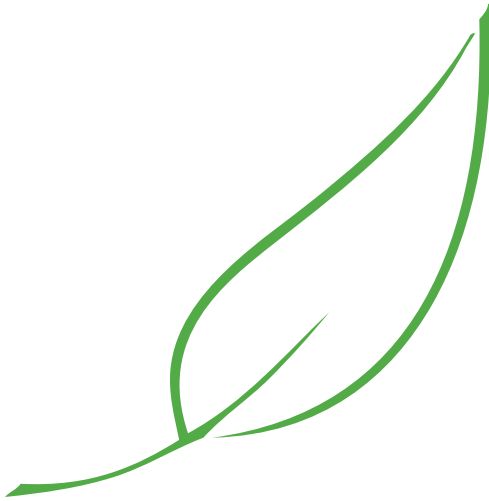


Hercules: Labor 12

The Quest For Cerberus

By Craig W. Stump



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HERCULES: LABOR 12

THE QUEST FOR CERBERUS

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HERCULES, LABOR 12, THE QUEST FOR CERBERUS

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SYNOPSIS: Hera and Zeus are back to narrate this humorous telling of Herakles' last Labor. Herakles (also known as Hercules) was committed to doing 12 tasks, called Labors, for King Eurystheus to compensate for a terrible wrong earlier in his life.

Herakles is the son of King Zeus and a mortal woman, but is named after Queen Hera, Zeus' wife. Queen Hera hates Herakles because of this, and has been trying to kill him since his birth and throughout his Labors.

The story begins with Hera giving King Eurystheus the idea to make the last Labor impossible for Herakles to do. It most assuredly will kill Herakles. Herakles must bring back Cerberus, the guard dog of the gates of the Underworld, one of the fiercest creatures under, or on, the Earth. Herakles seeks out advice from a priestess, Eumelia, who is not very helpful. He then seeks out advice from his half sister, the goddess Athena. Athena recommends that they also ask god Hermes for help since he takes the dead souls to the Underworld.

Herakles, Athena, and Hermes must go to Tanaerum, the city where the passageway to the Underworld is located. Tanaerum is full of a bunch of crazy people whose mayor is an old woman with a dead fish for a pet. Upon reaching the bottom of the passageway, Herakles must cross the river Styx to get to the Underworld on the other side. The only way across is to convince Charon the Ferryman to row him across. Charon the Ferryman is a carnival-type person who is excited to see a living human, especially Herakles.

Once in the Underworld, Herakles encounters Zombies, a Snake Woman, three Beauties, a Brute, and Theseus, his cousin. Theseus is not dead, but has been secured to a chair by Hades, the ruler of the Underworld. Finally Herakles meets Hades and his wife Persephone. Hades allows Herakles to try and take Cerberus, feeling confident that Cerberus will kill Herakles, a son of Zeus, and become another "trophy" for Hades.

Herakles is successful in capturing Cerberus and taking him back to King Eurystheus, who releases Herakles from his Labors. Since Herakles has spent so many years accomplishing his Labors, he is unclear what he should now be doing with his life. Fortunately, King Zeus offers a temporary solution to Herakles' dilemma.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 males, 12 females, extras)

ZEUS (m)Narrator, humorous, who speaks to HERA or the audience. He is king of the gods. He has lots of gray hair and a big gray beard. (Get a nice wig and beard, it is worth it.) He is dressed in a fancy, royal-looking tunic. ZEUS tries to please HERA, but fails terribly because he is very chauvinistic in his thinking about women. *(62 lines.)*

HERA (f)Narrator, who usually speaks to ZEUS. She is queen of the gods. All her hair is gray, but she does not act "ancient." Dressed in a fancy, royal-looking tunic. HERA despises HERAKLES and wants him dead because ZEUS fathered HERAKLES with a mortal woman and named HERAKLES after her. *(69 lines.)*

KING EURYSTHEUS (m)King of the city of Tiryns, but disliked by the people of Tiryns. He is, and acts like, a big spoiled child. It is KING EURYSTHEUS' duty to assign the 12 Labors to HERAKLES. He dislikes HERAKLES because HERAKLES has become more popular as he has completed each Labor. Dressed in a royal-looking tunic and simple crown. *(42 lines.)*

GUARDS #1 and #2 (m/f)They stand silently in the background until KING EURYSTHEUS needs them. Military looking. (*GUARD #1 - - 8 lines, GUARD #2 - - 9 lines.*)

HERAKLES (m).....Very popular hero, about mid-20s. Wears a leather tunic. (No one else wears a leather tunic except HERAKLES.) Dark-haired since most Greeks have dark hair. He can have a closely cropped dark beard if you would like. Big and muscular would be the classic look, but is not necessary. (*121 lines.*)

PRIESTESS EUMELIA (f)A priestess who HERAKLES seeks out for advice about entering the Underworld. She is young and bored with being a priestess. She “tricks” HERAKLES into giving her seven days of back-rubs. She wears a long, dark tunic with a hood. (*29 lines.*)

NEOPHYTE (m/f)A priest/ess in-the-making who brings HERAKLES to PRIESTESS EUMELIA. (*6 lines.*)

ATHENA (f).....Female, goddess of wisdom and military victory. She is HERAKLES’ half sister and likes him a lot. She wears a tunic underneath a goatskin chest and back covering that is fringed in snakes. Her hair would be pulled back in a ponytail or short in cut. A head ornament, military in nature, could be used. (*58 lines.*)

HERMES (m).....The outlandish messenger god, who also takes all the dead souls to the Underworld. He is the only one in the show dressed in bright white. White wings on his feet and perhaps on his wrists, his head, et cetera. Big wings on his back would be great. He can be wearing a white one-strap-postman-like-mailbag. His hair should be white. He is extremely over-the-top effeminate in his mannerisms and speech. *(68 lines.)*

PEASANT #1 (f).....A crazy (the crazier the better) old woman with wild hair and clothes (lots of rags and colorful), who carries a fish around as a pet. She is the mayor of the city of Tanaerum.
(3 lines.)

PEASANTS (m/f).....Forty PEASANTS are the residents of Tanaerum, the city where the entrance to the Underworld is. Tanaerum is a dump of a city. The PEASANTS are all crazy, all dressed in rags, all dirty-looking, all with crazy hair. *(Approximately one line each, unless doubled, tripled, etc.)*

CHARON THE FERRYMAN (m)..He is responsible for rowing the dead across the river Styx into the Underworld. He has a carnival-type personality. He has long fingers, a deathly facial appearance, and an outlandish costume (lots of things hanging off of him - - possibly things he took from the dead). The more extreme his appearance, the better.
(21 lines.)

ZOMBIES (m/f).....Ten in total. Really let your imagination run wild here. The costumes should not be too gory (little children and your families are your best audience), but creative and visually exciting. Halloween places usually have great costumes and/or ideas. Note the ten ZOMBIES needed in the script and add any others you would like. Make sure you get a good picture of your ZOMBIES for your memory book. *(Approximately 1 line each, can be doubled.)*

SNAKE WOMAN (f)Lots of thin, rubber snakes hanging from her hair, from her tunic, around her wrists, ankles, et cetera. At least one big rubber snake with which she lunges at HERAKLES. *(1 line.)*

BEAUTIES (f).....Three beautiful girls in enticing tunics, jewelry on their wrists, necks, and in their hair. These girls do not look dead. They have interesting voices (all the same or all different). Whatever works for your actors. Suggestions: hissing like snakes, hypnotic trancelike, hot and sexy, et cetera. *(BEAUTY #1 - - 5 lines, BEAUTIES #2 and 3 - - 4 lines each.)*

BRUTE (m)Big, ugly, bare-chested or full of armor, hairy and dirty. Dimwitted. Carries a large wooden hammer. *(1 line.)*

THESEUS (m).....HERAKLES' cousin. THESEUS' costume should be fun to make. The back part of it is attached to the chair and the front part is still on THESEUS. He should wear a red, skintight brief. The brief has pieces of material attached to look like shredded skin/flesh. Blood streaks are down his back and his legs, and on the chair. (17 lines.)

