

Poly X

by

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DESCRIPTION

A story of war.

CHARACTERS

Women

- Hecuba, queen of Troy
- Polyxena, daughter of Hecuba and Priam
- The Trojan Women (8)

Men

- Priam, king of Troy
- Troilus, son of Priam and Hecuba, brother to Polyxena
- Achilles, Greek soldier
- Greek Soldiers (8)

NOTE: Race/ethnicity does not matter in casting.

SET (Suggested)

The set is constructed of two sets of bleachers or risers on either side of a structure of scaffolding that should be constructed at odd angles but strong enough for the actors to scramble around on. It should be open in the back for entrances and exits. The scaffolding should be made of a heavy-enough gauge of pipe to withstand being pounded for percussion.

The bleachers should be metal (or metal-framed) and able to withstand some pounding.

There should be playing space around the base of the scaffolding and the bleachers so that the actors can move around it easily as well as playing space in front of the scaffolding. Action can spread out through the stage and house and is not restricted to the area called “the stage.”

Hanging from the scaffolding is something that looks like a side of beef—obviously not a real side of beef but a strong facsimile made out of a durable material that can take pummeling, sword strokes, and tossing around (which means that it needs to be unhooked easily from where it hangs).

COSTUMES

The women are dressed in simple white cotton dresses but underneath them wear something military like camouflage pants and combat/paratrooper boots. They can be adorned with other

signs/symbols that each actor feels expresses the character. POLYXENA will wear an oversized black leather jacket with a white knife stenciled on the back.

The men are dressed in combat clothing but “stressed,” the kind of clothing that a soldier would be wearing at the end of a war, not when he is being shipped out for the first time. In other words, no spit or polish left. The actors can adorn their clothing with other sign/symbols that they feel express the character.

Each character should have a pouch or a bag of some sort into which they can put objects.

ACHILLES should look especially punk/foppish. He wears an oversize black leather jacket, similar to POLYXENA’s, with a large penis stenciled in white on the back.

MUSIC/SOUND

Whenever and wherever possible, music should be used to underscore battles and other fighting, scene transitions (where appropriate), and to set mood/emotion. The music for confrontations should tend more to a hard edge or punk energy while other scenes of a lower temperature can use more meditative choices. In any case, the designers are free to choose what they need. (Live music would be the best choice, if budget permits.)

The actors will also be making sounds throughout the play, often by banging on the scaffolding, bleachers, and floor and by using objects. At the opening of the play, each actor will need two pieces of iron with which to bang on the scaffolding and bleachers.

LIGHTING

Lighting (unless otherwise stated) should at all times be both moody and harsh, as if all the action were taking place in the underworld.

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SCENE 1: Prologue

POLYXENA, wearing the oversized black leather jacket, comes running onto the stage through the house while the music blasts. She could even crawl over the audience if possible. She leaps onto the bleachers, then scrambles up the scaffolding until she stands at its very peak. Music stops. She smiles, slightly maniacally, slightly waif-like, at the audience, for several beats. She climbs over the edge of the scaffolding and hangs onto the side of beef, letting it swing with her on it smiling, as if she were a child on a playground toy—but do not count out any lascivious caresses of the swinging beef.

At this point the cast comes out and spreads themselves out across the scaffolding and bleachers; they should carry their iron rods. POLYXENA jumps off the side of beef; one of the ACTORS hands her a clear plastic glass of blood. She speaks and drinks as she moves through the audience. She should speak directly to the audience members.

POLYXENA: (*holding up the glass.*) Blood. Ambrosia. The true nectar of the gods—and of the humans they created—and the very best source of protein, yes.

The ACTORS bang on the scaffolding and bleachers once, loudly.

POLYXENA: Homer, the blind poet—how sweetly ironic is that?—you know, the Iliad?

ALL THE ACTORS: (*banging once*) The Iliad.

POLYXENA: The Odyssey?

ALL THE ACTORS: (*banging once*) The Odyssey.

POLYXENA: Yes? He must have had jugs of this at his elbow, sloshing it down like a Bacchic drunkard as he orated his orgasmic poems of death, as he versified the brutal shit of his bastard soldiers high on this protein kick-assing themselves across the plains of Troy into—art. Art. How sweet.

POLYXENA indicate the knife on the back of her coat.

POLYXENA: Polyxena—I am the subject of this play. Them—unfortunately—you will soon know.

As POLYXENA drinks the rest of the blood and spits it out, the ACTORS drum on the scaffolding. POLYXENA crushes the glass and throws it away, perhaps to someone in the audience; drumming stops.

POLYXENA: Me—I'm the last spitting image. I am the daughter of Hecuba and Priam, king and queen of Troy. Sister to Paris and Hector and Troilus and Cassandra—do any of these names ring a bell? Of course they do. Bong! My name? Nary a ding. Well, this is my story.

POLYXENA turns to the ACTORS.

POLYXENA: I can't start it out this calmly!

