HELEN, LATER: AN ORIGINAL PLAY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

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Denton, Texas
August, 1977

The purpose of this play is to dramatize the change of government in ancient Greece from a matriarchy to a patriarchy and from rule by the Ionian to rule by the Dorian Greeks through the last years of Helen of Troy. Faced with a challenge by her husband, Menelaus, who wants his sons to rule, Helen manages through intrigue to arrange for her daughter to gain the throne. Helen herself becomes a "goddess."
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Brief Study of the Historic and Mythic Backgrounds of Helen of Troy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. HELEN, LATER</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Original Play about Helen of Troy in Her Middle Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare's *Toilus and Cressida*, Diomedes speaks of Helen of Troy:

She's bitter to her country: hear me, Paris:  
For every false drop in her bawdy veins  
A Grecian's life has sunk; for every scruple  
Of her contaminated carrion weight,  
A Trojan hath been slain. Since she could speak,  
She hath not given so many good words breath  
As for her Greeks and Trojans suffer'd death.  
(IV, 2, 68-74)

Toilus, hearing the sounds of the battle without Troy, says:

Helen must needs be fair  
When with your blood you daily paint her thus.  
(I, 1, 53, 54)

Was Helen a wanton, a woman whose passionate love destroyed a city? In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus cries:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? (V, 2, 99)

Homer, in the *Iliad*, described her and her effect:

No one could blame the Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans  
For suffering so long for such a woman's sake

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2Ibid., p. 13.
She's frightfully like the immortal goddesses to look upon. (Book III)\(^4\)

In his encomium of Helen, Isocrates, the Orator, asserts Helen's uniqueness as the only daughter by a mortal that Zeus acknowledged. She possessed beauty in the highest degree, beauty to which even strength gave homage. The gods went to war and sacrificed their children in her cause. Both the Greeks and the Trojans were convinced that "in whichever land Helen's person resided that would prosper better."\(^5\)

Helen has been equated with goddesses of trees and the moon,\(^6\) with goddesses of the sea, navigation, stars and ball-lightning,\(^7\) as well as Aphrodite, Ishtar, and Artemis. Was she then a queen-priestess as well as a beautiful woman? Was she—to her people—a living god?

There is more to her story than the romance and myth. Helen was the result of vast social, political, and religious changes that occurred in Greece in the second and first millenia B.C. In examining her myth in terms of the recent scientific discoveries regarding the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures and the Greek Bronze Age, we find a new view of Helen of Troy as a religious and political figure.


\(^7\) Pollard, p. 56.
The race of Gods and men is one; from one mother we both draw our breath. Yet are our powers poles apart; for we are nothing, but for them the brazen Heaven endures forever, their secure abode.

Pindar

Greek tradition stated that there were four ages of man. The first was the Golden Age, and the men of this period lived like gods. Hesiod says that "they rejoiced in continual festivity." They were mortal, but at least "they died as though overcome by sweet slumber." After their death, they became benevolent guardians of the living. The second was the Silver Age, which fostered a race of men who obeyed their mothers all their lives. Hesoid thought of these men as feeble and inept, and said they were "agriculturalists." The men of the third age, the Bronze Age, were robust and warlike. "Their pitiless hearts were as hard as steel; their might was untameable, their arms invincible." They came to their end by killing each other. Helen most likely lived in this age, or in the Herioc Age that Hesoid placed after it. More general opinion follows the Bronze Age with the Iron Age, the contemporary age, a despicable period of misery and crime, "when men respect neither their vows, nor justice, nor virtue." Thus did mankind gradually degenerate.

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But these past ages long remained shrouded in the mists of prehistory. Even the chief chronicler of the Bronze Age, Homer, was believed until the late nineteenth century to have invented his tales of the god-like Greek heroes and Helen of Troy. When Heinrich Schlieman unearthed ancient Troy and Mycenae, his archeological discoveries raised Homer from the position of myth-maker to that of historian. With the later discoveries of Knossos, Hagia Triada, Mallia, Zakros, Pylos, and Tiryns, an astonishing world was disclosed, the Bronze Age world of high art and civilization with great citadels, extensive road systems, far-flung trade, and not one but two written languages: Linear A and Linear B.