HADES (m)The ruler of the Underworld, not the devil. All the dead mortals, bad or good went to the Underworld. Only the immortal gods lived on Mt. Olympus. HADES wears a long (to the ground) robe with a high collar and long sleeves. Arrogant, and not necessarily thrilled with his job. Prone to outbursts of anger. (17 lines.)

PERSEPHONE (f).....HADES wife. HADES tricked her into staying in the Underworld, so she is not happy with HADES and wants out. Dressed in a royal-looking tunic, although her complexion is deathly. (6 lines.)

DEAD SERVANTS (m/f)Two SERVANTS shuffle off stage and back on stage delivering drinks to HADES, PERSEPHONE, and HERAKLES. Dressed as slaves. (Non-speaking.)

CERBERUS (m/f).....CERBERUS is a three-headed dog with snakes covering his back and a dragon's tail. Yes, this is an elaborate costume, sorry. Use at least two people, one (or two) at the front moving the heads and jaws and one in the rear swishing the dragon tail and arching/shaking the back. A Halloween shop may be able to help you with ferocious dog heads. Plan ahead with this costume. (*Non-speaking.*)

MESSENGER (m/f).....S/he simply walks on and whispers a message to one of the GUARDS. (*Non-speaking.*)

TIRYNIANS (m/f)They are there when HERAKLES brings CERBERUS back to KING EURYSTHEUS and when KING EURYSTHEUS frees HERAKLES from his obligation to his Labors. All dressed in earth-tone tunics. (*Non-speaking, some oohs and aaahhs, gestures.*)

QUEEN (f)Simply stands in the last scene next to KING EURYSTHEUS. Royal-looking, with a simple crown. (*Non-speaking.*)

BEAUTIFUL TWINS (f)If you have twin females who want non-speaking parts, here is their role. They walk across stage in the last scene eyeing HERAKLES a lot. Dressed in identical sexy, short tunics. (*Non-speaking.*)

CHARACTERS BY SCENE*Act One, Scene 1: Labor 12 Assigned*

HERA, KING EURYSTHEUS, GUARDS #1 & #2, HERAKLES

Act One, Scene 2: Priestess Eumelia

ZEUS, PRIESTESS EUMELIA, NEOPHYTE, HERAKLES

Act One, Scene 3: Goddess Athena

HERA, ZEUS, HERAKLES, ATHENA, HERMES

Act One, Scene 4: Tanaerum

HERA, ZEUS, HERAKLES, PEASANTS #1-40, ATHENA, HERMES

Act One, Scene 5: Passageway to the Underworld

ZEUS, HERAKLES, HERMES, ATHENA

Act One, Scene 6: Charon the Ferryman

ZEUS, HERA, HERAKLES, ATHENA, HERMES, CHARON

Act Two, Scene1: The Underworld

HERA, ZEUS, HERAKLES, ZOMBIES #1-10, SNAKE WOMAN,
BEAUTY #1-3, BRUTE, THESEUS, HADES, PERSEPHONE, DEAD
SERVANTS (two)

Act Two, Scene2: Cerberus

HERA, ZEUS, HERAKLES, CERBERUS

Act Two, Scene3: Delivering Cerberus

ZEUS, HERA, KING EURYSTHEUS, GUARDS #1 & 2, TIRYNIANS,
(CERBERUS)

Act Two, Scene 4: The End of Labors

ZEUS, HERA, TIRYNIANS, GUARDS #1 & 2, KING EURYSTHEUS,
QUEEN, HERAKLES

SUMMARY OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Act One, Scene 1: Labor 12 Assigned

KING EURYSTHEUS, the king of the city of Tiryns, assigns HERAKLES his 12th and last Labor to perform.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ Elevated thrones for HERA and ZEUS
- ☐ A chair for KING EURYSTHEUS
- ☐ Long spears for the GUARDS

Act One, Scene 2: Priestess Eumelia

HERAKLES seeks out EUMELIA, a priestess, to learn how to survive in the Underworld.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ A table for PRIESTESS EUMELIA to lay down upon

Act One, Scene 3: Goddess Athena

HERAKLES asks the goddess ATHENA for assistance with Labor 12.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ Two or three lighter colored wall panels
- ☐ Heavy-looking wooden throne if desired

Act One, Scene 4: Tanaerum

HERAKLES, ATHENA, and HERMES arrive in Tanaerum, the city where the entrance to the Underworld is located.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ A backdrop, or set pieces, of old, falling apart huts
- ☐ Signs on wood (as indicated in the script)
- ☐ A pouch which HERAKLES wears
- ☐ At least one broken down cart made of styrofoam (HERAKLES must lift over his head)
- ☐ Dead fish, or, a fake rubber fish
- ☐ A fake worm to be pulled out of a PEASANT's ear

Act One, Scene 5: Passageway to the Underworld

HERAKLES, ATHENA, and HERMES journey through the passageway to the Underworld.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ Platform with a ramp/steps leading to down SL
- ☐ Stand-up cut-outs of rocks
- ☐ A large fan to provide gusts of air
- ☐ A fog machine, or, lots of baby powder
- ☐ Dark shredded paper or material
- ☐ Sheer pieces of material weighted at one end

Act One, Scene 6: Charon the Ferryman

HERAKLES meets CHARON the Ferryman.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ A rock for ATHENA to sit upon if desired
- ☐ CHARON's rowboat
- ☐ Oars for the rowboat

ACT TWO*Act Two, Scene 1: The Underworld*

HERAKLES must journey through the Underworld to find CERBERUS. On the way he encounters several ZOMBIES, the SNAKE WOMAN, the BEAUTIES, and the BRUTE, frees his cousin THESEUS, and speaks to HADES and his wife PERSEPHONE.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ A very large boulder if desired
- ☐ A backdrop of the inside of a cave if desired
- ☐ Lots of rope hanging from above
- ☐ Red gelatin/thick sugar solution in two plastic bags
- ☐ A fake arm
- ☐ Spear through a ZOMBIE's chest
- ☐ Heavy noose around a ZOMBIE's neck
- ☐ A sword in a ZOMBIE's stomach
- ☐ A leather pouch with dust/dirt in it
- ☐ A large block of wood/stone/metal ball attached to a chain
- ☐ An arrow/ax in a ZOMBIE's head
- ☐ One or two large rubber snakes for the SNAKE WOMAN

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- ☐ Rope for the BEAUTY
- ☐ Large wooden hammer for the BRUTE
- ☐ THESEUS' stone chair
- ☐ Flash pot
- ☐ A serving tray with three goblets of bubbling drink

Act Two, Scene 2: Cerberus

The idea is to portray HERAKLES as the first person to approach CERBERUS with kindness. HERAKLES is able to calm CERBERUS down and take him with him.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ A scrim if desired
- ☐ Fog machine, or lots of baby powder and a fan
- ☐ Heavy rope tied to CERBERUS' neck and held offstage
- ☐ Pieces of fake meat for CERBERUS to eat

Act Two, Scene 3: Delivering Cerberus

HERAKLES delivers CERBERUS to KING EURYSTHEUS.

