

PENELOPE'S ODYSSEY

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CAST

PENELOPE: wife of Odysseus

TELEMAKOS: son of Odysseus (a woman)

ANTINUS: suitor to Penelope

ODYSSEUS (NOBODY): a veteran of the Trojan War

SETTING

The action takes place in a room in the house of Odysseus on the island of Ithaka. The time is ten years after the end of the Trojan War, but the characters wear clothes drawn from the modern world of today.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE (Premiere Production)

As human beings we have always told each other stories in an attempt to understand and explain the world and our place in it. By most accounts, the epic poem of the *Odyssey* was composed around 2,700 years ago, and much of the story may have come from an even more ancient oral tradition of songs performed by illiterate bards. The songs and stories of the gods, kept alive by these travelling storytellers, were modified and embellished through time, as was *The Odyssey* itself. Last Spring, using the Central Works method, we began with the text of the *Odyssey* and Penelope's role in it as our jumping off point and then let the Muses, our contemporary sensibilities, and our playwright, Gary Graves, lead us, and now you, our audience, into a new story.

—John Patrick Moore (October, 2010)

ACT ONE

1 SCENE ONE:

1

(A room in the House of Odysseus on the island of Ithaka. One chair--like a throne.)

Alone, TELEMAKOS stands looking out a window at the sea. She is a young woman, dressed like a man.

ANTINUS enters from the dining room, a cup of wine in hand.)

ANTINUS

Thank you for the food. Your lamb is good. Your pears, and wine. All blessed by the gods. I appreciate your hospitality.

TELEMAKOS

Not at all. The gods demand it of us.

ANTINUS

A very fine house. Who built it?

TELEMAKOS

My great, great, grandfather, Cephalus, first king of Ithaka. He that took the goddess of the dawn as his lover.

ANTINUS

A fitting home for the line he begat.

TELEMAKOS

So. We've eaten. Now, tell me, what brings you to our home?

ANTINUS

I've come to pay my respects to the Lady Penelope.

TELEMAKOS

Hm. Well. I'm sorry to say, but my mother isn't seeing anyone these days.

ANTINUS

Sad news indeed. I hope she isn't unwell.

TELEMAKOS

No. She's perfectly well. But she prefers to keep to herself. She grieves for the loss of my father.

ANTINUS

Ah. Still grieving? Ten years after his loss?

TELEMAKOS

Not quite ten. Not yet.

ANTINUS

Still, almost ten years. And still she grieves?

TELEMAKOS

There is no greater love than that which my mother feels for Odysseus.

ANTINUS

I see.

(The sound of the loom, upstairs.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

What's that sound?

TELEMAKOS

My mother's loom. She spends most of her days weaving.

ANTINUS

Ah, yes, her weaving. I've heard about that.

TELEMAKOS

Have you?

ANTINUS

Yes, they say she has a gift for the art. That some god has a hand in what she weaves.

TELEMAKOS

No doubt.

ANTINUS

Perhaps you'd let her know I'm here, a guest in your house, and that I wish to offer her my condolences.

TELEMAKOS

She grieves his absence, not his death.

ANTINUS

Ah. Then she still harbors some hope that Odysseus lives.

TELEMAKOS

We all do.

ANTINUS

Hm.

TELEMAKOS

What?

ANTINUS

Nothing, I just thought that, well, I thought it was commonly accepted that he was lost at sea.

TELEMAKOS

He sailed from Troy when the war ended. What happened after that, no one knows for certain.

ANTINUS

There was a terrible storm, I thought--

TELEMAKOS

There was a storm, yes--no one saw him go down.

ANTINUS

No one survived. All were lost.

TELEMAKOS

There is no body. No evidence that he is dead. Until there is, we await his return. He is, after all, the king of Ithaka.

ANTINUS

Perhaps you would tell your mother that one who could offer her comfort, in a time of need, desires to make her acquaintance. One who could share with her the words of the old poets, quiet discourse on the arts, the thoughts of men--

TELEMAKOS

She has no interest in those things. She has her weaving.

ANTINUS

Perhaps you might convey my invitation to the lady, and let her speak her mind for herself.

TELEMAKOS

This grows tiresome.

ANTINUS

Are you her keeper then?

(beat)

What exactly are you?

(PENELOPE enters.)

TELEMAKOS blocks her way.)

PENELOPE

I heard voices. Have we a guest in the house?

(beat)

We mustn't be impolite, Telemakos.

(TELEMAKOS moves aside.)

ANTINUS introduces himself.)

ANTINUS

Antinus Eupeithiades.

PENELOPE

(extending her hand)

Welcome to my home.

(ANTINUS kisses her hand.)

ANTINUS

A great honor to meet you, Mistress Penelope.

PENELOPE

(to Telemakos)

Have we offered Mr. Eupeithiades something to eat?

ANTINUS

Yes, thank you. We ate well.

PENELOPE

Good. Good.

ANTINUS

A magnificent house. Your farm prospers. The orchards. Vineyards. The herds. Blessed by the gods, clearly.

PENELOPE

Thank you. Yes, we manage. Things are growing. The herds increase. Have you tasted the pears?

ANTINUS

Yes. Delicious. Quite delicious.

PENELOPE

Telemakos has a way with the orchard. Don't you, darling?

(beat)

What brings you to us, Mr. Eupeithiades?

ANTINUS

I wonder if we might speak privately?

PENELOPE

Privately?

(beat)

I have no secrets from my son. Anything you have to say to me, you may say freely in his company.

ANTINUS

Your...son.

PENELOPE

Yes?

ANTINUS

My father sends his greetings.

PENELOPE

Your father?

ANTINUS

Eupeithes. Our house overlooks the north coast of the island. Our lands run from the straight to the foot of Mount Nerius. Our holdings are the largest on Ithaka--excepting yours, of course.

PENELOPE

Ah, yes. I remember Eupeithes. How silly of me. My husband protected him from the Cephallenians when they wanted to hang him for piracy. But that was many years ago. Of course, I remember Eupeithes. Is he well?

ANTINUS

He thrives. Thank you.

PENELOPE

Does he. Good. Good for you.

ANTINUS

I've come to ask for your hand in marriage.

TELEMAKOS

This is an insult.

PENELOPE

Telemakos. Mr. Eupeithiades is a guest in our house. We must treat him accordingly. The gods are watching. We forget that at our peril.

(to Antinus)

I'm flattered by your proposal, sir. However, in case you've forgotten, I'm already married.

ANTINUS

Odysseus is dead. And everyone knows it. It's time you took a new husband.

PENELOPE

I see delicacy is not one of your virtues.

TELEMAKOS

(to Penelope)

I will not allow this.

PENELOPE

The gods are watching. I'll handle this.

(TELEMAKOS confronts ANTINUS, face to face, and looks him in the eye.)

TELEMAKOS

My father will hear of this.

(TELEMAKOS exits.)

ANTINUS

That's quite a boy you have there.

PENELOPE

It's been a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Euphithiades--

ANTINUS

Antinus, please.

PENELOPE

Please give my fondest regards to your father.

(beat)

Good day, sir.

(He reaches out his hand to her.)

ANTINUS

Give me your hand.

PENELOPE

Good day, sir.

(Still, he extends his hand.

She starts out.)

ANTINUS

I will have your hand.

(She stops.)

PENELOPE

You may show yourself out.

(He sits in the chair.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

That is my husband's chair.

ANTINUS

Is it. I rather like it. It's very comfortable.

PENELOPE

Get out of that chair.

ANTINUS

It's time you took a new husband. Ithaka expects it.

PENELOPE

You're a guest in this house. How dare you.

ANTINUS

I want your hand in marriage. And I'll stay here, till I get it.

(PENELOPE exits.)

ANTINUS sits in the chair, waiting.

He looks around the room.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

I could grow to like it here.

(looks out the window)

If you're out there, Odysseus--what are you waiting for?

(Blackout.)

2 SCENE TWO:

2

(Lights up, sometime later--night.

Loud music plays, off stage, in the dining room.

TELEMAKOS enters angrily.

ANTINUS follows.)

ANTINUS

Yes?

TELEMAKOS

This has to stop.

ANTINUS

What has to stop?

TELEMAKOS

You and your friends--you can't stay here any more.

ANTINUS

My friends? They're not my friends.

TELEMAKOS

You invited them here.

ANTINUS

I did no such thing. They came on their on.

TELEMAKOS

You brought this on.

ANTINUS

She brought it on. I asked for her hand, and she refused. This isn't what I wanted. Now she has to choose.

TELEMAKOS

You have to get rid of them.

ANTINUS

They're your guests. How could I get rid of them?

TELEMAKOS

They are not our guests. They invited themselves into our house--thanks to you.

ANTINUS

Don't blame me. The word it out. It's time. She has to take a new husband.

TELEMAKOS

They have to get out. All of you have to get out.

ANTINUS

She has to make a choice. She has to pick one of us.

TELEMAKOS

Never.

ANTINUS

Then we will all stay, and there will be more, and more, and more--

TELEMAKOS

You sleep in our house, you butcher our livestock, eat up our food, guzzle our wine--

ANTINUS

She has to choose.

TELEMAKOS

Why?

ANTINUS

Because she's a woman.

TELEMAKOS

If my father were here--

ANTINUS

But he's not. Is he?