The ACTORS drum on the scaffold, loud and abrasive and yell, "Go, Go, Go, Go." This sends POLYXENA into a frenzy, as at the top of the show. Once back downstage center, she takes a knife from a holder attached to the back of her pants—it the same shape as the knife on her jacket. She holds it to her throat, and the drumming stops.

POLYXENA: All right! This is where you see me first! Like this! This is my last moment in Homer's gut-filled art! *(to the ACTORS)* This is where I am. All of you—all of you!—know it. All of your hands are on this. *(to the audience)* They know it—and they will not stop it. It will not be stopped, will it?

ACTORS: *(banging once)* No.

POLYXENA: Fine. Fine!

ACTORS: *(banging once)* So be it.

POLYXENA: But bloody speech, then—bloody, foul prologue!

ACTORS: *(banging once)* Go!

POLYXENA puts away her knife. The ACTORS begin a percussion again, but low, barely audible.

POLYXENA: It is horrible war—again!

ACTORS: Never-ending.

POLYXENA: Yes. Again we—some, not all—spout an acceptable patriotism—*(makes her face look piteous)*—so that we don't have to think about the unspeakable horrors done in our names! Patriotic gore!

POLYXENA screams.

POLYXENA: "It is sweet and proper to die for one's country."

ACTORS: "It is sweet and proper to die for one's country."

POLYXENA: *(spits on the floor)* Better the country dies first that believes in that kind of butchery.

The percussion stops.

POLYXENA: What shit. What lies.

POLYXENA walks among the ACTORS, hitting them, cursing them.

POLYXENA: All mouthed by this dangerous beef. Beef with minds. Minds with principles. With conviction. Conviction that brings a sentence raped across my throat. (*to the audience*) Welcome to the world where nothing of the good or the beautiful is welcome.

As she names the characters, they face the audience. They do not respond to POLYXENA.

POLYXENA: My cast of “beef.” Priam, Hecuba—my “dad” and my “mom.” Hi! Brother Troilus. My other brother, boner-headed Paris, is off jonesing the slut Helen.

POLYXENA yells, as if to PARIS.

POLYXENA: Got to get your dick out of her hand, bro—the slut is going to break it off! Sister Cassandra—sassy Cassie—is also off somewhere prophesying truths no one listens to, dribbling into toilet bowls. She got that way because she wouldn’t let Apollo pork her, so pissed he gets and breaks her tongue so that when she speaks the truth, no one believes her.

POLYXENA keeps yelling.

POLYXENA: Sorry, Cassie, but no one believes the truth anyway, so you haven’t lost anything! The fucking (in more ways than one) Greeks—especially this one, our “hero” for the evening, the punk butt-plugger Achilles. Calm down, boy! Various Trojan women for the required rapine and wailing.

The TROJAN WOMEN do a short bit of keening, in harmony, even doing some Motown moves if they want.

POLYXENA: Various soldiers simply too sad-assed to name.

The SOLDIERS do a silly synchronized military drill. Then, as POLYXENA continues speaking, everyone begins drumming softly on the scaffolding, gradually building to a deafening percussion.

POLYXENA: Welcome to the vasty fields of goddamn Ilium. Sing, O goddess, of the I-can’t-fuck-my-boyfriend-Patroclus-anymore anger of Achilles. Hey, Priam—the twin lords of sceptred sway will slit you like a roasting pig. Hecuba, mother dearest, the sorrows of your closing years will eat your guts clean out through your asshole. Helen—wherever the fuck you are—you ask, “Why, then, do I prolong my life?” I don’t know either! You should have cut your tits off and made ashtrays out of them so that we could have gotten some sleep! Hector, my sweet brother—only your ghost here—ashes, ashes, all fall down.

POLYXENA begins beating on the side of beef to the same rhythm of everyone else, almost as if she were boxing it. Then, at a pre-arranged signal, everyone stops.

POLYXENA: (*screaming*) All right! Get the fuck to your places now! Places!

Everyone exits but ACHILLES.

ACHILLES: Come here, my sweet.

POLYXENA: (*to the audience*) Look at him—he never did listen to anyone. (*to ACHILLES*) Not yet. Not time. Not your place.

ACHILLES: What does it matter?

POLYXENA: How I make sure my name is remembered to them matters.

ACHILLES: (*pompously, flexing*) No one is going to remember your name, no matter how much you scream! Mine, yes—I will be iconic! My slaughterous virtues will champion manly, robust, honorable love of country! Every fucking guy—and some women—they are going to want to be like me. Pretty Polyxena—Poly X—ain't gonna turn into anybody's epic.

POLYXENA: Not. Now!

ACHILLES: All right—all right.

ACHILLES goes up to touch her jacket, then reaches inside to grab her breast.

POLYXENA: What would your bend-over-boy Patroclus say to that?

ACHILLES tightens his arm against her throat and raises her off the ground, seemingly choking her. POLYXENA refuses to respond. ACHILLES puts her down, laughs, and exits.

