CHORUS: Human civilization is thrashing and dying, women and men are the main players, and the old myths passed down to us tell us a major sacrifice is required to bring things back to life. So, To Hell and Back—

ALL: —wherever that leads! (*Actor says it much less convinced.*)

ACTOR: But Inanna got her husband off the hook!

CHORUS: We'll see.

ACTOR: But she remembered that she loved him, remember?

CHORUS: I said, we'll see! (*Ritualistically, beating a drum*) Something was out of whack all over the land.

ALL: (*In cascades*) Out of whack, out of whack....

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Cutting in*) Leave it to us, the younger people. We'll save the day. We'll have to. No choice.

ACTRESS: (*To Actor*) We really have raised amazing children. Young folks today are extraordinary.

ACTOR: (*To Youngers*) You're the main thing we did right.

ACTRESS: You hold climate marches, anti-school shooting rallies—

ACTOR: You hold us accountable.

CHORUS: (*Cutting in*) Something was out of whack all over the land.

ALL: (*In cascades*) Out of whack, out of whack....

CHORUS: Perhaps by betaking ourselves to death's chill realm, we shall uncover something that, if sacrificed—or rewritten—will allow men and women to recognize they are equal, thus allowing our human civilization to escape extinction and ultimately thrive.

ACTOR: (*Nervous*) I'm not sure I'm ready to meet our dark side.

CHORUS: Too late. Our pain is severe. By facing our hellish nature, hanging it on a hook to crumble, the myths from our forbears tell us we just might squeak through.

ACTOR: (*To Actress*) Ladies first.

ACTRESS: I'm not going without you, sugar lump. It takes two to tango.

ACTOR: I don't want to die!

ACTRESS: You think I do?

YOUNG ACTRESS: Break a leg. (*Gives them both a kiss.*)

CHORUS: Ceremony of Entrance! Abandon all hope, ye who enter here. Dante.

ACTRESS: How does one enter the underworld?

YOUNG ACTRESS: With great respect and humility, I should think.

ACTOR: (*Circus theme, actor clowning*) Ya ta ta ta..

*They glare at him.*

ACTOR: Sorry. A little nervous.

CHORUS: Ceremony of Entrance!

*Chaotic dance of death from ALL, improvised, with alarm sounding.*

YOUNG ACTRESS: I am Charon (*Habravn*), who row row rows your boat over the River Styx.

CHORUS & YOUNGERS: (*Singing*) Life is but a dream.

YOUNG ACTOR: I am Cerberus, the slavering, three-headed guard dog of hell.

*He growls at ACTOR & ACTRESS.*

YOUNG ACTOR: I will let you in but you'll have a harder time getting out! (*Growls menacingly*).

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*Grabs a flashlight*) I am now an Underworld Guide. You will now give up all worldly goods.

*ACTORS strip down to short togas.*

YOUNG ACTOR: (*Flashlight*) I also am now an Underworld Guide. Stripping yourselves shows you are nothing but your deeds, both good and bad.

CHORUS: Into the maw of the myth.

*Odd dancing movements from ALL.*

CHORUS: We approach the heart of darkness to make a sacrifice.

ACTOR: But wait. Are you sure making women inferior is part of the patriarchy?

*(All stare at him in disbelief for a beat.)*

YOUNG ACTRESS: Dictionary definition: “supremacy of the father, legal dependence of wives and children, and descent and inheritance in the male line.” Leaves half the world out.

YOUNG ACTOR: O-kaaay. So the Patriarchy has brought us all straight to hell’s gaping, stinking bowel. We shall hang this smelly beast on a hook—

*They threaten Actor with book.*

ACTOR: No! The earth is shaking here. You’re blaming me, making me play the villain.

ACTRESS: Well that, and the lead. And lots of supporting parts.

YOUNG ACTOR: Hang him on that hook!

ACTOR: No, don’t do this to a fellow member of the human race.

ACTRESS: Pitchfork him!

ACTOR: You’re not being very subtle.

CHORUS: It’s hard to turn the huge boat of so-called civilization around with subtlety, so I bang the drum loudly for now. Subtlety and artistry come in our next play.

ACTOR: I beg forbearance!

YOUNG ACTOR: Why?

CHORUS: *(Ritualistically)* One half of the world tries to explain keeping the other half under its cloven hoof.

*Actor becomes The Man*

THE MAN: *(On stepladder)* Hell, we men did the best we could at the time. We’re not fortune-tellers, how should we know we’d hammer humanity down a flushing black hole?