TELEMAKOS

You'll pay for this. All of you.

ANTINUS

Don't threaten me.

TELEMAKOS

You have numbers on your side now. But that will change.

ANTINUS

Are you a man...or a woman?

TELEMAKOS

I am the son of Odysseus.

(ANTINUS shakes his head, no.)

TELEMAKOS (cont'd)

Ask the grey-eyed one.

ANTINUS

Athena?

(beat)

What do you mean?

TELEMAKOS

You want to find out?

ANTINUS

All right, look. This isn't getting us anywhere. We don't have to be enemies. You and I...should be friends.

TELEMAKOS

Friends?

ANTINUS

We should work together.

TELEMAKOS

You're not serious.

ANTINUS

I have no affection for that lot in there. I have nothing in common with any of them. I agree with you, they're pigs--for the most part. They have no character, no substance. No real intelligence. They're little more than animals. It's true. But the time has come: your mother has to make a choice. Odysseus is gone. Forever. Great hero that he was, we must accept that. And move on. There must be a man. She cannot remain alone. That's the law. Persuade her to chose me. My father's house is the wealthiest on Ithaka, next to yours. Together we would be supreme. There is unrest on this island. You know that as well as I. The wolves out there are restless. No one believes Odysseus is coming back. No one out there. And there must be a king. Whoever marries your mother, joins the old line with a new one. That's the only way forward, otherwise we will have war on Ithaka. Is that what you want? Does anyone want that? Go to her. Tell her to pick me. I'll make sure you're well taken care of. You can stay here. Keep your room up there. Be...whatever you want. If you're willing to put on a dress, you could even marry my little brother. He'd be a good match for you. That would join our houses even more deeply. That's what we need now. Otherwise...the wolves will come calling. I don't want to see that. Do you?

TELEMAKOS

Go. Eat at the trough with your friends. My father is alive, and when he returns, you will all pay for this offense. You have abused our hospitality, and dishonored my father's household. You will all pay.

ANTINUS

Don't be an idiot.

TELEMAKOS

From Odysseus...to you? Ha! You're nothing compared to my father.

ANTINUS

I've heard enough from you.

TELEMAKOS

A dog before a Titan.

ANTINUS

Enough!

TELEMAKOS

He lives.

ANTINUS

Then where is he? If he lives, why has he deserted you?

TELEMAKOS

He has not deserted us.

ANTINUS

Why has he abandoned you without a trace? Not a word from him in ten years--why? Because he's dead.

TELEMAKOS

No.

ANTINUS

Accept it.

TELEMAKOS

No!

(beat)

ANTINUS

Oh, now I understand. You think that you'll be king of Ithaka one day. You. Ha!

TELEMAKOS

I'm the son of Odysseus.

(ANTINUS laughs.)

TELEMAKOS (cont'd)

Get out.

ANTINUS

Or what?

(challenges her)

Come on!

(beat)

Well?

(TELEMAKOS turns away.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

I see. The son of Odysseus.

(he laughs)

She has to choose. That's the way it is. Tell her to pick me, if you know what's good for you.

(The music starts up again in the dining room.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

I'm hungry.

(ANTINUS exits to the dining room.)

The music builds.

TELEMAKOS covers her ears.

Finally, she exits through the garden doors, and runs off into the night.

Blackout.)

3 SCENE THREE:

3

(Sound of the waves.)

Lights up on ODYSSEUS, in a spotlight.
He is dressed in rags, asleep on a
beach somewhere.

He groans, dreaming. He writhes,
dreaming he is caught in the grip of a
sea monster.)

ODYSSEUS

(in his sleep)

Let go of me, monster!

(He wrestles with the beast.)

I will strangle the life out of you!

(He wakes, suddenly.)

Aah!

(He looks about, startled,
confused, disoriented,
frightened.)

What monster had me in her grasp? Was it Scylla? So many
heads. So many teeth. Devouring my comrades. Tearing them
to pieces. Swallowing them whole as they screamed in vain.
So many dead. Good friends left behind on the fields of
death. But not me. Not me you great, toothy bitch!

(looks around)

Where am I? Dry land. Finally. Where I wonder?

(calls out)

Hello?

(an echo in the distance, he
calls again)

Is there anyone there?

(another echo, another call)

Can anyone hear me?

(the echo fades into the
distance)

Where is this place? The world above, or below? Alive or
dead? Dreaming...or awake? No stars above. No moon. An
overcast sky, or the roof of the underworld? No world at
all. Is everything gone?

(sees something)

What's that? Who are you? Man or beast? God or monster?
I'm surrounded. An army of shades. The dead of the world.
Have I killed so many? You. I know you. Sweet heaven, it's
brave Achilles. Old friend. Stay. Come back. And there,
mighty Ajax. Antilochus. Patroklos. Wait. Friends. Wait
for me. All gone. All died in the mud. All dead. Why?
Who's this? Iphigenia. Still just a girl. Was I wrong to
persuade your father to cut your throat? Will you forgive
me? Please. Oh, god. The boy. Little Astyanax. Bloody.
And broken. From the fall.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS(cont'd)

Just as you were, after I threw you from the battlements. To your death on the rocks below. Come for your revenge? Take it. Take it, please! Just stop the memories. Stop! I'm a dead man. I want to go home. I want to see my wife. I want to kiss the baby.

(he laughs)

"Wise is the child these days that knows his own father, especially them that's conceived in the dog days of summer, when their mothers are frantic with love."

(He laughs like a madman.

Blackout.)

4 SCENE FOUR:

4

(Lights up on PENELOPE, back at the house, a few weeks later--night.

She looks out at the night.

ANTINUS enters.)

ANTINUS

Did you call me?

(beat)

I was asleep. I was dreaming. About you. Weaving away. At your loom up there. A great, golden tapestry. Alive with all the creatures of the world in it. Oceans, and mountains, and forests. Children playing. Beneath the sun, and the moon, and the stars. Your face. Your eyes. Whispering to me. My name. On your lips. Then I woke up. And I heard someone call my name. Was it you?

PENELOPE

You were dreaming.

(beat)

It's quiet in there.

ANTINUS

They're all asleep. It's hot. I couldn't breath. There's thirty guys in there now. How long are you going let this go on?

(beat)

What are you doing down here anyway?

PENELOPE

I want to know where Telemakos is.

ANTINUS

Oh.

PENELOPE

Has anything happened to him?

ANTINUS

I wouldn't know.

PENELOPE

(repeating herself)

Has anything happened to him?

ANTINUS

(repeating himself)

I wouldn't know.

PENELOPE
If anyone so much as touches her...

ANTINUS
Her?

PENELOPE
Him.

ANTINUS
Right. Him. Does she really believe she's a man?

PENELOPE
Do you really believe you're a man?

ANTINUS
I know what I am. It's plain to see.

PENELOPE
Is it? What kind of a man are you?

ANTINUS
You're afraid.

PENELOPE
Has she been harmed?

ANTINUS
Not that I know of.

PENELOPE
Where is she?

ANTINUS
I told you, I don't know.
(beat)
What are you weaving up there?

PENELOPE
Burial shrouds. One for Odysseus. One for Telemakos. And one for myself.

ANTINUS
Do you miss the touch of a man?

PENELOPE
I miss my husband.

ANTINUS
Let go of Odysseus.

PENELOPE
Have you done anything to Telemakos?

ANTINUS

No.

PENELOPE

Swear it. Before the gods.

ANTINUS

I swear it.

PENELOPE

Is there any plan to harm him?

ANTINUS

No.

PENELOPE

Swear it.

(he hesitates)

Swear it!

ANTINUS

There is a plan. Some of the others. Have gone to look for her--him.

PENELOPE

And if they find her? Him. Her. If they find her, what will they do to her?

ANTINUS

They want proof of what she is. Him. Her.

PENELOPE

And you would be a part of such a thing?

ANTINUS

No. I have no part in it.

PENELOPE

But you know of it.

(beat)

Is this how you would win my heart?

ANTINUS

I've told you what I know.

PENELOPE

Are you a man or an animal? Before I marry you, I will cut my own throat.

(She exits.)

Alone, ANTINUS looks out the window.

Outside, an owl hoots.

ANTINUS exits, off into the night.

Blackout.)

5 SCENE FIVE:

5

(Lights up, a few weeks later--day.

TELEMAKOS enters, returning home, in disguise as a man. She looks around the room, listens at the door to the dining room, exits into the dining room.

PENELOPE enters from elsewhere in the house, dressed in her finest. She sits in the chair, and ponders her situation.

TELEMAKOS returns from the dining room.)

PENELOPE

Telemaka!

(embracing her)

Thank god. Where have you been?

TELEMAKOS

Don't.

PENELOPE

Are you all right?

TELEMAKOS

I'm fine.

PENELOPE

Are you hurt?

TELEMAKOS

Stop it!

PENELOPE

I was so worried about you. Why didn't you tell me you were leaving? Where did you go? Why are you dressed like that?

TELEMAKOS

I said, stop it.

(she pulls away)

Are they still here?

PENELOPE

Yes. They're still here. More than ever.

TELEMAKOS

How many now?

PENELOPE

There must be fifty of them. More. They've all gone down to the beach. They're holding some kind of games. Contests and gambling. They're sacrificing one of the bulls.

TELEMAKOS

Antinus?

PENELOPE

No. He's gone. They were looking for you. They were going to...