POLYXENA: What an octamaroon, eh?

POLYXENA pulls out her knife.

POLYXENA: Precious Hector, I have to begin— (*looks straight at the audience*) Let's get started with my death—and with yours.

Screams as she clammers up to the top of the scaffolding, where she sits.

POLYXENA: Achilles! Achilles! Places!

Music for transition.

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SCENE 2

From off-stage is a long, rending scream of pain. Then silence. Then another long scream. Then silence. On the third scream, ACHILLES enters, sword in hand and begins murderously lashing the side of beef. Following him is an ATTENDANT, played by one of the SOLDIERS, who watches but does not interfere.

When he is done, ACHILLES, exhausted, falls to his knees.

ATTENDANT: Done? Are. You. Done?

ACHILLES wheels on the ATTENDANT with his sword, threatening; the ATTENDANT does not flinch.

ATTENDANT: Lost your fair-haired boy, did you?

POLYXENA: *(hoarse whisper)* Good.

ACHILLES: Hector.

POLYXENA: *(hoarse whisper)* To Hector.

ATTENDANT: To Hector, yes—you can put that down. You're ruining the supper.

ACHILLES drops his sword. ATTENDANT goes to the beef, inspects it.

ATTENDANT: Ach, we may be able to salvage a lop-off or two for you. To feed the beast.

ACHILLES: Patroclus.

ATTENDANT: The ex-Patroclus. Ex-bed-mate, ex-vessel of your affections—ex-everything, now—now meat for the pyre. All you can do is make cinders out of him—very uncomfortable, yes, to press up against cinders in your bed.

POLYXENA sprinkles a thin mist of ash on ACHILLES, who bats it away without knowing what it is.

ACHILLES: Shut up.

ATTENDANT: Yes, your [two syllables] enraged one. (*laughing*) You put the poor lad into your armor—thinking it would enlarge him—Hector zeroed in on him and then zeroed him out, thinking he'd castrated the bull—and all he got was the calf.

POLYXENA: (*in a loud stage whisper*) More rage.

The ATTENDANT gestures to POLYXENA, as if to say, "I'm trying my best."

ATTENDANT: What did you expect—the boy may have been a good gungel—a great gungel—but as a warrior—fey beyond belief.

POLYXENA: (*to ATTENDANT*) Enough exposition. (*indicating the audience*) They get it—Hector kills Achilles' boy-toy Patroclus. (*to ACHILLES*) More rage.

ACHILLES: I feel enough.

POLYXENA: No you don't. Not enough for my story. Express it—after all, that overbearing Homeric puke we're forced to read as a Western classic is all about your rage, your noble wrath. C'mon—give us some of that patented fury. C'mon, boy—c'mon, c'mon—

Reluctantly at first, but then taken over by his feeling, he takes out his rage against the scaffolding and bleachers with his sword. POLYXENA lets him go on for a bit until she claps and ACHILLES stops.

POLYXENA: (*to ATTENDANT*) Sufficient?

ATTENDANT: He's got the hot stuff down cold, doesn't he?

POLYXENA: Established, then: Achilles is pissed at Hector because—(*to ACHILLES*)—because?

POLYXENA encourages him with hand gestures.

ACHILLES: (*with hatred*) He killed what I loved.

POLYXENA: Oh, as if you were the only one—(*to ATTENDANT*)—as if he be the only one who has ever had that happen.

POLYXENA swings down from the scaffolding.

POLYXENA: I need to drill something back into your brain, punk. Thug. Pug. Thunk. (to ATTENDANT) Backstory! (out loud to everyone) Backstory of Troilus! (to the audience) Backstory for you.

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SCENE 3

Transition music. The cast comes out carrying candles in holders that are hung from the scaffolding, which is now the temple of Apollo. One or two SOLDIERS take away the side of beef, then rejoin the crew. They stand on the bleachers at attention looking in. The TROJAN WOMEN enter and stand on the bleachers. HECUBA and PRIAM climb the scaffolding. One of the TROJAN WOMEN enters the temple carrying a container of water.

POLYXENA: (kneeling, full light on her) It was said—whomever it is that says the things that are said when someone says “it was said”—it was said that the kingdom of Troy would not fall if my brother Troilus were not killed before the age of twenty. Who lays down these stupid conditions on our living lives?

At this point the SOLDIERS climb onto the scaffolding and spread themselves out, peering into the temple, hovering.

POLYXENA: We went to the temple of Apollo to pray and to gather water—as we had done throughout. The temple had always been neutral ground, in the same way that the water one found there is a neutral element, friend to all, slaker of every dusty throat. Here is what happened.

Over her shoulder, to the SOLDIERS.

POLYXENA: Are you ready?

ACHILLES: What was that, my dear?

POLYXENA: (trying to restrain herself) Are. You. Ready?!

ACHILLES: Ah, the sweet moan of the hyena bitch.