PROPS AND SETS:

(Same as Act One, Scene 1)

- ☐ Backdrop of ancient Greek buildings if desired

Act Two, Scene 4: The End of Labors

HERAKLES is released from his commitment to KING EURYSTHEUS.

PROPS AND SETS:

- ☐ A platform for KING EURYSTHEUS and the QUEEN

ADDITIONAL SETS AND PROP INFORMATION

All of your sets and props should be as simple, or as complex, as you are willing and able to do. Utilize the expertise available to you. Remember to start all your sets early! Your goal is to be able to rehearse several times with all the props and sets finished or near finished. This will make your life much easier!

Act One, Scene 1: Labor 12 Assigned

HERA and ZEUS' thrones: They should be on elevated stone-looking thrones on far SR and SL. The higher the thrones the better.

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Act One, Scene 2: Priestess Eumelia

Table: If an authentic-looking wooden table is not available, just cover any table with a plain tablecloth.

Act One, Scene 3: Goddess Athena

HERMES: It would be great to fly HERMES on stage, but I realize the difficulty/expense associated with flying. HERMES can just run in as quickly as possible and strike a pose.

Act One, Scene 4: Tanaerum

Backdrop: A good backdrop, or built sets, of broken-down huts would be great.

Peasant #1's fish: I do not think anyone would have an objection to a real, rather large, dead fish on stage. Depending on the slipperiness of the fish, push a dowel/spike/large nail through the tail area so she can hold the fish more easily. Refrigerate the dead fish between shows. A rubber fish is also an option, but probably not as effective.

Cart: The cart which HERAKLES picks up over his head can be made with 1" or 2" styrofoam insulation boards. It cuts easily and can be glued together with contact cement. If this is not possible, you can wire the cart to an overhead pulley and hoist it up when HERAKLES picks it up.

Act One, Scene 5: Passageway to the Underworld

Fog, wind, et cetera: Low/no odor fog machines do work well. Dry ice in water, blown across stage, can also work. Even baby powder swept/thrown on stage can work. Keep the lighting low and eerie.

Unknown stuff that gets everywhere: Shredded dark paper or cut up dark material or dry peat moss can be thrown across stage at HERAKLES and ATHENA.

Dead souls: Just pieces of sheer material, weighted at one end, thrown at/across HERAKLES and ATHENA.

Act One, Scene 6: Charon the Ferryman

Boat: Build lightweight sides of a boat with no bottom. Build two benches with wheels. One for CHARON to sit on, one for HERAKLES. Attach the sides to the benches so the sides do not touch the floor. As CHARON rows, his back is towards HERAKLES and he pushes the boat along with his feet on each pull of the oars. The boat's name, "Song of the Styx!" is on both sides of the boat.

Act Two, Scene 1: The Underworld

Vines: Hang painted, frayed rope from above. Crisscross the vines a good deal.

The more vines the better. If the rope is hung from a drop pole, different length wooden cross pieces on the pole with rope hung from them, will add depth to the appearance of the vines. Cobweb type stuff can be hung between some of the vines. A fake skeleton(s) can be hung among the vines. If the drop pole could be slowly shaken, it will cause the vines to move adding a good effect.

Tearing the Vines: In two places the vines are masking taped together so they can easily be torn apart. The blood that is to ooze out of the rope is a small bag with thick red sugar/gelatin solution in it. This bag is attached right where HERAKLES tears and squeezes the rope. The bag is torn open when HERAKLES tears the rope apart and red blood oozes out, especially onto HERAKLES' hands. Experiment with the quantity and consistency of the "blood."

Wooden hammer: If a solid wooden hammer is too heavy, a wooden box can be made for the hammer head and carved/cut to look rough.

Stone chair: Make a box-like chair with no arms which can be painted like stones (or styrofoam can be used to cover the frame and carved to look like stone).

Drinks: If the drinks could be bubbling and smoky, it would be great. A small piece of dry ice in each mug works well. Do not actually drink the liquid.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I sincerely hope that you have a great deal of fun doing this play. If theater is not fun, do not do it! Every day will not be fun, but your final product, what you will walk away with, will be an experience that you will never forget. And hopefully this experience will put a smile on your face because you are proud of what you accomplished. Remember that when the audience applauds, it is for everyone involved in your play, not just the actors. And may your production be rewarded with lots of applause!

SCRIPT:

Text which is in brackets "[]" are explanations and should not be spoken. In the dialogue, words in CAPITAL LETTERS are to be yelled. Words that are underlined are to be stressed or emphasized.

COSTUMES:

These can be as elaborate or as simple as you are able. I have let cast members make their own costumes with great success. There are several characters whose costumes have the potential of being memorable. Tunics, the predominant costume here, are simple. They are long pieces of material slightly wider than a human folded in half with holes cut out for the heads to fit through. A belt (rope?) is then used. Use different colors of material for the tunics unless they are part of a group (like the GUARDS, BEAUTIFUL TWINS, et cetera). HERA and ZEUS's tunics should be the fanciest, with gold or silver trim or something to set them off as royalty. KING EURYSTHEUS and the QUEEN's tunics should also be royal looking. You should rehearse in costumes before dress rehearsals so there is time to make any necessary changes.

MAKE-UP:

Most of the cast will probably be able to do their own make-up once shown how to do so. Remember that everyone in the Underworld, except THESEUS, looks deathly.

There are many good stage make-up books out there which are very helpful.

SETS:

Your sets can be as elaborate or as simple as your skills and time allow. They do not have to be involved or authentic. Cutouts are sometimes very effective and get the point across. Plan your time, and level of expertise, so that the sets are done well in advance of the show. You will be much calmer if you can rehearse with all of the sets in place well before dress rehearsals begin.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1
LABOR 12 ASSIGNED

AT RISE:

Spotlight on ZEUS, who is sideways in his throne with his head back, fast asleep and snoring loudly. As the spotlight hits him, he grumbles, snores, grumbles, wakes up, looking at the ceiling.

ZEUS: Whhhooooaa! Oh baby, that was good! They do not make women like that anymore! *(Looks sideways at the audience, and is shocked that he is being watched.)* And I did not know you were here! *(Sits up, wipes his eyes, stretches, et cetera.)* Sorry about that, I hope you were not waiting long. I must have dozed off there for a moment or two. Maybe a little longer. Anybody know what day it is? *(Pause. Stretches some more.)* Sometimes I think that life is a bunch of interruptions . . . *(Pause.)* . . . which happen between my naps. Not that you are an interruption, no, no. *(Shakes himself a little.)* OK, OK, I am awake now. So they tell me that you want to hear a story about my son. But first, allow me to introduce myself . . . *(In a big, bold voice.)* I am Zeus, king of the gods! *(Lightning and thunder.)* In just a moment you are going to meet a lovely woman, Queen Hera, who is my wife. The problem is that she hates my guts right now. And I really do not understand it. I father a few children who are not hers, and she is angry about it! She was especially angry when my boy Herakles was born! But what was I supposed to do? *(Dreamily.)* Herakles' mortal mother, Alkeme, was simply too beautiful to pass up . . . *(Back to the audience.)* So now Hera spends her time trying to get Herakles killed. *(Sarcastically.)* Lovely woman, my wife. Anyway, you know my boy as Her-cu-les, because the Romans could not get his name correct. Do you know why they could not get his name correct? The Romans were wacky in the head from drinking wine out of lead cups. A little dissolved lead in your body and your entire empire falls apart. Stupid Romans. Well, I thought that it would be nice to name Herakles after my wife, Queen Hera . . . Hera . . . Hera-kles . . . but instead of being appreciative of my kind and loving gesture, she got crazy, out-of-her-mind, frothing-at-the-mouth angry about it! She screamed for about a month, all