TELEMAKOS

To what?

(PENELOPE shakes her head, no.)

TELEMAKOS (cont'd)

How do you know they were looking for me?

PENELOPE

He told me.

TELEMAKOS

Who did?

PENELOPE

Antinus.

TELEMAKOS

Why? Did you promise him anything?

PENELOPE

No.

TELEMAKOS

Anything at all?

PENELOPE

Of course, not.

TELEMAKOS

Have you said anything to any of them?

PENELOPE

Not a word.

TELEMAKOS

Why are you wearing that?

PENELOPE

What--this?

TELEMAKOS
Why the make-up?

PENELOPE
What?

TELEMAKOS
Why are you wearing all that make-up?

PENELOPE
I always wear make-up.

TELEMAKOS
Not like that, you don't.

PENELOPE
Exactly like this.

TELEMAKOS
What's been going on here?

PENELOPE
What's been going on here? What do you think has been going on here? I have fifty men living in my house, eating us out of house and home, lounging about like pigs in the mud, throwing parties around the clock, drinking and singing and shouting at all hours--and I thought you were dead!

(beat)
Where have you been?

TELEMAKOS
I went to Pylos, and Sparta.

PENELOPE
Pylos, Sparta--why?

TELEMAKOS
To see if I could find him.

PENELOPE
Your father? And?

TELEMAKOS
There's hope.

PENELOPE
What--tell me.

TELEMAKOS
It's all...like a dream. In my head. The night I left, I was... I couldn't think. I didn't know what to do, where to go. I just wanted to kill him.

PENELOPE

Who?

TELEMAKOS

Antinus. He laughed at me. I should have choked the life out of him then and there.

PENELOPE

Telemakos. What happened?

TELEMAKOS

I just ran, and ran, and kept on running, all the way across the island, all the way up the mountain. To the rock of the Gorgons. And there I fell down on my knees, in the dirt, and I cried. I just wanted to die. I lay on my back for hours, looking up at the moon, calling to her. Help me. Athena. Goddess. Please, help me. And as the moon sank below the waves, a gentle breeze began to blow. And on the wind, I heard her voice. Calm and quiet. Speaking softly to me. From the darkness. If you want him, go and find him, she said. Where would I look? How would I travel? Go. I will guide you. Every step of the way. Always at your side. And so, as Dawn spread her rose-tipped fingers across the sky, I rounded the mountain, and went into the house of old Eumayus, while he was out with his herds, and I got these clothes to wear. Then I went over to the docks at Iokus--no one knows me over there--and there I signed onto a freighter, bound for Pylos. No one recognized me. No one even suspected that...this was me.

PENELOPE

Are you sure of that?

TELEMAKOS

There were only a few hands on the ship. I kept to myself. There was always work to do. I slept apart from the others.

PENELOPE

If they had discovered you...

TELEMAKOS

She was with me. Always. I was never afraid.

PENELOPE

Why Pylos?

TELEMAKOS

I don't know. I put my trust in Athena. And true to her word, she guided me on my way. When we reached the shores of Pylos, I met a man in the harbor who said he fought in the war. He knew father, or knew who he was, but didn't know him personally. He said all the soldiers used to call him...

PENELOPE

Used to call him what?

TELEMAKOS

The Bullshitter. He suggested I talk to an old friend of father's, a man called Nestor, that served beside him throughout the campaign.

PENELOPE

Nestor?

TELEMAKOS

He said I would find him in Pylos, if I looked in all the sleazy bars and filthy back alleyways along the wharf there.

PENELOPE

I remember Nestor. Odysseus loved him like a father. He once told me Nestor was the finest man he'd ever known.

TELEMAKOS

That seems strange, since the man I found living under an old bridge beside the boat works, was a sad wreck of a human being. Bearded, and filthy, stinking of wine and urine. A babbling old fool. He cursed Agamemnon. Said the Greeks were doomed to defeat when they chose Agamemnon to lead their cause.

PENELOPE

What about Odysseus?

TELEMAKOS

He said some very troubling things about Father.

PENELOPE

What?

TELEMAKOS

That he had abandoned the Greeks. Given up the fight. That he took to drink and debauchery. That he lost himself, and went to live in a cave.

PENELOPE

No.

TELEMAKOS

I could've killed the old drunk. I grabbed him by his coat, and called him a liar. Admit these are lies, I shouted at him, take back what you say, or I will snap your neck like a twig!

PENELOPE

You didn't hurt him, did you?

TELEMAKOS

He just laughed. Laughed and laughed. All right, have it your way, he said, it's all a lie. Lies, lies, lies. From one bullshitter to another. Then he begged me to give him some money.

PENELOPE

Poor Nestor.

TELEMAKOS

I wasn't sure what to make of that. But there was one thing he said, that made it all worthwhile: talk to Menelaus, he said. Menelaus has been all over the east, and he's just returned home to Sparta. If any man knows anything about Odysseus, it's Menelaus.

PENELOPE

Menelaus is home?

TELEMAKOS

Yes, missing as long as Odysseus, and home safe and sound, or...

PENELOPE

Or what?

TELEMAKOS

Well, they say he's changed a bit.

PENELOPE

Changed--how? Did you see him? How did you get to Sparta?

TELEMAKOS

I walked.

PENELOPE

Walked--all the way to Sparta? Those mountains are crawling with thieves. You could have been killed, you could have been--

TELEMAKOS

I wasn't afraid. She was with me. No one bothered me. Maybe they couldn't even see me. It was like I was invisible. Maybe I was.

PENELOPE

Invisible?

TELEMAKOS

The gods can do that to us. In Sparta, I asked around, and a beggar on the street told me that I would find the king at a mansion outside the city walls.

(MORE)

TELEMAKOS(cont'd)

But when I found the place, it seemed the whole estate was in the midst of a big celebration. Was it a wedding, some holiday? I couldn't tell. A long line of people arriving out front, wealthy wellborn lords and ladies, all dressed in strange, outlandish costumes. Dressed like this, I was afraid they would never let me in, no matter what I told them, or who I said I was. I wasn't invited. So I decided to circle around back, and try to sneak in through the gardens behind. And I did. I climbed over a wall, and then just walked in along a winding path through a vast, rolling garden. Beautiful groves of laurel and almond trees, a quiet lily pond. And this was surely Athena's hand at work, because there, beside the pond, I came upon a solitary figure, a woman, sitting all alone, in a strange costume. Quietly crying to herself.

PENELOPE

Who was she?

TELEMAKOS

I had no idea. But I startled her. I didn't know what to do. I just stood there. She wiped away her tears, trying to hide her sadness, collecting herself. Who are you supposed to be? she asked. I'm Telemakos, the son of Odysseus. And you? Helen of Troy, she replied. But it was just a costume. She took me inside, and never have I seen such a party as this. The music nearly split my ears. Everyone in strange costumes, Theseus and the Minotaur, bloody Medea, Heracles in lion skin, club in hand, centaurs and satyrs, Medusa with a head of snakes. Wild dancing, tables and tables of food, oceans of wine. The wealthiest lords and ladies of Sparta celebrating the rites of Dionysis. My Helen of Troy took me to the lord of the party, His Highness, King Menelaus, his naked body painted pure gold, two great bull's horns sprouting from his head, presiding over the party like a reigning majesty in the underworld. He had been drinking. He could barely stand. I asked him about father.

PENELOPE

What did he say?

TELEMAKOS

He just shook his head a bit. But he pointed to a man dressed as a god of the sea, and said, speak to him, Proteus will know.

PENELOPE

Proteus?

TELEMAKOS

The Old Man of the Sea. Who never lies. I asked him about Father...and he said he was alive.

PENELOPE

What?

TELEMAKOS

Held prisoner, far away, on an island in the west.

PENELOPE

Was he serious?

TELEMAKOS

Very.

PENELOPE

But who was he--how did he know this?

TELEMAKOS

He had seen him there with his own eyes.

PENELOPE

Who--where?

TELEMAKOS

That's all he said.

PENELOPE

But who was he, this man, Proteus?

(beat)

Who was he?

TELEMAKOS

I think he was a god.

PENELOPE

Why?

TELEMAKOS

I don't know. I just knew it. That was the last I saw of him. After that, the party got really wild. Everyone took off their clothes. And started dancing. Then they started... All together. Everyone. Oil and wine, the music pounding. Dionysis. I had to leave.

PENELOPE

That's not the Menelaus I knew.

TELEMAKOS

He's alive... Father.

PENELOPE

You mean...

TELEMAKOS

I know it.

PENELOPE

Who else did you talk to?

TELEMAKOS

She says he's alive.

PENELOPE

Who does?

TELEMAKOS

Grey Eyes.

(beat)

What's wrong.

PENELOPE

Nothing. I'm just glad you're home. You're safe. You'll want a bath. Some fresh clothes. Are you hungry?

TELEMAKOS

No. I'm fine.

PENELOPE

Let's go upstairs.

TELEMAKOS

Is there anything left?

PENELOPE

What do you mean?

TELEMAKOS

The animals. The food. Our wine. Is there anything left? They've disgraced our house. Disgraced Father. Insulted me. To my face.

PENELOPE

Enough.

TELEMAKOS

It's our family honor. It's up to me.