TROILUS joins POLYXENA and hands her an earthen jug, not large. There is a low, ominous thrum underneath this scene.

POLYXENA: Troilus handed me the earthen jug. I could see in his eyes how scared he was.

TROILUS: Even though this is sacred ground.

POLYXENA: "Was anything sacred left?" was what his eyes said. I moved to get the water.

The TROJAN WOMAN pours some water from her container into POLYXENA's jug.

TROILUS: She said she needed air, needed space, needed the reminder of fresh water.

ACHILLES: And that was when we arrived—

POLYXENA: In the middle of a cool drink.

TROILUS: Falling in like dark spiders.

In the nature of a slow-motion ballet, the GREEKS lower themselves into the temple. The TROJAN WOMEN crawl onto the scaffolding and spread themselves out, watching. ACHILLES notices POLYXENA.

ACHILLES: (to POLYXENA) And you are?

POLYXENA: He asked.

TROILUS: (drawing a short sword) This space is sacred.

ACHILLES: (ignoring TROILUS) And you are?

TROILUS: Leave her alone.

ACHILLES: Little Troilus.

POLYXENA: Leave him alone.

ACHILLES: Twenty questions minus nineteen. What is tomorrow?

SOLDIER: His twentieth birthday.

ACHILLES: Well—it's a go, I guess.

The GREEK SOLDIERS grab TROILUS, and in a flip and a lift they have him hanging from the from the scaffolding, in the same place as the side of beef. His legs are hooked over the bar while being held by the SOLDIERS. The TROJANS on the scaffolding recoil from touching him.

POLYXENA: (*yelling at the TROJANS*) Do it! It's on your hands, too!

Reluctantly, the TROJANS grab TROILUS and hold him. TROILUS is now hanging upside down, his hands trussed behind him.

POLYXENA: Good! Christ—how goddamn hard it is to get people to take responsibility! (*to ACHILLES*) Go ahead.

ACHILLES: You're sure?

POLYXENA: Establishes motive.

ACHILLES: You know—

POLYXENA: I don't want to hear it—I don't want to be undermined!

ACHILLES: (*to TROILUS*) You heard her. (*shifting tone*) You know the policy, Troy, baby—we are search-and-destroy. The Greek Special Forces—Delta Force. Insert ourselves. Policy: to assassinate all the Trojan bambinos we can find. And bambinas—but that's for later, and in a purely different way. And if you make it to tomorrow—well, it's been said—by whoever it is that says the things that are said when someone says "it's been said"—that if you make it to twenty, we don't make it home.

ACHILLES snaps his fingers; POLYXENA hands him her knife.

ACHILLES: Without further ado. (*to POLYXENA*) Yes? No?

POLYXENA: Yes. It's already been done, anyway.

ACHILLES grabs the earthen jug from POLYXENA and takes out a small bag of blood. He jabs it, catching the flow of blood in the jug. TROILUS writhes as if he has had his throat slit. Everyone waits. When done, ACHILLES gives the jug to POLYXENA, who mixes the blood with more water and drinks, then hands it to ACHILLES, who drinks as well. He hands it around to the other SOLDIERS, who drink as well. ACHILLES hands back the knife.

ACHILLES: I became enamored of her as the body cooled.

POLYXENA: This man's sword cuts with two edges, I guess.

ACHILLES: Inflamed, actually—engorged with interest.

POLYXENA: Always a hard prick, that Peleus' son.

The last SOLDIER finishes, then tosses the jug up to HECUBA. ACHILLES motions to the SOLDIERS; together they lift TROILUS' body so that the TROJANS can grab it and pull up onto the top of the scaffolding.

ACHILLES: I told her—

POLYXENA: (*mock male voice*) "I'm going to ask Priam for your hand in marriage."

PRIAM: How quaint that sounded.

POLYXENA: "Bind our two families together."

HECUBA: And by this—

ACHILLES: Put an end to the war.

A hesitation—then all the SOLDIERS laugh.

ACHILLES: (*mock indignant*) It's true! It was also a good policy to get closer to the other assassinations.

In the beat, HECUBA laughs out loud, maniacally, then barks like a dog. Then she stops abruptly. Everyone looks at her, then continues.

POLYXENA: It struck me then how I would fight the invader. Not with honor, nobility—not those infected and diseased words.

POLYXENA motions to the SOLDIERS, who lift her up to grab the bars of the scaffolding. She hooks her legs around ACHILLES' neck so that his head is almost crammed into her crotch.

POLYXENA: I gave him to think that I found submission sexy—slavery arousing. Death—especially in the sight of a close brother's cooling carcass—a real electric charge.

POLYXENA lets go, and ACHILLES supports her as she slides down his body, their bodies intertwined.

PRIAM: He smelled her.

HECUBA: We could all smell her—how did she do that on command?

SOLDIER: Not a man had an unmasted flag.

SOLDIER: Raised for the honor of his country, of course.

All the SOLDIERS grab their crotches.

POLYXENA: Why not?

