

PENELOPE

A Play in Three Acts

By

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Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

- Eurynome a servant
- Penelope. the queen
- Amphinomos. suitor of Penelope
- Telemachos. her son
- Melantho. a slave
- The Sailor

(Reference is also made to four characters who do not appear on-stage:
Eurymachos, a guest, Medon, the household marshall; Eumaeus, the swineherd;
and Eurycleia, Odysseus's old nurse.)

A pronouncing guide

Ailoia (I-o' lia)

Ailos (I-o' lus)

Amphinomos (Am-fin' -o-mos)

Antinioos (An tin' -o-us)

Dulichion (Do-lick' -eon)

Eumaeus (You-may' us)

Eurycleia (You-rey-klay' ia)

Eurynome (You-rin' a-me)

Laertes (La-air' -tes)

Medon (May' don)

Melantho (Me-lan' tho)

Nausicaa (Now-seek' a-a)

Odysseys Laertiades (O-di' see-us La-air' -tee-ah' des)

Penelope (Pe-ne' lo-pe)

Telemachos (Te-le' -ma-kos or Tele-ma'kos)

Setting

The setting is ancient Ithaca, at the palace of Penelope.

The action takes place on one complete day.

Act I. Daybreak

Act II. Noon

Act III. Dusk

Act I, Scene 1.

Penelope's bedchamber

As the action begins the stage is black. It is too dark for the audience to see. From afar comes the distant note of a horn. It dies away. All is blackness. Then cautiously a figure enters, cupping a tiny oil lamp. The flickering light is too low to reveal either the setting or the features of the person entering.

The figure crosses the stage, sets down the lamp and moves to one side, where she throws open the shutters of one window. By a weak dawn light we see it is Eurynome. As the shutter opens the room itself is revealed - wide, spacious, and also spare. Three windows are covered by wooden shutters (one now open, as Eurynome ties it back). At one end of the room is a bed covered with sheepskins, in which Penelope sleeps, and in another corner the shadowed suggestion of a long unused and dusty tapestry frame. These ideas are brought out bit by bit as the light increases in the room, and finally the audience notices as well that Penelope is lying in the bed.

EURYNOME

(throwing back the first shutter) Wake up, wake up! It's a beautiful day.

(For the next few minutes she is preoccupied tying back the shutters, opening and airing the room. She is a woman well along in years, heavy with work, but strong.)

PENELOPE

(stretching in bed) Oh, what a dream I had.

EURYNOME

Look, the storm is over, the sun is shining, and the sky as hard and blue as granite. The wind's shifted too.. It's coming from the mountain now.

PENELOPE

(sniffing the air) The smell of winter snow.

EURYNOME

Winter indeed: It's a beautiful autumn day.

(Now with two shutters open, Penelope is revealed in bed, a fine strong woman in her middle age. Eurynome is hauling on a shutter. She turns gaily to her mistress.)

And what a day. Such a lot to do. And us all exhausted from last night.

PENELOPE

I've never seen such a storm.

EURYNOME

No, and not a bit of sleep for us downstairs. That new girl, up she leaps at the first stroke of lightning, screaming and jumping as if she'd never heard a storm before.

PENELOPE

That's . . . That's . . .

EURYNOME

Melantho.

PENELOPE

Yes.

EURYNOME

No one could sleep with her running around the room, tripping over blankets and squealing like a pig at nose-ringing time. Then, you know what she did?
(Pausing for effect) She opened the door and ran out past all the men sleeping in the outer hall!

PENELOPE

Past the men?

EURYNOME

Waking them up, too, with her shrill little shrieks, her oh! and eeh! And down she runs to the wine cellar steps.

PENELOPE

(incredulous) In the dark?

EURYNOME

Crouching on the steps with the cobwebs in her hair and the mouse droppings under foot. And she in just her skin!

PENELOPE

Is she. . . *(tapping her forehead)*.

EURYNOME

Ah, isn't she though! Just then comes a clap of thunder like to suck the breath out of your lungs, and she throws herself against Eurymachos, pressing up on him, so he lifted her up and carried her back to bed. Hmph. Would a been his own too, but I wouldn't have none of that. No sir. Not in this house. And she not here a week!

(She puts out oil lamp. The shutters all tied back now. Turns to Penelope, who has risen from bed, wrapping herself luxuriantly in sheepskins. Penelope is concerned by story, interested. Amused.)

PENELOPE

Has she a dowry?

EURYNOME

Not a wooden spoon to call her own.

PENELOPE

No property at all. . . We'll have to settle her I think. A girl like that isn't healthy in a house . . . Is any man preferred?

EURYNOME

I doubt it. She likes all men.

PENELOPE

I'll watch for her.

(From the moment Penelope has left her bed and throughout this scene she is dressing with Eurynome's assistance. Eurynome moves around laying out robes, putting out belts, brushing Penelope's hair.)

I remember that thunderclap though, It woke me up. The rain was beating on the shutters. The wind moaned and when I looked outside I could see the olive trees whipping in the black night like silver witches' hair. God save poor sailors out in last night's storm.

EURYNOME

Can you imagine? The waves broke right through the seawall.

PENELOPE

Is it bad?

EURYNOME

I don't know. Medon heard it from the woodcutter, when he brought in wood. He's gone down to inspect it. Now, here's your water ready, mistress, for washing in, and I'll just go see where the girl's got to with your breakfast.

(exit Eurynome. Penelope sits before her table. She has the direct, forceful manner of one accustomed to command, wasting neither motion nor words. She stares at herself in her mirror, a direct examination without vanity, looking then more closely at the lines around her eyes and mouth.)

PENELOPE

(to her image) So you dreamed of Odysseus last night. And now you think it an omen, don't you? But what a dream! A great eagle flying at me while I lay in bed. His shadow darkened the house as he approached and screeching -- talons spread -- Oh gods! The crash was only thunder, and the shutters were intact, but I woke shaking.

Why do I think it concerned Odysseus?

Stop it! He's dead. I know he is. Yes, he'd do that, smash his way through any barrier. I'll not have it! Not today, not even in my dreams to interrupt --

(She stops, as Eurynome enters carrying a tray of cheese, fruit and milk.)

EURYNOME

Well, if it's not one thing it's another. There. (setting down the tray)

And now it's bodies washed ashore like logs of wood. Today! As if there weren't enough to do.

PENELOPE

What are you talking about?

EURYNOME

(grimly) It's not a good sign, that's what.

PENELOPE

What's not?

EURYNOME

(savoring her news) Medon just told me a dead man's washed ashore.

PENELOPE

A dead man?!

EURYNOME

A sailor, cast up on the beach. Eumaeus found him this morning when he took out the pigs.

PENELOPE

Today? You're sure he's dead?,

EURYNOME

I should expect so, with the waves last night. Fifty feet high, and curling above the upper rocks. Even now, you could never take a boat out there today.

PENELOPE

Dead. Poor man. But what a thing to happen now. Well, we'll have to bury him right away. Send Medon in. I have to talk to him.

EURYNOME

What! Before you're dressed? With your hair all down like that?

PENELOPE

(laughing) Well, go yourself then. Tell him I say the body is to be buried at once. And Medon himself must perform the proper rites, with wine and fine white meal to sprinkle on the ground. Properly, mind, with all ceremony, but tell him not to waste our time. We have a lot to do today. Tell him I want to see him when he's finished.

(exit Eurynome)

What a time for a corpse to wash ashore. Ninety guests with all their servants in the house. It should be a day of revelry, not marred with dead men. What does it mean? Stop it, Penelope. Get hold of yourself. You act like a giddy girl.

(enter Eurynome, out of breath)

EURYNOME

Talking to your mirror? -Caught you, didn't I? Well, it goes to show.

(She picks up brush; Penelope sits at table. Eurynome begins to brush her hair.)

PENELOPE

Show what?

EURYNOME

Oh, it shows it's long enough you've lived like a hermit. It's time you took a husband. Even on such queer terms. I've never heard the like of that I'll tell you.

PENELOPE

(smiles) Of what?

EURYNOME

You know, of this . . . *(gesturing)* this . . . I mean, usually a wife follows her husband. That's what I mean. This business that you live --

PENELOPE

Eurynome! You understand nothing. Fools. I suppose you are all gossiping in the kitchen about that, are you?

EURYNOME

Gossiping! Mistress! I swear no one knows but me. And I wouldn't tell. Hmph! I understand some things, I do, even if I am a servant.

PENELOPE

Of course you do. Oh Eurynome, I don't know what I'd do without you . . . But don't you really understand? How could I give it up? To go away to some strange house. Think! This

house, the fields. It's not, that they are mine, Eurynome. They are me. My lands that I have worked, my people, my house . . .

EURYNOME

Ah, well now, I don't even know what that means.

PENELOPE

How could you. Perhaps if you had ever owned a plot of land you'd understand how it can take possession of you, until it owns you more than -

EURYNOME

Well, I don't see the sense of that. If owning a thing makes you the slave of what you own, you may as well be a slave, I think, and own nothing. Any way it's not right. Everyone knows a decent woman gives her property to her husband when she marries. That's the way things are.

PENELOPE

Enough of this! Amphinomos understands and that's what matters. I agree to marry him. I live one part of the year on his estates but he in turn will live the rest on mine. I won't discuss it further.

EURYNOME

I'm not asking you to discuss it, I'm sure.

PENELOPE

I will not see my work destroyed by poor management or slovenly --

EURYNOME

That's up to you.

PENELOPE

(savagely) Would you want someone else to own you? Would you be happy in the power of some stranger?

EURYNOME

Mistress!

PENELOPE

Did you ever hear what this place was like when Odysseus left? A wasted, worn out land. He left me here with his little son and ten or fifteen servants, and most of them the old and sick. We had 20 pigs to eat, did you know that? -- and a pack of hunting dogs, and his father going senile, and the red land washing down the gullied hills in every rainstorm because he had never terraced properly or plowed across his fields.

EURYNOME

And no stores to speak of --

PENELOPE

Because he'd taken them all to war . . . Now . . . look at the kingdom. We have 250 sows farrowing, and 20 boars alone. The house is broad and the servants healthy. Laertes, his father, is cared for, crazy and queer and babbling to himself up there on his own farm, dressed in his country leather. But he's alive, isn't he, at 90-odd? And he's not poor.

EURYNOME

No one could say you have not provided.

PENELOPE

No one could say I have not provided. I have husbanded these lands. I raised my son and washed the old man, Laertes.

(she relaxes, smiling; takes up the brush and twists her hair up herself.)

And I have loved doing it, Eurynome. I have loved my land and bringing forth its fruit. You see why I can't give it up?

EURYNOME

But in marriage --

PENELOPE

Not even in marriage. I could not bear to see it wasted or abused.

EURYNOME

As if the lord Amphinomos would --

PENELOPE

(smiling) I know. I know. Never mind. He understands. The contract is made.

(She looks at her image in the mirror. Suddenly she is struck with self-doubt.)

Eurynome?. . . You don't think I'm foolish, do you?

EURYNOME

Foolish?

PENELOPE

You don't think I'm a foolish old woman?

EURYNOME

Whatever are you talking about? To marry the lord Amphinomos?

PENELOPE

Oh, Eurynome. I'm so frightened sometimes. I don't know how I feel. Look at me. My hair is gray.

EURYNOME

Is turning gray.

PENELOPE

I've lost two teeth.

EURYNOME

You've others in your mouth.

PENELOPE

My face . . . my hands . . . look at the wrinkles. What am I doing? The mother of a grown son and accustomed to authority. For 19 years no man has told me what to do . . . And look at me! When I see him -- will you laugh? - when I see him, my heart leaps up like a dog to his master's hand. Me! Penelope! Look at me! I'm not a blushing bride! I'm an old woman! And I flutter like a schoolgirl.

EURYNOME

Well, what a man to flutter for. Handome, brave, and never an unkind word from his mouth. He's not like your Antinoos who courted you before. Oh then, weren't we frightened you would marry him.

PENELOPE

My loom saved me then. Dusty old cloth. A good trick too, because I could not afford to make an enemy of such a man. I could only stall. No. I could never have married Antinoos, thank you. Oh Eurynome, even now, I'm so frightened at times. I am filled, with foreboding.

(From afar the sound of funeral music, growing louder as the procession approaches.)

EURYNOME

There. The funeral begins.

(The two women move to the window to watch.)

PENELOPE

Foreboding .

EURYNOME

Now, that's not like you.

PENELOPE

I have such a -- I dreamed of Odysseus last night, and now this dead man's washed ashore.

What does it mean?

EURYNOME

What was the dream?

PENELOPE

An eagle that burst screeching into my room and vanished.

EURYNOME

Vanished while it was in the room?

PENELOPE

Yes.

EURYNOME

Why it's clear as day. It means Odysseus is dead and gone. And here's a body washed ashore to prove it -- a dead body, just like his that was.

PENELOPE

Yes, yes. I hadn't thought of that.

(They stand in silence watching the funeral procession from the window. Throughout the next long speech the music will play, undertone, gradually fading before the end.)

You know, Eurynome, it was just such a day as this that I left home to be married. That was 22 years ago. A crisp fall day, with a sky like a ringing bell. I was so happy. I danced with joy into my mother's bedroom. "Wake up," I said, tumbling into bed with her. "Today we leave. Will I be happy, Mother? Will Odysseus love me? Tell me again what will happen."

She smiled that tender, gentle smile. I was thirteen years old. "Such a grown-up girl," she said. "My little child."

"Oh Mother!" I was annoyed, you, understand.' "Tell me about Odysseus. What does he look like? How will he act with me?"

Because in those days a proper girl, you know, wouldn't see her husband before the wedding day.

