

Sisyphus

By

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Inspired by the works and thought of Albert Camus

## Cast of Characters

Fates: Women of Greek Mythology, any type of female can be cast in these roles. Most important is a sense of kinship.

Sisyphus: To be played by anyone-by the person who best feels the text and the thinking behind it. Sisyphus should take his time with his speaking. It is his first time putting all these thoughts together, his first time vocalizing the truths of his life. He has the cadence of one who does not have a plan for what he is saying, but feels it so deeply that it comes out rather smoothly despite this.

## Scene

A note: / indicates that the next character begins speaking, joins in with previous speaker.

ACT I

Scene 1

*Three women, knitting.*

FATE 1

You say it's your destiny / as you

FATE 2

as you look up to the sky / as if

FATE 3

as if you could discern amongst the clouds the shape of  
your future.

FATE 1

You are young and bright and hollow

FATE 2

hollow

FATE 3

hollow. You yearn to be full. You think you can find  
wholeness by looking. You strain your eyes at the  
far-away rivers that lead to far-off seas / that lead  
to salty depths that lead to granite.

FATE 2

that lead to salty depths / that lead to granite.

FATE 1

that lead to granite. You seek an answer to the  
question of existence. You think you hear one echoing  
around your empty core but when you listen hard you  
begin to realize you are listening to the ocean through  
a shell and it sounds the same but it's not the same  
and sound can vibrate the void inside but not fill it.  
Maybe the universe is deaf or maybe it was never meant  
to hear.

FATE 2

But "meant" implies intent

FATE 3

and thus the gods were born.

FATE 1

And as for us?

FATE 2

We weave words better than we weave yarn

(CONTINUED)

FATE 3

so if you find any knots in your life's string, we'll understand if you choose to lament not untie. After all, and alas, aren't you the same as I?

FATE 2

We!

FATE 1

Why?

FATE 3

Why what?

FATE 2

Why we?

ALL

Why? Why? Why? Why...

*They continue this slow "why?" chant softly throughout the next section. It is steady, continuous, almost sung. It becomes background noise, noticeable in absence, not sounding.*

*Sisyphus enters SL heading SR (DS of Fates), straining against an imaginary boulder, as if he were trying to push it uphill. He struggles greatly but slowly makes ground. He has evidently been pushing for a long while, he is sweaty and worn, but he never once ceases to push, never once rests. When he reaches a little right of center, he has reached the top. With a final push, the boulder crests the summit, and Sisyphus lowers his hands, eyes locked on the boulder. He has upon his face a look of utter despair, which changes to a look of hope as the boulder sits still. The moment his hope solidifies, the boulder rolls back down the hill SL; we follow its movement with Sisyphus's gaze. Sisyphus watches to boulder till it rolls off left, then turns to the audience and addresses us:*

SISYPHUS

Somehow I always think that won't happen. Somehow, there's always a part of me that believes. This time'll be different. I can get what I want. Contentment is achievable, is graspable like a boulder.

It's not of course, it won't ever be. I know.

I'll go back down in a minute.

(MORE)

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SISYPHUS (cont'd)

Can I tell you a secret? You gotta promise not to tell Hades. That guy really doesn't like me.

The ascent's the easy part.

Hades wouldn't get it. He's the god of death; of inaction. For him, the constant toil he's condemned me to must seem like the ultimate punishment.

But it's something to *do*. At least I'm not standing around like the rest of his "subjects." His poor average idiots, condemned to boredom for eternity. Physical exertion isn't boring. And having a goal is almost like being alive.

Oh, the ascent's the easy part. As I struggle, constant, upwards, I experience victory; victory over the boulder, over its will, or its laziness; victory over the protest in my muscles; victory over the protests in my mind. With each step, I achieve; I am constantly achieving. How is that a punishment?

Nor is the descent the difficult part, really, although it is more difficult. I've never liked going downhill. You either gotta expend all this energy digging in your feet to walk at a normal pace, or you let yourself go entirely and burst downward. There's no balance downhill. All or not much.

But physically it can't even compare to holding up that boulder. My God, is the decent a physical vacation. A breeze. Like being carried on Zephyr's breath. I always feel light on the decent.

There are two things difficult about descending. First is the knowing. The knowing of what is to come. Ugh, that's an awful phrase. I feel like the witches from Macbeth or a Christmas Carol or something. "What is to come," ugh. Let me rephrase. The decent is difficult because on it, you come face to face with eternity. On the way up you see the boulder and the ground in front of you. When you turn around, you see all. You see where you've come from and where you're going...*and they're exactly the same*. You begin to feel inevitable; you are confronted by that nagging suspicion that has been with you since long before you were conscious of it, that lurking possibility that you suppress so as to keep on living, that possible truth that renders you impossible. Fate. You see that freedom is an illusion, for everything is laid out for you, all is preset and predetermined...and ultimately insignificant. Time elapses. I am here. Time elapses. I am here. Time

(MORE)

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SISYPHUS (cont'd)

elapses. I am. Always here. There is no purpose. Nothing is achieved after all. I create the illusion of meaning for myself because we humans need such an illusion to continue to exist. But it is an illusion, no more. Not really.

Then comes the rebuilding. The second difficulty. It is no easy feat to knit an illusion back together once it's been torn. But as each uncomfortable footfall brings me closer to my boulder, my fate, I determine to look at it instead as my task. I must. I must have meaning. To exist. And I must exist.

Why?

*Sisyphus says "why" with Fates, who fall silent after.*

Why do I need to exist?

*A long pause. Fates slowly come forward and wrap the scarf they've been knitting around Sisyphus's neck. It is unfinished; needle and ball of yarn trail from it. They slowly exit SR.*

Still, I need to, so I embrace my illusion, and I commend myself on the strength it takes to do what I do. My perseverance. Mine, I. I claim selfhood. Self determination, self setting. My boulder, my task. I, I. I begin again to continue. I continually begin.

Thus I exist.

*Looks SL, sighs heavily. Begins as if to go downward, but before he actually takes a step, pauses. Turns back out to audience.*

The difficult part. Well, you saw it I suppose. Cresting the summit. Momentary completion. Hope. Hope, our one defender against all the unconfined ills of this world. The fabric of illusion and the essence of survival. Illogical, irrational, utterly devastating at times...and eternal. Infinite as the truth it defies. For somehow despite my continuous exposure to fate, I still have hope that one day this mountain path I'm on will rise me above it. Somehow, I always find myself saying...

...maybe this time...

*Sisyphus walks off SL. The yarn remains on the floor, unraveling as he walks. When he is off stage, the Fates enter SR, pick up the yarn, and follow him off SL. End of play.*