ACHILLES: You agree?

POLYXENA: Make an appointment with my “mom” and my “dad.” We’ll talk.

POLYXENA should now be on the floor.

ACHILLES: Consider it made.

POLYXENA: Consider that you have made me.

ACHILLES motions to POLYXENA, as if to say, “Enough?” She motions for him to leave. ACHILLES motions for the SOLDIERS to follow him, and they exit in some distinct way. POLYXENA rises.

POLYXENA: *(to the audience)* Such are the veils that counterterrorism needs. *(turns on the TROJANS)* What? What?

HECUBA: There is no winning here.

POLYXENA: There are, however, higher and lower ways of losing. Bring him down.

The TROJAN WOMEN come down; they take a large blanket that is under the bleachers and walk to the front of the scaffolding. POLYXENA scrambles up, and with HECUBA and PRIAM, they roll the body over the edge, where it is caught by the WOMEN in the blanket. They lower it to the ground and, using rolls of duct tape, wrap the body. With what’s left of the blanket, they drag it offstage.

POLYXENA: Lug out the tub of guts. He'll come later—to talk.

PRIAM: We know.

POLYXENA: You know what to do.

HECUBA: Know it—hate it.

POLYXENA: Without it—no hope.

HECUBA: No hope anyways.

POLYXENA: Don't undermine me! Backstory over.

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SCENE 4

Very, very short musical transition.

POLYXENA: Frontstory.

ACHILLES is pulled onstage by the ATTENDANT in some sort of child's wagon, stable enough for him to stand up in. ACHILLES is dragging the side of beef behind him, now HECTOR's body. The scene should look both ridiculous and tragic. The ATTENDANT pulls ACHILLES to one side of the stage, then back again.

POLYXENA: *(indicating the scaffolding)* Around! Around! Three times. *(to the audience)* The body of Hector. *(to the ATTENDANT)* Come on!

The ATTENDANT acknowledges and pulls ACHILLES around the scaffolding. He may make it comical by not quite being able to make the turn, etc. so that the ATTENDANT only really makes one circle.

POLYXENA: *(to the audience)* Achilles' great rage at losing Patroclus ends in unspeakable savagery. *(speaks to HECUBA and PRIAM)* Get started.

HECUBA and PRIAM do great operatic swoops of grief, stylized. They hesitate when they see ACHILLES having trouble getting around and stop when ACHILLES finishes.

POLYXENA: Ash in the hair.

HECUBA and PRIAM take a pinch of ash out of their pockets and sprinkle it on their hair.

POLYXENA: (to ACHILLES) You! A bit more of the patented rage, please! Full-out desecration!

ACHILLES gets out of the wagon. He takes the beef, and with equally operatic roars of grief, slams the body of HECTOR around the stage as if it were a WWF match—but always in a stylized manner. The TROJAN WOMEN come out in choral fashion, keening. They take down the candles and blow them out. The SOLDIERS come out, stand on the bleachers, and march loudly in place. Also, TROILUS comes out and joins them on the scaffolding. ACHILLES finishes.

ACHILLES: (to HECUBA and PRIAM) You want the carcass back? Pay up.

The SOLDIERS and TROJAN WOMEN exchange places as the SOLDIERS lift up the side of beef over their heads: they are now a scale to weigh the body.

ACHILLES: Gold in the weight of his body for the body back to you. Nothing in war without its price.

HECUBA and PRIAM sprinkle gold dust from their pockets. As they do, the SOLDIERS lower their own bodies, as if being weighted down by gold. But they are not down far enough.

ACHILLES: Oops—a little short, it seems.

PRIAM and HECUBA throw up their hands, as if distraught.

PRIAM: (in stilted language) We have no more gold, oh great warrior!

ACHILLES: Too bad.

POLYXENA takes a pinch of gold dust and lets it go. The SOLDIERS go to their knees as if weighted down.

ACHILLES: Well—sufficient.

The TROJAN WOMEN leave the bleachers and arrange themselves on one side of the stage or the other into a “pyre,” on top of which the SOLDIERS place the beef. ACHILLES gets back into the wagon, and the ATTENDANT pulls him off through the

back of the scaffolding. Before he can leave, POLYXENA swings down as before and wraps her legs around him. ACHILLES grabs the scaffolding and lifts himself up, and the wagon continues without him with the ATTENDANT and SOLDIERS exiting. As before, their bodies twine, and they move downstage.

ACHILLES: You gave just enough to make the difference.

HECUBA: That smell again.

POLYXENA: I wanted to make sure you didn't leave empty-handed.

ACHILLES: War can be such hell on the nerves.

A hot light shines on the "pyre," and the TROJAN WOMEN begin turning the side of beef as if it were a rotisserie. They also begin to make hissing and popping sounds, as if meat roasting. POLYXENA is on the floor, and she goes to lick ACHILLES' right boot. He reacts violently.

POLYXENA: Not submissive enough?

ACHILLES: Not there.