EURYNOME

But you had peeped at him, hadn't you? From an upper story? Or behind the pillar on the stair?

PENELOPE

I never saw him though. I'd tried.

(she laughs, and now she is going back in memory to become that earlier girl.)

I sneaked and peeked about with my two friends in fits of laughter, but somehow I always just missed seeing him.

Oh, but my mother told me of him. . .

(remembering her mother's voice)

He was not very tall, she said, but broad across the shoulders, and he walked head forward like a bull. A golden bull, head crowned with laurel. He stood up in the great hall of my father's palace, and all eyes turned on him. The drinking stopped. A hush fell. He stood, holding his spear casually in one hand, surveying the crowd. Everyone knew why he had come. I knew it too, upstairs in the women's rooms. I was very young, but I knew a King had come for my hand.

How were they to know? How was I to know? My father accepted his gifts on condition that he wait until I reached my time. And for the next three days there was feasting, but Odysseus returned home without ever seeing me; nor I him.

I never tired of my mother's descriptions. Or my father stroking my hair, and he would get a far-off look his eyes and shake his head. 'What is it?' I asked him once, but he shook his head and combed his beard with his fingers to hide his smile.

"I was thinking how happy I've been with your mother," he answered. "How fortunate is Odysseus to have a wife like you."

It's true. They loved each other. They would talk for hours together, looking in each Other's eyes. How were they to guess what would happen to me?

EURYNOME

Oh, mistress. Don't!

PENELOPE

We were married in Odysseus's house. My father was very ill and could not come. He sent me with my mother and some servants.

EURYNOME

All these years --

PENELOPE

We came up the mountains by mule. I had never seen such hills. I kept turning my head and looking up to see the tiny patch of sky between the peaks. Because I was accustomed to wide blue sky in Sparta. Finally we arrived. I was stunned. The house so cold and forbidding. And not well-planned as it is now. No, but bare walls and cold stones. Not at all like the sunny rooms of my father's palace. And the servants spoke that strange mountain twang. I don't know what I'd do without it now. Now it `s music to my ears, but then it seemed barbaric.' We were married the next morning, and I laid eyes for the first time on my husbandAnd after the ceremony (*talking more to herself*). . . after the ceremony, all the men went out on a hunt. 'A boar hunt. Even my mother thought that was strange.

Afternoon passed into dusk, and dusk to night. My mother lay in the bed beside me for company. I remember 'I wore the nightgown I had made myself for just this precious night. It was the finest soft white wool, with a blue ribbon. How I worked on that gown. My mother played with my braids and told me how loving my husband would be, how beautiful this night would be. She told me how she too had been 'frightened on her wedding night -- but all girls are; and how my father had `came into her room and lay on the bed beside her, he a man of 18 then and she being 12. And he had lain on top of the sheepskins, fully clothed, while they talked till dawn. Then he had crawled under the covers, shivering with cold and they had talked until they fell asleep in each other's arms; and when they woke he had kissed her, she said, gently on each eye -- which so fired them both - My wedding night was different. The night came on. It grew later and

later. My mother would glance at the door with a worried frown. Once we fell asleep. And then there was a clash of doors below and raucous laughter and footsteps clattering on the stones. I stood up beside the bed; facing the door. My mother beside me. -And oh!the door opened with a crash.

EURYNOME

Oh!

PENELOPE

He was covered with blood. His hands. His clothes. His hair all matted with dried boar's blood. I shrank back. Ooowwww His lips turned back from his teeth like an animal snarl. 'Odysseus!' My mother cried, at which he roared: 'Get out!' He threw my mother from the room, my mother, Eurynome.

EURYNOME

Eoi, moi.

PENELOPE

One foot kicked closed the door and one hand pulled the latch, and all the time he was staring at me. I was a child, a baby in my white dress, trembling with fear. I put out one hand. He leapt across the bed, and Eurynome, I ran. He grabbed me by the waist. I screamed. And then he ripped my dress in two. His hand over my mouth, covering my scream. Oh gods, oh god.

EURYNOME

Mistress!

PENELOPE

He raped me again and again, Eurynome. It was an orgy of blood. He took his bloody knife and held it to my throat. I could see the dried hair of the boar stuck in that dried blood. He pricked my nostrils with his knife. He beat me with his fists and when he finally fell across the bed, Eurynome, in a stupor of sleep, I was bleeding everywhere. I stumbled to the door. I crawled on my hands and knees to my mother, weeping helplessly outside the door, and I collapsed.

EURYNOME

Eoi, moimoi.

PENELOPE

(in rage) Do you know, Eurynome, I could not walk for days? That was the man I was given to. My parents tried to buy me back. And he refused. Oh, generous king! He said he had paid for me. They could not take me home.

EURYNOME

Oh, mistress! Mistress!

PENELOPE

Well, I learned. I learned to control his lust.

EURYNOME

It's not right to talk of --

PENELOPE

He did not rape me again like that. No I learned that at least.

EURYNOME

Mistress. It's long ago. It's not right to think of things like that. Come now. Up, and let the dead be dead. As if we don't have enough to do today with a houseful of guests and a new life to plan.

PENELOPE

You're right. He's dead. I'll not have him back to haunt me. Come. I want to make sure Eumaeus kills his pigs! *(laughs)* You know I ordered the white boar sacrificed. It makes the second time. Eumaeus has a way of falling in love with his animals and then he refuses to slaughter them. This time I told him he couldn't hide the boar in the woods again. I'm afraid he's very angry with me.

(During speech, enter Amphinomos, an older man; strong, well-formed, grizzled beard.)

AMPHINOMOS

And don't you want to see Amphinomos?

PENELOPE

Amphinomos!

(Her face lights up; she makes a movement toward him.)

EURYNOME

Oh, my lord. *(bustling about, cleaning up)* I didn't know it was so late.

AMPHINOMOS

At least, Eurynome, I thought you'd tell her to see the most important people first. I come behind the swineherd now?

PENELOPE

Amphinimos. *(She has eyes only for him.)*

AMPHINOMOS

How beautiful you are.

(This must be subtly played. Amphinomos is a mature and experienced man, a thoughtful, graceful human being, gentle and passionately in love with a capable, strong woman. He does not at any time treat her as a property, and when he says 'How beautiful you are,' he makes it a statement of fact, not a compliment or deprecating flattery to a child. They are equals.)

PENELOPE

Amphinomos.

(Exit Eurynome, bustling)

AMPHINOMOS

How good you smell.

PENELOPE

Do I? I feel so strange today.

AMPHINOMOS

You're upset.

PENELOPE

I don't know. Yes. I am upset.

AMPHINIOMOS

What's wrong?

PENELOPE

(laughing) Look at me! You'd think I was ablushing bride. My fingers are so swollen, I can't get my' rings on. I—

AMPHINOMOS

(bursts out laughing)

PENELOPE

I know. As if --

AMPHINOMOS

(teasing) As if you're to marry today. Well, look at me.

PENELOPE

(surprised) You?

AMPHINOMOS

I don't get married every day. First I didn't sleep all night. Then when I found myself standing outside your door a moment, ago, my hands broke out in sweat. One moment I can't believe my luck and the next I worry --

PENELOPE

What could you have to --?

AMPHINOMOS

I worried all night. Was I doing the right thing in marrying you?

PENELOPE

(Worried herself.) Oh.

AMPHINIMOS

Will I make you happy? And then I swore that anything you need for happiness is yours -- even if it means I go away.

PENELOPE

(laughing) So that's your love that wants to leave its love?

AMPHINOMOS

I know. I'm like a little boy, my heart in turmoil and only easy when it comes in sight of you. Last night -I set myself to think of you, and made a case: What would I do if you ordered me to go away?

PENELOPE

What would you do?

AMPHINOMOS

I would plead and question your decision. I would take you in my arms and kiss your mouth until your body refused to obey your own words.

PENELOPE

(teasing) And if I still insisted?

AMPHINIMOS

(serious) And if you cruelly ordered me away, or if I had to go to save your life -- because that is the only reason I can think of to make me go -- then

PENELOPE

Yes?

AMPHINOMOS

(teasing) But I don't need to, do I, Penelope? So you will never know.

PENELOPE

(happily) No. I will never know. I hope I never know . . . Did you hear our unlucky sign? A dead man washed ashore last night.

AMPHINOMOS

I heard --

PENELOPE

I have ordered him buried.

AMPHINOMOS

Poor soul. And probably his family waiting for him still . . .

PENELOPE

Well, we can't be bothered by that. The storm broke through the seawall and I want to look at that this morning. And then I must see Eumaeus. Do you want to come?

AMPHINOMOS

Yes. But wait -- I have to talk to you.

PENELOPE

About?

AMPHINOMOS

Telemachos. You should tell him what is happening tonight. At this harvest feast.

PENELOPE

We've been through that.

AMPHINOMOS

It's wrong not to warn him about us. He's your son, not a servant in the house.

PENELOPE

I don't know --

AMPHINOMOS

I do. Why won't you tell him?

PENELOPE

I want to surprise him. I want to have him learn it all at once, including my . . . gift.

AMPHINOMOS

One-half the lands?

PENELOPE

Yes, and the other half upon my death, so that before witnesses he knows --

AMPHINOMOS

(scornfully) Then tell him that. But don't surprise him at a public --

PENELOPE

He'll like it.

AMPHINOMOS

But will he like the manner of the gift? Surely out of respect for him --

(they are close to quarreling)

PENELOPE

Respect. I have enough respect for him.

AMPHINOMOS

Then do it for me. Because I ask you to.

PENELOPE

I don't know . . . What will he think?

AMPHINOMOS

Woman! What does he think now. You think he's blind that he has no opinion about his mother and myself?

PENELOPE

Silence! I will not have that said. All right . . . I shall think about: it. Let me see. If the time is right, and I see him, then I will tell him in advance. If I can.

AMPHINOMOS

For me, Penelope. You know it's right.

PENELOPE

Now I must look to the wall. And Eumaeus. Will you come?

AMPHINOMOS

You're impossible . . . We have a seawall at home 1'1.1 show you, that's built
in such a way that . . .

(exuent, talking)

Act I. Scene 2

The stage becomes a hallway. It is bare of furnishings. From offstage comes a series of little giggles and shrieks. Enter, running, Melantho. She is a beautiful girl, dark-skinned, exotic, a foreign slave. She is still a child, hardly more than 12 or 13, but she has a seductive, sultry quality picked up from observing older women. Her gestures are wild and open, bar-baric in comparison to the restraint of her masters. She is half-child, half-woman, vulnerable and scared. She covers her insecurity with a protective mask of sensuousness.

She is followed by Telemachos -- tall, healthy, handsome in a sullen, indolent way.

He catches her, laughing, pins her to the wall, as she squirms, giggling, slapping his hand away.

MELANTHO

Stop that!

TELEMACHOS

You think I didn't see you last night?

MELANTHO

I don't know what you mean.

TELEMACHOS

Oh don't you? I saw you eye me over that man's shoulder.

MELANTHO

(slipping away) Telemachooooos.

TELEMACHOS

It wouldn't have been to your own bed I took you, if I'd been he. And you'd have come.

(kissing her)

MELANTHO

No, wait. What of your mother?

TELEMACHOS

My mother!

MELANTHO

Ohw!

TELEMACHOS

What has she to do with me! Remember if I want you --

MELANTHO

(breaking away)

And what would you want with me, a poor foreigner . .

TELEMACHOS

Want to know?

(He reaches for her, fumbling, as enter Penelope and Amphinomos, who stop stunned.)

PENELOPE

Telemachos! What do you think you're doing? Shame! Shame! With a servant!

And you *(to Melantho)* Out! I shall deal with you later!

(exit Melantho at a run)

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope, he's only a boy.

PENELOPE

He's old enough to cause his share of problems.

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope, if you must speak to him - -

PENELOPE

I am still the mistress of this house.

AMPHINOMOS

(angrily) You forget everything we've talked about? What we agreed --?

PENELOPE

At a time like this you think of that?

AMPHINOMOS

Woman, will you never learn?

(Penelope turns to Telemachos)

I'll not be witness to this scene!

PENELOPE

Dishonor, Telemachos! Shame and dishonor! Have you no idea what trouble that causes in a house? Have you no diversions, no woman of your own that you chase after mine? And a foreigner! A slave!

TELEMACHOS

(undertone) You're one to talk.

PENELOPE

Have you no pride? No sense of dignity? I sent you to Menelaus and around the whole Greek Isles to give you breadth of understanding and you return to --

TELEMACHOS

Oh, I know why you sent me away.

PENELOPE

-- lounge restless in the sun and paw the --

TELEMACHOS

(louder) Dishonor on you, I say!

PENELOPE

How dare you!

TELEMACHOS

I remind you of my father, don't I?

PENELOPE

What do you mean?

TELEMACHOS

That's why you sent me away. You always, hated my father, didn't you? You were glad when he left.

PENELOPE

Don't talk of things you do not understand.

TELEMACHOS

To visit kings and meet their daughters, you said. But it was because I remind you of Odysseus and you cannot bear the sight!

PENELOPE

That wasn't it at all.

TELEMACHOS

I look like him. Thinner maybe and taller. But I am his son!

PENELOPE

(fiercely) You look nothing like him. He was a -- Never mind.

TELEMACHOS

He was a hero. Yet you hated him.

PENELOPE

Stop it, Telemachos! We're discussing your behavior, not mine.

TELEMACHOS

The two combine.

(They glare at each other.)

This houseful of guests. A disgrace to his good name.

TELEMACHOS

Yes, of Odysseus. And I am his son-.

PENELOPE

(recovering) Then act like it. Act like a king. I sent you on that tour to see the world and grow into a man. You're twenty now. It's time you showed control.