Still, it was not until Michael Ventris broke the "code" for Linear B that we found that these men and women of the late Bronze Age used an ancient form of Greek. Linear A, the Minoan tongue, as yet, remains undeciphered.

Archeology has its limits, but it can tell roughly when a palace burned down or at what level a new and datable style of pottery appeared. There is evidence of human habitation of Greece as early as 70,000 B.C., and by about 6,000 B.C. there were settled neolithic communities. These early settlements were in Macedonia, Thessaly, Central Greece, the Peloponnesus, and Crete, and were well developed by

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3,500 B.C. The towns had a notable lack of fortification, probably indicating peaceful co-existence and the sharing of a mutual culture. Their pottery skills were advanced, and from innumerable small female figures found all over Greece and the Balkans from this period, it may be assumed these early people worshipped a female deity.\textsuperscript{11}

The peacefulness was shattered sometime during the fourth millennium B.C. by invaders from the North. Pouring into eastern Thessaly, down the valley of the Peneus, and settling as far down as the Gulf of Volo, they brought with them pottery styles with strong affinities to those of cultures in Hungary, Rumania, West Russia, and Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{12} They also brought a different, more organized lifestyle to Thessaly. Their towns had a central meeting place and, evidently, fortification.\textsuperscript{13}

But central and southern Greece, untouched by the invasion, continued on their original paths. The schism between northern and southern Greece grew, and they made little contact for a thousand years. During that time, in southern Greece, the Minoan civilization developed in Crete, and the worship of the Earth-Mother goddess flourished.

\textsuperscript{12} Samuel, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 23.
Through their expanding trade, the Minoans spread their culture to other parts of central and southern Greece. This would have been the culture of Helen's ancestors, the Minoan peoples.

Meanwhile, the great-grandfathers of the Achaean Greeks lived in constantly growing settlements in northern Greece, tended their herds, and developed the worship of patriarchal Father Zeus on the heights of Mount Olympus. They developed the Greek language. Also, at this time the use of bronze was discovered, spread quickly, and brought with it a period of great material advancement for both northern and southern Greece.

Eventually, the pressures of overpopulation and intertribal warfare in the north forced an invasion of the south by these early Greek-speaking peoples. Depending on the source, the northern or Greek invasion of the Pelasgian Minoans (as opposed to the Cretan Minoans) occurred anywhere from 2200 B.C. to 1600 B.C. Probably the invasion was a gradual one, with occasional battles and political coups, and took a full six hundred years.

14 Hawkes, p. 60.
15 Kitto, p. 15.
16 Samuel, p. 10.
17 Emily Vermeule, Greece in the Bronze Age (Chicago: 1964), p. 278.
The Greeks would have found a people similar to the Cretans on the southern mainland. They were probably dominated by the Cretan thassalocracy, whose trade extended throughout the Aegean Sea, and the Levant, Egypt, Libya, and possibly Sicily. As late as the sixteenth century B.C., embassies from Crete were received by Pharaoh at the Theban capitol.\(^\text{18}\)

As the rough Northerners entered central Greece, the Cretans were worshipping their goddesses and dancing with their bulls. Their written language was Linear A, which had been developed with forms learned from the Phoenicians and Egyptians. As can be seen from their palaces with flush toilets,\(^\text{19}\) their delightful frescoes, and their dress and jewelry, their civilization was highly sophisticated. Judging from references to their "mistress," the arrangement and decoration of their throne rooms, their matrilineal dynasties, it is probable that their political structure was matriarchal.\(^\text{20}\) The mainland settlements spoke a language akin to Minoan and also used Linear A. They worshipped their own goddesses, and they also used a matriarchal form of government.