PENELOPE

There are fifty of them--who knows how many altogether--the sons of half the families on Ithaka. Anything you do to them will be paid back in kind. As awful as they are, they are guests in our house.

TELEMAKOS

Guests? Guests! They're squatters! Thieves who have slipped in through a perversion of our customs and robbed us under our noses. Every day they offend us with their presence here, their arrogance, their defiance, their ingratitude, their willful disdain. What would Father say?

PENELOPE

He would say be reasonable. There are fifty of them.

TELEMAKOS

I don't care how many there are. All of them. They die.

PENELOPE

Quiet! Don't ever say such a thing. The gods will strike you down.

TELEMAKOS

The gods demand it.

PENELOPE

No. Never.

TELEMAKOS

You're afraid. You're a woman.

PENELOPE

I'm not afraid. It's just...wrong.

TELEMAKOS

Then what?

(beat)

What?

(beat)

What are you thinking?

(PENELOPE shakes her head, no.)

TELEMAKOS (cont'd)

You're keeping something from me? What is it? Tell me.
(grabs her)

Tell me.

PENELOPE

Let go of me.

(she let's go)

I had a dream.

TELEMAKOS

A dream?

PENELOPE

Your father came to me.

TELEMAKOS

Go on.

PENELOPE

He was cloaked in a mist. With tears streaming down his cheeks. A wound in his heart. His head cleaved with a terrible gash.

TELEMAKOS

No.

PENELOPE

He took my hand in his, and kissed it gently. He asked my forgiveness.

TELEMAKOS

Why?

PENELOPE

For he would not return home, he told me.

TELEMAKOS

No.

PENELOPE

He that departed, would never return.

TELEMAKOS

No.

PENELOPE

And then he turned and walked away. Off across the beach. Into the distance. Leaving his footsteps in the sand behind. Till the waves slowly washed over them, and little by little, they disappeared.

TELEMAKOS

This is a lie.

PENELOPE

It's time to let go, Telemakos.

TELEMAKOS

No.

PENELOPE

We have to move on.

TELEMAKOS

No! This is a false dream, sent by some god to deceive us! This is a lie! I have the word of Proteus, a god of the sea!

PENELOPE

A man in a costume. At a drunken party.

TELEMAKOS

No man in a costume, Proteus!

(beat)

What's wrong with you?

PENELOPE

I'm going to speak to them.

TELEMAKOS

Who?

PENELOPE

(pointing to the dining room)

Them. All of them together.

TELEMAKOS

Why?

PENELOPE

I'm going to appeal to their sense of decency.

TELEMAKOS

What are you talking about?

PENELOPE

A test.

TELEMAKOS

What sort of test?

PENELOPE

Leave that to me.

TELEMAKOS

When?

PENELOPE

Tonight.

TELEMAKOS

No. You can't go in there, in front of all of them. Like that.

PENELOPE

It's a woman's way, darling. Trust me.

TELEMAKOS

How disgusting. So this is why the clothes. This is why the make-up.

PENELOPE

No, you don't understand--

Whore.

TELEMAKOS

How dare you.

PENELOPE

(TELEMAKOS strikes PENELOPE.)

You will not speak to them. None of them. Ever.

TELEMAKOS

Do not pretend to tell me what to do.

PENELOPE

Until my father returns, I am the man of this house.

TELEMAKOS

And I am your mother.

PENELOPE

They die.

TELEMAKOS

No.

PENELOPE

You're not my mother. You never were. I will be revenged upon those animals. Those pigs. In their sty. For the dishonor they have brought upon this house. And I will be revenged upon you, if you betray my father.

TELEMAKOS

(TELEMAKOS exits.)

Alone, PENELOPE composes herself.

She looks at her reflection in the window. Adjusts her hair a bit.)

How do I look?

PENELOPE

(to herself)

(Lights change to a spotlight on PENELOPE, catching her a little off guard.)

She looks about at the audience, the fifty suitors, all gathered about her in the dining room of the house.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

(to the suitors)

Good evening. Gentlemen. My qualities, I know--my face, my figure--are not what they were nearly twenty years ago, when my husband left for the east, to do his duty for the Greeks, in the Great War. He did his part, some say as bravely and resolutely as any that went with him. None of you will ever know what he, and those who served with him, suffered and sacrificed for those of us left behind. For you, here today. You have reaped the fruits of their labors, their toil, their agony, and in many cases, their deaths. Odysseus is gone, and with him my happiness. Were he to return, were I to see him once again, I would be happier than any other woman in the world. But he has not returned, and the gods have chosen to visit only grief upon me all these years. Never will I forget his face.

(Sound of a ship's horn calling in the distance.)

Lights change.

ODYSSEUS enters, on the day he embarked for the war.

He faces PENELOPE to say goodbye.)

ODYSSEUS

It's time. I have to go. They're waiting for me.

(She turns away from him.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

I've tried everything. There's no way out of it. We have to be strong. I'll be back. Don't worry. The whole thing'll be over before you know it. You'll be on your own here. You'll have to take care of everything, the farm--the whole island will look to you. It's all in your hands now. Our child.

PENELOPE

Don't go.

ODYSSEUS

I have to. I pleaded with them. I begged. You saw me. They've decided. The answer's no. I have to go.

PENELOPE

This is not our affair. The whole thing has nothing to do with us. This is between Menelaus and that woman!

ODYSSEUS

I'm bound by the oath. All of us are. As Greeks.

(She shakes her head, no.)

The ship's horn sounds.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

I will come back to you. No matter what, I swear to you, I will come home again. No man, no god, no monster on the high seas or from the underworld below, nothing will keep me from returning home to you, and our little girl. Hear me, god. I will come back to you.

PENELOPE

I'm so afraid.

(He kisses her.)

They embrace tightly.

The ship's horn sounds.)

ODYSSEUS

I will come back.

(He exits.)

Lights change, back to the spotlight.)

PENELOPE

(to the suitors)

For almost twenty years now, I have borne his absence, a long night of bitter loneliness, desolation, solitude. The king of the gods has deprived me of all the sweetness life has to offer. And to this injury, all of you have added grave insult. Is there no decency in any of your hearts? There was a time, when a man came to court a woman in marriage--a woman of dignity and self-respect, a queen in her own household--there was a time when such a man would come humbly, honorably, bearing gifts, gracious offerings, kind words, thoughtful gestures, gallantry and nobility. It seems those days are long gone, dead to the world. Nowadays it seems the suitor moves in before he marries, lives off the food and wine and good graces of his intended until finally she submits, when all her household is utterly exhausted, and she is compelled to acquiesce. Well, here I am, a poor, weak, defenseless woman, left to suffer these indignities in silence. Now, my lords, hear me: suitors indeed, you took over my house to gorge yourselves on my food and drink, day and night, my husband being gone, out of sight, out of mind. You have no right to be here, none except your wish to seize what you do not have. Stand up then, and declare for me: who among you has a pure heart? Who will bring honor back to this blighted household?

(MORE)

PENELOPE(cont'd)

He that hath a pure heart, to him and him alone, will I give my hand, and join that man in marriage, my life to his, leaving my former life behind, forever, to be remembered as if only in a dream. To that man, and no other, will I give myself. So step forward. Come on then. Which one of you has a pure heart? I'm waiting.

(Blackout.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

6 SCENE SIX:

6

(Lights up on ODYSSEUS, sitting in the chair, eating a pear, dressed in rags once again.

He looks around the room, thinking.

The sound of a motorcycle approaches outside.

ANTINUS enters, wearing motorcycle leathers and helmet, like armor. He removes his helmet.)

ANTINUS

Who are you?

ODYSSEUS

Nobody.

ANTINUS

Don't you have a name?

ODYSSEUS

Yeah.

ANTINUS

Well, what is it?

ODYSSEUS

Nobody. That's what they call me.

ANTINUS

What's that smell?

ODYSSEUS

Hm?

ANTINUS

Is that you?

ODYSSEUS

I beg your pardon?

ANTINUS

What are you doing here?

ODYSSEUS

Eating a pear. They're good. You should try one. Grown in the orchard out there, or so they tell me. Very juicy.

ANTINUS

I said, what are you doing here?

ODYSSEUS

I'm a storyteller.

ANTINUS

You're a beggar.

ODYSSEUS

I prefer the term "roving bard."

ANTINUS

I see. How long you been here?

ODYSSEUS

Since this morning.

ANTINUS

They still in there?

ODYSSEUS

Who?

ANTINUS

The guys. There was a bunch of guys staying in the house when I left. Are they still here?

ODYSSEUS

Oh. Them. Yeah, they're still here.

ANTINUS

What are they doing?

ODYSSEUS

They just had lunch.
(holds up the pear)

ANTINUS

That all they gave you?

ODYSSEUS

They didn't want me in there eating with them. They said I smelled bad. Said I'd have to get out. One of them threw a pig's foot at me. Another threw a foot stool. And another said he would beat me with his shoe. They said some very unkind things to me. Had a good laugh, they did. They've been drinking quite a bit. That's all right. We'll settle up on that account. In time.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS(cont'd)

(beat)

Who are you?

ANTINUS

A friend of the family. Did she choose yet?

ODYSSEUS

Huh?

ANTINUS

(pointing upstairs)

Her. She whose house you're sitting in. Did she choose a new husband yet?

ODYSSEUS

Oh, her. Right. Yeah, I heard about that.