*(Switching tracks)* Anyway, I don’t know why we’re worrying about relations between men and women. If pandemics don’t get us, climate change will. I can see the headline now: ‘Mother Earth aborts herself of her insane child.’

*(Switching tracks)* Hell! Men like being on top, we don’t want to share. We earned it! Why should we share? *(Nyah Nyah)* We got here first!

*(Switching again)* All right, no, we didn't. We stole it, we conned for it, muscled it, slanted the playing field. *(Enjoying)* Some people might say that's called smart.

But you just try for a minute being me. You ready? Imagine what it's like to joust continuously for power every moment of your life! A wild animal, always always on alert. One misstep and I'm a dead wild animal. I clamp emotion in the bottom of my belly where it can't move and little that's kind or gentle in me escapes—yet the brute in my belly always claws out. I am the biggest and bad-est, because if I'm not, some other dumb-ass will decimate me, and I won't get the girl, the job, the money, the recognition. Always, there's the money. Don't forget the money. It has to keep coming in. Whether I have too much or not enough, money rules, and I'm cornered. I'm banging my damn head on cement. Desperation knocks inside me so hard it comes out my fists. So I scare up someone to bully. And that someone is often you *(to ACTRESS)*. *(To Audience)* And you. And you.

CHORUS: Drums all beating, hell hounds howling, wheels still turning, balls all dropping, death so present.

YOUNGERS: Always working, stomach churning, never ceasing, Vulcan forging, hammers striking, heart beating, never stopping, never offstage, always onstage, never resting, always leading, blood coursing, earth wheeling.

THE MAN: The Man! I am he. The buck stops here!

*Pause.*

CHORUS: But we are into the years of the two thousands. The ancient drumbeat could stop.

*Pause.*

ACTRESS: You could share the weight.

THE MAN: Share the weight? *(Holds hands out to Actress)* The weight of the world?

*(Turns away from her.)* But I'm king! I can't give up my kingship! To give up privilege feels like oppression!

*(To her)* But it's not, is it?

*(Beat)*

*(To her)* Kiss me. May we kiss? Dance with me, madam, may we dance? You are beautiful. Juliet is the sun. You are the sun. My sun.

I can change. Help me change.

ACTRESS: You're a poet.

THE MAN: I'm a human.

CHORUS: And that's fine. We're only human: complicated, extraordinary, dazzling, scary beings with cement blocks banging poetry-mangled heads. We're fantastic.

ACTRESS: But what do we do about that hook?

YOUNG ACTRESS: You know what? I'm tired of this melodrama. We've played this scene to shreds over the eons. The Patriarchy always hangs people, or beheads them, or waterboards them, or shoots them, and hangs them on a hook. The Patriarchy always demands sacrifice.

We could play that tired old scene—

CHORUS: And it really is a tired, old scene!

*They all act out the following scene, hammy yet very quickly, as though in a jerky 1920's film of a melodrama. They are rushing through this trite scene, wryly knowing how trite it is.*

*CHORUS & YOUNGERS with hook, fast-pace humming a funereal march while dancing around ACTOR threateningly.*

CHORUS & YOUNGERS: (*Lining up together SR, marching threateningly on ACTOR, who backs up to SL*) You must bait the hook, you must bait the hook, you must bait the hook toDAY!

ACTOR: (*Speaking quickly, hand to forehead*) I can't bait that hook, I can't bait that hook toDAY! (*Running across stage, arms waving overhead*) Please don't hang me on that hook, I'll never do it again! (*Running back across the stage, beckoning to AUDIENCE*) Save me! Save me!

CHORUS: That melodrama doesn't work anymore.

YOUNG ACTRESS: (*To ACTOR*) That's not who we are anymore. We're changing the old myths to suit today, right? (*All swaying together to a mellow, sweet tune*) We're finally smart enough to save ourselves from hitting bottom. Let's just do it. Let's be adult enough to just decide to save ourselves.

*They stand looking at one another, realizing this is an important step forward.*

YOUNG ACTOR: Can we do that?

YOUNG ACTRESS: Let's just do it.

*All take hold of each other's hands.*

ACTOR: (*Touched*) Thank you. You youngsters are groovy.

CHORUS: That was a good confession by The Man. And cutting the hook scene certainly eliminates drama—

YOUNG ACTRESS: Melodrama.

CHORUS: (*Alarm sounds*) Let's keep moving, we've no time to linger. To set the scene for your hook-hanging, Madame—

ACTRESS: What? You just let men off the hook! What kind of double standard is that?