The Greek conquerors initially took more from the Minoan civilization than they gave. The Greeks brought

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\(^{18}\) Hawkes, p. 62.  
\(^{19}\) Samuel, p. 34.  
\(^{20}\) Hawkes, p. 77.
the horse and the Greek language, but as they settled in, the new masters learned from and were greatly influenced by their subjects. To accommodate the conqueror's language, Linear B was developed out of the Minoan Linear A.\textsuperscript{21} Other evidence of the Minoan influence can be recognized in the Greek adoption of the powerful goddesses they found. Zeus married the Argive Hera, gave birth to Athene, even though she pre-dated him, and finally allowed the Cretan Gaia to be his grandmother, changing his birthplace from Olympus to Crete.\textsuperscript{22}

Some sources call the original Greek invaders the "Achaeans," but the tradition was that the Achaeans came to Ellis and later to Mycenae in the retinue of a very wealthy stranger from Asia Minor. Calling themselves "Achaean Greeks," they claimed to have originated in Thessaly.\textsuperscript{23} The stranger with whom they came was Pelops, son of Tantalus, King of Phrygia, the same Pelops who was cooked and served up to the gods by his father at the infamous banquet.\textsuperscript{24} Whether the original northern invaders or a later group, the Achaeans worshipped Zeus, were patriarchal, spoke Greek, and, as they gained ascension, ruled as a haughty aristocracy

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21}Vermeule, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{22}Hawkes, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology}, p. 204.
\end{flushright}
over the darker, smaller Pelasgians. Homer refers to them as the "brown-haired (Xanthoi) Achaeans," possibly to distinguish them from their black-haired subjects.

Until about 1400 B.C., the island of Crete remained untouched by the mainland conquerors except through trade. Crete and her Queen still dominated, and the god called the Cretan Zeus, or Velchanos, was still subordinate to his mother. But about 1405 B.C., Knossos was sacked by the Achaeans. After the fall of Knossos, the first Greek king sat on the Cretan throne. The Parian Marble sets 1410 B.C. as the floruit of Minos, the first Greek king.

According to the legend, this Minos was the son of Zeus and Europa, the daughter of Phoenix. Phoenix was the son of Agenor, King of Phoenicia and Tellphassa, and, as will be seen, a great-grandfather of Helen of Troy. Europa was the young lady that Zeus, in the form of a bull, carried on his back across the sea to Crete. There she was married to the King of Crete, Asterius, who adopted her son.

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28 Zairopulo, p. 5.
29 R. M. Frazer, Jr., translator, The Trojan War, the Chronicles of Dictys of Crete, and Dares, the Phrygian (Bloomington, Ind., 1966), p. 174.
30 Durant, p. 13.
tradition stated that the first Achaean king of Crete (he was called Taurus and equated with Zeus) went to Tyre, carried Europa to Crete, and built the mighty city of Gortyn for her. King Agenor, to revenge himself for the kidnapping of this granddaughter, sent a force after her led by his son, Cadmus. 31

At Mycenae in this time period (c. 1350 B.C.), the king ruled whom the Greeks knew as the founder of the city—Perseus. While excavations at Mycenae prove it was in existence considerably prior to 1400 B.C., it may well be that Perseus rebuilt the city destroyed by earlier Greeks. The legend stated that he dropped the cap of his scabbard (mykes) and took it as an omen to build a city. Another story related that he plucked a mushroom (mykes) and from the ground an unending spring of fresh water gushed forth. From these stories, the derivation of the name "Mycenae" is explained, and there is a spring located a short distance to the east of the Citadel, known as Perseia. Thought in antiquity to be the one revealed by Perseus' mushroom, in modern times it "still provides the village of Mycenae with a good supply of excellent water." 32

31Kitto, p. 22.

However the city came into being, Perseus founded the Perseid dynasty at Mycenae. This dynasty was not Achaean, but "Danaan," derived from his forefather Danaus, an immigrant from Egypt. Though Perseus' family might have been Egyptian-Minoan, the myth stated that there was (or the Greeks like to think that there was) a Greek father, for Zeus visited Danae in the form of a golden shower and impregnated her with Perseus.\textsuperscript{33} Mother and infant were exiled, to be taken in by Polydectes, King of Seriphos. Later, having grown to manhood, Perseus went off to hunt the Gorgon, commit many other heroic deeds, and finally end up King of Mycenae.\textsuperscript{34}

The Perseid dynasty at Mycenae ended with the death of Eurystheus, Perseus' grandson. Sthenelus, Perseus' son, had married Nicippe, the daughter of Pelops, who had won the hand of Hippodameia, a princess of Ellis. Nicippe had two brothers, Atreus and Thestes. With Eurystheus' death, his maternal uncles succeeded to the Mycenaean throne.