day and all night! She was unbearable to live with! *(Pause.)* All you married guys are sitting there thinking, "Boy, do I know how that feels!" But a little screaming does not keep us from loving our wives. Right, guys? *(Points to the audience.)* Guys, look at your wives and nod! In fact, it is your wife who got you to come and see this play, is it not? The loving dear that she is probably dragged you here against your will! You were all content, sitting at home, with your feet propped up, eating nachos, and watching *[Insert the name of any popular show.]* Wives will do that, you know. They make you get all dressed up when you do not want to and drag you out someplace. *(Pointing out at the audience.)* But from what I can see out there, some of you skipped the "getting dressed up" part and just walked out of the house looking pretty darn pitiful! The least you could have done was wear clean blue jeans. *(Sits back and breathes.)* Well, my boy Herakles did something awful, really awful, when he was young and married. So he sought out the god Apollo to find out what he could do to right his wrong. Apollo told Herakles to perform 12 tasks, called Labors, for King Eurystheus. Even though these Labors were outrageously difficult, he was able to complete 11 of them, which I think had something to do with him being the son of Zeus, who would be me. Apple, apple seed, you have the idea. But his twelfth Labor, his last Labor, took Herakles to a new level! Hera and King Eurystheus outdid themselves with this one. *(ZEUS motions to the stage. Spotlight out on ZEUS.)*

HERA: *(Spotlight on HERA on her throne. Ticked off, in disbelief.)* How is it possible? *(Pause.)* Explain to me how it is possible that Herakles, that ill-conceived offspring of Zeus and a mortal woman, has been able to live through 11 Labors? The most difficult 11 tasks assigned to anyone on Earth ever! And Herakles, this over-muscled, half-mortal has been able to perform all 11? Explain this to me! Someone! Anyone! I, Hera, queen of the gods, made sure that the Labors were impossible! I gave King Eurystheus enough hints about what to assign that even he, that dimwit, could not get it wrong! The Lernean Hydra, the Cretan Bull, the Horses of Diomedes . . . Herakles did them all! I thought for sure the Amazon Women would finish Herakles off, but even my Amazon Women failed! Failed! Well, there is only one more Labor left to assign before Herakles is free of his debt to Apollo, so I have to make it the hardest of all! This Labor must not fail! *(Contemplatively.)* Now what can it be? Herakles has retrieved things from distant lands, defeated all of the beasts on Earth . . . *(It comes to her.)* But of course! Of course! Why did I not think of this sooner? Is middle age dulling my senses? Herakles has defeated all of the beasts on Earth, so what about in the Earth? The Underworld! The destiny of all the dead! Brilliant! I have saved the worst for last! *(Spotlight dims on HERA, but not out.)*

A simple royal chamber. There are two GUARDS with long spears up stage of KING EURYSTHEUS, who is down center stage. Lights up on KING EURYSTHEUS. He is seated, leaning over with his head in his hands. His motions indicate that he is worried. He stands, he paces, he sits, he stands, he paces, he sits, et cetera. With lots of hand gestures.

KING EURYSTHEUS: I am doomed! Doomed! I, King Eurystheus, the king of Tiryns, have been unable to give Herakles a Labor that he cannot do! Each Labor I give him is really, really hard! But does that matter? No, it does not matter at all! Mr. Half-God does them all! And the people of Tiryns love him! He is their hero! Oh sure, I am their King, but they detest me! It is Herakles who gets the cheers every time they see him! Have they ever once cheered for me? Nooooo . . . I get rotten vegetables thrown at me! *(Stamps his feet like a child.)* And I do not like vegetables! I want to be a hero! Mommy always said that I would be a hero someday! *(Looking up in the sky.)* Well, Mommy, your son is not a hero! Far from it! I have let you down! *(Looking down.)* My mommy is probably rolling over in her grave right now! *(Walking over and sits. Puts his head in his hands and starts to wail loudly.)*

HERA: *(Spotlight up on HERA.)* Eurystheus! *(No response. Louder.)* King Eurystheus!

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Not looking up.)* What?

HERA: Lift your head up and act like a king!

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Looking around in the air.)* Mommy, is that you?

HERA: No, this is not your mother!

KING EURYSTHEUS: Then who? Who are you? What are you? *(Grabs his head and shakes it.)* These voices in my head! Where do they come from?

HERA: That is not important. Just listen. For Herakles' twelfth, and last, Labor . . . are you listening?

KING EURYSTHEUS: Yes, I am listening. For Herakles' last Labor . . .

HERA: Tell him to go to the Underworld!

KING EURYSTHEUS: Go to the Underworld?

HERA: And bring Cerberus to you!

KING EURYSTHEUS: Bring Cerberus to me?

HERA: Yes, bring Cerberus to you!

Pause.

KING EURYSTHEUS: Cerberus who?

HERA: *(In disbelief.)* Cerberus who? You do not know who Cerberus is? Cerberus, the Keeper of the Gates of the Underworld!

KING EURYSTHEUS: Oh, that Cerberus!

HERA: Yes, that Cerberus! The Hound of Hades! The fiercest beast of the Underworld!

KING EURYSTHEUS: The Hound of Hades. But how can Herakles bring Cerberus to me? No mortal has ever gone to the Underworld and returned.

HERA: Exactly!

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Confused.)* Exactly? *(Then realizing. Becoming excited as he talks.)* Exactly! No one has ever returned! I will be rid of Herakles once and for all! Mr. Popularity will be out of my hair! He will be a permanent visitor to the Underworld! The people of Tiryns will love me when Herakles is gone! *(More reserved.)* Or at least, maybe they will stop throwing vegetables at me.

HERA: Are you not glad that you thought of it?

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Confused.)* I thought of it?

HERA: Of course you did!

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Confident.)* Of course I did! Send Herakles to the Underworld to bring back Cerberus! *(Dancing around excited like a child.)* Oh I am going to get Herakles with this one! GUARDS!

GUARD #1 and #2 walk forward and hit their spears on the stage twice.

GUARD #1: Yes your majesty.

KING EURYSTHEUS: Bring me Herakles! Immediately!

GUARD #2: As you wish King Eurystheus!

GUARD #2 hits his spear on the stage once and exits SR or SL. As the lights dim to black and come back up, KING EURYSTHEUS is brushing himself off, fixing his royal tunic, preparing to talk to HERAKLES. GUARD #2 enters.

GUARD #2: *(Hits his spear twice on stage. Loud and bold.)* King Eurystheus, Herakles awaits!

KING EURYSTHEUS: Show him in.

GUARD #2 brings in HERAKLES, who goes down on one knee.

HERAKLES: You summoned me, my king?

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Giddy.)* I did indeed, Herakles.

HERAKLES stands.

KING EURYSTHEUS: I have decided upon your last Labor.

HERAKLES: Yes, your majesty?

KING EURYSTHEUS: I want you to take a trip like no other trip which you have ever taken!

HERAKLES: As you wish, your majesty.