TELEMACHOS

Showed control. Yes, as if you'd let me show control. You sent me away so I could show control? Control of what? The lands you grasp? The palace? My heritage, my servants.

PENELOPE

Telemachos. I have always said they would be yours.

TELEMACHOS

Then give them to me.

PENELOPE

Then deserve them!

(gaining control, she begins again)

Telemachos. Telemachos, my son. My only son. I do not mean to fight. If I offend you, it's for your own good I say such things.

TELMACHOS

My good!

PENELOPE

(gently) Oh Telemachos, I forget you're a man. I see you still as a child, a little boy left toddling in my care -- but yes, I'm giving the lands to you. Sooner than you think they're yours. You're a man now. I -- you'll see --tonight -- we'll talk of this tonight.

(exit)

TELEMACHOS

Forgets I am a man . . . For my own good. What contempt she has for me. Oh, she'll give up the land on the day it covers her clod by clod. She'll always have the land.

And I? What am I to do? Stay here a guest in my mother's house? No power! She holds the reins. No duties! The steward, the maids have more privilege than I. 'Then Act Like a King!' she said. Did you hear her?

(laughing wildly)

'Act Like a King,' she said. A king should be generous. That's what I would be, were I the King. I'd be renowned: I'd make the House of Telemachos ring through the world, 'a place where one could find the finest wines and meats and sacrifices to the gods. Not this niggardly carping on expenses: we can't afford this. We must save that. This old rag is almost perfectly good.

(Stops. Eyes audience. Cocks head)

You haven't seen that side of her yet, have you? But that's all I hear. Listen. I'm not allowed anything -- my clothes -- I have to beg new shoes. You don't believe it? You see a house full of guests and her lovers crowding round, courting Penelope, my mother, this whore!

(Approaches whispering)

They want her lands, you see, because whoever marries her gets all the land. My land. It's

Mine! And the Queen, my mother, leading them on -- pleasuring herself. That's another reason, you know, that she sent me away. So she wouldn't have me judging her.

(laughing) Because I know the joke, you see. Look. The fair Penelope will go down in history -- admit you think of her this way -- as the Faithful Wife, the gentle, pious woman who waited 20 years for her husband to return, thinking only of one man for 20 long and lonely years, with helpless sighs and teary eyes, and a tapestry that she wove day by day and took out stitch by weary stitch all night to keep her chastity intact.

Now the reality: teasing her lovers in her own house. My mother! Penelope! The whore! The whore!

(Off-stage, during the end of this speech and rising as he speaks, a hubbub of voices, growing louder, joyous and sad music mingle together. Telemachos does not take notice)

I'd clear them out. Drinking my wine! Eating my bread! They have no right --

(Off-stage, Eurynome's voice in distress)

EURYNOME

(off stage) Mistress! Mistress!

(Telemachos turns, listening. Enter Eurynome, running)

Where's the mistress?

(She stops, fanning herself, nearly fainting with exertion as behind her the noise and music grows louder, a sense of something terrible happening...)

TELEMACHOS

What's happened? Are you alright?

EURYNOME

(panting) That man. Oh!

(Enter. Penelope and Amphinimos.)

PENELOPE

Eurynome, what's wrong?

TELEMACHOS

What man?

EURYNOME

Oh mistress! The sailor! The one that's dead, he's not! He's coming to the palace now. He wasn't dead at all!

(Melantho, attracted by the noise, enters and stops at the doorway just in time to hear this speech and see Penelope, Amphinomos and Eurynome openly rejoice; all talking at once)

PENELOPE

The gods be praised!

(She turns to Amphinomos, her instinctive reaction.)

AMPHINOMOS

(embracing her)

So now the omens are good!

EURYNOME

We went out to bury him, and he wasn't dead at all!

(Penelope is laughing, Amphinomos too. Behind them, off-stage, the music rises, gay and jubilant, played on the same instruments that went out earlier as a funeral march; and only Telemachos watches his mother and her lover; scowling --)

TELEMACHOS

Who cares?

(He thrusts himself across the stage, awkward with anger and anguish, stops, looks up and sees Melantho observing everything from the door. They look at each other ... the light holds on these two, and on their glance exchanged across the others' joy.)

END ACT I

Act II, Scene 1.

The Great Hall.

The stage bare except for a long table on which is the remains of a meal: some fruit, a basket of bread, a wine goblet. One stool is pushed back casually as if the occupant has recently left.

The stage is empty.

Around a doorway peeks the sailor, barefoot, in rags, a beggar. He is an old man, missing a front tooth and whistling through the gap. He spots the bread, looks around clownishly to see if anyone is near, then creeps with comic exaggeration toward the table -- snatches up the loaf and retires to one side, hugging it. He tears off a hunk of bread and eats it hungrily. What is he? A fool? A buffoon? But there is a furtive, watchful look in his eye, as if in enemy territory.

Enter Melantho. The sailor starts, hides the bread, and shrinks back into shadow. Melantho, walking seductively, goes to clear table, bending toward audience to wipe it with broad strong strokes. Her back is to the sailor.

In pantomime the sailor cups her breasts, waist, buttocks. He grins, he leers. He expresses desire. She has not seen him. He creeps slowly up behind her, each step a cartoon -- and grabs her!

SAILOR

Gra-ha!

MELANTHO

(Twisting away, lands him a solid blow to the head that sends him sprawling)

You dirty goat. Hands off!

(Grabbing up bread-basket and goblets, she flounces to exit, bumping into Telemachos at the door. She brushes past him with an angry glare. He is surprised.)

TELEMACHOS

What's this?

MELANTHO

Who let in that trash?

(Exit Melantho. The sailor is on the floor, ears ringing. He feels himself self-pityingly for bruises.)

TELEMACHOS

(prodding him with his foot) What this? Who are you?

SAILOR

(leaping up guiltily) No, it was she started it, not me. The little tart. She come cuddling up to me. Warn't my idea. I had nothin to do w'it. *(Relaxing as he sizes up Telemachos)* But they know, ye know? The womens alays know who's got it there *(plucking at himself)*. They can sniff it out like a dog at a widdlepost. But I told her no, not in a respectable house like this. So she got mad and took it out on me. That un's not much anyway *(rubbing his arm)*. Now I seen women -

TELEMACHOS

Who is this man?

SAILOR

I seen em all kinds, all colors, big, little, tall, skinny. Trouble is wi women you give em a little something and they always want more. Know what I mean? I should guess so, fine young feller like yourself.

TELEMACHOS

Take your hands off me. Who are you, old man? *(aside)* Drooling beggar.

SAILOR

(slyly) Eh? Not polite to ask that, eh? I could ask the same. Who're you? Screwing that tart, eh? You tell me first. *(aside)* Pale young feller. A week at the oars he'd be dead. *(to Telemachos)* Yer not the steward are ye? You don't have the keys to the pantry do ye?

TELEMACHOS

(offended) The steward! The pantry! I am the Prince! I am Telemachos, son of—

SAILOR

Are ye now? The very prince.

(Enter Melanthe, stops at door listening)

TELEMACHOS

My father was Odysseus Laertiades, a hero at Illium.

SAILOR

So what happened to him. Is he dead?

TELEMACHOS

To --?

SAILOR

Yer Daddy. Is he dead?

TELEMACHOS

Ah.

SAILOR

Never came back, eh? Yep. That happens. War's a heady business. Probably set his roots down in some sweet girl, he has, and he's driving to the very pit of --

TELEMACHOS

No! If he were alive he'd be here now. *(distractedly)* He is dead.

SAILOR

You know that, eh?

TELEMACHOS

Yes. So long as there were strength in his arms, with his last breath he'd have returned.

His wife was here. His son . .

(Melanthe behind Telemachos's back throws up her hands in annoyance, leaves again)

SAILOR

(chewing his bread, watching) I knew him onct.

TELEMACHOS

Knew whom?

SAILOR

Yer blessed Dad. Odysseus.

TELEMACHOS

You knew my father?

SAILOR

(holding up two fingers together) Like that we was. Fought at Troy, didn't he? Yup. That's the one. And afterwards such a pack of voyages we took.

TELEMACHOS

(on his dignity) When did you see him last?

SAILOR

(sly) Oh my, and when might that have been? Some time ago i'twas. We was acoming home travelling in convoy, like, mebbe five or six ships in all, when a big storm come up. Separated the whole fleet.

(watchfully)

He never come, eh?

TELEMACHOS

No. He never arrived. We've had no word in years. King Menelaus saw him in Crete, but that was seven or eight years ago by now. He must be dead you see.

SAILOR

Dead? Odysseus? You mark my words, nothing could kill that snake. Squeeze the juice of death he would. I'll tell you -a story about old Odysseus. (spits) Under the walls of Troy we was"-

(hacks, coughing, a spongy tubercular sound, ending in a fit of wheezing and hacking that sends Telemachos recoiling in disgust. The coughing stops, the old man is left muttering to himself in his corner as Telemachos waits. Finally he interrupts)

TELEMACHOS

What story?

SAILOR

Story?

TELEMACHOS

A story about Odysseus.

SAILOR

Story. Yes. Which one was that?

TELEMACHOS

How should I know? Under the walls of Troy.

SAILOR

Oh yes, hehe. You know about the horse, don't you? My idea, that horse. We took the city with that horse.

TELEMACHOS

(interrupting) I've heard that story

SAILOR

Oh. That was a smart plan, that horse. Well. You wants a new story about yer daddy, eh? Onct we're out scouting, him and me and one or two others, advance scouts right up at the city walls. Our job was to be on the lookout for spies, you know, but it 's' cold (whistles). No spies was going to be out on that frost, not after 7 or 8 years of war, And- If they were, hell, we knew 'em all. So we crawled under some bushes and we're sleeping like good guards.

All cept me. Cuz like a dunce I'd forgot, my cloak. I'm shivering in the dark (he spits) thinkin: 'Now how can I get me 'a nice warm, woolen blanket without running all the way back to the ships?'

(Falls into another fit of hacking, wheezing, loses the train of the story. After a moment --)

TELEMACHOS

And?

SAILOR

And what?

TELEMACHOS

You were shivering without a cloak.

SAILOR

That's right. I was stark naked, not a blessed bush to hide in, when down the beach comes this girl. Nausicaa. So young and dear she was –

TELEMACHOS

What are you talking about?

SAILOR

(catching himself) No, no. That's another story . . . Now my memory . . . Thinking of --

(He falls into forgetful muttering for a moment, then suddenly recovers, flashes a quick, sly look at Telemachos--)

So, I'm thinking, how to get me a cloak. I elbow Odysseus in the dark. 'Hey y'old gaffer,' I whisper, 'I'm so cold I'm done for if I don't get a cloak. How think up a plan.' He laughs.

'Don't worry, old toad, my buddy, my sword

'Now quiet, and pretend to sleep.' Then we pretends we're all asleep, see? And we lie there for a time with the snoring rising up out of the bushes. Suddenly up jumps Odysseus with a shout: 'Men!' he howled. We're on our feet in a flash, stabbing the bushes. 'Men!' – but in a whisper like. *(Gesturing to gather)* 'God has sent me a dream. Attack is at hand. Thoas!' he orders, 'Run down to the Lord Agammemnon and tell him --, draw the army up on shore by dawn, for the attack will be terrible.' Thoas tosses off his cloak and he's off and running, lickety split for the beach. So I rolls up in his cloak and goes to beddy-bye. That was Odysseus for ye. Alays had a plan *(angrily)* They won't see his kind again!

TELEMACHOS

(laughing, pleased) And where have you been since Troy?

SAILOR

Been, where haven't I been? Up, down, in, out. You're thinking I'm a poor beggar now, ain't ye, but don't let looks, deceive you.

It's just an old man forgetting his manners, mind, bein as how yer daddy and me was such buddies.

TELEMACHOS

You really knew him then?

(gestures to height, his own shoulders)

Short, stumpy sort of fella, wasn't he? Brash, bragging. Rough. And a good man at the oars. Never better in a high wind, with the waves coming over the bow of the ship and the need to bend a back. *(whimpering)* the wind, damn wind. Damn damn wind, and sleet and cold. Will it ever stop? Ice on the sheets and our hands stuck frozen to the oars until the skin's ripped clean off our palms. And strangest of all, sonny, *(awed)* we was where the sun never slept. It ran low along the lip of the earth so we wondered if it was agonna teeter off at any time.

TELEMACHOS

(not believing) The sun never set? And it wasn't overhead?

SAILOR

It was light all the time. Night and day. But it warn't warm like here where you have a night and day. o, it was cold, and the wind ablwin, the damn wind. Then the Laistrygonian giants pouring out to kill us., All yeller hair and yeller beards. When we pulled away the wind knocked overboard. *(weeping)*

The waves crash over the bow, sheer green water, and the wind wailing in the shrouds, howling like a bag of wind exploding in my ear. Like a bag of wind.

(He stops)

That's it, a bag of wind, hehe, sent by that old windbag *(laughing)*.

(Enter Melantho, talking over last sentence of Sailor's speech.)

MELANTHO

Are you still here? *(To Telemachos)* Who is he anyway?

TELEMACHOS

(shrugging) A sailor. I don't know. He's raving . . . He says he knew my father.

MELANTHO

(bursts out laughing) Do you believe that?

SAILOR

(together with Telemachos)

(chuckling to himself, muttering, oblivious of the two) Hehe, what was his name? Alos . . .

Ailos Hippotadis. Talk and talk.

TELEMACHOS

(embarrassed) I don't know. Who knows? He says he travelled with Odysseus long ago. He says my father was on his way home when he saw him last.

MELANTHO

Well, I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for him.

(She is instantly sorry, swings her hips suggestively)

I can think of plenty of things to do besides hear lies from loony sailors.