YOUNG ACTRESS: We all still have some lessons to learn.

CHORUS: And this is theater! We need some drama! How else will the audience get to experience possible doom from the safety of their seats? And surely a lead actress wouldn't want to cut a good scene, even though we are running out of time?

ACTRESS: Oh. When you put it like that.

CHORUS: Here it is: (*Ritualistically*) A scene of demonly mayhem, raging animals edging toward rearing cliffs, ultimately causing reason, truth, and beauty to triumph and shine! One half of the world labors painfully out from under the cloven hoof!

(*Back to normal*) You're seventeen. You're at a frat party. Near Washington, D. C.

*ALL dance in place, mime drinking, rhubarb rhubarb.*

CHORUS: (*To Young Actor*) You're a frat boy. (*To Actor*) You're his young pal. Got it? (*He nods.*)

FRAT BOY: Cockadoodledo! (*pivoting out of the group with a drunken, arrogant saunter, takes a long swig of beer, burps obscenely, begins strutting like a rooster*) Nobody burps better than Me, The Great!

PAL: (*Also a drunken frat brother, joining him, arm over shoulder also rooster-ing*) Nobody farts better than you! Cockadoodledo!

BOTH: Cockadoodledo! Cockadoodledo!

*Both continue strutting around like roosters.*

FRAT BOY: Nobody fucks better than me. Best at everything! Me, the Great! I'm a stunner! Gonna stun the world!

PAL: We got everything.

YOUNG ACTOR: Handsome, too.

BOTH: Cockadoodledo!

PAL: You going to Italy again summer vacay?

FRAT BOY: Yah, like always, but I'll be back here for football practice.  
Gotta get me some pussy before I go.

PAL: Wha-a-a! You too "chicken" to get an Italian girl, damsel, what do they call em, bambina?

FRAT BOY: No way. I'll screw a bunch of dam—whatevers. (Drinking) Now you got me horny.

PAL: I got laid so much last Saturday my 'scepter of heaven,' was purple all week.

FRAT BOY: Groovy! Let's yank the first chick walks by into the bedroom. They all want it.

PAL: Do 'em a favor!

FRAT BOY: Who cares what they want! I want it!

PAL: Gonna get it, too. But—I think dad might be home now.

FRAT BOY: Him? He'd never say anything. He never says peep.

PAL: Damn bitches drive us wild—

FRAT BOY: —then pretend they don't want it.

PAL: (*Pretending to be a girl*) Oh no, don't put your hand there!

FRAT BOY: I'm the one with the say! I'm the decider! Here comes a friggin' bitch.

CHORUS: (*To Actress*) You play a teen-aged potential rape victim. You're at the party too.

FRAT BOY: Here comes a griffin' bitch (*To ACTRESS, playing potential rape victim*) Hey, baby!

*ALL surround Actress threateningly, pushing her from side to side.*

MEN: Cockadoodledo!

POTENTIAL RAPE VICTIM: No! I know this guy. I know what he and his crew do.

*ALL fall away. Actress to stepladder.*

CHORUS: Isn't it just in fun? Boys will be roosters?

POTENTIAL RAPE VICTIM: *(Real, triumphant, quietly elegant, really talking to him, determined to get through to Frat Boy. On stepladder.)*

(To Frat Boy) I'm a woman you fucked up when I was a young girl, and you're the guy who grew up to be a Supreme Court Justice, so there's something I want to say to you.

I promise you; you're the last rapist who will ever be a Supreme Court Justice. After you, no rapist will dare, for the court of public opinion has changed,—I trumpet this—the court of public opinion has changed, because of me and all the brave ladies taking the risk of stepping forward. The Me Too movement has opened society's eyes, never again to shut. It's out in the open now, not stinking and hidden.

But over and over, for many formative years of my life, the memory rode me, over and over and over again. I can still relive it for you: *(She stays in the present where she is completely comfortable reliving this horror.)* You're taller than I so your shoulder crushes my mouth into the bedspread, I'm clamped shut by your weight, my scream goes into your meatiness. God, I can't breathe underneath your sweaty heaviness. Sweat and Brylcream. To this day, Brylcream gags me. I see slightly through the left eye, half scrunched on that damn bedspread. Can't breathe. Right eye being squished under—no!—fingers? No! That's my eye! Please! Don't be too drunk to notice—Please! That's my eye!

Air!

You might, by accident and oversight, you might really blind me.  
Or kill me.