KING EURYSTHEUS: I want you to go to the Underworld!

HERAKLES: Whatever you want, your majesty.

KING EURYSTHEUS: And bring back Cerberus, the Hound of Hades . . . alive! *(Hoping for a response from HERAKLES, which he does not get.)* Did you hear me?

HERAKLES: Yes, your majesty, I heard you.

KING EURYSTHEUS: I said Cerberus! The keeper of the gates of the Underworld! The fiercest, meanest, ugliest, vile creature of the Underworld!

HERAKLES: Whatever you want, your majesty. I will leave as soon as possible. *(HERAKLES goes down on one knee, stands, exits.)*

KING EURYSTHEUS: *(Like a little child throwing a fit.)* Oh come on! He never reacts! No matter what I assign to him, he just says . . . *(In a bold, mocking voice)* As you wish your majesty! Yes, your majesty! Whatever you want, your majesty! *(Angry, with lots of hand motions and facial expressions.)* Where is the fear? I want to see terror in his eyes! He is sure to perish with this last Labor and all I get is . . . "Yes, your majesty"! Well, we will see who gets the last laugh now, Herakles! You will not live through this Labor!

BLACKOUT on stage. Spotlight on HERA; she smiles and nods.

HERA: I have waited so long! This will be ever so satisfying to watch!

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2
PRIESTESS EUMELIA

AT RISE:

Spotlight on ZEUS.

ZEUS: Do you have any idea how tough it is to watch King Eurystheus, that Jellyfish of Tiryns, gloat over the possibility of my boy Herakles failing on his last Labor? Some of these kings on Earth are just plain jerks. Do you guys have any kings or queens, I think you call them bosses, who are just plain jerks? (*Pointing to a few people.*) I see a lot of nodding out there! Is your big leader a jerk, too? You know, the one you call "president"? You guys must think that he is a jerk, because you keep changing him every bunch of years! Sort of like a diaper, huh? You have to change them when they stink. Well, when you rely on mortals to be in charge, what can I say? But back to my story. My boy Herakles was a bit, shall I say, concerned, about going to the Underworld. (*ZEUS motions to the stage. Spotlight out on ZEUS.*)

Black stage, with a spotlight on Herakles who down SL.

HERAKLES: (*Concerned.*) Journey to the Underworld! I fear no man, I fear no beast, I fear nothing on Earth! But the Underworld . . . the Underworld is the realm of Hades. No mortal returns from the Underworld! Once you enter, you do not exit! That is the job of Cerberus. He makes sure that no one escapes from the Underworld. If I enter the Underworld now and I am unable to get back to Earth, I will be destined to stay in the Underworld suffering a never-ending punishment for the wrong I committed upon my family! (*Pause, lowers his head.*) But this is my last Labor! I am so close to finishing. (*Pause and raises his head.*) I have heard of a place, Eleusis, where the holy people know the secrets of survival in the Underworld. Perhaps they know the secret of escaping from the Underworld. I must try.

Spotlight follows HERAKLES as he exits SL. BLACKOUT.

The stage lights come up slowly. There are no props or sets present. PRIESTESS EUMELIA is slowly running around the stage flapping her arms, acting like she is flying, soaring, making bird noises. This goes on for a few moments with several different bird noises and several different styles of arm flapping. We hear a knocking sound from SR. Upon hearing the knocking, PRIESTESS EUMELIA hurriedly sits down center stage, cross-legged, with her arms straight out to the sides, eyes closed. PRIESTESS EUMELIA stays in this position until the NEOPHYTE exits.)

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: (*Solemnly.*) Enter.

A NEOPHYTE enters from SR.

NEOPHYTE: Excuse me, Priestess Eumelia.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Yes?

NEOPHYTE: I am sorry to disturb your contemplation of the essential-elements-of-reaching-the-supreme-level-of-contentment-in-life, but you have a visitor who insists on seeing you immediately.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Go on.

NEOPHYTE: A person calling himself Herakles is seeking to speak to your holiness.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: A person named Herakles, you say?

NEOPHYTE: Yes, your holiness. I will tell him that you are not to be disturbed, Priestess.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: No! No. I will make time for my visitor. Send him in.

NEOPHYTE: As you wish. *(The NEOPHYTE exits.)*

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: *(Stands up and becomes animated, crazy with excitement.)* A visitor! A visitor! Yes, yes, yes! Some excitement in my life! Someone to talk to! This high holy priestess stuff is for the birds! Too much sitting around with nothing to do. This contemplation of the essential-elements-of-reaching-the-supreme-level-of-contentment-in-life is just plain overrated! Do you know what the essential-element-of-reaching-the-supreme-level-of-contentment-in-life is? Do not sit around contemplating the essential-elements-of-reaching-the-supreme-level-of-contentment-in-life! That is what it is! Nothing else! Just get out and do something! And I get to do something today! And of all the people to come and visit! A man! A man among men! The man! The mighty Herakles! Big, strong, and I hear that he is so good looking! I cannot wait! I have not seen a good-looking guy in ages!

A knock on the door from SR. PRIESTESS EUMELIA sits down center and resumes her position.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Enter.

The NEOPHYTE and HERAKLES enter.

NEOPHYTE: Priestess Eumelia, your visitor.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Thank you. You may go.

The NEOPHYTE leaves.

HERAKLES: May I present myself to your priestess? I am Herakles.
(Deep bow.)

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PRIESTESS EUMELIA: (*Stands.*) Are you the one they call the mighty Herakles?

HERAKLES: Yes, your holiness.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: And are you the son of King Zeus?

HERAKLES: Yes, your holiness.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: And are you the strongest mortal?

HERAKLES: Yes, your holiness.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: And are you really good looking?

HERAKLES: (*Confused.*) Really good looking, your holiness?

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Sorry, ignore that. What brings you to me Herakles?

HERAKLES: I am seeking your guidance and direction.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Go on.

HERAKLES: I must enter the Underworld to fulfill my last Labor. I understand that you have the secret to entering and exiting the Underworld unharmed.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Entering the Underworld is easy Herakles. It is the exiting of the Underworld that is not an easy task! Let me think a moment. (*Pause, faces the audience so that HERAKLES cannot see her face. Slowly she smiles.*) I may be able to help.

HERAKLES: Thank you, your holiness. I have come to the right place.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: (*Walks to down center stage, puts her arms over her head with her palms together.*) Stand behind me, Herakles. (*HERAKLES stands behind her.*) Place your hands above your head like I am doing. (*HERAKLES does so.*) Clear your mind. (*Pause.*) Breath in . . . (*PRIESTESS EUMELIA breaths in, HERAKLES breaths in.*) Breath out . . . (*PRIESTESS EUMELIA breaths out, HERAKLES breaths out. PRIESTESS EUMELIA drops her arms.*) Put your hands on my shoulders. (*HERAKLES does so.*) Now relax and feel my spirit flow into you. (*Pause.*) Do you feel it?