TELEMACHOS

(reaching for her)

Come to me tonight.

MELANTHO

In front of a house of people?

TELEMACHOS

No one will notice.

MELANTHO

I have to serve.

TELEMANCHOS

I'll give you a signal. We'll meet outside. Then I'll show what a man can do with a girl.

MELANTHO

Look. He's watching.

(Telemachos turns, catches the sailor's eye -- a crafty flash that is instantly gone. The sailor is again a beggar absorbed in his singsong ramblings.)

SAILOR

Did you hear it, sir? Listen it was like this. We'd stopped at this island, the island of Aiolia. There lived a friend of the Immortal Gods . .

MELANTHO

I'm not going to listen to this.

SAILOR

They was girls. Wine so rich you could add twenty parts of water and still get drunk.

MELANTHO

I've got work to do.

SAILOR

Oh, the rich know how to live right enough. Don't stint the hospitality, they don't.

MELANTHO

Get out of here, you beggar-!

TELEMACHOS

Let him be, Melantho. He's a sick old, man.

SAILOR

They offers wine, a real king does . . .

TELEMACHOS

(laughing) Go bring us wine, Melantho.

(She shrugs, exits)

SAILOR

Thankee sir. You know how a king should live, I can see that. And wouldn't turn a poor shipwrecked stranger from your door. And neither did Ailos. No, when I spoke of leaving,

(As he begins the story of Ailos Hippodades, the sailor strikes a romantic and poetic pose, such as the professional singers would use, but his clumsy gestures and body movements seem ridiculous, incongruous with the high-flown tone.)

he took the skin of a nine-year-old ox, and he made it into a bag. And in this bag he bottled up the winds, for he had power over all the winds, to loose or hold them as he saw fit. Then he tied the bag with a silver wire, fine as cob-web and so tight that not a breath of air could escape. But the west wind, he left free to blow us home -

(Enter Melantho. Passes the wine; as Telemachos interrupts --)

TELEMACHOS

Where is your home?

SAILOR

(stops) Home.

(He looks about, thinks. Takes wine and drinks.)

Home. Well now, that's a good question. But onct I had me a fine home with a great palace -- biggern this, with doors as high as the roof here, and a faithful wife . . . *(his voice quavering for sympathy)*

(Throughout the rest of the scene he continues to drink liberally)

MELANTHO

(to Telemachos) How can you stand it?

SAILOR

(shooting her an annoyed glance) Made this place look like a hovel. That's so. And food.

And drink. *(He sinks down, mumbling)*

MELANTHO

(nudging him with her foot) Filthy goat.

TELEMACHOS

No, no. His mind's washed out. What's one beggar more? The house is filled with them.

MELANTHO

As if beggars were a bargain here. Get up, you stump, and out. Go on. I've things to do.

SAILOR

(Rising to feet, menaces one arm drawn back. She confronts him. They circle -- and comically sidling off to walk around. Suddenly he stops, peers out the window --)

Hello. What's this?

TELEMACHOS

What?

SAILOR

Who's that?

(Telemachos and Melantho move to window beside the sailor, all three looking down)

TELEMACHOS

My mother, the queen.

MELANTHO

Penelope.

SAILOR

Penelope. Wife of Odysseus, right?

MELANTHO

That's her.

SAILOR

And who's the man beside her? Oozing into her eyes. Another minute and he'll have both paws on her boobs. Hehe, such simpering at each other. Will ye look?

TELEMACHOS

That is the lord Amphinomos.

MELANTHO

Her suitor.

SAILOR

Wants to marry her, legal and all? Looks like he don't need to.

TELEMACHOS

Hold your tongue. Many a man would be proud to claim Penelope for his wife. Have you seen the guests in the house?

SAILOR

Them men? I seen em. Big, tough gents with their bodyguards, feet on the table and sharpening their knives. Men o'violence, I say.

TELEMACHOS

They are all suitors, every one.

(Melanthe gives exclamation of disgust.)

TELEMACHOS

And all her friends.

(By now the sailor has been drinking steadily)

SAILOR

Ye little fool. You think they're friends? I know the type. Say they come honorable, and they'll turn on ye with a knife . . . You know what ole Odysseus would do? He'd kick em down the stairs. I saw him onct, his hand on Circe's throat, and a knife to her ear and him bawling for her to hold back her men or he'd slit her gullet. And that's a woman he loved. Old motto: beat yer wife every day. If you don't know why, she will.

TELEMACHOS

Don't touch me.

SAILOR

Oh, there I go, I forgot again. And you the son of the Lord Odysseus.

TELEMACHOS

(to Melantho) Let's get out of here.

SAILOR

I wonder what he'd a thought of you. Never saw him did ye?

TELEMACHOS

Stop it.

SAILOR

Now, you take what happened to Agamemnon. You heard

TELEMACHOS

Agisthos.

SAILOR

That's the one. Killed Agamemnon! Imagine! He comes back to his own house after the War and finds his wife bedding with the traitor. . . Murdered her husband! *(weeping)* And he a great soldier . . . *(angrily)* It jes goes to show.

TELEMACHOS

Show what?

SAILOR

Now, did his son sit around and moan?

TELEMACHOS

Orestes wasn't even there when it happened.

SAILOR

Eggsactly.

TELEMACHOS

What do you mean? He didn't come home until eight years after his father's death.

SAILOR

(stalking Telemachos; whispering) And then he killed the man. And his mother too.

TELEMACHOS

And was hounded by the Furies.

SAILOR

He revenged the family honor, didn't he? But o'course that's not the style of everyone.

(They stare out the window at Penelope and Amphinomos.)

Another minute and he'll throw her on the bank . . . or she'll wrap her legs around him.

Hard to tell which. Look at her lean toward him, and their shoulders brush like butterflies, and now she bends her neck so coy, and he bends in sympathy. Step. Step.

And – oops there! He kissed her. Lookit that. Took him long enough. Look. She's kissing him back. Oh my, lookit the old man fumbling like a pimply kid.

TELEMACHOS

Stop it. I can't bear to watch.

MELANTHO

I think it's interesting. *(laughing)* Look at her kiss him in return.

(She encircles Telemachos's waist with one arm.)

SAILOR

You know what yer daddy would do if he were here?

TELEMACHOS

(not wanting to know) What would he do?

SAILOR

He'd kill the bastard on the spot. Tonight. At yer harvest feast. He'd get his son to help.

MELANTHO

Telemachos?

TELEMACHOS

Kill Amphinomos?

SAILOR

Hehe. What a lark it'd be. Kill the whole lot of ere. We'd need a couple more men on our side.

MELANTHO

What are you saying?

SAILOR

What d'ye say, boy? Shall we do it?

TELEMACHOS

Kill the guests?

SAILOR

What d'ye say?

TELEMACHOS

I say you're mad! And Odysseus is dead. Now leave me. Go on. Get out.

MELANTHO

Go on, you heard him.

SAILOR

Come on, sonny. Don't ye know anything? Look around ye!

(Throwing arms wide in display. Telemachos looks around.)

TELEMACHOS

What do you mean?

SAILOR

Why, oh my, oh my, I'd a known you anywhere. Standing tall and strong as Odysseus himself. I guess the old man's changed though, hasn't he? You got to expect the sinew of years to show.

TELEMACHOS

What are you saying?

SAILOR

(To Melantho) Bit dense, yer feller. *(To Telemachos)* Ask me again my name.

TELEMACHOS

Tell me your name.

SAILOR

Don't you recognize me, boy? It's me, yer own Daddy!

MELANTHO

(bursts out laughing) You're Odysseus!

SAILOR

And I'll take care of you, missy, jes you wait.

TELEMACHOS

My father!?

MELANTHO

You can't believe that, Telemachos.

SAILOR

Yer very own Dad, my boy, what ain't been home in a while, and returns to find these "looters" abegging for his dear wife's hand, and men of violence stealing his boy's

inheritance.

TELEMACHOS

You're Odysseus?

SAILOR

Now you mustn't tell a soul, because they'd kill me dead. Nor you neither, girl. See, the gods have sent me home just in time to give my kingdom to my own true boy. I aint got many years to live - -

MELANTHO

He's mad.

TELEMACHOS

What are you saying?

SAILOR

(coughs, wheezing) And all I wants now is to sit in the sun as an old man should . . . And
chew a bit o'bread mebbe onct a day -- that's all, because I aint much for appetite no
more.

MELANTHO

(aside) Oh, none!

SAILOR

And watch my son stand proud in the possession of his kingdom -- and admire his pretty
wife.

MELANTHO

Oh, go on with you.

SAILOR

Aye, a beautiful girl like you would make a fine wife.

(She stares at him transfixed.)

A queen you'd be, dressed in your finery. Anyone can see you've noble blood
in yer veins. Oh, I can see meself now-, watching my grandsons romp and play,
and Telemachos here, astriding through the Hall, giving orders and commands.
His hounds at his heels; and his table heavy with meats and grain, and Kings
from far-off Argos, yes, even the horse-country, would climb the mountains to
bring him gifts in homage.

TELEMACHOS

Yes.

SAILOR

(watching him) But we got to get rid of em first. They want yer lands,
Telemachos. They want yer mother fer her property, which is to say your property.

(outside, the sound of men't voices approaching; of armaments clattering and dogs baying.)

Hsst. Listen. People're comin.

MELANTHO

The guests are getting ready for the hunt.

TELEMACHOS

But we don't need to do anything. We just announce that Odysseus has returned.

My father has --

SAILOR

No, no. That's the last thing ye could do. They'd be on us in a flash. And me old and defenseless. Now, listen. We're in this together, aren't we?

(Looks about. They look at each other.)

Now don't ye give out on me. And not a hint o' who I am. I'm jes a sailor see, that's cast ashore. Now I'm a gonna slip out and spy about the place.

I'll meet you two here later.

TELEMACHOS

But when?

SAILOR

In the later afternoon. When the men are out for the hunt. Oh my! What a lark. I aint had a good fight . . . So

(Finger to lips, and exit.)

Outside the voices of the men grow louder, the clash of buckles and spears. A hunting horn is sounded in fun -- and goes off-key. Laughter. Melantho watches Telemachos.)

MELANTHO

Do you believe that?

TELEMACHOS

What?

MELANTHO

All that. About him being Odysseus. Is he your father?

TELEMACHOS

Go away. I need to think

MELANTHO

(She shrugs disdainfully and moves to window beside him, looking down)

What he says is true. If your mother marries, you will lose the land.

TELEMACHOS

Leave me alone, I say.

MELANTHO

So that's Odysseus. *(laughs)* If he really is, I mean.

(Exit Melantho)

TELEMACHOS

Oh god, is that my father? How could it be? . . . He would be old, of course. I hadn't thought of that . . . Somehow I never expected -- Or is he an imposter?

He has done horrible things. A man like that would certainly pretend to be Odysseus.

Who's to say he's not? My mother? Who doesn't want him back anyway?

But what if he is?

In either case I win. If he is Odysseus then once in power he slumbers in the sun, while I rule. If he is not . . . my father . . . he's still useful; for with Penelope out of power, I

take the land myself . . . It would be dangerous . . . Ah, they kiss again. The sailor's right. She will marry him. And deprive me of my rights.

And yet to kill them all . . . Guests . . .

(The lights dim. Exit Telemachos as the noise of the hunt begins. The hunters' horns come up, the clatter of buckles and gear . of dogs baying and men calling. The stage goes black. The noise increases . . . and blends with . . .

Act II, Scene 2 Penelope's chamber

EURYNOME

(off-stage)

Mistress! Mistress!

(All sounds of the hunt stop dead. The stage is filled with light as Eurynome entering throws herself at Penelope's feet, moaning and weeping.)

I've been looking everywhere. Oh gods, and just when things seemed good.

PENELOPE

What's happened?!

EURYNOME

Oh mistress, we should have known.

(She crumbles on the floor until Penelope, shaking her in fury:)

PENELOPE

Stop it! Stop that this instant! Has something happened to Amphinomos?

(Eurynome shakes head, still crying. Penelope, relieved --)

Thank god! Then nothing's wrong at all. *(smiling, teasing)* And we are ready for tonight. The ox is split and roasting. I've ordered the best wines and loaves of bread.

EURYNOME

Oh mistress!

PENELOPE

And when the men return from the hunt -- Did you see them go out, so gay and gallant? It was like old times, with the dogs barking and the flags flying.

EURYNOME

Aiee, she will not listen to me.

(She bursts into tears; Penelope turns to her, surprised and concerned, puts her arms around her, comforting her. She makes soothing, clucking sounds, encouraging her.)

PENELOPE

Eurynome, there, there, what is it dear?

EURYNOME

It's that sailor.

PENELOPE

What?

EURYNOME

We should have known he'd bring us trouble. Now the servants are saying --

(She stops.)

PENELOPE

What?

EURYNOME

That the sailor knew Odysseus, and Odysseus is coming home. They say there's proof.

PENELOPE

What proof?

EURYNOME

(enjoying her story now) The old black hound, you know? What lives on the manure pile by the gate. Well, he was found dead this morning.

(She nods emphatically. Penelope stares at her in scorn.)

(whispering) They say he saw the sailor -- dragged himself -- tail knockin in the dust and licked the sailor's hand, and then he lay right down and died. I heard it from Melantho. He'd been waiting to see his old master all these years before he could die in peace.

PENELOPE

(laughing) Is that your proof? We've been expecting that dog to die for years. He's as old as Telemachos. It comes as no surprise.

EURYNOME

Ah, she will not listen.

PENELOPE

Indeed I will not listen to such tales.

EURYNOME

Mistress, but there's more. Eurycleia, his old nurse -- she's saying now the master's home.

PENELOPE

What do you mean?