POLYXENA: Some fears we have about our feet?

POLYXENA begins unlacing his right boot.

POLYXENA: *(to the audience)* Something startled him. Badly.

ACHILLES: Don't!

POLYXENA: And again. *(to ACHILLES)* Tell me what it is.

ACHILLES pushes her away and kneels to re-lace his boot. POLYXENA bowls him over before he finishes, sits on top of him, and begins grinding against him.

POLYXENA: You have sensitive feet, is that it? Ticklish?

ACHILLES: Get off me!

ACHILLES throws her off and goes back to frantically lacing up his boot. POLYXENA knocks him over again, and each time he goes to re-tie his boot, she disrupts him

until ACHILLES grabs her in a rage and pins her against the scaffolding. PRIAM makes to come down and interfere.

POLYXENA: (to PRIAM) Don't! Go back! Look to your roasting young son!

PRIAM: (to the TROJAN WOMEN) Enough!

The TROJAN WOMEN stop their "pyre" and sit on the stage, holding the side of beef. The SOLDIERS come out.

POLYXENA: (to ACHILLES) Are you going to fuck me right now, great warrior? Are you?

ACHILLES: No.

ACHILLES frees her.

POLYXENA: Wait until the wedding night—it will be much smoother. We can use your spit—

POLYXENA spits into his hand and rubs her hand against his.

POLYXENA: Mine's too thin and lady-like.

POLYXENA kisses ACHILLES deeply. ACHILLES responds, then pulls her away and looks at her harshly.

ACHILLES: Enough?

POLYXENA: Establishes the point.

ACHILLES tosses POLYXENA to the SOLDIERS. The TROJAN WOMEN turn the side of beef over onto the stage and begin a rhythmic slapping of the beef, a percussive underscoring.

ACHILLES: It had more honor and glory in the original.

POLYXENA: Only in your own eyes. (to the SOLDIERS) Put me down.

ACHILLES nods, and they put her down. They kneel at the bleachers on each side and begin the same rhythm as the women, softly, to underscore.

ACHILLES: It was right to do what we did.

PRIAM: None of it was right.

ACHILLES: We fought to do what we were taught to do.

HECUBA: And “glory” turned the ground red, and “honor” filled the air with a shroud of dust.
Only fools would agree that this is what our earth-time is for.

POLYXENA: Enough theorizing! Enough poeticizing! Enough glamorizing! Enough “izing” on the cake! Enough farting around! This is mine! Remember?

POLYXENA goes around beating the same rhythm on the scaffolding, on ACHILLES, on the ground, on herself, then stops—everyone stops.

POLYXENA: End time of earth-time is near. (to TROILUS) Play Paris, since our scurvy little brother seems bent in heat somewhere else.

TROILUS: All right.

POLYXENA: Besides, it’ll give you a chance to get back at your brother the ball-cock. Let’s go, everybody—betrothal scene at the temple!

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SCENE 5

Transition music. The SOLDIERS take the side of beef and hang it from the scaffolding. They then go inside the temple and stand in formation. HECUBA, PRIAM, and TROILUS descend. The TROJAN WOMEN all take out skimpy little lace veils that they put over their faces and a bouquet of fake flowers, like the ones used by magicians, and arrange themselves around the opening of the temple—it would be good if they could actually make the flowers appear as a magician would. HECUBA and PRIAM stand in front of the side of beef; occasionally, one of the SOLDIERS will give it a little push and bump it against them and laugh. TROILUS stands on the bleachers with an arrow in his hand and wearing a blond curly wig. POLYXENA and ACHILLES stand like a happy wedding couple in front of HECUBA and PRIAM, facing the audience. Music ends abruptly, and as it does, there is a series of three strobe flashes, as if a camera were being used for a wedding picture. At each strobe, ACHILLES and POLYXENA change positions, always smiling.

ACHILLES: I’m not sure I want to go through with this.

POLYXENA: Having cold feet?

POLYXENA tries to play footsie with him; ACHILLES pulls away violently.

ACHILLES: Everyone knows how it ends.

POLYXENA: No they don't—they might think they do, but they don't. They always forget how it ends. I am not forgiving any more forgetting of how it ends.

HECUBA: Polyxena—

POLYXENA: Nothing from you.

HECUBA: I can't—

POLYXENA: For them, you must. *(to PRIAM)* You, old man—you get off easy.

The SOLDIERS collectively clear their throats to remind POLYXENA to continue.

POLYXENA: Oh, that's right—pardon moi—*(to the audience)* I'm delaying their rapine, pillaging, and scorched earth campaign.

SOLDIER: Rapine and pillaging will do.

The TROJAN WOMEN collectively clear their throats to remind POLYXENA to continue.

POLYXENA: Sisters, when I think of you I do get faint-hearted.

TROJAN WOMAN: Yes.

POLYXENA: But, yes, I must.

TROJAN WOMAN: You must.