You are so unaware, completely off in your own world, laughing to your friends who are lying right there giggling, watching you crushing me, waiting their snorting turns. I can't breathe. I might die here!

I, the actual me, might as well not even be here. You are killing me and you don't even know I am me, as real a person as you.

What can you have been thinking? I try to get into your mind.

Then a miracle happened. You lifted the hand from my eye and you reached for something, you couldn't get to it, you had to stretch.

A beer, most likely.

Your weight shifted—

—and before I've even thought it, I am torquing, scrambling, knee hard hit on bedstead, out the door, gulping, falling down stairs, limping, outside, streaming tears, breathing, breathing, running, limping, gasping.

Breathing.

I'm alive, safe. I am not in that room with you!

*(Pause)*

But for a long time, in my mind, I was still there. For in my very next breath—damn, the patriarchy muddies me down, mucks me up. Somehow, this hot venom that is your fault has somehow transmuted into mine! Somehow, I did it! Shame shakes me; I can barely stand. I don't know how I got home.

*(Pause)*

At the time, I just couldn't understand it. I was a young girl looking for a prince to love—not you—I hardly knew you, maybe we had a math class together. It didn't matter to you who I was. You didn't even know who it was you'd pancaked under you. You didn't know I was me, I was less than nothing to you! You probably couldn't have come up with my name.

I'll never forget yours.

*(Pause)*

And now you'll never forget mine.

You were supposed to be a young god, given everything to grow up to become a wise man. What happened to you?

What was driving you? What were you thinking? I really want to know. Did you think I was a dumb animal? 'She's nothing, a vessel merely, she has no soul, if you prick her she won't bleed.'

You should have masturbated instead of using me as your sex doll. That's what girls do—we masturbate. We want sex too, but not in the personality-less way you wanted it. You just wanted a place to stick your pompous, pucky, protuberant prick. If I prick that prick, you're damn right it would bleed!

You simply didn't care, did you, you were so overcome by your all-mighty, teenaged boy lust, which is supposed to excuse anything and everything. 'Boys will be boys. Let's blow up the world, fuck all the females.'

I wonder if I sound pedantic here, but we need a whole rethinking of how boys view girls and how they grow up to be men who treat girls and women like the human beings we are. Your daughters aren't nothing to you. Your wife isn't nothing to you. Your mother. What in the world do they think of you now? I wonder if they could possibly admit to themselves that what I said might be true. I'll bet they're prone to nightmares, and they don't deserve that. Do they?

I'll wager I'm not nothing to you anymore. You shudder when you think of me, don't you. No woman is nothing to you now, I'll wager. We're all humans in this cockamamie, cataclysmic, kooky life together, we're the astonishing consciousness of the universe, unique in all the world, so we better bring our best selves to this game, wouldn't you think?

*(She turns away, then turns back—more to say.)*

It's quite an interesting situation you find yourself in, isn't it, Your Dis-Honor. You know what I said on the stand was true, you know you lied to reach your heights. You must be constantly worried about whether your companions believe you or think you're a liar.

How do you live with this? I'd really like to know. What do you admit to your colleagues on the Supreme Court—'Well, I am a big beer drinker, I used to be a goof off, but I always knew I could make it to the top on family connections so I didn't—and don't—worry much. I'm entitled. Nobody will stop me.'

I imagine how you live now with the lies you've pushed down into your gut. Your stomach must be churning. In fact, I sometimes worry about your health.

But don't you worry about mine. I am fine now. It's only that I was young at that time and for far too many years thereafter, too mortified to give myself proper credit. But I am well recovered from your mental and physical brutality. And don't for a minute think you've crushed me again in front of the whole Congress of the United States of America. No, your Non-Honor, Your Un-Honorable, Your Dis-Honored. You read the history books in twenty years' time and I will lay you a fat wager that I am the one who wins the round. I'm the one people will believe and favor. I braved that degradation you dumped on me; I said what needed to be said. I said what I needed to say.

And I did it in blaring public, too, you might've noticed.

*(Beat)*

I will tell you this, though: it took me many years to unscramble my way.

CHORUS: You've triumphed. You're off the hook.

YOUNG ACTRESS: I'd like a turn at this. Ahem! 'My dear frat boy!'

CHORUS: *(To Young Actress, gets stepladder, speaking ritualistically)* The love that passeth all understanding. *(Normal)* Preach it, girl. Give yourself a pulpit!

YOUNG ACTRESS: 'I see that you are wounded, my dear frat boy!'