EURYNOME

She says she's seen him. Today, Odysseus himself. She told Medon that, and when he asked her more, she whimpered and said she's forgot she wasn't sposed to tell.

PENELOPE

Were those her words, that she wasn't supposed to tell?

EURYNOME

She'd forgot and wasn't sposed to tell.

PENELOPE

What fools people are. Poor Eurycleia who gums her food. Bladder and bowels are beyond her control, and she's so muddled in her mind that she lives in some past time. Yet let her deliver this outlandish news, and everyone believes her.

(thinking)

What difference does it make if the rumor's false once everyone believes the tale? How shall I marry then, with Odysseus said to be returning home?

EURYNOME

That's true. You can't.

PENELOPE

(Looking up at the heavens) Help me. The white boar if you help me.

What does the sailor say?

EURYNOME

I don't know . . . Talk to him, Mistress. Make him go away. Now before the banquet.

PENELOPE

Yes. All right, I shall see him then. While the men are on their hunt. Eurynome, have him meet me in the Palace Hall. *(Eurynome moving exit)*

But, Eurynome, I want you there too.

(Exeunt by different paths.)

Act II, Scene 3

Penelope's chamber

(The lights dim and come up in Penelope's bedchamber upstage. Melantho is admiring herself in Penelope's mirror. She slips on an arm bracelet, extends her arm to look at it, smiles .

Enter Eurynome, who stops - shocked)

EURYNOME

Ha! Girl! What are you doing here?

MELANTHO

I --

EURYNOME

And with the mistress's jewelry! Put that back! You thief. She's a thief, she is, as well as a whore!

MELANTHO

Don't speak to me like that.

EURYNOME

Like what? I find you poking in the queen's own rooms, and I should guard my tongue?

Get out, you slut -

MELANTHO

Shut up!

EURYNOME

You'd better be thankful she didn't find you here herself. She'd have you whipped.

MELANTHO

Don't threaten me, Soon I shall be your queen and then you'll come on your knees and lick my feet. You'll brush my hair and tend my jewels.

EURYNOME

You! You'd be my queen! Oh, she's gone out of her mind too, the queen indeed.

MELANTHO

I am to marry my lord Telemachos.

(There is a stunned silence, then Eurynome bursts out laughing.)

EURYNOME

Marry Telemachos? Is that what he said? Oh myohmy . . . *(laughing)* Ohoh . . .
poor child. You're not the first -- or last neither to believe a man what wants a bit of
sweets. But a brown slave. And be the queen. Oh, haha!

MELANTHO

Stop it! Do you hear? I am a queen in my own country, anyone can see. I come
of royal lineage, with servants of my own --

EURYNOME

(laughing still) Of course you are, with royal servants. You stupid girl.

Didn't I see you on the pier when you were brought? A naked girl in chains.

MELANTHO

Shut up. For I will slit your throat before this night is passed. If you only knew my news.

EURYNOME

What news?

MELANTHO

Ah. That I won't tell.

EURYNOME

Them that don't have nothing to tell can't tell nothin. Now get on back to the kitchen where you belong.

MELANTHO

Keep your hands to yourself --

EURYNOME

All right, but now come along --

(She begins to go, expecting Melantho to follow.)

Oh gods, what's comin over the house? With the slaves walking as cool as water into the queen's own rooms. Trying on her things . . . We'll get her married soon as things settle down. There's nothing like a man to soothe a troubled girl. Poor child. The slut. Oh, what a day --

(Exit Eurynome, leaving Melantho still at the mirror, alone in the room. Slowly she remove the arm bracelet; then fingers the trinkets on the tray, gives a poignant intake of breath, and a half a sob - Eurynome bustles back in)

EURYNOME

Well? Are you just standing there? Come on. *(Sees her stricken expression.)*

There, there. I'm sorry I spoke so harsh. You'll see, it'll be all right.

You'll git uster the place fore long. You'll come to love it.

MELANTHO

I hate it here.

EURYNOME

I don't seem possible, I know, that you could forget your own home. *(putting one arm around her)* That's right, just cry . . .

MELANTHO

(weeping) I'll never --

EURYNOME

I remember when I first come here, I felt just like you. I cried and cried, and do you know what was strangest of all? The sun come up every morning, I couldn't believe it, when my heart hurt so. But there it come, joyous and red. Before you know it, my heart began to tremble, lift. And then one day I was singing at my work.

One thing, the mistress. You're lucky to be in a house like this.

(Nudging her toward the door now, one arm around her shoulders)

She's a wonderful woman. I saw her once deliver a breech birth and save both mother and babe.

MELANTHO

(looking up) I don't see that she's so wonderful.

EURYNOME

(leading her gently out of the room) Well, she has a lot on her mind right now. When things settle down, you'll see how happy this house is . . .

(Exeunt)

Act II, Scene 4 The Great Hall.

Vertical columns of light stream from the ceiling, like white pillars. Penelope is seated on a stool centered in a column of light. Immobile. At her feet sits Eurynome. They wait. At a sound in the shadows, Penelope turns. She peers into the darkness.

PENELOPE

Who's there?

EURYNOME

(in a whisper) It's him.

(There is no answer. Penelope strains to hear. The sound is repeated, and then we see, still in shadow, a shadowed figure standing at the door)

PENELOPE

Who's there? Ah. Why do you stand in the dark? Come forward.

(It is a command, and after a moment the sailor takes a step into the light, watching her, sucking his teeth, guarded and a little cunning. He does not speak. He prowls back into the shadow. The pause lengthens and the two watch each other.)

I am told you knew Odysseus.

(The sailor does not respond. The pause lengthens.)

Is it true? *(He does not answer)*

Don't play games with me! I have no time for that.

SAILOR

Aye. I met him onct. All o' us who fought at Troy as seen the man.

PENELOPE

Who are you? What is your name?

(The sailor, sullen, silent, prowls from light to dark and back again, so that half the time he is in shadow; in contrast to Penelope seated in the light. In shadow he gathers a fierce power.)

Sir, I asked you a question. Have you no tongue? Yet I'm told you talk very freely with my household staff.

SAILOR

(whining, sickly) No'm, I was jes thinkin.

PENELOPE

Do you know who I am?

SAILOR

Oh, I know yer a fine lady. Anyone kin see that, in your soft gowns and jewelry.

PENELOPE

I am Penelope, Queen of Ithaca. My father was King Icarius of Sparta, my husband was Odysseus Laertiades. Now. What is your name, and where are you from?

SAILOR

(giggling, insolent) Oh lady, why, that'd take a year to tell; that's what I told yer pigman, my lord the Swineherd, who listened jaws agape to my tale, and wept fer me, man to man, he did. He wept. I seen some things as ud make the hair o' yer head stand up on end.

PENELOPE

Words.

SAILOR

I seen heaven and hell, I have.

PENELOPE

Begin with your name.

SAILOR

(ebullient) Ah, jes like a woman. No. I'm Noman, that's me. That's what I told the giant cannibal when he asked me that. 'Who are you?' he yelled; blinded by my radiance he was, and my strong right arm, as you could say. 'Who are you?' he shouted, groping about with his colossal arms. 'Noman!' says I. 'Tell 'em Noman did this to ye.' Then when his cronies come up, see, they all look around in wonderment and axed. 'Who did this to ye? Who put out yer eye?' And he answers -- cuz he warnt too bright -- Noman did it. Go catch him.' How they laughed! Hehe. And corse they all went off and none of em chased after me. Noman, get it?

(A pause. Penelope stares at the sailor.)

PENELOPE

Who are you, sailor? Stop playing games with me.

(The sailor is still prowling as he moves into shadow, gathering fierceness:)

SAILOR

Or mebbe I'm Everyman. Aye, there's some of me in Everyman.

PENELOPE

I asked for information and you give me idle chatter. Are you nothing but a wanderer? No name. No place where you belong?

SAILOR

What d'ye mean no name? I'd have ye know I was once a rich man. Yes ma'am. And not the pore shipwrecked sailor that you see here. I was rich. I had a

beautiful wife onct and fine children and a great palace . . . In Crete, it
was -- with doors of bronze and servants.

PENELOPE

Did you.

SAILOR

My father was a rich man, yes.

PENELOPE

(skeptical) Your father.

SAILOR

Yes. *(prowling angry)* And war was my line, not busying about the orchards
and a'countin jars o' wine. That bores me. What I like are ships and battles
and fine smooth javelins with their barbed bits flashing out toward flesh and
tearing into blood . . . *(sees her expression; laughs)* . . . dangerous things
that make folk shudder.

PENELOPE

Go on.

SAILOR

(turns away) Well, everyone to his own taste. Before Troy I commanded a
fleet nine times against foreign enemies. Nine times. And took spoil. Yes.
As commander I took all the best. You shoulda seen me then. I was a different
sight, I was.

PENELOPE

And then?

SAILOR

And then come that little tussle up at Troy, (*sadly*) and I had to leave my dear wife and kids --

PENELOPE

But you loved the war, didn't you?

SAILOR

I loved it. I loved the clash of arms and the comrades and the women, and good food on a cold night, standing around at the fires and laughin. But everyone knows about the war . . . Then I returned home finally to my dear wife, what I hadn't seen in all those long, cold years.

PENELOPE

Back to Crete?

SAILOR

(*prowling constantly*)

Trouble is I caint stay long noplac. I get . . . I don't know . . . I stayed a month, and then I got this idea to lead an expedition down to Egypt. Nine ships I had. Good men. Off we sets, a north wind behind us. Like travelling down a river it was, the wind at our back, sliding on the current. What a sail! We set into the river Egyptos there. And then I sent out spies. "Now don't do nothin," I said to them. "Just go look and report straight back."

(*contemptuous*) But they off and find a couple women doing their washing and jumps 'em in the piles of wet clothes, killing the little children till the stream run red with blood

(*angrily*) just warning everyone downstream of the slaughter up the hill. The fools!!

(*prowling*) And next we know we're captured - sold for slaves.

(*a pause*)

PENELOPE

And were you also sold into slavery?

SAILOR

Me! A slave? I dropped my sword and tore off my helmet and threw myself at the feet of the king. 'Mercy!' I called. Right off he recognizes that I am a man of substance. He raises me up, dusts me off, puts me in his own chariot. I stayed in his house for . . . oh . . . seven years. I was like a brother to the king, like this --*(holding up two fingers)* he loved me so.

(Penelope looks skeptical; the sailor sees it, continues his story even more passionately)

But a Phoenician come along, see. We joined as partners on the coast of Libya.

What I didn't know --

(Sailor backs into shadow)

he was planning to sell me into slavery. So we was drifting off the coast. They jumped me. Bound my hands and feet. But the gods destroyed them! And good riddance too.

PENELOPE

How?

SAILOR

A great storm come up and the whole ship sank.

(Penelope laughs aloud.)

No, it was terrible. There we was, so many heads bobbin on the black water like black crows, while the lightning split the sky. The waves broke over my head, all gray froth and

salt and I thought I was dead for sure. Suddenly I caught a spar. I clung to it. For nine days. Nine days. On the tenth I was thrown up on the Thesprotian shore.

PENELOPE

Where the king himself took you in hand and entertained you in his palace like a king.

SAILOR

Well, yes.

(Penelope gives a derisive laugh)

And it was there I heard of Odysseus.

PENELOPE

(uncomfortably) Ah.

SAILOR

(pressing her) Aye, he'd been there just afore me. They tol me so. *(watching Penelope sharply)* He'd been given a great swift ship and he was headin home.

PENELOPE

And when was this?

SAILOR

Oh, just a while ago. And he had treasure enough to support his family for ten generations, he had. He should be acomin in any time at all, he should. Mebbe right now his ship's apullin in the harbor. We orter go look.

PENELOPE

(rising) And when you left were you given an even faster "great swift ship?"

SAILOR

Oh, no'm, Not me. I took passage on a grainship to Dulichion.

(Shifting into the shadow; dropping his voice --)

But the men on the ship, see, they thought to sell me into slavery. So they tied me with ropes, and they dressed me in these rags here --

(Voice whimpering; tears in eyes and voice)

Just rags. But I cut the knots on the edge of the mast; and then I dived overboard and swam for my life in the storm last night. And then next morning I found myself here in this beautiful palace, the guest of a gracious and bountiful queen, as renowned for her generous hospitality as for --

PENELOPE

(interrupting) It's quite a story, You've been everywhere, I see.

SAILOR

Aye, I've been to the very gates of Hell and I've seen all kinds of scum and wickedness as you wouldn't believe, a fine good lady like yourself – And a fine wife I'm never to hold in my arms again, and strong sons. . .

PENELOPE

They are back in Crete, am I right? Tell me, Sailor, are the Cretans known for their Honesty?

SAILOR

(with a snarl) Arr, all Cretans are liars. You caint never trust a man from Crete.

PENELOPE

Yet you're from Crete. Does that mean you're a liar?

SAILOR

(Appreciative laughter; then, slyly:)

If a Cretan says all Cretans lie, is he telling the truth? Hehe, there's a riddle to unravel. Or mebbe it's this: if I say I'm from Crete and all Cretans are liars, do I come from Crete? Ha ha' Oh my, figger that out. Oh my, hehe.

(Penelope watches him for a time, thinking. He stops laughing. Looks at her. Coughs. The pause lengthens.)

PENELOPE

And what do you want now, sir?

SAILOR

Oh, a little hospitality, my lady, jes to put me on my feet. You'll see I'm not one to stay in one place long.

PENELOPE

In all your travels you never stayed anyplace? You never found some woman whom you loved?

SAILOR

No, I did. They was two. I'll never see their like again.