HERAKLES: No, not really, your holiness.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Concentrate harder! Clear your mind! *(Pause.) Gently squeeze my shoulders. (HERAKLES does so. PRIESTESS EUMELIA smiles at the audience.) Squeeze a little harder and relax. Squeeze and relax. (HERAKLES does so. PRIESTESS EUMELIA smiles at the audience.) That is it! Now rub up and down my back. (HERAKLES does so. PRIESTESS EUMELIA smiles at the audience, squirms a little.) My spirit is definitely loving this! Is your spirit loving this? (Catches herself.) I mean, is my spirit flowing into you?*

HERAKLES: I am sorry, your holiness. It does not seem to be working.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Then we must increase our bodily contact! Do as I do! *(PRIESTESS EUMELIA puts her arms straight out to the sides. HERAKLES puts his arms straight out to the sides. She spreads her fingers wide. HERAKLES spreads her fingers wide.) Now intertwine our fingers. (HERAKLES does so. PRIESTESS EUMELIA wraps her, and his, arms around her. She smiles.) Nice arms, Herakles.*

HERAKLES: *(Not sure of what to say.)* Uh, thank you, your holiness.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Gently squeeze me, Herakles. *(HERAKLES does so. PRIESTESS EUMELIA is loving it and shows it in her facial expressions. She rubs his arms, tilts her head back onto HERAKLES. Dreamily.) Oh, does that feel good! Take me, Herakles, I am yours!*

HERAKLES: Your holiness?

PRIESTESS EUMELIA snaps out of her dream world.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: *(Unwrapping HERAKLES' arms.)* Sorry, extreme requests require extreme measures. *(Facing the audience so that HERAKLES cannot see, she smiles.)* You must stay for seven days, and we must practice bodily contact three times a day until I can transfer my spirit into you.

HERAKLES: Seven days, your holiness?

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Seven days, three times a day.

Brief BLACKOUT, during which a table is quickly brought on stage and PRIESTESS EUMELIA lays on the table, head down stage and HERAKLES is giving her a karate chop back rub. Lights up. Pause, while the audience sees what is happening.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: *(As she speaks, her voice vibrates from the karate chops.)* That is exactly correct, Herakles! You are good, very good! Has my spirit entered you yet, Herakles?

HERAKLES: *(He stops chopping her back.)* Your holiness. I am a disappointment! It has been seven days, I have done all that you have requested, and I have not once felt your spirit enter me.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: *(Stands and faces the audience, stretching and feeling all loose.)* I am sorry that you have not benefited from your stay as much as I have! Boy, did that feel good!

HERAKLES: Now what am I to do? Am I doomed to enter the Underworld, never to return?

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: It will be difficult without my spirit with you, but try these two things. Number one: Be determined in your endeavor! Fulfill your Labor! Do not take no for an answer!

HERAKLES: Be determined, fulfill my Labor, do not take no for an answer.

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Yes, and number two: Do not tick off Hades!

HERAKLES: Do not tick off Hades?

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Sure! Do not get him angry with you! While you are there, why would you irritate the big guy? He can be one nasty god of the dead, if you know what I mean!

HERAKLES: I will try, but your holiness, I am afraid that it will not be easy!

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: Of course it will not be easy! *(Pause.)* By the way, what is your 12th Labor anyway?

HERAKLES: I must bring Cerberus back to King Eurystheus alive!

PRIESTESS EUMELIA: *(In shock.)* You have to take Hades' dog from him? *(Shaking her head a lot while looking at the audience, and motioning back to HERAKLES.)* It is not happening! I have tried! He is dead meat! He is sucking big wind! *(Conciliatory, while she is pushing him towards the door SR.)* Good luck, Herakles! Remember, be determined, stay your course! Do not anger Hades! *(HERAKLES is off stage. To the audience.)* Oh, is he going to make one nice trophy for Hades. *(Feeling all loose again.)* And he was so good with his hands, too!

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

GODDESS ATHENA

AT RISE:

Spotlights on HERA and ZEUS in their thrones.

HERA: Men are so dumb!

ZEUS: Dumb! How can you call men dumb?

HERA: Like this. You, and every male that has ever walked this Earth, including Herakles, are dumb!

ZEUS: What did Herakles do that makes him dumb?

HERA: Did you not see what the Priestess Eumelia did with him? She suckered Herakles into giving her a bunch of backrubs for seven days! He did not learn one thing about the Underworld!

ZEUS: He trusted her! He believed that she would help him, teach him about the Underworld! Us males are trusting people! We believe what people say to us!

HERA: Like I said, dumb! I will never understand why your Herakles is so popular!

ZEUS: Possibly because he has done outrageous things! Stronger than strong! Defeating monsters everywhere he goes! *(Smiling a lot.)* And it does not hurt that he is good-looking like his dad!

HERA: Strong and good-looking! So what? Do you really think that the only things women want in a man are strong and good-looking?

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ZEUS: (*Befuddled.*) Yes!

HERA: You see! Dumb! Women want more! Women want intelligence and compassion and security and trustworthiness and sensibility and integrity and romance and faithfulness and honesty and allegiance and fidelity and adoration and obedience and devotedness and reverence and homage . . .

ZEUS: Whhhooooaaa! You women want all of that?

HERA: Yes, we do! Much more!

ZEUS: More?!

HERA: Yes, more!

ZEUS: How are we supposed to be all those things when we do not know what half of them mean?

HERA: Exactly! The world would be a better place without you dumb men!

ZEUS: You do not mean that! A better place without men?! You need us! Who would carry in the groceries for you? Who would herd the sheep for you? Who would cut the firewood for you? Who would take out the trash for you? Who would you verbally abuse whenever the urge strikes you? (*Smiling.*) Who would make you happy late at night?

HERA: Stop right there! Make me happy late at night? Is that all you think about?

ZEUS: No, of course not! No. I think about wrestling and . . . and . . . chariot races every now and then!

HERA: Arrrrggggghhhh!!!!

Spotlight out on HERA.

ZEUS: What did I say? Perhaps it would be better if I never said anything? But you have to admit that she is beautiful when she is angry with me, huh? (*Thinking.*) Which means that she is beautiful pretty much all the time. But before I continue, my son really is a famous guy! There are more stories about Herakles than any other Greek hero! Herakles was the most famous and beloved hero of ancient Greece. Actually, Herakles was the first what you guys call “superhero” on Earth! He came before [*Name any comic book super heroes that you would like to.*] the Fantastic Four, before Batman, before the X-Men, before the Incredible Hulk, before Spiderman, and even before Superman! I have to admit that your Superman is pretty cool! That x-ray vision thing that he does, yeah, I like that one! (*Glares at the audience like he has x-ray vision pointing from his eyes to the audience and back.*) Oh, what I could be seeing right now with x-ray vision! (*Stops glaring.*) Yes, Herakles was the original, never to be duplicated, but often copied, superhero! He was the man! You see, the rest of us gods were famous but mostly on Mt. Olympus. Herakles lived on Earth, where all the humans could see him, touch him, and believe in him. Had there been comic books in Greece, his would have been the top seller! Had there been movies, his would be setting box office records! Had there been T-shirts, his face would have been on them! Well, since my boy Herakles did not get any help from the Priestess Eumelia, he decided to ask for help with his last Labor from someone else.

ZEUS motions to the stage. Spotlight out on ZEUS.

A dark stage. HERAKLES is anywhere on stage with a dimmed spotlight on him.

HERAKLES: (*Looking up into the sky with his arms up.*) Athena, goddess of wisdom, it is I, Herakles, and I come seeking your assistance.