ANTINUS

Well?

ODYSSEUS

Well what?

ANTINUS

What have you heard?

ODYSSEUS

Oh. Yeah. No. She hasn't picked a new husband yet.
(he laughs)

ANTINUS

What's so funny.

ODYSSEUS

A very clever woman.

ANTINUS

Yeah, why's that?

ODYSSEUS

She's put them to a test.

ANTINUS

A test--what sort of test?

ODYSSEUS

A very clever one. She's promised to give herself to him that's possessed of a pure heart.

(more laughter)

Imagine that--a pure heart!

ANTINUS

Why is that so funny?

ODYSSEUS

For there isn't such a man in all the world!

(laughter)

Nary a one, from the smoldering ashes of Ilium, to the crumbling Pillars of Heracles, no man in this world is possessed of a pure heart, especially not among the Greeks; they are the most impure of them all. I can assure you of that. I know. I've seen it with my own eyes. Yes, truly, this is a great woman. Her greatness shines forth in her brilliance. And a beauty, too, I hear. Far too much woman for the likes of that lot in there, eh? What about you?

ANTINUS

Hm?

ODYSSEUS

You planning on throwing your hat in the ring? Or your...

(gestures at the motorcycle helmet)

Why not? A fine strapping lad such as yourself. What's the matter--haven't got the heart?

(laughs)

Don't feel bad, son. Neither have I.

(ANTINUS starts out.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Where you going?

ANTINUS

I have a letter to deliver.

(turns back)

Any news of Telemakos?

ODYSSEUS

Who?

ANTINUS

The son of Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

The son of Odysseus?

ANTINUS

Never mind. I'll find out for myself.

(ANTINUS exits.)

ODYSSEUS

(alone)

The son of Odysseus? That's news to me. Off you go little fellow. One more dog to add to the pack. Sniff, sniff. Bow-wow. Ruff-ruff.

(He barks like a dog, howls, growls.

TELEMAKOS enters.)

TELEMAKOS
What are you doing in that chair?

ODYSSEUS
Hm?

TELEMAKOS
Get out of that chair.

(ODYSSEUS gets up from the chair.)

TELEMAKOS (cont'd)
Who are you, anyway?

ODYSSEUS
Nobody.

TELEMAKOS
What's your name?

ODYSSEUS
That is my name.

TELEMAKOS
Oh. You're the beggar.

ODYSSEUS
Roving bard, if you don't mind.

TELEMAKOS
(smells something)
Oh, god. Is that you?

ODYSSEUS
What?

TELEMAKOS
That smell.

ODYSSEUS
Oh, that.

TELEMAKOS
You're foul.

ODYSSEUS
So I've been told.

TELEMAKOS

Are you here to ask for my mother's hand in marriage, as well? Every other beggar in Ithaka is already in there.

ODYSSEUS

Your mother?

TELEMAKOS

The Lady Penelope. My mother. Where are you from?

ODYSSEUS

You're--?

TELEMAKOS

Telemakos. Son of Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS

The son of Odysseus?

TELEMAKOS

Have you got a problem with that?

ODYSSEUS

But you're...

TELEMAKOS

Yes?

ODYSSEUS

You're a...

TELEMAKOS

What?

ODYSSEUS

I wasn't aware Odysseus had a son.

TELEMAKOS

Well, now you are. This is my house you're in, and I'll thank you to keep your smelly ass out of that chair. That chair belongs to my father. The king of Ithaka. It's his. He's the only one who's supposed to sit in it. You understand...Nobody? Now, get out of here--you stink.

ODYSSEUS

I think you lie.

TELEMAKOS

What did you say?

ODYSSEUS

You lie. Odysseus has no son. He has a daughter.

(She grabs him.)

TELEMAKOS

I have a mind to cut your tongue out for saying that.

ODYSSEUS

Do you?

(beat)

I know Odysseus. We are old friends. I fought in the war with him. And I know he has no son.

TELEMAKOS

You know my father?

ODYSSEUS

We are practically brothers.

TELEMAKOS

Is he alive?

ODYSSEUS

Who wants to know?

TELEMAKOS

His only son, Telemakos.

ODYSSEUS

You take me for a fool? I have eyes. You expect me to believe... He had a daughter. A little girl. Is that you?

TELEMAKOS

I was his little girl. Now I'm his son.

ODYSSEUS

You're mad.

TELEMAKOS

When I was thirteen. A little girl, with long curls. White dresses. Always in white. One day I was down on the beach. I used to wait at the water's edge, every day, all day long, waiting for him to come home, hoping I'd be the first to spy the ship that would bring him back to us. Day after day. But one day, as I lay there on the sand--I can remember the heat of the sun. I had to close my eyes. When I opened them, there she was: the grey-eyed one.

ODYSSEUS

No.

TELEMAKOS

Yes. She was right there, standing over me. The waves lightly licking against her bare feet in the dark, wet sand, the sun blazing behind her, the gleaming helmet tilted back upon her long, black hair, terrible shield in hand, emblazoned with the awful face of the snake-woman, a mighty spear at her side, standing twice the height of an ordinary man. A great, towering beauty, ready for war. I could barely breathe. Why have you come to me? I said. You...are the son of Odysseus, she replied. His only son. One day you will be king of Ithaka. Then the sound of wings beating. The scream of an eagle. And away she flew. Across the water, into the distance. Goddess Athena. Born a daughter, grown into a man. The son of Odysseus.

(ODYSSEUS laughs, long and hard.)

TELEMAKOS (cont'd)

Are you laughing at me?

ODYSSEUS

No, but it's funny.

TELEMAKOS

What's funny?

ODYSSEUS

Athena. It would be Athena. Oh, how perfect it all is.

TELEMAKOS

What are you talking about?

ODYSSEUS

Perfectly mad.

TELEMAKOS

You don't believe me.

ODYSSEUS

Oh, no, I believe you, to the bottom of my testicles. I can see it in your eyes. The truth shines out.

TELEMAKOS

Really?

ODYSSEUS

Young man, to my ears, all this makes perfect sense. Perfect sense. You see, I myself happen to be on very intimate terms with old Grey Eyes.

TELEMAKOS

You've seen her, too?

Oh, yes, many times. ODYSSEUS

Then you know. TELEMAKOS

I do indeed. Yes, all this makes perfect sense to me now. ODYSSEUS

How so? TELEMAKOS

You don't know, do you? ODYSSEUS

Know what? TELEMAKOS

Her secret. ODYSSEUS

What secret? TELEMAKOS

Athena is herself...a man. ODYSSEUS

What? TELEMAKOS

Haven't you ever noticed? The next time you see her, take a close look--big hands. ODYSSEUS

Big hands? TELEMAKOS

Always the tip off. ODYSSEUS
(beat)

Funny, isn't it?

What? TELEMAKOS

The way the world is. ODYSSEUS

Not really. TELEMAKOS

The gods are mad. ODYSSEUS

TELEMAKOS

You mean angry?

ODYSSEUS

No. The son of Odysseus. Imagine that.
(he laughs)

TELEMAKOS

What did you say your name was?

ODYSSEUS

Nobody. Why?

TELEMAKOS

What do you know about my father?

ODYSSEUS

What do I know about Odysseus? Only this, Zeus be my witness, he is on his way home, already near, already here, present on the island of Ithaka.

TELEMAKOS

Here--where?

ODYSSEUS

Out there among the rocks, or on the slopes of Mount Nerius, or hiding in the forest. He comes. And he is close. He knows what evil is afoot in this house. And he has it within him to bring a black hour upon those men in there, those cowardly dogs, those conniving thieves.

TELEMAKOS

Oh, god, if only it were true.

ODYSSEUS

Believe it. It's true.

TELEMAKOS

How do you know this?

ODYSSEUS

He sent me to you.

TELEMAKOS

He sent you?

ODYSSEUS

I told you, we're like brothers.

TELEMAKOS

He's coming. I can't believe it. Do you know how long I've waited for this?

ODYSSEUS

I do, I do.

TELEMAKOS

He's coming. He's here. He's out there. Oh, god--what should I do?

ODYSSEUS

You're father will be proud of you.

TELEMAKOS

Where has he been all these years?

ODYSSEUS

You'll have to hear that from him. But rest assured, he has suffered the tortures of the damned, and the enmity of the gods. Well, some of the gods.

TELEMAKOS

I can only imagine. But he's...well?

ODYSSEUS

As well as can be expected. Tell me about these fellows in here. What do you think we should do with them?

TELEMAKOS

What do I think? They've disgraced this house. Disgraced my father. My mother. This is open rebellion. They want the throne. We cannot allow that. They have to be punished. We have to set an example.

ODYSSEUS

Death?

TELEMAKOS

Every one of them. In the throat.

ODYSSEUS

Have you ever killed a man?

(beat)

A word of warning: it's not the killing that's so difficult. That part's relatively easy. It's the living with yourself afterward that can be a bit tricky.

(TELEMAKOS nods.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

How many altogether?

TELEMAKOS

Almost exactly fifty, when I counted this morning.

ODYSSEUS

Are they carrying weapons? I didn't see any.

TELEMAKOS

Some might be.

ODYSSEUS

That makes it difficult.

TELEMAKOS

I know how to do it. I've got it all figured out.

ODYSSEUS

Really?

TELEMAKOS

But what about their families?