POLYXENA: Because I am not forgiving any more forgetting of how it ends—and that includes myself. All right, then.

ACHILLES stands to one side of PRIAM, and POLYXENA to one side of HECUBA, and the scene in its symmetry becomes a strange reflection of a marriage ceremony.

ACHILLES: I have to come ask for your daughter's hand—

PRIAM: First, as an honor to the temple of Apollo, to the glory of love, we must all take off our shoes and in reverence to the ground on which we stand.

POLYXENA: That was my idea.

ACHILLES: I can't do that.

HECUBA: Do you want her?

ACHILLES: I do, but—

HECUBA: Then you must follow our customs.

*HECUBA and PRIAM remove their boots and socks, as does POLYXENA.
ACHILLES hesitates.*

POLYXENA: Don't you want me? Don't you want all of me?

Everybody sniffs the air—the smell again.

TROJAN WOMEN: She had turned on the smell.

POLYXENA: The nights of Patroclus gone are over.

*ACHILLES hesitates a bit more; the TROJAN WOMEN clear their throats.
ACHILLES kneels to take off his shoes and socks. Out of the right boot drops a metal heel sheath with a clang. Everyone notices and not-notices; the SOLDIERS become agitated, unable to do anything without a direct command. ACHILLES stands in his bare feet. Scene freezes; POLYXENA turns to the audience. As she starts to speak, TROILUS, holding the arrow, begins to move slowly into the scene toward ACHILLES as if he were an arrow in slow motion flight.*

POLYXENA: Feet of clay—how neatly turns that phrase. I didn't know the story until later—of how Thetis, the Nereid, Achilles' mama, dipped her darling little boy into the river Styx to make his soft, silky skin invulnerable—except for the little itty-bitty part of the heel by which she held him to do the dunking. All I knew is that he didn't want the toes and arch and instep of his right foot to be licked when I wanted to lick him—some vulnerable part of the bravo-boy that balked at the light of day. That's all the intelligence I needed—that's all I wanted.

TROILUS is very close to ACHILLES. The SOLDIERS are even more agitated.

POLYXENA: A simple arrow dipped in poison from the bow of my brother Paris to avenge the assassination of Trojan brothers in their homeland.

TROILUS kneels at ACHILLES foot.

POLYXENA: The smell from my cunt that lured him was now the reek of the charnel house—charred bones, shivered guts, stupid and pointless lamentation.

TROILUS places the arrow against the heel of ACHILLES. Everyone leans ever slightly forward. TROILUS leans on the arrow and pushes it into through a hole drilled in the stage, so that it appears as if the arrow disappears into ACHILLES' heel. Everyone unfreezes, and immediately POLYXENA leaps on to ACHILLES' back as he reacts in pain. ACHILLES is free to use the entire stage, house, and scaffolding as he moves around trying to get POLYXENA off his back. The SOLDIERS take down the side of beef.

POLYXENA: I am on your back, boy! Yippee-ki-yo-ki-yay, motherfucker! Even now the poison travels straight to your mortal heart. Phew! You soiled your pants, didn't you? Didn't you? How does the noble and glorious experience of death feel now, you rotting son of a bitch? You killed my brothers! You murdered our peace! You misguided bastard!

Exhausted, ACHILLES' last move is under the scaffolding. As he passes through, POLYXENA grabs the bars and stops him, then puts her legs around his neck as she had before.

POLYXENA: It's a dark cave now, isn't it?

POLYXENA releases him and gives him a shove with her feet, which sends him sprawling. She jumps down to the stage, then clammers up the scaffolding and stands.

POLYXENA: Meat.

ACHILLES: Am I dead?

POLYXENA: A few more flops, please.

ACHILLES flops around a few more times.

POLYXENA: Enough. Your shade has departed, Acky-boy. So can you—go get ready. Everybody—go. Go.

Everyone exits except ACHILLES, the TROJAN WOMEN, and HECUBA.

ACHILLES: Are you sure?

POLYXENA: You look subdued. Your moment of supreme triumph over the tricky virgin is coming. You had a lot more cocky on your face before.

ACHILLES: I had forgotten.

POLYXENA: What?

ACHILLES: Everything.

POLYXENA: In the blaze of glory?

ACHILLES: It can be blinding. I have to go.

ACHILLES exits. POLYXENA descends.

POLYXENA: Now comes the hardest part.

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SCENE 6

Music. The TROJAN WOMEN re-hang and re-light the candles. They bring out a fresh white dress. Several of the women light incense. As POLYXENA speaks, the TROJAN WOMEN disrobe her and re-clothe her in a simple white dress. They can also adorn her with other artifacts to completely change her visual nature.

POLYXENA: You all know this story and how it ends. The Greeks never went away. We took in their stupid wooden horse—was there anything ever more tragically silly than accepting a large hunk of wood as a gift? Ten years of war had addled our pates.

POLYXENA indicates for HECUBA to join her.