ATHENA: *(She is rolled out on a heavy looking wooden throne or walks on stage. Excited to hear from HERAKLES.)* Herakles! Good to hear from you! How long has it been? Why, it seems like only the other day I was taking the Golden Apples back to the nymphs of Hesperides after you brought them to King Eurystheus! Wait, it was just the other day! Ha! That King Eurystheus is worse than a spouse, huh? Just keeps coming up with ridiculous things for you to do! *(In a kingly voice.)* Bring me the Ceryneian Deer with golden horns, clean the Augean Stables, and what about those Stymphalian Birds! *(Back to her normal voice.)* Quite the vicious buggers those Stymphalian Birds, huh, Herakles? But we got them! Scared the crap out of them with my bronze noisemakers and then you shot them out of the sky! You are the best with the bow and arrow! Ah, the good old times . . . *(Pause.)* So what can I do for my half-brother?

HERAKLES: Athena, King Eurystheus has assigned me my last Labor to perform.

ATHENA: And what is whiny King Eurystheus telling you to do now? Probably came up with a real humdinger for your last Labor, huh?

HERAKLES: I must journey to the Underworld!

ATHENA: The Underworld?! Ouch!

HERAKLES: And bring back Cerberus to him.

ATHENA: Cerberus! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! A joke, right? Who is he kidding? The Hound of Hades! That is impossible! *(In retrospect.)* He is not smart enough to have thought of this one on his own, he must have had help. So who helped him?

HERAKLES: I would imagine Queen Hera.

ATHENA: Hera! Of course, Hera! Is she ever going to get off your back? She keeps trying to kill you off just because you were named after her! You would think that she would give it a rest after so many years, but no, not Hera. *(Pause.)* Just curious, have you ever thought of changing your name?

HERAKLES: *(Stammering.)* I . . . well . . . change my name . . .

ATHENA: *(She cuts him off.)* No, never mind, dumb question. Back to your last Labor. *(Thinking, pacing.)* Cerberus, huh? This does top all the others. Well, to bring Cerberus back, the first thing you would have to do is go to the Underworld.

HERAKLES: Yes. I have already sought out the advice of the Priestess Eumelia about surviving in the Underworld, but she was not much help. She told me not to anger Hades.

ATHENA: How long did it take her to come up with that advice? Of course you would not want to anger Hades! *(Pause.)* But how are you planning on killing Cerberus without making Hades angry?

HERAKLES: I cannot kill him! I have to bring Cerberus back alive!

ATHENA: Alive! You have to bring the meanest, nastiest, fiercest beast of the Underworld up to Earth alive! Well, sit me on a torch and watch me scream! I want you to walk back to King Eurystheus, look him straight in the eyes, and tell him that you are not doing his stupid Labor! And while you are there, tell him that he is the dumbest king to walk this Earth and that he is a disgrace to every other king around and that he should go get Cerberus himself if he wants him so badly! That should put an olive branch up his butt!

HERAKLES: *(Panic builds as he speaks.)* Athena, I must complete my Labors! If I do not complete my Labors, my sin of sins will not be forgiven, my mind will never be at ease! I am too close to finishing my Labors to give up on the last one!

ATHENA: Herakles! Sorry! Relax, relax! I was just blowing off some steam about King Eurystheus. *(Not very confidently.)* But of course you will finish your Labors! You will . . . no question . . . just finish them right up . . . *(Pause.)* However . . .

HERAKLES: However?

ATHENA: You see, I cannot help you.

HERAKLES: *(Panic again.)* But goddess Athena, you must! You have always been my protector! I am in need of your wisdom! *(Gets down on his knee.)* Please, Athena, please!

ATHENA: *(Pulls up HERAKLES.)* Herakles, you see, the Underworld is off-limits. The seas are Poseidon's, the Earth is Zeus', and the Underworld is Hades'. I cannot interfere in the Underworld. I am an Earthly god, not an Underworld god.

HERAKLES: But what am I to do?

ATHENA: You could ask Hermes.

HERAKLES: Hermes?

ATHENA: Sure, Hermes. You know, the god with wings on his feet, takes godly messages to everyone. When you least expect it, he flies by nearly knocking you over! I think he tries to knock people over on purpose! Sneaky, very sneaky, that Hermes. He also has to take every dead soul to the Underworld. He knows the Underworld. No question, Hermes is the god to help you out!

HERAKLES: But I barely know him!

ATHENA: Of course you barely know him! He is pretty standoffish, unless you are a god, that is. And since we are not sure of your standing as a god quite yet, let me do the talking. (*Faces skyward, arms out.*) Hermes? Are you there oh-so-fast-and-punctual messenger god? (*To HERAKLES.*) He needs his ego stroked all the time! He likes the oh-so-fast-and-punctual stuff. Typical, ty-pi-cal male!

HERMES: (*HERMES voice from offstage.*) I heard that!

ATHENA: (*Caught a little off-guard.*) But . . . but . . . Hermes, I meant it! You are oh-so-fast-and-punctual! Has Athena ever lied to you?

HERMES: I do not know. Have you?

ATHENA: Would I do such a thing? Lie to Hermes, the swiftest of gods, the man with the messages, the binding force that keeps the Olympians functioning at peak efficiency?

HERMES: (*Runs on stage, or flies on stage, and strikes a pose.*) OK, OK, enough crapola! What do you want already?

ATHENA: (*Walks up to HERMES, acting feminine.*) Got a moment for your favorite goddess, Athena?

HERMES: (*Giving her the cold shoulder.*) A moment is all I have! Speak, speak!

ATHENA: (*Noticing and pointing at HERMES feet.*) Hermes!

HERMES: What?

ATHENA: Are those new wings on your feet?

HERMES: (*Showing off his feet.*) Do you not love them? The old ones were just getting so outdated! I designed these myself! They have a flare that is just so me!

ATHENA: You are just too much, Hermes! No one has your style!

HERMES: That is true! Oh so true! Style is my middle name! But back to why you called me . . .

ATHENA: Well, Hermes, Herakles here . . . (*Motions to HERAKLES.*) You know Herakles? Son of Zeus and a mortal woman, half-god, half-mortal. Queen Hera wants him dead because Zeus named Herakles after her.

HERMES: Yes! Yes! I do know who Herakles is! I am the messenger god! I know all the gossip! In fact, I know the gossip before it becomes gossip! Get to your point. I am very busy, you know! I have things to do!

ATHENA: So you know that Herakles has been given his last Labor to perform.

HERMES: (*This is interesting to him since he has not heard a thing about this yet, but he doesn't want to let on.*) Yes, I recall something about it.

ATHENA: Herakles has to bring Cerberus alive to King Eurystheus.

HERMES: (*Amazed.*) Cerberus, alive!?! Really! Where did you hear that? (*Back to faking that he knew.*) I mean, of course! Of course! I knew that! Cerberus to King Eurystheus. So what does this have to do with me?

ATHENA: Well, since you take all the dead souls to Hades . . .

HERMES: Day in and day out! At all hours! There is never a resting moment! Why can people not die on a schedule? Is that too much to ask? Pleeeaaassee, if you are going to die, it must be done at sunrise! How hard would that be? The sun comes up, you fall over dead! Easy! Efficient!

ATHENA: Yes, I will talk to Zeus about people dying at sunrise for you, Hermes. But right now, Herakles could use your help.

HERMES: My help?

ATHENA: Hermes, you know the way to the Underworld.

HERMES: Yes, of course I do.

ATHENA: And you talk to Hades.

HERMES: Not unless it is absolutely necessary! I try to avoid it if I can! Hades' breath could knock over a dead person! (*Chuckles a little.*) Maybe that is the reason they made him king of the dead! Oh, a joke! I am so witty sometimes!

ATHENA: You can get Cerberus for Herakles.

