



# *My Only Narrative*

Hannah Polk • 9 • monologue

## Entry 1: A Long Awaited Rant

Penelope. She had a chance to tell her side of the story, but like anyone, she manipulated it to her advantage. We know of her infamous web she so cunningly weaved, but just as agilely as she weaved that shroud, she weaved her words to create an illusion to her workings. I will say that I was rather fond of her as sort of a daughter could be to a mother, but only so much gratitude goes to one who controls every aspect of your life. Yes, I was the favorite in her eyes, but did she not see that I could never say no? I wasn't given the choice.

I was told that life is unfair. How true, how true, but death is unfair, too. Penelope hears the world praise her for her loyalty and intelligence even after her death. I still hear the whispers from men and women who join us down here. They know me as the disobedient, whoring traitor. Harsh words, yet I have heard worse.

Even by her story, she created this victimized position that she felt oh-so guilty of my death. At least Penelope gave the world a kernel of a truth. We, the maids, were not at fault for our deaths. Okay, fine. There was one maiden who had fallen deeply in love, and I mean head-over-heels with the suitor Amphinomus.

What was there not to like? He was handsome, kind, and well mannered. It was more than what you could say of the others. I warned the young maid off, of course. For it is a dangerous path to pretend to fall in love but to fall in love truly, a deadly choice.



For the question the world asks repeatedly, knocking the doors of my peaceful death home: "Melantho, did you or did you not sleep with Eurymachus, and did you not betray Odysseus by doing so?" Sometimes I think this to be an ironic question as it remains asked by the most vulgar and discrepant people who to my understanding are using me as a comparison to the wronged sins they have committed themselves. For it isn't fair to judge one who has been put into a light that is so dim you see not what is truly there. Do not talk to me about morals; I was commanded to do whatever necessary. Can you say the same? Whatever necessary.

**He ruined me. There's no pretty way to say it. No matter how much the narrative is manipulated.**

Eurymachus was a guy with looks and nothing more. Nothing more should I say than a massive ego that took up more than half of his witty brain. I will say, he wasn't so far into the category of "point of no return to human decency" as Antinous, but a bad man is a bad man, especially one who caused such depression and turmoil as he did. He ruined me. There's no pretty way to say it. No matter how much the narrative is manipulated. Take one thing away. I was raped. The world takes in every aspect of the situation to deny me the decency of truth:

*"Your peplos was too tight; you asked for it."*

*"I saw you smile at him; you flirted with him."*

*"Melantho, you never outright said no."*

What do you want me to say? As a sixteen-year-old girl, I had no room to run. Bound by duty, I smiled and served those horrendous men. Honor, worth, innocence? No such choice was given to keep those things. Penelope said she thought of me as her daughter, yet her betrayal hurts just as much as the actions following it. What kind of mother sends her daughter to be forcibly taken for her own personal gain? And then, better yet, doesn't stand up for you when you face death by her own son and husband.



So yes, I have waited patiently for my turn at this explaining-my-side-of-the-story, and I wish it not to turn into a ranting session. Breathe...

Despite her questionable story, Penelope relatively explained the narrative of our part in the seduction of the suitors. Yes, we listened. She thought it to be out of love for her, but there is only so much love a milking goat can give to its master. The price I paid for my inferior birth came at far too much.

I lost my innocence, trust for others, and then my life. I trusted Penelope to defend us against her husband and son and despite all of her excuses, she chose the man and his pride over the lives of twelve innocuous girls.

Those girls. Sure Penelope feels guilty-yada-yada-yada. I, as one of “those girls” cannot begin to explain the remorse and sorrow I felt for not only me, but the others who suffered the same fate as I did. Eurycleia saw the favor Penelope “bestowed” on me and as such, I was the designated “sister” maiden. It was my job to help train these young girls, some who started up at the age of ten, to fulfill the responsibilities and duties that the lady of the house required. In a way, we maids created a family of our own.



## Entry 2: The Unneeded Kardashian Show

To fall in love. It's ironic, isn't it? Continuously shamed for my “indecent” ways, but the one male I did care for was the very one to hang me by my neck. Men. He and I grew up with each other. We crawled around on the same dirty floors and giggled when we were scolded. No one ever assumed feelings would develop. After all, we were to be raised as playmates, and I, as a lowly servant, would assume my role as such while Telemachus would assume his role of a vengeful prince. As we both aged, he played his part too well, ordering me about and acting above me as if I never saw his bare bums when we

bathed in soapy water as toddlers. I never took it to heart. Unrequited love seems to be a mocking plague the gods tend to throw down upon us:

*“Ha, look here! The lowly servant girl has feelings for the prince. What fun we shall have!”*

*“Oh my heavens! I overheard the Fates talking of her future and guess what? He is the one to kill her!”*

*“Ahhahahaha!”*

Even after death, I struggled to find closure. I wandered for at least nine weeks mourning my death as most tend to do after they die. Mothers weep for their children, grandparents for the child they never met, lovers for the ones they so desperately believed; I wept for myself. Telemachus followed suit not long after. For time works in mysterious ways here. I approached him occasionally, seeing if the love I had for him would ever subdue the hatred for killing me. Alas, it is for the best; better to hate him than to love the man who hanged you.

He married Circe, the past lover of his father, Odysseus. I know what you're thinking; however, I am not above the scandalous gossip that floats around. My time in Asphodel is rather drab as a sixteen-year-old spirit. (Your spirit has a default setting any time you return to the underworld; they say it is the life that you are most credited for.) Anyway, the very man who ordered us killed for infidelity is the very man who was the topic of gossip a mere month ago. Odysseus was slain; the great royal son, Odysseus, was killed. And by, drum roll pleaseeeeeee..... his illegitimate son, Telegonus. None other than the son of Odysseus and Circe, ahem—Telemachus' wife. And to the further delight of the dead community, the drama saga continued. After the death of her husband, Ms. Loyalty 101 remarried to the very man that killed him, her stepson, Telegonus.

My brain could hardly process the amount of satire and hypocrisy of their family. And even still, their story remains to be one of triumph and glory. I guess I will never fully understand the works of history.

### Entry 3: Closure

I see her every now and then. Wandering the fields of Asphodel. She walks alone. Without a son or husband. Perhaps that is her punishment—to be forgotten by the very men she devoted her life to. We haven't spoken to each other. She hasn't wiped her memories clean as I expected. She tells the world that she is truly lost in her guilt, and yet I still believe it is her hardy pride that prevents her from getting on her knees and confessing her sins.

Rather than dwell in past events, I have moved on. Sometimes it feels better to forget than return to memories of pain. I have found what I wasn't given in that distant life another chance at love. At first I was wary of all men, and then I slowly came to realize that not all men are disgustingly harsh or vulgar—some do have morals. I've been with many as a daughter, a sister, a wife, a lover, and a mother. I have lived as an activist, a nurse, a teacher, a blogger, a psychologist, and a lawyer.

There are dark days when returning to the fields of Asphodel. Reminiscing the path is a dangerous thing, but the joy and delight I have felt from the other lives I have lived always brings light into my mind. To say I am not content is a lie. I have found my worth, my presence, and self-love through others and through myself.

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Blog Post 213:

To the women of the world now, find your self-worth. Forgive yourself, whether or not you believe it to be your fault. Find yourself: be confident in who you are and embrace your uniqueness. Free yourself: go live your life free of the obstacles holding you back; unleash yourself and be a light to others. And know that no matter the circumstances, you are loved, you are cared for, and you deserve the world.

– Melanie Ano



Still in Flight

William Shepherd • 9 • watercolor