POLYXENA: Out they came, like roaches from a fire—and Ilium fell in an avalanche of shame. (to HECUBA) Last act, mother.

HECUBA: Don't be an optimist.

Music. The SOLDIERS come on and hand everyone a white half mask. Then they kneel, facing the scaffold. They also each bring out a large sign, made out of flash paper, on which are written the following words: Honor, Glory, Country, Patriotism, Courage, Hero, Faith, God. The director needs to find a way to hang the signs on the stage; perhaps from poles inserted into the stage.

ACHILLES climbs to the top of the scaffold, now dressed completely in white and masked, and speaks to them.

ACHILLES: You want to get out of here and go home? You want the winds to carry your ships back to your horny wives and your dripping lands? Do you?

SOLDIERS: Yes!

ACHILLES: (*indicating POLYXENA*) Then cut her throat on my grave.

In the following lines, the TROJAN WOMEN and HECUBA speak their choral parts in two groups, one of four and one of five. The groups can be set as A and B, or a different group of four or five women can speak each time, depending on what the director wants to do. The SOLDIERS all speak at once unless indicated otherwise.

TROJAN WOMEN: She has done nothing wrong.

ACHILLES: She betrayed me.

SOLDIERS: The values must be upheld!

TROJAN WOMEN: She only betrayed one who had betrayed others.

ACHILLES: She killed me.

HALF THE SOLDIERS: Even though we're Greeks: "Dulce et decorum est—"

THE OTHER HALF OF THE SOLDIERS: "It is sweet and proper."

TROJAN WOMEN: There is nothing sweet!

TROJAN WOMEN: There is nothing proper!

HALF THE SOLDIERS: "Pro patria mori."

All SOLDIERS: To die for your country!

TROJAN WOMEN: What is a country—

TROJAN WOMEN:—that one should die for it?

ACHILLES: Women are such fools.

TROJAN WOMEN: She only sought justice for injustice.

ACHILLES: And that makes her guiltless?

TROJAN WOMEN: That makes her collateral damage.

POLYXENA: It's all right.

TROJAN WOMEN: The damaged innocent can do whatever they need to do—

TROJAN WOMEN: And all without guilt.

ACHILLES: I beg to differ.

HECUBA: The winners always beg. To differ. (*to POLYXENA*) You really think it's the last act?

POLYXENA: Stop it! I have to make this the last act.

ACHILLES: (*to the SOLDIERS*) If you want to get home, if you want to avenge my death—that's your goddamn job, after all!—then cut her throat.

TROJAN WOMEN: (*to the SOLDIERS*) Don't kill an innocent person—

POLYXENA: For the sake of a ghost.

ACHILLES: I don't care if she's innocent—why should I care about that? What is important to me—to me!—is what is most important here. You don't get out of here until she dies for me.

The SOLDIER who played the ATTENDANT steps forward and takes up the classic posture of a messenger.

ATTENDANT: We don't have a choice: our dripping wives or ten more years here? Personally, I cannot imagine emptying any more of my piss into this ground.

POLYXENA: Get on with it.

ATTENDANT: We have to go with the ghost, dear one, we have to stay with the old values: What can we do? So, announcing: the Dance of Collateral Damage.

NOTE: The director is free to stage the following in any other way that gets across the action of the scene as long as it includes the elements of the dance, the preparation, and the execution.

Loud rock or punk music as everyone goes into a dancing fit. During the dance the SOLDIERS and/or TROJAN WOMEN will fire the signs with the words on them so that they go up in a flash of fire. HECUBA stays with POLYXENA. ACHILLES sits on the edge of the scaffolding. POLYXENA gestures, and HECUBA takes out a black grease pencil or a similar kind of marker. POLYXENA draws a dotted/dashed line across her throat, then hands it back. One by one the TROJAN WOMEN dance by POLYXENA, and as they do, they take out a red marker and write one letter of the word "INNOCENT" in a diagonal from the right shoulder to the left shin. Then the ATTENDANT, sitting on the back of a crouched SOLDIER, sits in front of POLYXENA and, taking out good-sized squirt-gun, aims it at POLYXENA.

Music stops.

In the silence, ACHILLES reaches down with his foot and puts it on top of POLYXENA's head. He tilts her head back, exposing the throat. A SOLDIER takes POLYXENA's knife and draws it across her throat. As he does, the ATTENDANT squirts a red stream of what looks like blood across the dotted line. ACHILLES releases the head; POLYXENA lowers it so that she faces the audience squarely and takes her time to look slowly into the audience members' eyes.

POLYXENA: And it has not changed all that much.

The cast also looks slowly into the audience members' eyes. Abruptly the music blasts again, and there is resistance on the part of the cast to engage, but almost against their wills they begin to dance again, and except POLYXENA (even HECUBA now dances) they dance in a frenzy until the lights fade to black. Music continues into the dark until, in a synchronized cue, the music stops and a tight light comes up on POLYXENA, enough to include the shoulders and head. Then light bumps out. End of play.