HERMES: No, no, no! I cannot get Cerberus for Herakles! What are you thinking, child? I cannot get Cerberus for anyone! First off, he slobbers like a waterfall! And slobber and I are not good together! Second off, all that barking! Bark, bark, bark, bark! Personally, I think the three heads do not get along very well with each other. Can you imagine having three heads? Another head right here and here! (*Motions to the right and left of his own head.*) With two more heads, I would probably start barking, too! Ha!

ATHENA: But Hermes, this is not just anyone asking you. This is me, Athena. I am always there for you, Hermes.

HERMES: Yes, yes, you have always been good to me, but . . . this is Cerberus! This is Hades' guard dog! You know that we cannot interfere in the Underworld! Zeus would be so angry that he would reassign us to . . . to . . . following around his horses and scooping up all their caca! No sir, this god is not becoming the Horse Doo-Doo god! No . . . thank . . . you!

ATHENA: (*Playing up to HERMES, rubbing his arm.*) Hermes, if you help Herakles, I would be willing to . . .

HERMES: (*Interested.*) Willing to?

ATHENA: Wash your feet for you.

HERMES: (*Melts at the thought.*) Wash my feet? Oh, I do so like to have my feet washed!

ATHENA: So do we have a deal?

HERMES: OK, OK, but I cannot do much!

ATHENA: Thank you! Thank you! We will take anything that you can offer!

HERMES: I can show you the cave leading into the Underworld, and I can get you to the river Styx, but that is it! After that, you are on your own! I am not allowed to cross the river Styx unless I have a message for Hades himself or his wife Persephone. And Athena, love, you are definitely not allowed to cross the river Styx at all!

ATHENA: Yes, Hermes.

HERMES: (*To HERAKLES.*) And you know, Herakles, that once you are past Charon the Ferryman, you can only come back to Earth if Hades allows you to do so! There is no other way!

HERAKLES: I will do my best.

HERMES: Hades must specifically tell you that it is OK to leave the Underworld!

ATHENA: *(She bows to him, and motions for HERAKLES to do the same.)* You are kind and generous, oh-so-fast-and-punctual Hermes!

HERMES: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you caught me on a good day. *(Shows off his feet.)* My new wings have me in a good mood! I am just too easy!

HERAKLES: Thank you, god Hermes.

HERMES: Why am I doing this for a half-mortal?

ATHENA: One, because he is the son of Zeus.

HERMES: Good point.

ATHENA: And two, because you love me, Hermes!

HERMES: Child, how do I let you talk me into these things?

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

TANAERUM

Spotlights on HERA and ZEUS in their thrones.

HERA: Is Herakles unsure of himself? Is he running scared?

ZEUS: *(Indignant.)* Running scared? A son of Zeus, running scared? Surely you jest! Ha!

HERA: I never jest.

ZEUS: *(Sarcastically.)* Ah yes, what a pleasant part of your personality, Hera, oh-queen-of-the-gods.

HERA: Herakles has gone to the city of Eleusis looking for help from the priestess Eumelia, which he did not receive. And now he asks for help from the goddess Athena, who then asks for help from god Hermes. That would be running scared!

ZEUS: Nonsense! Herakles is just utilizing the resources available to him! Athena is his half-sister!

HERA: Half-sister or not, let him ask anyone he wants to! Herakles will be no match for the Underworld and Hades! Herakles is near his end! *(Spotlight out on HERA.)*

ZEUS: *(Sarcastically.)* Life with Hera just keeps getting better and better! Her good qualities just bubble over, making you wish you

were anyplace else. *(Pause.)* Well, you brave wearers of dirty blue jeans, did you know that Athena and Hermes are just two of my 12 Olympian gods? Twelve gods! And to be honest, why you guys downsized to just one god, I do not understand. With 12 gods, we are always fighting and arguing and having a good old time! All our gods are immortal. We live forever on Mt. Olympus, a beautiful mountain in northern Greece! Since we live on Mt. Olympus, we call ourselves Olympians. Clever, huh? Ancient Greece was a time when the Olympians ruled the Earth. We have a god for just about everything you need or want. A goddess of the hunt, Artemis. Did you know that she is an avid virgin? Can you imagine, wanting to be a virgin all your life? *(Going off into his own world.)* Never understood that one. What is she thinking? *(Catching himself.)* Ah-hem, and since this is a family play, I better move on quickly before I get myself in trouble. So where was I? Oh yes, lots of gods! A god of wine, Dionysus. Wine is not as popular today as it was in ancient Greece. Instead of a wine god, what you guys need is a beer god! Something like a big, fat, hairy guy, called . . . Rocko, the god of beer! *(Pause.)* We have a god of war, Ares. You guys have five war gods, right? You built that five-sided building, the Pentagon, for your war gods. Five war gods? A little overkill there? Just my opinion. *(Pause.)* And one of the most interesting, a god to deliver messages, Hermes! You just met him, the guy with wings on his feet! Not quite your normal, run-of-the-mill kinda guy god, huh? But darn good at what he does! You have a delivery god too, do you not? I believe yours is named UPS, *[Or FedEx.]* yes? Now you see, since Athena and Hermes agreed to help my boy Herakles, and there is only one place to enter the Underworld, they had to go to the city of . . . Tanaerum. *(ZEUS motions to the stage. Spotlight out on ZEUS.)*

A backdrop, or set pieces, of ancient broken down Greek huts. There are signs on broken pieces of wood, in awful (but readable) handwriting: "Dead is good!" "The dead love it here," "Not dead yet? We can fix that!" "One way tickets, cheap," "Die now, pay later," "The only way to go," "Come see us again," "Hurry back." Lots of PEASANTS (younger children can be included if desired); all are dirty, wild-haired, dressed in rags, some with missing teeth, one carrying a bunch of dead rats by their tails. Be varied and extreme with their clothing and appearances. At least one broken-down cart. ATHENA and HERAKLES enter from SR. HERAKLES wears a pouch with the strap across his chest, and a lion skin (not the head) like a cape.

HERAKLES: *(Asking PEASANT #1, female.)* Excuse me, have we reached Tanaerum?

PEASANT #1: *(She is stark raving mad, crazy eyes, wild hand/body motions, holding a fish by the tail which she waves a lot.)* Aaaaaahhhhh! Tanaerum! Aaaaahhhhhh! Fish, do you like fish? I like fish! Fish are good! They swim through the water! Watch! *(Makes her fish swim through make-believe water.)* A fish is not a goat, you know! Fish swim! Goats eat grass. *(Puts her fish in an apron pouch; acts out eating grass.)* And goats ram right into you! *(Rams her head into HERAKLES while she says it. HERAKLES sort of avoids/catches her in the process.)* But a hawk . . . *(Spreads her arms.)* Will soar through the air . . . *(She soars around a bit.)* And when you least expect it, they attack your head . . . *(She swoops and attacks HERAKLES' head.)* Trying to scratch your brains out! *(HERAKLES politely pushes her off, holds her shoulders. She calms down, reaches into her pouch for her fish.)* Do you want to smell my fish? *(She pulls out her fish and shoves it in his face.)* Smell my fish! *(HERAKLES leans back away from the fish. PEASANT #1 smells her fish.)* Nothing smells better than my fish! *(She moves away waving her fish at people.)*

ATHENA: You know, Herakles, if you behave yourself, and come back from this last Labor alive, I can fix you up with that one. *(Gesturing to PEASANT #1.)* It is rare that you meet a woman who wants you to smell her fish.

HERAKLES: Although the offer is tempting, Athena, I must decline.



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