ODYSSEUS

What do you mean?

TELEMAKOS

We'll have a war on our hands.

ODYSSEUS

Trust that to the gods. Your honor's at stake.

(TELEMAKOS nods, yes.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

What a fine young man you've grown up to be.

TELEMAKOS

Huh?

ODYSSEUS

Don't you recognize me?

(beat)

It's me. Odysseus. Your father.

TELEMAKOS

You?

ODYSSEUS

Come. Embrace me.

TELEMAKOS

No. It can't be.

ODYSSEUS

It is.

TELEMAKOS

I can't believe it.

ODYSSEUS

Look at me. Look in my eyes. Don't you remember me? Think back, to the last time we saw each other, the day I left for the war. Do you remember?

TELEMAKOS

I was only five years old.

ODYSSEUS

But you remember, don't you? I picked you up, and held you in my arms. You were so little then. I hugged you as tight as I could. And I said, don't worry. Don't worry, little girl, Daddy's coming back. I'll be back, no matter what, I'll be back. And I kissed you on your cheeks, as the tears came rolling down. And off I went. In their ships. You remember that. Don't you? Don't you?

TELEMAKOS

Daddy.

ODYSSEUS

That's my little girl.

(They embrace.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Yes, what a fine young man you've grown up to be.

TELEMAKOS

Are you all right? You smell terrible.

ODYSSEUS

I rolled in shit.

TELEMAKOS

What?

ODYSSEUS

The perfect disguise--no?

TELEMAKOS

Oh, god. Come on. Let's get you a bath. I don't want mother to see you like this.

ODYSSEUS

Wait. Not yet.

TELEMAKOS

What?

ODYSSEUS

Not yet. No one must know I'm here.

TELEMAKOS

Not even mother?

ODYSSEUS

We have to protect her. It's safer this way. Absolute secrecy. We must be meticulous. The numbers are against us, far and away against us. Come, let's find somewhere to talk more private than this. We shouldn't be seen together, if we can avoid it.

TELEMAKOS

This way. In here. Dad.

ODYSSEUS

Lead the way...Son.

(The exit together.)

Blackout.)

7 SCENE SEVEN:

7

(Lights up in the room--later that night. ANTINUS looks up at the moon, beaming in through the windows.

Outside, the owl hoots.

ANTINUS smiles.

Music plays in the dining room, where the suitors carouse.

PENELOPE enters, cautiously.)

ANTINUS

Hello again.

PENELOPE

Hello.

ANTINUS

I wasn't sure you'd come.

PENELOPE

Your letter surprised me. Somewhat. You said you've had "a change of heart." What do you mean by that?

ANTINUS

I see Telemakos is back. She's well I trust?

PENELOPE

This has all been very difficult for the both of us.

ANTINUS

Yes, I know. And I'm sorry for that. It's all my fault, really.

PENELOPE

Where did you go?

ANTINUS

You got me thinking. That night. The last night I was here. "What kind of a man are you?" That's what you said. That got me thinking. I went to the others, and I persuaded them to abandon their plans to...find Telemakos. It took some convincing, but...I don't want to see her hurt. Any more than I want to see you hurt.

(produces a necklace)

I brought you this. It's from the island of Cyprus. The stone is sacred to she that was born from the foam of the sea.

PENELOPE

The goddess of love?

ANTINUS

It will protect you. May I?

(He fastens the necklace around her neck.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

I'm sorry for what I've brought upon your household, and your family. I want to set things right.

PENELOPE

That will take some doing. Where have you been?

ANTINUS

I spent some time alone. On my motorcycle. Rode all over the island. I keep thinking...about you. Something...is happening to me. Some god. I was riding up along the cliffs on the north point, and I had to stop. Walked down to the rocks, sat, and just looked into the water. There were fish. Birds. The sun, sparkling on the waves. And then I saw her. A dark form in the water at first. Is that--? It was her. A snake crawled from the water. It was her. Penelope is a goddess.

(PENELOPE is amused.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

You laugh. But it's true. I heard the words. Some goddess whispering in my ears.

PENELOPE

Too long in the sun, I think.

(He laughs.)

ANTINUS

Much too long perhaps. You know, when I was little, my father told me that, before the goat is sacrificed, it sings a song. It tells a story. A lesson for each of us to learn: please, God, don't let it be me. The poor little goat.

(He sings "It's Not Unusual" like Tom Jones)

It's not unusual to be loved by anyone
It's not unusual to have fun with anyone
but when I see you hanging about with anyone
It's not unusual to see me cry,
oh I wanna' die

(They laugh together.)

The laughter passes.

They lie beside one another on the floor.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

Tell me what you want from me. It's yours. Tell me what I should do. I'll do it. Love...has...me. I don't know what god... My head is filled with thoughts...of you.

PENELOPE

I will not marry.

ANTINUS

Then there will be no marriage. I don't care. I only want...

(They kiss.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

Have you put some spell upon me?

PENELOPE

No.

ANTINUS

Are you a sorceress?

PENELOPE

No.

ANTINUS

I love you.

(She moves away.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

What do you want from me?

PENELOPE

I'm just a woman. Telemakos and I are all alone.

ANTINUS

I'll protect you. Till the death. I swear before all the gods. To the death.

PENELOPE

There are too many of them.

ANTINUS

My father could put an end to this. He knows all their families. I think I could persuade him that this has become a disgrace. We have defied the laws of hospitality. Zeus will punish us for this transgression. We must make amends. Offer sacrifice. Repair the damage we have done. The honor of Odysseus demands it.

PENELOPE

No marriage?

ANTINUS

Not unless you wish it.

(She starts out.)

ANTINUS (cont'd)

Wait.

(she stops)

Where are you going?

PENELOPE

I have to think. I have to speak with Telemakos. My weaving. I have to finish my weaving. It'll take me the rest of the night.

ANTINUS

No.

PENELOPE

I'll come to you in the morning. Here. At sunrise. We'll go to your father together. Till then.

ANTINUS

But...

(She kisses him.)

PENELOPE

Till sunrise.

(She goes.)

ANTINUS

(alone)

All about, an endless sea, no ship in sight, no land, only the stars at night above. Exhausted from the fight, my arms and legs slowly turn to lead. And down I go. Beneath the waves. Into the darkness below. Down, down, down. I am in love.

(He exits into the dining room.)

TELEMAKOS enters from elsewhere in the house, with a cup of wine in hand. She waits, anxiously, in the shadows.

ODYSSEUS enters from the dining room.)

ODYSSEUS

Ah. You're here. Good.
(sees the cup of wine)
And what is this?

TELEMAKOS

This is for you.
(hands him the cup)
Try it.

ODYSSEUS

Is it--?

TELEMAKOS

No. Go ahead. Taste it.

ODYSSEUS

(sips the wine)
Mmmm. Very good. From our own vineyards out there?

TELEMAKOS

Yes, and there's plenty of it in the kitchen there, waiting to go in to our guests.

ODYSSEUS

Good. And the other?

(She holds up a small pouch.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Let me see it.
(he smells the powder)
Yes, that's the stuff, all right. Where did you get it?

TELEMAKOS

In the House of Menelaus. There's was no end of it there.

ODYSSEUS

Really.
(he tastes a bit on his finger)
Mmm.

TELEMAKOS

What are you doing?
(snatches it away from him)

ODYSSEUS

Just curious.

TELEMAKOS

The tiniest taste is enough to put your head in a fog.

ODYSSEUS

Are you sure it's from the lotus?

TELEMAKOS

Yes, I'm sure.

ODYSSEUS

We can't afford to be mistaken. Give me another taste, to be doubly certain.

TELEMAKOS

I'm already certain of it. Enough.

ODYSSEUS

Truth be told, I know the stuff well. All too well. It's good you keep it from me.

TELEMAKOS

What?

ODYSSEUS

Never mind. It brings back bad memories, dark days, in a dark cave. Years I spent there. I can't say how long exactly. I lost track of everything there. Keep it away from me. Lovely poison. How I do love and hate it. Hate it. Love it. Hate it.

TELEMAKOS

Are you all right?

ODYSSEUS

Is it time?

TELEMAKOS

Yes.

ODYSSEUS

Are they all in there?

TELEMAKOS

Yes.

ODYSSEUS

Every one of them?

TELEMAKOS

Every one of them. Eager for the show.

ODYSSEUS

We can't have any stragglers. And the wine is in the kitchen, you say?

TELEMAKOS

Yes, everything is set.

ODYSSEUS

Good. Mix it well, and pour freely.

TELEMAKOS

I will. Don't worry.

ODYSSEUS

What's wrong?

TELEMAKOS

Nothing.

ODYSSEUS

What?

TELEMAKOS

What if...

ODYSSEUS

What?

TELEMAKOS

Nothing. Just...thinking. That's all.

ODYSSEUS

No more of that. It's time for action now.

(The owl hoots outside in the garden.)

TELEMAKOS

What's that?

ODYSSEUS

What?

(The owl hoots again.)

TELEMAKOS

Did you hear that?

ODYSSEUS

I did.

TELEMAKOS

You think it's her?

ODYSSEUS

I do indeed.

TELEMAKOS

She's with us.

ODYSSEUS

Take heart. Now go. It's time. I'll listen for my cue.
Make sure I can hear it.

(she goes)

Wait.

(she stops)

A kiss for luck.