(He is talking to himself, remembering; he walks aside, but in the light)

There was Circe. An enchantress, she was, tall as a willow tree, sweet and lithe. Her boobs and buttocks bulging out to fit the cup of yer hands. A voice like a siren's song. Oh, she could turn any man into a pig. I'd root in her cellar till she'd haul up my snout with her two hands and drink her own juices off my chops --

(all speaking at once)

EURYNOME

(rising) Shame! Shame!

SAILOR

Oh, Circe, why did you send me away?

PENELOPE

How dare you --

EURYNOME

Have you no respect?

PENELOPE

Such language is not fit to be spoken in my presence!

SAILOR

Ye wanted to know.

PENELOPE

Get out! And be warned, sailor. If you touch one woman in my kingdom, if you make any trouble --

SAILOR

(cunning) Ah, but we aint finished about Odysseus yet.

PENELOPE

Very well. What of Odysseus?

SAILOR

(Stepping back one step. Again he is in shadow, leaving Penelope vulnerable, exposed in light.)

He'd not stand for the likes of this I seen. Men of violence all over the palace. They're eatin his food and drinkin his wines and stealing that piss ass son's propertee and hunting with his dogs. There's blood and fornication here -- I seen it -- and all types o' evil such as I aint seen in twenty years of wanderin. He's comin back. I've said so to em all.

PENELOPE

To whom?

SAILOR

The swineherd, the maids. He's comin back. Then he'll clean out this pack of wolves and the wicked women with their bobbin bosoms. They'll be blood and fire, I think. The rivers will flow red with blood. Hehe! I jes might stick around and jine the fun.

(As he speaks he moves into light.)

PENELOPE

(Interrupting, takes command; made nervous by his outburst)

What makes you think my guests are violent?

SAILOR

Oh I seen 'em -- clattering about with their spears and swords, I seen em laughin, same as men o' war.

PENELOPE

You're wrong. They went hunting this afternoon for sport.

SAILOR

That's what you say.

PENELOPE

Have you never hunted, Sailor?

SAILOR

Course I have. Boar, bear, stag, man. You name it, I've killed it. I've a deadly eye. (Loosing an imaginary arrow) Fwang! And draw blood every time. I hunted on my wedding day --

(As he speaks, Penelope shifts into shadow; now the sailor is exposed in light, and she obscured.)

PENELOPE

Sir, I see you are an honorable man. I propose to treat you as one should treat a nobleman of Crete, a proud adventurer. Sir, I have a ship in the harbor. This very night I shall fit it out according to your state. I shall add gifts of iron and bronze. My own men shall take you wherever you wish. To Crete, if you want to return a wealthy man. If not, then back to your Circe or to --

SAILOR

Oh my, oh my. Now I thankee ma'am, but I've been moving so long now, ma'am, my old bones ache. No I'd like jes to stay around for that feast I heerd about --
(raises one hand, palm out)

Now, I won't make no trouble. I'll jes set in a corner, like the beggar I am, and mebbe some fine member of the gentry will toss me a bit of gristle now and then.

(During speech, enter Amphiromos. He pauses, grasping situation . . .)

PENELOPE

Then you refuse my offer?

SAILOR

Oh, no. No. But mebbe later. We'll see. It's a fine gesture though, befittin the wife of Odysseus, and I'm sure it'll stand tomorrow.

(Penelope controlling her anger; the two in confrontation and perfect understanding.)

AMPHINOMOS

What offer? What's this about?

(Penelope turns to him, her whole soul in her eyes, and places a hand on his arm expressing 'Thank god you've come'; she turns back to the sailor.)

PENELOPE

Listen. Accept the ship.

SAILOR

Don't want me, eh? And after I bring such good news of yer dear hubby. He'll want to see me. We was war buddies, him 'n me.

PENELOPE

Get out of here! If you won't take my ship, then leave on your own two feet. I want no beggars in my land tonight. Now go!

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope!

(The sailor watching the two, smiles)

PENELOPE

I have warned you now, as you warned me. Get out of my sight.

SAILOR

(To Amphinomos) She sure has a problem makin up her mind.

PENELOPE

Eurynome.

EURYNOME

Come on old man. We'll get you a nice glass of wine. Come away now.

(Exuent Sailor and Eurynome. Penelope watches, her face hard. She is anxious, avoids Amphinomos, pacing nervously . . . And when the sailor is out of earshot, she turns suddenly to Amphinomos.)

PENELOPE

Kill him.

AMPHINOMOS

What?

PENELOPE

Yes. You must kill him.

AMPHINOMOS

Kill what? That sailor?

PENELOPE

He is a wicked, evil man. He's going to hurt me.

(growing increasingly agitated)

AMPHINOMOS

(laughing) Penelope, he's an old man. How can he hurt you?

PENELOPE

He's doing it now. And not only to me. To us. Listen, blood will be shed tonight. I felt it this morning. He must be killed.

AMPHINOMOS

(amiably) So you'd kill the man to keep from shedding blood? Good logic, that.

PENELOPE

You didn't hear him talk. He says Odysseus is coming home. He's turned the servants against me.

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope, be calm.

PENELOPE

It's a plot to take my land. I don't know who he is or who's behind him, but that's the point. He wants my land.

AMPHINOMOS

He cannot claim your land.

PENELOPE

He can if everyone believes he is Odysseus! Or that Odysseus is coming home!

AMPHINOMOS

You make too much of this thing.

PENELOPE

But don't you see, Amphinomos. How can we be married if Odysseus is coming home? Then who do I become? The wife of this mythical man? I am no longer Queen. What difference if it's all untrue. I'd have to wait another twenty years . . . I'll not do it! He's dead. I will not be enslaved to that man's name. I tried to make him leave. You heard me. I offered him a ship, well fitted out, and presents. He would not go. We must kill him. Stab him on the cliffs. He'd be carried out on the next tide. Who would know? Or care?

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope, I don't know you!

PENELOPE

He hasn't even any name! Is any man alive to miss the man?

AMPHINOMOS

How can you talk like that?!

PENELOPE

How can I not, my very life at stake?

AMPHINOMOS

But to talk of killing the man. I couldn't do that.

PENELOPE

Coward! Then I will kill him myself. I'm not afraid. No, I will not see everything I've built destroyed by one imposter.

AMPHINOMOS

To kill the guest in your house is wrong.

PENELOPE

Have I no right then to protect myself from his assault? Strike first!

AMPHINOMOS

What nonsense! You're raving! To commit a murder on our wedding night? Imagine! (taking her in his arms) Would you want me after that? Would you love me then?

PENELOPE

I'd love you for it all the more.

AMPHINOMOS

(pushing her aside) Then would I love you? Talk of killing when you've done it once! Good god . . . to slit his throat -- or stab him in the back perhaps - is that how you envision it would be done? And wipe my sword of his blood and an hour later join your bloodied hand in marriage to my own?

PENELOPE

Oaie. Only this morning I was happy.

AMPHINOMOS

(following his own thoughts) Moreover, you exaggerate. So what if gossip spreads? We will announce our marriage tonight and no one will think of the sailor . . . Now if he were indeed Odysseus, then

PENELOPE

Then what?

AMPHINOMOS

Then . . . I would understand your anguish. But he's only a castaway.

PENELOPE

And if he were not?

AMPHINOMOS

(smiling at her joke) Why then we could not marry, and . . .

(Penelope says nothing.)

Penelope . . . Is he Odysseus?

PENELOPE

Yes. He is Odysseus

(But the lines are so delivered that we are not sure we believe them.)

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope!

PENELOPE

You see what we must do.

(A horn sounds off-stage)

Listen, the guests are returning from the hunt. Amphinomos, no one will know.

Eurynome and I will help --

(The horn, a second time --)

AMPHINOMOS

Penelope!

PENELOPE

I say he is Odysseus! We have no choice. . . What difference does it make?

The danger's the same. Don't you understand? He's trying to destroy me.

AMPHINOMOS

(with a bitter laugh) So we must kill him first?

(For the third time, the horn sounds.)

PENELOPE

Oh, I don't know what we must do. I feel so alone. I want to live with you,

Amphinomos. I want to be your wife.

AMPHINOMOS

(Recoiling, Moving toward exit)

Don't touch me.

Act II, Scene 5 The Great Hall

(At stage left, the lights come up to reveal the Sailor, Melantho, and Telemachos --)

SAILOR

Squiggle up there, girl. See if you can reach it.

(They are boosting Melantho up to a ledge of the Great Hall, hung with dusty flags, old weapons, and a single long bow.

The movements of the Sailor now display an urgency not seen before. There is nothing comic about him, but purposeful, even frightening. Throughout the scene the sailor is aware of Melantho and she of him: a tension is building of a sexual, shared hatred . . . As Melantho reaches for the bow --)

TELEMACHOS

It was my father's. He traded a spear and sword for it.

SAILOR

Decent onct.

TELEMACHOS

Do you remember?

Dried out. If we try to use it, it'll crack. Hey, you girl -- Do ye see any axes, like, up there?

MELANTHO

(holding up one) Like this?

SAILOR

That's it.

(She hands two down. Sailor takes one, blowing off the dust.)

You ever seen this played?

TELEMACHOS

No.

SAILOR

(taking them from Melantho) Dirty, aint they? Now listen, sonny, what we do is plant em in a row right down the hall, see? mportant to get them straight. Put em here, like this. You gotta learn. It'll be up to you. What you need's a string.

(They implant two or three, measuring a straight line between holes. The sailor's movements are competent, deft. There is nothing gentle in him.)

Now the point is to shoot an arrow through the opening. What we're gonna do is use this bow.

TELEMACHOS

(surprised) But you just said it would crack.

SAILOR

You jes put yer faith in the old toad. He'll do the thinking for this party.

(Takes an arrow, turning it, searching for warp and imperfections)

These aint so hot either. They'll do fine for the guests, I mean, but we need

four good bows and decent arrows. Or we won't stand a chanct.

Now here's the plan. When the party's going strong and the men are

drunk -- and by the way, don't ye be drinking. The wine's not watered tonight

a drop. At my sign, you stand up, fine master of the house, and challenge em

to this game. No one's go': a bow, right? So we takes down this old dried

out one of Odysseus', that's been hanging twenty years. You pass it round.

Tell em each to try to string it. No one'll be able to. Not after twenty years.

TELEMACHOS

Then how do we --?

SAILOR

You hesh! When the bow's going the rounds and everyone's talking and laughin

and makin bets -- and that's your part too, see, to egg em on; and then you

gotta make cracks about how Odysseus uster be the only one could string this

bow. And how strong he was. And what they wouldn't see if Odysseus were here.

You gotta get their dander up, eh? Finally the bow will pass to you.

TELEMACHOS

And I string it?

SAILOR

Ye poor thing. No, you don't string it. You don't even try. What you do is hand it over to me.

MELANTHO

To you? A beggar by the door?

SAILOR

That's right, miss pussy, to me. He can do it. Make a joke, "You gents are weaklings, you say. Even this old beggar can string the bow." Like that.

Now I'm right beside the door; and you, girl, you're on the other side, passin in the platters. When you hear me bellow, you heave yourweight on thet door and slam the bolt. You hear? You close it and keep it shut.

Now, sonny, I'm gonna have me the good bows and a mess of arrows under me rags. And that's for me and you and Medon and the pig-man. My first shot will go down that row of axes. The next is for the gents. They'll drop like flies.

(Melantho scrambling from ledge with Telemachos' help)

MELANTHO

But it would be a massacre!

(She stops. The sailor is looking at her strangely. She backs away a step . . . another. Telemachos looks uncertainly from one to the other, as the sailor stalks her . . .)

SAILOR

What d'ye say, boy? Shall we celebrate? *(nudging Telemachos)* Let's give her a poke. A pig in a poke.

(Melantho, frightened, ducks behind Telemachos. The sailor in pursuit. Telemachos grabs his arm -- Off-stage, far away, faint sounds of revelry, as people begin to gather for ceremonies --)

TELEMACHOS

Stop it! She's our own woman, not some --

SAILOR

(laughs, picks up axes) Don't look so woebegone. I aint gonna jump yer girl.

(laughs) I'm jes joking. She agonna be yer wife, aint ye, missy?

(Telemachos and Melantho watch him uncertainly)

SAILOR

Now we're ready for tonight? It's blood and guts, sonny. And if we don't back

each other up, we're both killed. But we got the odds, remember that. What

fun! I say you aint never killed, you aint never lived -

And missy, remember at my signal, close that door!

(As if to emphasize, he gooses her. She turns and slugs him -- the fight they have been building toward this scene)

MELANTHO

Hands off!

(Sailor reaches for Melantho, and they crash to floor -- he would rape her there. She screams. Telemachos pulls the sailor off.)

TELEMACHOS

Stop it! You want to bring the house down on us?

(Melantho snatches dagger from Telemachos' sheath, holding it out in front of her with both hands, point aimed at the sailor)

SAILOR

(circling) If yer about this evening, missy, I'll give you something hard *(lewd gesture)* to remember me by.

(Melantho sticks out her tongue in bravado and exits, running.)

TELEMACHOS

(grabbing up arms) Are you crazy? We've got the weapons set. Come on.

(They turn to leave and meet Amphinimos. He stops, surprised.)

AMPHINOMOS

Where are you going? What are the weapons for?

TELEMACHOS

I thought I'd lock them in the store-room. With all the drinking tonight we shouldn't have loose weapons hanging on the walls.

AMPHINOMOS

(puts one arm around Telemachos' shoulder)

You are a man! Listen, Telemachos, tonight you receive a great gift. I can't tell you what it is, but you will --

TELEMACHOS

What are you talking about? I can make my way without you.