CHORUS: Wounded soul.

YOUNG ACTRESS: *(Massaging Frat Boy's shoulders as he stands in front of her)* I also see your tennis-buffed arms, your torso which torments in a tee-shirt, your boyish blond bangs hanging in your flaming blue eyes. And I also see your gaping wound.

CHORUS: Wounded child!

YOUNG ACTRESS: Now your mother did not raise you to abuse young girls now, did she?

CHORUS: She did not!

YOUNG ACTRESS: And you love your mother, don't you?

CHORUS: You love your mama!

YOUNG ACTRESS: But being a typical teen with a typical teen's lack of self-esteem, you feel strongly impelled to impress your male friends, to be popular, so you pressured girls relentlessly and you even raped some.

CHORUS: You did that!

YOUNG ACTRESS: And deep underneath, you are ashamed of yourself—

CHORUS: Ashamed!

YOUNG ACTRESS: You are so ashamed of your nasty deeds that your gut smokes.

CHORUS: Smokes hot!

YOUNG ACTRESS: The secret shame fires your forehead red, which is why you drink so much beer.

CHORUS: You like beer!

YOUNG ACTRESS: Everyone sees this behavior—your shame is not a secret. We all see the grimace and the sweat.

CHORUS: We see it!

YOUNG ACTRESS: Your soul, however, is a good one, sweet boy—

CHORUS: Sweet boy!

YOUNG ACTRESS: That's right, I said sweet boy! But unable to escape your shamed soul, you down another beer—we all know you like beer. But the beer doesn't drown that shame. Your dear mother is ashamed of you.

CHORUS: Yes, she is!

YOUNG ACTRESS: In years to come, your wife is ashamed of you.

CHORUS: You know she is!

YOUNG ACTRESS: You know she is. And that future sugar-lump daughter of yours is too.

FRAT BOY: Stop! You can stop now!

YOUNG ACTRESS: So you down another beer, shove aside rank, stinking memories, and in your agony, you thrash, a wounded animal, and lash at the world, at anyone smaller.

ACTRESS: And when the pain of your shame finally breaks open with disgust, your better self will surge to the fore and say just get over it. Grow up!

*Pause.*

CHORUS: And with that simple realization, comes the light.

*Massage stops*

Here is the answer, so simple. Never hurt others, and you're off the hook.

FRAT BOY: Never hurt others. I demolish the patriarch if I never hurt others.

YOUNG ACTRESS: We forgive you; we heal your wounds with kisses. Go and sin no more, sweet boy. Never hurting others kicks shame right out the door. All of us are just as real as you, and if you prick us—

CHORUS, ACTRESS, YOUNG ACTRESS:—we do bleed.

POTENTIAL RAPE VICTIM: It took a tragi-comedy but I unscrambled my way.

YOUNG ACTRESS: And we love you. We love you.

FRAT BOY: I understand.

PAL: I do too.

ACTOR: Groovy youngsters!  
Thank the gods!

CHORUS: Young girls, givers and receivers of love.

*(Alarm sounds)* We're not out yet. Let's keep things moving if we hope to survive. One more scene needs rewriting.

*(Ritualistically)* Look not to the fist-raised fathers—*(normal)* Oh hell's bells, I'm just going to say it this time. Love your mother! Call her!

ACTRESS: Ah. Yes.

*(As Penelope, stepladder, takes deep drag on mimed cannabis joint)* I call upon the Olympian realms. I sit at my loom and weave the Dancing Goddess into being. She enters me. My

heart draws music and colors from the loom, and a honeyed Earth replaces this tiger-toothed world.

Use me to help this change of Earth. Let it begin with me. The buck stops with me, and as we are all one, it stops at you, too.

And by the way, Goddess, light my face with smiling.

*She takes Telemachus' hand.*

My son, cherished Telemachus, remember we sat with little Argos, he but a newborn pup and both of you teething. You shared hard biscuits, one bite for puppy, one for you, and we three sprawled together for months in heaven's lap. And now the new pup has become the old dog awaiting his far-traveled master's return.

You'd give pup a bite, then take a bite yourself, both happily slobbering.

I know you remember those times, I know you do. You craved the sound of my voice, it lit your world and beamed through your soft eyes. You leaned on me and rested safe, and I had care of the finest babe ever lived. It never crossed your sweet mind to debase me.

Look into my eyes, my son. What we share is iron-clad. You are my love. My darling little love.

Because you remember when you and I were so bound, you won't hurt me or humiliate me. You simply can't. You cannot hurt anyone.