(he kisses her on the lips)

There. Now go. Time's awasting.

(TELEMAKOS exits to the kitchen.)

Music plays in the dining room.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

(to the suitors)

Enjoying yourselves? Live it up, boys. The appointed hour
draws near.

(to himself)

Calm down. Steady. You've seen worse than this. Men eaten
alive before me, their brains dashed out on the rocks,
drunken one-eyed giants standing over me. Nobody. Only your
wits got you out of that cave alive. Steady, steady, keep it
in.

(He contorts, seized by a rage, but he
collapses, restraining himself, like a
man trying not to explode.)

He rocks himself, sitting on the floor,
back and forth.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Whip the dogs. Kill them all. Where will I go?

(The owl hoots.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

(to Athena)

Yes, I hear you. Old friend. I hear you...

(he lies back on the floor)

I hear you... I hear you...

(he falls asleep)

(PENELOPE enters, and passes through
the room. She discovers the strange
man sleeping on the floor.)

She looks at his face.

She smells something unpleasant.)

PENELOPE

Oh, god.

(ODYSSEUS wakes.)

ODYSSEUS

Hm?

(He sees PENELOPE.)

ODYSSEUS stands.

Silently, they regard one another.)

PENELOPE

Were you sleeping there?

(beat)

Who are you?

ODYSSEUS

Nobody.

PENELOPE

What are you doing in here?

(beat)

Do you need food?

ODYSSEUS

I'm the entertainment.

PENELOPE

Hm?

ODYSSEUS

I tell stories.

PENELOPE

Ah. Perhaps a bath.

ODYSSEUS

You must be the wife of great Odysseus. Even more beautiful than your reputation.

PENELOPE

Have you come from the mainland?

ODYSSEUS

From the other side of the world.

PENELOPE

Have you heard any news about my husband?

ODYSSEUS

Brave Odysseus? None that I would share.

PENELOPE

What? What have you heard?

ODYSSEUS

I have no wish to hurt you, Madam Mistress.

PENELOPE

Hurt me--how? Why--what have you heard?

ODYSSEUS

It will break your heart.

PENELOPE

Tell me.

ODYSSEUS

Sad news. Forgive me. I heard that, after the war, he got lost on his way home. And he went mad.

PENELOPE

Mad? No.

ODYSSEUS

So I heard.

PENELOPE

Heard from whom? Where?

ODYSSEUS

I don't remember where. On the wind maybe?

PENELOPE

The wind? You're mad yourself.

ODYSSEUS

Am I?

PENELOPE

Is he alive? Does anyone know where he is? Have you heard anything about that?

ODYSSEUS

They say he went down into the underworld.

PENELOPE

You mean he's dead?

ODYSSEUS
No--just that he went down into the underworld.

PENELOPE
What do you mean?

ODYSSEUS
To find his way back home.

PENELOPE
That makes no sense.

ODYSSEUS
Aye.

PENELOPE
You're a strange one. Strange indeed.

ODYSSEUS
I'll take that as a compliment.

PENELOPE
There's something about you.

ODYSSEUS
Don't you recognize me?

(beat)

PENELOPE
I'm looking for someone.
(she goes to the door, stops
and looks back)

Nobody.

(PENELOPE exits.)

ODYSSEUS
(alone)
No one escapes his doom.

(Music plays.)

Lights change to a spotlight on
ODYSSEUS. He looks around at the
audience of suitors.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)
Good evening, fine gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here
before you. A toast.
(raises his cup)
To the sons of Ithaka! Drink up. Drink up. I've partaken
of your banquet--the lamb was excellent, by the way.
(MORE)

ODYSSEUS(cont'd)

Now its time to repay my debt to you all. I thank you for your hospitality. Now, a story. For your delectation. A tale from the Great War.

(another toast)

To the heroes of the Great War! A libation. Drink up. Drink up.

(he drinks)

Ahhh. Now, we begin... In the belly of the great wooden beast they crouched. Trembling in terror. Some wept silently. Others strained in an ecstasy of fear. Only the son of Achilles showed no emotion, while round and round the giant hollow horse, the citizenry of Troy circled, in awe of the magnificent creation, a gift to the victors, after ten years of war, a tribute to the unconquered city, left behind by the Greeks. In defeat, they vanished in the night. And when the king of Troy, old white-haired Priam, saw the great towering wooden horse standing alone on the beach, he ordered his sons to bring it within the city walls, as a gift to grey-eyed Athena. And in so doing, he condemned his people to obliteration. Yea, crouching in the belly of the beast that night, they waited, till darkness, and silence lay over the city. And he in command, cunning Odysseus, waited to issue the order--for the brilliant stratagem was his devising, brave Odysseus, cleverest among all the Greeks.

(another toast)

Drink up. Drink to Odysseus--clutching his sword as he waits. Now? Now? Whisper the others. Patience, my comrades, wait for the signal. Be still. Be silent. Even now, the Greek ships are pulling ashore, returning, with utter destruction in mind. Now, whispers Odysseus--now! Trap door opens, and down the rope they slide, one by one, then a break for the gates, a few drowsy sentries, quietly silenced with a knife to the throat--phit! Unbar the doors, and slowly, the great city gates of Troy creak open. In pours an army of soldiers like a river bursting through a canyon when the winter rains first break, down through the moonlit streets, into the unguarded houses, the Greeks begin their slaughter, cutting Trojan throats as they sleep, till the city awakens to the horror--they are here, inside the walls, we are doomed! And the killing goes wild. With one great blow, the son of Achilles hacks off the head of the old white-haired king, and drags his withered corpse out to onto the Trojan plain, to the tomb of great Achilles. And there the son leaves a gift to the memory of his father, the headless body of the old Trojan king, left in the dirt to rot on the mound of brave Achilles.

(another toast)

Drink to brave Achilles, mightiest of all the Greeks--drink up, my friends, drink up! Meanwhile, in the city, the slaughter proceeds. Every male must die. Every woman a slave. The rape of an entire city, a whole world, an entire civilization, one by one by one. There goes one, after him, run him down, quarter him, in pieces, leave him in the dirt. There goes another, take her, may she never forget. Burn it.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS(cont'd)

Burn it to the ground. Let there be nothing left. Not a hair. Cut, slash, hack, death, blood, rivers of it! Ten years we have waited for this night, drink to the sack of Troy, drink to the Greeks, drink to victory. Drink to the fields of severed limbs we left behind, to the smoldering heaps of ash and dust and dried bones. Drink--to little Astyanax. The only son of Hector, valiant prince of Troy. The boy must die, they said. If the boy lives, he will avenge what we do tonight. But he's only a child. The boy must die, says Odysseus, in final judgement. And he takes the boy under his arm, and climbs to the highest point on the smoking walls of the fiery inferno, and there before all, from the heights of Troy, he flings the child into the air, and down he tumbles, down, and down, and down, to rocky doom on the crags below. The child is dead. Only a little boy. It is done. It is conquered. It is over. Drink. Plunder. Burn. Divide the spoils. Raze the walls. Make sacrifice. Thank the gods.

(He drains his cup, and calls out to Telemakos.)

It is done.

(TELEMAKOS enters, with two big kitchen knives in hand.

She looks at the audience, anxiously.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Look at 'em all. Dead to the world.

(Thunder rumbles in the distance.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Listen. Thunder. And not a cloud in the starry night sky out there.

TELEMAKOS

Zeus?

ODYSSEUS

He's pleased. Come on.

(She gives him one of the knives.)

We have work to do.

(Blackout.)

8 SCENE EIGHT:

8

(Lights up in the room--sunrise the next morning.)

ANTINUS looks into the rising sun.

PENELOPE enters, with a folded up length of black fabric--her weaving--in hand.)

PENELOPE

Antinus?

(He doesn't respond.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

Did you sleep? I was up all night. Working. At the loom. My weaving is done. I went to find Telemakos, but his bed is empty. Have you seen him? Antinus?

(He looks at her.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

I've thought a lot about the things you said last night. I think...you're a good man, at heart. It's difficult to know how to live one's life these days. Everything seems upside down in this world. The gods push us and pull us in so many different directions, for reasons that we can never fully understand. Their petty jealousies, and disputes--how are we to know what moves them to favor us, or destroy us? What do the gods desire of us? What makes them love us, hate us? Are they at war with one another? Is that what drives the world? I think so, perhaps. The men against the women. The old against the new, the young against the old. Who's winning, I wonder? Who will lose? I don't know why, but I'm hopeful.

(She kisses him.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

What's wrong?

ANTINUS

I have to go.

PENELOPE

Shall we see your father?

ANTINUS

I have to join the others.

PENELOPE

The others--who?

ANTINUS

The wine was drugged.

PENELOPE

What wine?

ANTINUS

Last night, in there, the storyteller told a tale, as we sipped the wine, laced with a drug that has a strange power over the senses.

PENELOPE

What?

ANTINUS

He rhapsodized upon the fall of Troy, the awful calamity of the war, the death of so many--for what? Does anyone recall? I wept as he spoke. My uncle died in the war. Wounded once, he returned again to the front, and then was struck a second time, but the second time was fatal, his skull cleaved in two. Slaughtered with the rest. How many went down in that war? Will we ever know? Yes, I wept as he sang. But then something strange. A numbness in my lips, my tongue, my fingertips, a drowsiness, I couldn't hold my head up, couldn't move my arms, my legs. I was on the floor, powerless to move, but my eyes--my eyes were still open. And I watched, as they moved through the room, one by one, cutting the throats of every one of us there. When my turn came, I saw the face of Telemakos, cursing me through angry teeth, cursing my soul forever more, as the life slowly drained out of me.