(Pulling away, he jostles Amphinimos against the sailor - who turns, enraged --)

SAILOR

Keep yer hands to --

AMPHINOMOS

(backing off peaceably) No, no, I'm not --

(But the sailor attacks Amphinomos. They scuffle. Amphinomos, suddenly aroused, frustrated, fights back angrily and beats him).

SAILOR

Don't hurt me. I'm going.

AMPHINOMOS

Get out. We don't need your kind here!

(Sailor exits)

(To Telemachos) Your mother's right. He's no good . . . Here. I'll help to get the weapons put away. *(Laughs, glad at heart)* Thank god you thought of this. Thank god, no blood shall spill tonight.

(Telemachos looks at him with rage. Exeunt Telemachos and Amphinomos. The lights go black.)

END ACT II

Act III, Scene 1. Outside the Great Hall

A large room outside the Great Hall. At one end is the doorway to the Great Hall. Melantho is leaning there, beautifully dressed, for she is helping at the feast, by passing plates to the men inside.

From the room not visible to the audience come the sounds of men laughing, carousing, their voices rising. At the other end of the stage is Eurynome, busying herself with some task --

Enter Penelope in crimson. She is singing happily, does a little dance-step, swooping joyously and laughing. She takes Eurynome's hands and begins to twirl her round, so that her red robes swing out wide. Eurynome is reluctant, however, and hangs back, though pleased at the attention. Melantho watches from the doorway without expression.

PENELOPE

How do I look? Do you like the red? I wanted to be gay. Come on, Eurynone (*clapping her hands*), we're all so gloomy here . . . Melantho, child --

(Her voice tender, she lifts Melantho's chin affectionately)

Such a pretty girl. It must have broken your mother's heart to sell you for a slave.

(Melantho, uncertain how to respond, turns away, a study in anger, resentment, suspicion, longing to be loved.)

You'll see. Everything will work out. Sometime you'll grow to love this house.

(Suddenly, Penelope pulls off her arm bracelet)

Here, take this. Tonight I want the sun and moon to celebrate.

(Melantho turns it in her hands, awed, uneasy by the movements of the queen.)

MELANTHO

For me?

PENELOPE

There, and doesn't it look fine against your skin.

EURYNOME

Say thank you, girl! Have you no manners?

MELANTHO

Thank you.

(She retires to door, looking at the bracelet)

EURYNOME

It's more than she deserves.

PENELOPE

Now you, Eurynome. I've thought and thought what I could give you as my wedding gift.

Something that would mean the most to you, my friend, who has served me eighteen years. I give to you, Eurynome . . . your freedom! *(She smiles expectantly)*

EURYNONE

My freedom! Oh mistress I've offended you! I know my tongue's harsh, I shouldn't a said those things about the girl. *(bursts into tears)*

PENELOPE

Eurynome!

EURYNOME

I raised Telemachos from a little babe. I've loved him like my own son. And who would look after your things as I have, never stealing so much as a twist of thread?

PENELOPE

Eurynome, you haven't offended me.

EURYNOME

Then why do you want to get rid of me? You want that slut, maybe, to wait on you. Is that it? I'm an old worn-out shell of a woman --

PENELOPE

Eurynome.

EURYNOME

It's true I'm old. And I'm slow up the stairs --

PENELOPE

Eurynome --

EURYNOME

But a loyal mistress wouldn't turn a poor old woman out of doors in the winter of her life. (*fiercely*) You'll see. You won't find anyone can take care of your household like me.

PENELOPE

Eurynome, of course you would remain. But as a free woman. I thought you'd want your freedom.

EURYNOME

(*fiercely*) What would I do with freedom, eh? Have to buy my own clothes and food. You think to get off cheap? And pay my own funeral expenses, too, suppose, after all these years.

(*Overcome, she bursts into sobs*)

MELANTHO

There! That's the kind she is.

PENELOPE

Eurynome, what do you think I am?

EURYNOME

That's how it alays is, you serve 'em loyally, and in return --

MELANTHO

(tentatively) You can give me my freedom. I'll trade her for the bracelet.

PENELOPE

(Not hearing Melantho, laughs, embracing Eurynome)

Now stop that. Stop.

MELANTHO

(more urgently) I'll trade you.

PENELOPE

(Glancing at Melantho -- but her mind is on Eurynome)

Eurynome, of course I shall not send you away.

(Eurynome dries her eyes on the back of her hand; Penelope teasing her into a good mood.)

I'll find another gift for you. Because tonight my lord Amphinomos will speak out publicly for my hand.

(She looks toward Great Hall)

What do you want? A new gown? A jewel?

(Eurynome waves the offer away, wearily; Melantho throws herself at Penelope's feet.)

MELANTHO

Oh, couldn't you set me free?

PENELOPE

(surprised) Why . . . I . . . I don't know. Where would you go?

MELANTHO

I'd go away. It's dangerous for me here.

PENELOPE

I don't see how I could . . .

MELANTHO

I'd do anything, believe me. I could repay you -- tonight! If you give me my freedom, I can save you. If you say the word.

PENELOPE

I paid a lot for you.

(Melantho sees she is not even thinking seriously about it . . . rises, stalks back to the doorway.)

MELANTHO

So . . . that's decided.

PENELOPE

Don't fret, Melantho. I'll say this. Stay with me loyally, child, for a time. I am not ungenerous. I will remember your request.

MELANTHO

You'd give it to Eurynome!

PENELOPE

But she has served me eighteen years. Will you do that?

(Melantho shrugs and turns away, as does Penelope. The subject is closed.)

(Melanthe watches from the doorway the men inside. Penelope falls into a daydream, wanders vaguely back and forth. Already she has forgotten the pleading of her slave.)

MELANTHO

(undertone) You'll be sorry. I could have saved you tonight.

PENELOPE

What are they doing? Have they started yet?

EURYNOME

They're still gathering.

MELANTHO

They're joking and drinking.

(Door opens with a burst of noise. A voice bawls out --

Eurynome and Melanthe jump to hand in plates of food, baskets of bread, the wine . . . noise and laughing. The door half closes, the three women are alone.)

PENELOPE

Soon they'll sit down to dinner and when the wine is poured Amphinomos will rise and bring the guests to silence.

EURYNOME

Eh, such a sight. How I'd like to see it.

(Melanthe makes a face, but she is fascinated.)

PENELOPE

Then I shall take him by the hand. Will I look too gaudy, standing there in red?

EURYNOME

No, beautiful!

PENELOPE

"I have no presents for Amphinomos," I'll say, "beyond my heart. Because my gifts are to Telemachos. To Telemachos I give this night one-half of my lands --"

MELANTHO

To Telemachos?

EURYNONE

I'll stand at the door. Melantho and I will peek a bit.

(Burst of laughter from off-stage)

PENELOPE

What's happening, Melantho?

MELANTHO

The beggar's set them laughing.

PENELOPE

(leaps to door) Of course, it would be him.

(Melantho gives way for her, smiling.)

No matter. It's too late now. He can't do any harm . . .

(The three women wait, listening. Off-stage the roars of the laughter rise --)

EURYNOME

It all seems so queer, the things as have happened today. Don't it seem a long time ago to this morning when I woke you up? I mean with the storm last night --

PENELOPE

It was a long time ago.

EURYNOME

And all that business with the sailor. Mistress?

PENELOPE

What?

EURYNOME

I was thinking.

PENELOPE

What?

EURYNOME

What if that old man really was Odysseus come home?

PENELOPE

Well, he's not.

EURYNOME

No, but supposing he was.

PENELOPE

Well, you don't have to suppose. He's not Odysseus, and that's the answer.

EURYNOME

Jes saying, though, that it was the old master. Do you think he'd sell the slaves? There's some masters as beats em, herds em outdoors --

PENELOPE

Is that what's worrying you? Listen, whenever you want your freedom, come and ask. It's yours. And when I die, I shall provide enough for you to live on and die on and be buried properly.

EURYNOME

Oh mistress, who else can see like you, right to the heart of things? . . .

No, but I was thinking of that looney . . . If he were ever in power --

PENELOPE

(Gives a laugh, amused)

Listen, there was one person who could handle Odysseus. And that was me. If he returned, I tell you truly, I would not let him hurt one hair on any servant's head. I promise that, Eurynome. No one shall squander my property. Or harm my people.

(She laughs again.)

And especially Odysseus, because he's dead.

(Outburst from within -- calls for "Telemachos," "Antinoos"! Riotous singing, the pounding of feet and cups, fast-paced music of a dance. The women listen quietly. Then Penelope continues, with a change of tone. Reminiscent.)

You know, it's funny about Odysseus. It wasn't the women, Eurynome. Though there were plenty of them. It wasn't the drinking. Though he did plenty of that too. Or the obscenities and vulgar abuse. . . It was the lies. He lied to me. Lied and lied. He could not tell the truth.

(The clamor from within. A pounding of feet and fists on tables.)

What's happening, Melantho?

MELANTHO

They seem to be preparing some game.

PENELOPE

Why doesn't he stand up and speak? Here I am ready to accept his suit. Ras he changed his mind?

(The off-stage clamor grows; it continues throughout the scene.)

EURYNOME

Oh, he's just waiting for em to quiet down a bit.

PENELOPE

We quarreled this afternoon. What if he no longer wants me, Eurynome.

EURYNOME

Now, what nonsense. He's just waiting for the time to speak.

PENELOPE

He should have tried by now.

EURYNOME

Now, don't go getting upset. He's a grown man and perfectly capable of choosing his own way.

PENELOPE

He didn't know that I could kill. He's changed his mind. He wants another kind of woman.

EURYNOME

Eh, I've never heard you act like this. Haven't I seen him look at you?

PENELOPE

Do you think so? He was appalled this afternoon. He would not touch me, and when he did . . . when he took me in his arms to stop my trembling, his arms were trembling too.

(From off-stage, the noise increases of pounding tables; drunken singing.)

AMPHINOMOS *(off-stage)*

Gentlemen, I want to speak. Hear me while I --

(His voice drowned in laughter and raucous singing, voices also including those of Telemachos and the beggar.)

PENELOPE

There he is. Oh listen, Eurynome! Listen, Melantho! Do you feel my heart?

(Snatching Eurynome's hand and placing it over her heart)

Now he will --

EURYNOME

Hush, woman. You'll miss him.

AMPHINOMOS *(off-stage)*

An announcement! The queen has bid me say --

(scuffle)

TELEMACHOS *(off-stage)*

A match! A match! Not yet, Amphinomos. I, the son of Odysseus, master of this house, propose a match!

(The voices lift, drowning him out too)

PENELOPE

What's happening? What is he doing?

MELANTHO

(A gesture -- to hush)

EURYNOME

Did Amphinomos yield?

MELANTHO

He's sitting down. And now Telemachos has taken up a handful of axes. He's setting one in the earth . . . Another. In a line . . .

PENELOPE

Aiee, I know what they're going to do. Now this will take all night.

MELANTHO

It seems to be a game of sorts.

PENELOPE

Stand up, Amphinomos, and speak out for my hand!

EURYNOME

Now, how can he, Mistress, with all that mass o' guests?

PENELOPE

And now they're drinking. What pleasure can men get from getting drunk?

EURYNOME

Men are goats, that's all. They're goats.

(Off stage, louder shouts, with Telemachos' voice above the rest.)

PENELOPE

Is that Telemachos?

MELANTHO

They're ready to play. See, the line's set up. They've got a bow.

PENELOPE

(scornfully) I wonder if they have an instinct to destroy.

EURYNOME

Now you caint say that about Telemachos. He's a good boy.

PENELOPE

Oh, but look at him. We spoiled him, Eurynome. He hasn't any strength. He needed a father is all. If he'd been born a girl he would have had domestic duties from the age of

five, and by fifteen he'd know how harsh life is.

EURYNOME

He was such a pretty thing. The way his chestnut hair curled on his neck.

PENELOPE

He never had to lift a finger for himself. And never will. His mother. His nurse. Soon a wife, all trotting before him, smoothing his path. Later it will be his paramours . . . Which is why men often hate women, I think, they're so dependent on them.

MELANTHO

You don't mean that! Why do you speak against men merely because you have power yourself. I like men.

PENELOPE

(amused) Oh, I like men too. But men fight --

(From off-stage, shouts, and the thunderous roars of the party.)

Great gods! What's happening?

(Melantho, laughing wildly, throws her weight against the door and bolts it.)

What are they doing girl?

MELANTHO

(blocking the door) Now you'll be repaid.

PENELOPE

What are you talking about?

(She grabs Melantho)

MELANTHO

Get your hands off me. You will not be Queen tonight.

PENELOPE

What is it? *(To Eurynome)* Some fight has broken out.

EURYNOME

Telemachos is there. He'll stop it.

MELANTHO

Telemachos is fighting with his father against the guests.

PENELOPE

With whom? That's not his father! You think that pitiful creature is Odysseus?

MELANTHO

(laughing wildly) I told you it would come tonight. Fool, to think you could marry your lover.

PENELOPE

(not listening) How can we stop them? But so many against two or three.

They'll overcome --

(At this moment the door bursts open. Melantho is thrown back as Telemachos rushes in. He is wild, exultant with triumph. He waves his bloody sword.)

Telemachos!

TELEMACHOS

I bring good news. Amphinomos is dead! I've killed Amphinomos! The pretender's dead!

PENELOPE

(a pause, then a scream) Ahhhhhmphinomos!

TELEMACHOS

I, Telemachos, killed him by myself. The spear flew from my hand and lodged between his shoulder blades.

EURYNOME

You killed him in the back!?

(Penelope bursts into tears.)

(Melantho smiles.)

TELEMACHOS

The pretender is dead!