Your father, Odysseus, will return; and now you are strong enough meet him. You are man enough to stand on your own and take the steeper path; the one that treats the world with kindness instead of steel.

*Suitors come forward and kneel, rhubarb rhubarb.*

You suitors whom I shall henceforth call unsuitors because I am not a widow. Yet will I continue to feed you and house you, and you will listen to me as I weave for you the incredible story of the gems the Dancing Goddess promises. For in coming centuries, humans, if we will grow up, could evolve into the bright miraculous.

Sit with me, glory in the many and marvelous wonders you and your big brains, along with my sisters and our—ah—bigger brains, relatively speaking, devise together. Together, we make a Garden of Eden of our treasured and only Earth, and we pull each human up the consciousness ladder.

So put up your weapons, sup at my table, keep watch with me for my so-missed husband, and help me teach my son the ways of noble, honorable men.

*An alarm sounds.*

We cannot fail, for that would dim the light of consciousness in the universe. We'd become destroyers in the eternal annals, the race that let the universe down.

ALL: (*Softly*) Ya ta ta ta ta ta, ya ta ta ta ta ta.

PENELOPE: But that is not our path—

*CHORUS holds a star over everyone's head.*

PENELOPE: —for we are beings formed of stars.

And by the way, Mother Earth is not killing her insane child, but She is giving us a swift kick in the pants. Tough love, booting us into adulthood.

We owe Mother Earth one hell of a lot. Think about it: She has borne the weight of our birth and being for centuries, do you ever ponder that? She has fed, clothed, sheltered, and given a particularized education to each one of us. And furthermore, when my time has come, She will welcome me back into Herself. And She'll do that for each of us, for you too, welcoming us home, a guaranteed place to rest, we haven't a thing to worry about.

We owe Her. The time is way past-nigh for humanity to become high functioning adults.

*Pause.*

The Dancing Goddess entices our souls. Her prophecies are invariably right!

CHORUS: We love you, Mother.

ACTOR: Viva Homo sapiens!

ALL: Viva Homo sapiens! (*They cheer.*)

CHORUS: And with that, abracadabra-quick—

it's not for nothing we call ourselves the Big Brains—  
—we learned a thing or two, dissolved the hook, slogged through that blasted tunnel and exploded into the sunshine of our beautiful Mother Earth. (Holds photo of Blue Marble Earth). Reborn as better human beings.

ALL: Viva Mother Earth! Viva us!

ALL: (*Dancing Can Can, celebrating*) Da da da....

ACTRESS: Can it really be that simple? Can we do it?

CHORUS: I don't know. I'm a Chorus. Not an Oracle.

Was that the lead you wanted to play?

ACTRESS: We're an ensemble, with good monologues. That's even better. We're all in this together. We learn our lessons and that's better than killing people on a hook.

CHORUS: (*To Audience*) Did you get that?

*Beat.*

CHORUS: All right then.

To avoid becoming pretentious, we'll end with a small scene, based on a true story. The setting is a woman's apartment.

ACTRESS: I have created a new thing. I shall call it—The Sports bra!

YOUNG ACTRESS: That is amazing. How did we ever get along without it? You must sell this fine creation. Take it to a sports store owner.

CHORUS: (*Setting the scene*) The scene changes to a sports store.

*Young Actor bounces a basketball to the side.*

ACTOR: (*As sports store owner*) What? A tittie basket? I wouldn't touch this...it's nasty! I got no faith in a "sports bra!"

(*Chuckling*) Wait'll I tell the guys!

ACTRESS: (*Enjoying, sexy*) Wait a minute, sweetheart. You're in the business of selling—oh—jockstraps, aren't you?

ACTOR: (*Looks askance.*)

ACTRESS: Well isn't this the same thing? A little support?

You know, sometimes I wonder if your brain is big enough!

ALL: Ya ta ta ta ta ta...

CHORUS: And today, the running bra biz makes—

ALL: —gazillions!

CHORUS: So add running bras in with airline towers and stop signs. We know how to make this fine old world spin properly.

But just out of curiosity: would you vote for a woman for President?

ALL: Yes!

CHORUS: Put her face on the \$20 dollar bill?

ALL: Of course!

CHORUS: Be like the sexy bonobos?

ALL: You bet!

CHORUS: So although dancing sometimes seems silly in these perilous times, before we go figure out how to get the better of climate change—

ACTOR: Let's all dance!

*All dance triumphantly to sexy music.*

*The End*