PENELOPE

No.

ANTINUS

The blood of fifty, pooling on the floor, a rising red tide, washing us all away. All still. An audience of bloody corpses, frozen in silence, faces aghast, throats gaping, limbs all askew, a soaking red slaughterhouse.

PENELOPE

But you're here. Alive, standing before me.

ANTINUS

Only my shade remains.

PENELOPE

No.

ANTINUS

My father will avenge this crime. Wars will follow. Blood begets blood begets blood.

(ANTINUS exits into the garden.)

PENELOPE

Wait... Antinus... Wait...

(ODYSSEUS enters from the dining room, covered in blood, and confronts PENELOPE.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

You. Who are you?

ODYSSEUS

You really don't recognize me?

(beat)

Time does funny things to us, eh? Funny things.

(sings)

This old man, he played one,
He played knick-knack on my thumb.
With a knick-knack, paddy whack,
Give a dog a bone,
This old man came rolling home...

Where's the dog?

PENELOPE

Who are you?

ODYSSEUS

I had to go all the way to the ends of the earth to find my way home. I crossed the five rivers, the Rivers of Sorrow and Lamentation, where I wept for all those I left behind-- brave men that died on the fields of battle--across the River of Fire, where I saw the whole world go up in flames, across the River of Forgetfulness, where I drank from the wine-dark waters and forgot all my sorrows. Down I went, down into the great pit of Tartarus, prison of all the old gods, dungeon of all damned souls, the land of Erebus, where stands the House of Hades, amidst the Fields of Asphodel. There the Old Man himself feasted me, his slave girls bathed me, and caressed my skin with fragrant oils, while music played on soft strings, and life went on, and on, and on. Till finally, I crossed the last river, the River of Hate, the most difficult crossing of all, to the Islands of the Blessed, the Elysian Islands, where the virtuous reside through eternity, where all initiates of the ancient mysteries dwell.

(MORE)

ODYSSEUS(cont'd)

And it was there I finally learned the only way back home, the way that had eluded me all these many years: all I had to do is follow my own footsteps, backwards, all the way back to where I began, right back here, homeland, home, the center of the world. Back to the woman I left behind, my faithful, loving wife...

(TELEMAKOS enters, also covered in blood.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Back to my son. My heir. The future. It is accomplished. The family is restored. The house is reclaimed. The pretenders have been punished. Life is good again. The journey is ended. I'm home, Penelope. Come kiss me.

PENELOPE

I don't know who you are.

ODYSSEUS

I'm your husband, the Raider of Cities.

(She shakes her head, no.)

ODYSSEUS (cont'd)

Is the old bed still up there? You can't imagine how long I've dreamed of sleeping in that bed again. Beside you.

TELEMAKOS

Enough.

ODYSSEUS

Come, my dear. To bed.

PENELOPE

(to Telemakos)

What have you done? Murdered them? All? Here in our house? How could you do such a thing?

ODYSSEUS

Let's go.

PENELOPE

That is not your father. That is not the man that I married. The man that I loved, and waited for, for twenty years. I don't know who he is, but it's not him.

(beat)

Those men have families. There will be vendetta. They will make war on us. The whole island...

ODYSSEUS

We'll see about that.

PENELOPE

The gods will curse you forever for this.

ODYSSEUS

The gods wanted this. They demanded it. We couldn't have done it without them.

PENELOPE

Do you really believe this man is your father?

TELEMAKOS

Do as he says.

(TELEMAKOS exits.)

ODYSSEUS

She'll make a fine king one day. You've done well. You're as beautiful as you were the day I left. It's time we went up to the bedroom. Then, perhaps, a bath.

(beat)

Don't be long.

(ODYSSEUS exits.)

PENELOPE

(alone)

This is all my fault. All my fault.

(Thunder rumbles in the distance.)

The owl hoots.

Lights change to a spot light on PENELOPE.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

I run. Run from the house, run, into the rising sun, tears streaming down my cheeks, down to the water's edge, down to the sea. Escape, somehow, forever. Throw myself into the waves? Turn to stone? Some god take pity on me, turn me into a tree, a flower, a bird, let me fly away across the sea. No? No? Then I'll hide. Hide in the rocks. Hide all day. Huddle in the darkness, all night long. Shivering in the cold. Sleep.

(closes her eyes)

Finally sleep.

(opens her eyes)

Who are you? A fisherman. With kind eyes. And a gentle voice. A stranger on Ithaka, returning to the mainland. Will you take me with you? Surely some god in disguise. But which one? I do not know. At dawn we set sail. And my journey begins.

(She drapes the black fabric over her,
a beautiful black robe.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

Ten years I wander. Telling stories as I go. In exchange for hospitality, something to eat, a roof over my head for the night. Perhaps a warm bath. I cross the highlands of Arcadia, to the snow-capped peaks of Thessaly, where I pass through the shadow of Mount Olympus, ancient home of the gods. I travel by ship across the blue Aegean, to sacred Delos. I pray in the temple of Hera. On the isle of Crete, I walk the halls of the labyrinth in Knossos, around and around and around, among the bare-breasted priestesses of the Sacred Bull. Northward, along the coast of the Black Sea. The Amazon, Queen Hippolyta, makes a royal guest of me. I unchain Andromeda from her captivity on the rock, lead Eurydice out of darkness through the gateway at Necromanthion, shelter Io from the stinging gadfly, and spit in the face of Orestes the matricide. On I go. The years pass. A child smiles sweetly at me as I walk along the road. She laughs. Never will I be forced into the bed of a man I do not desire. Sometimes you have to give up everything you have, in order to get what you really want. Ten years I wander, till finally I return to the place where I began.

(TELEMAKOS enters, and sits in the
chair.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

Telemakos--King of Ithaka.

(ODYSSEUS enters, in a silk robe, open
to reveal his boxer shorts underneath,
a bottle of wine in hand.)

PENELOPE (cont'd)

A teller of stories.

ODYSSEUS

Sing, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man so skilled in all the ways of contending, the wanderer, harried for years on end, after he plundered the stronghold on the proud heights of Troy.

(ODYSSEUS chugs the wine.)

PENELOPE

Does no one recognize me here? Perhaps the grey-eyed one has cloaked me in some disguise that none can see through.

ODYSSEUS

Sing of how he strung the great bow, that none other could string, and revealed himself before all the assembled suitors of his faithful wife, Penelope.

(another chug of wine)

PENELOPE

Or perhaps no one here ever really knew me.

ODYSSEUS

(heroically)

Casting off his rags, he cries out, it is I, Odysseus, son of Laertes, master mariner, soldier and strategist, harrower of the gods, now you yellow dogs, you who thought I'd never make it home, you who plundered my house, you who dare to bid for my wife whilst I still live--all of you, your last hour has come. Now you die in blood. And with his brave son, Telemakos, at his side, the two together set out to be revenged on the wicked one hundred. Drawing back an arrow in the great bow, brave Odysseus let fly the shaft, and called to Apollo to guide it home to its mark. Shot after shot whilst his arrows did last, great Odysseus dealt out redress. He shot and he shot, till his quiver was empty, and dozens lay dead on the tiles. Breathing hard, snorting like wild bulls, father and son stood firm at the door, facing the final assault. Now with swords alone, like mighty blacksmiths beating down on red hot steel and anvil, now a lopping blow, now a slicing cut, still they came on, with a thrust, and a stab, and a chop, all through the day, till at last, no one remained, and death's black fury slowly passed.

(down on the floor)

Imagine a fisherman's catch, in a fine-meshed net, when all are poured out on the sand, twitching their cold lives away in the sun, so the suitors lay heaped up that day in the house, a hundred and some all lay dead. While Odysseus, lord of all the tricks of war, stood erect, a lion splashed with blood and muck. True Odysseus...The brave...

(ODYSSEUS passes out.)

TELEMAKOS notices the woman in black,
but doesn't recognize her.)

TELEMAKOS

Who are you?

PENELOPE

A traveler, my lord. One who has seen the world.

TELEMAKOS

What do you want?

PENELOPE

There is a curse on Ithaka.

TELEMAKOS

Who are you?

PENELOPE

Ten years of war have ravaged the island.

TELEMAKOS

There is no curse.

PENELOPE

Poverty. Disease. Soon there will be starvation. Nothing grows here anymore. The gods have cursed you.

(pointing at Odysseus)

So long as he remains in this house.

TELEMAKOS

Who are you?

PENELOPE

Cast him out.

TELEMAKOS

He's my father.

PENELOPE

No, child, he is not. Cast him out.

(PENELOPE starts to go.)

TELEMAKOS

Where are you going?

PENELOPE

Home.

(beat)

Cast him out.

(PENELOPE exits through the garden.)

TELEMAKOS sits on the throne, and looks at ODYSSEUS, lying passed out on the floor.)

ODYSSEUS

(in a drunken sleep)

I killed a giant. Stabbed him in the eye...

(TELEMAKOS looks at the drunk on the floor, and wonders what to do.)

Blackout.)

THE END