(He looks at the three women uncertainly, gives a strange giggle, then a shout, waves his sword and runs back to the battle -- The women are left stunned. Melantho, eyes shining with excitement; Penelope weeping uncontrollably; and Eurynome starting to approach her mistress, then hesitating, not knowing what to do. Off-stage the sounds of battle rise -- and with them rise the wails of Penelope; keening, wailing -- a primitive howl of pain)--

EURYNOME

Mistress!

(She tries to embrace Penelope who pushes her away in her despair.)

Mistress!

(Sees that Penelope cannot hear her, turns to Melantho)

And listen! The men are fighting! They are killing the guests!

MELANTHO

They are helpless against the attack. They have no weapons. They will all be killed, every man in that room. And then I shall marry Telemachos. Yes.

EURYNOME

Do you know what you're saying, girl? There'll be wars of vengeance now.

Murderin the guests, and no one here to stop them.

(She herself is weeping with emotion and fear. Penelope, meanwhile, clutching herself and moaning like a sick child, "Oh . . . oh . . ." rises, turns slowly round, confusedly.)

MELANTHO

Ooohhh. She's mad. *(pointing at her)* She's mad. Watch for the witches now. They come to catch you when the mad are near. *(She twirls in place -- arms flung wide)* Turn round three times if you want to be safe.

EURYNOME

(embracing Penelope) Stop it! She is grieving, that's all: Leave her alone. *(Urging her to sit again)*

MELANTHO

No, she's caught by the witches' hair. She'll wind herself up tighter and tighter until she falls down dead.

PENELOPE

Amphinomos is dead.

EURYNOME

Hush. Hush. There, there.

(Melantho whirls around and around to rid herself of the witches' spells.)

EURYNOME

Stop that! What are you doing? Casting spells? Well, it will take more than you and your witches to possess her soul.

(Throughout these speeches, offstage, the sounds of battle, cries and shouts. Melantho stops, rubs one arm defensively, watches Penelope. Eurynome turns back to her mistress. Slowly we become aware: the sounds of battle are dying down.)

MELANTHO

Listen!

EURYNOME

What? I don't hear nothing.

MELANTHO

The noise has stopped. Is everyone dead, do you suppose?

(She bursts into nervous tears.)

I can't stand it. I hate this place. Scream, damn you. Scream!

(Then with a crash the door opens -- and she screams! and runs across the stage!

The sailor is at the door. He is covered with blood. Blood on his clothes, blood on his naked thighs, blood on his chest. His sword is covered with blood. His lips are curled back in a horrible grin, and his eyes flash with excitement.

He bellows at the door, a wordless howl, that picks up and echoes Melanths's scream.

She runs across the stage.

Behind the sailor comes Telemachos, shaken, dragging his sword. He too is covered with blood, but he is bewildered, horrified . . . He looks back, then stumbles forward --

The sailor, at Melanths's movement, rushes into the room, then stands still, like a boar brought to bay, his head forward between his shoulders, eyes glinting, his head shifting side to side.

Penelope does not even see him. She is still lost in her own dreams. Melanths shrinks back into the shadows. Eurynome shrinks against Penelope, so that the three women are grouped at one end of the stage, the men at the other.

The sailor, breathing heavily, looks around. Telemachos, moving to center stage, pushes past the sailor. Telemachos, dragging his sword, sickened.

The sailor gives a mad, wild laugh --)

SAILOR

Another! There's another with a sword! Have at em, boys!

(He attacks Telemachos, shouting, so that Telemachos, taken by surprise, is forced to defend himself.)

TELEMACHOS

Hey! Stop: It's me. Sailor, stop that now!

(Melanthe screams)

EURYNOME

Mistress! Wake up! The gods preserve us. This is no time --

(Melanthe, screaming, hides behind Penelope who has remained hunched on the floor, quiet and severe. When the sailor came in, she raised her head and, disinterested, turned away.)

(to Melanthe) Get away, you whore. Mistress, wake up, we need you. Please.

(Melanthe, still screaming, still clinging to Penelope; the two men fight around them.)

He'll kill us all. Oh, what's to be done? Mistress!

MELANTHO

Kill him, Telemachos! Fight!

EURYNOME

She cannot hear. Mistress!

(Eurynome slaps Penelope hard across the cheek.)

Penelope! *(slap)* Wake up! *(slap)*

(Eurynome grabs Melanthe's dagger.)

Here, give me that.

(Penelope moans, looks sightlessly about. Eurynome slaps her again.)

Get up! You coward! Save your people!

(Penelope shakes her head weakly.)

Get up and kill the man who killed Amphinomos!

(Penelope sees the dagger. She takes it in her hand.)

PENELOPE

I'd kill him willingly.

(Stares at the dagger. Behind her the fight continues sometimes offstage, sometimes entering the room with Telemachos backed into a corner by the old man.)

TELEMACHOS

Stop it! It's me, Telemachos! Your son!

(The sailor, quick and strong, is slashing at Telemachos. It's all that the boy can do to ward him off.)

PENELOPE

(coldly) My own son. A drunken sailor and my son.

TELEMACHOS

(desperately) Mother! Mother!

(Penelope turns, the dagger in her hand. Eyes flashing, she takes in the scene: the sailor hacking at Telemachos, teasing, stabbing at his feet, his belly, his balls.)

Mother!

(Penelope lunges forward, the dagger raised, rushing the two men -- and it's uncertain which she'll kill. She is a sinuous sweeping movement all in red --

And as she passes Melanthe, she grabs the girl by one wrist --)

PENELOPE

Odysseus! A sacrifice!

(In one movement executed quick as thought she hurls the girl at the sailor. Melanthe lands against the sailor, who grunts at the unexpected blow --

For one moment he is off-balance. Telemachos slips to safety, holding his sword in two hand, pointing like a firearm toward the sailor, defending himself, fearfully. Behind him stand the two women.

But the sailor, in one reflex movement, grabs Melantho She is slipping against his bloody body. She struggles against him. They turn. For an instant they are shielded from the audience. There is the flash of a sword, and he has slit her throat!

Blood gushes over his hands, her head drops back. He is holding her bleeding body against his own.

He stands, panting with exertion, intently watching her face.

And the others on the stage are frozen. Time is frozen. Slowly her body begins to slip to the ground slimy with blood . . . slowly . . . slowly . . . down his hips, his thighs . . . inch by inch . . . Penelope is in control. Rigid.)

PENELOPE

(whispering) His sword, Telemachos. Get the sword. And you, Eurynome, bring water. Quick. And cloths. We must clean up this mess. Telemachos get the weapons out of here. He must not see them now.

(Already Eurynome has run off-stage. Telemachos reaches out and takes the sailor's sword without difficulty. He does not even know he has relinquished it, so hard is he concentrating on the girl's body, slipping from his arms.

Telemachos takes swords off-stage.

Eurynome returns with water.)

Quick. We must clean this place.

(Penelope drops to her knees, scrubbing the blood off the floor.

Now, Melantho's body falls to the ground. The sailor stands bewildered. He whimpers, like the whine of a lost dog. He is confused.

Eurynome and Penelope scrubbing. Penelope turns to Telemachos:)

Telemachos, help me. Get this body out.

(Together they drag out Melantho's body and shut the door.

The sailor stands exhausted, blinking, motionless.

Eurynome is washing up and Penelope, speaking firmly, urgently:)

Go, Telemachos. And bring back your finest robes. Now run!

(Gratefully he leaves. Penelope lifts basin and towel and with great dignity approaches the sailor, speaking softly:)

There, there. It's over now. There, there.

(The sailor, standing still. She sets down the basin and proceeds to wash him.)

Hold still. Hold still while I wash your hands and face. Your jacket. There, take that off.

(Gently she strips him of his filthy rags. He stands naked and confused.)

How did you ever get so dirty?

(Eurynome is helping Penelope. The sailor stands docily. He doesn't know quite what's happening. Eurynome picks up his rags, exits as Telemachos returns fresh changed and carrying a robe -- All the time Penelope is talking, soothing the sailor.)

That's not the way a king behaves.

SAILOR

It's not? . . . It's not?

PENELOPE

A king is dignified. A king would not behave like this.

(She takes the robe.)

Put on your robe. There. Now the other arm. That's right. And that looks better. Eurynome bring him water. He is thirsty. He needs something to clear his mind.

SAILOR

No! Wine!

PENELOPE

No. That is not what a king would have. A king would have water now,

SAILOR

He would?

PENELOPE

A king would drink a little water now. Come, sit down here . . . As a king would sit. A king would speak softly. He would be honorable and gentle with his people. Are you tired? Sit and rest now.

(Eurynome brings a tray of food and water. Penelope and Eurynome hand him dishes. He drinks, takes a mouthful of food, and falls exhausted asleep. The two women stare at him, sagging with fatigue. Telemachos approaches.)

TELEMACHOS

(in a whisper) Mother. Mother, we could kill him now.

PENELOPE

You should have thought of that before. It's too late now.

TELEMACHOS

Mother, I can kill him this minute.

PENELOPE

You're a fool. First you massacre our guests. You bring down cause of war, and now you'd kill our only chance to live? It's too late. To save ourselves we have to save him now. I will not have war in my domains. I will lie, Telemachos, and steal and cheat to prevent more war. We've had enough of blood.

TELEMACHOS

Then let's kill him. And say he killed them all.

PENELOPE

Better to twist the truth as Odysseus used to do, lie and survive. We need the man. No, now we must spread the word that these were suitors, just as you two charged, Telemachos, squandering Odysseus' goods. Now, Odysseus has killed the suitors of Penelope. We cannot kill the man, therefore, who took his kingdom by his rightful act. *(She gives a ghastly laugh.)*

TELEMACHOS

He's crazy, Mother . . .

PENELOPE

You should have thought of that before.

(They exchange a look. Telemachos turns to leave. She calls him back.)

Telemachos, you cannot leave. The blood of our guests is on our hands. Now you must show real strength. Line the bodies outside the palace gates. They are our protection, for they dishonored this house.

(Recovering her self-possession)

Get me some men, Telemachos, have them clean the Great Hall. Now Eurynome bring me my tapestry, for we have further work to do tonight . . .

(Exit Telemachos to give orders; exit and reenter Eurynome carrying the loom.)

(The sailor, waking, looks around him.)

There . . . *(blowing off the dust)* . . . My needle's still in it. Eurynome I believe that you should wash the feet of our new master, the king.

SAILOR

Get your hands to yerself. I don't want my feet washed.

PENELOPE

Hush now, a king would wash his feet, my lord.

SAILOR

I'm not a king. I'm just a poor sailor.

(Penelope at her loom, rethreading it, is weeping. The tears pour slowly, down her cheeks. Yet she is maintaining control.)

I'm not a king.

PENELOPE

Ah, that's true.

SAILOR

I don't want to be a king.

PENELOPE

You should have thought of that before.

(Her movements are jerky.)

My wool's all tangled. Here, hold this, while I try to unravel the wool.

That's right. One hand there. Like that. That's very good. Now you're behaving properly.

SAILOR

(wistfully) I killed em all, didn't I? Killed the pretenders?

PENELOPE

Yes, yes. You killed the pretenders. You killed them all.

(The lights are dimming.)

SAILOR

And the women and the whores and the sluts? An I got rid of em all? (wildly, starting to rise) No! But there was more. They was a whole mess more. I got to clean out this unclean house --

EURYNOME

(Who is washing his feet)

No sir. You got em all. Dozens of women are dead. Nary a bad person left.

PENELOPE

Sit down, my lord. It's over now!

SAILOR

(sitting) All done? And they're gone out of the house?

EURYNOME

They're all gone, and now you're home.

SAILOR

I've come home?

(Lights dimming now. It is cold and dark. Telemachos enters, sits beside his mother, puts his head on her shoulder, sobbing.

With a gesture of embrace, she pats his head.)

PENELOPE

Telemachos? Throw a log on the fire. It's cold tonight. We feel the winter chill. Hold your hands a little higher, my lord.

EURYNOME

It's been a long day.

(A pause.)

PENELOPE

Poor little Melantho. Poor child. She didn't know what she was doing. Poor child. I'd not have hurt her for the world.

TELEMACHOS

Oh, mother! You hated her. You killed her for your lands.

PENELOPE

No . . . I killed her for you, Telemachos . . . I didn't know I loved you so.

EURYNOME

She deserved it, mistress. Don't you think another thought about it. That girl was bad clear through. From the moment she came.

PENELOPE

Poor, lonely child. I did not want to hurt her.

(They sit in silence for a while.)

SAILOR

Is this all a king does? Sits like this?

PENELOPE

Tell us a story, my lord. Tell us what has happened to you, *(sarcastically)*

Odysseus, since you rode the waves to Ilium.

SAILOR

Tell what?

EURYNOME

(happily) Aye, he's seen heaven and hell, he says.

PENELOPE

Tell about how you went down to hell. Did you speak to the God of the Under world? Tell us, Odysseus.

(She bends over the tapestry.)

SAILOR

(eyes lighting up) Yes. You bet I have. Ohmy, ohmy. And the Sun King too.

I been everywhere.

PENELOPE

Begin at the beginning, then. With the Fall of Troy.

EURYNOME

(bursting into tears) Oh mistress, I wouldn't have thought it possible.

PENELOPE

Stop bawling, Eurynome. No one says that life is easy. The least we can do is to help each other to endure . . . Tell your story, Odysseus.

SAILOR

Well, the horse was what did it, the great wooden horse, and when the Trojans
had broken down the city wall . . . then the soldiers

*(The lights are dimming as he speaks, until only his voice
remains, speaking from utter blackness, the voice of
Odysseus, telling his story across 4,000 years of time --)*

. . . . the soldiers come, sneaking out in the dark, and they set a pyre on
the two west towers, a great blaze in the black night . . .

(The voice having dropped low, as if far away, then stops . . .)

FIN

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