Another of Perseus' sons was Electron, the father of Alcmene.\textsuperscript{35} Alcmene married a nobleman called Amphitryon, who lived near Tiryns and claimed Egyptian ancestry. According to Hesiod, Amphitryon quarrelled with his

\textsuperscript{33} Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 194.
father-in-law and killed him. He then took Alcmene with him into exile, and they went as suppliants to Thebes, where Cadmus, son of Agenor, was king. His expedition to Crete to rescue Europa having failed, Cadmus established the Cadmean dynasty in Thebes—the dynasty destined to end with Oedipus. Cadmus welcomed the exiles to his city, and there Alcmene gave birth to twins, Heracles, the son of Zeus, and the mortal son of Amphitryon, Iphicles. 36

The myth of Zeus' having tricked the virtuous Alcmene by taking Amphitryon's bodily shape and thereby impregnating her with Heracles was widely known. At the same time Alcmene's uncle, Sthenelus, and his wife, the Pelopid Nicippe, were expecting a child. Hera, enraged once again by Zeus' unfaithfulness, made him swear that the first born of these two offspring would rule Mycenae. Then she caused Nicippe to go into labor first, at seven months. Thus Eurystheus became king, and at his bidding Heracles was to later perform the famous labours. 37 Nevertheless, Heracles' claim to the thrones of Argos, Tiryns, Mycenae, and other cities through his relation to Perseus was to become the basis of the claims to Mycenae made by the Dorian Greeks and the Heraclidae when they invaded the peninsula a hundred years later.

36 Zairopulo, p. 66.

Heracles was said to have fathered eighty sons. After his death, fearing persecution by Eurystheus, they became exiles. Finally, Demophan, a son of Theseus, received them in Athens. Was was declared between Eurystheus' Mycenae and Athens for this affront, and Eurystheus lost his life in the campaign. He was killed by Iolaus, the son of Heracles' mortal twin, Iphicles.

With this victory, the sons of Heracles returned to claim their throne from Atreus, the new King of Mycenae. Atreus was able to defeat the sons of Heracles and kill the eldest son, Hyllus. Plagues that occurred at this time were interpreted as the god's displeasure with the Heraclidae, and the remaining sons agreed to suspend their claims to Argos and Mycenae for one hundred years. This left the situation open for the return of the Heraclidea in alliance with the Dorians around 1100 B.C.

Atreus, of the new Pelopid dynasty, was a good king. Mycenae prospered, and he extended the citadel's ring wall, originally constructed by Perseus. Atreus also built the great Lion Gate, which still stands, and he was the father of Agamemnon, and Helen's husband, Menelaus. At Tiryns, he

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38 Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 199.
39 Zairopulo, p. 79.
40 Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 199.
41 Durant, p. 42.
42 Mylonas, p. 34.
constructed a great cattle stockade, and these extensive fortifications may indicate that the Greek peninsula was under frequent attack.

Who were the attackers? No one knows for sure, but the Greeks turned their attention to Thebes. Atreus appealed to the other Greek princes for cooperation. Together they barred the isthmus with a Cyclopean wall, a task accomplished in an amazing brief span of time, about ten years. Then the Greeks launched their first major organized campaign, that shown by Aeschlus in his play *The Seven Against Thebes*. The Achaean Greeks were defeated, and shortly thereafter Atreus died.

His brother, Thyestes, succeeded Atreus, but only for a short time--about five years. Upon Thyestes' death, the oldest of Atreus' sons, Agamemnon, became King of Mycenae. The city was at the zenith of its power, with trade routes and influence that out-distanced even the Cretan sea empire of old. It was a kingdom that commanded respect from the Hittite and Egyptian Empires. In the annals of the Hittite Kings, the great kingdom of "Ahhijawa" was mentioned, that being the Hittite word for "Achaean." Still, the Achaeans felt they had to contend with Thebes.

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43 Vermeule, p. 39.  
44 Ibid., p. 40.  
Thebes had been severely weakened by its internal problems, however, and by this time was ruled by Jocasta's brother, Creon. Agamemnon, whose name meant "very resolute," organized the Greek princes into their second unified expedition called the "Epigoni," and Thebes fell.  

II

. . . Shall Troy, shall Priam
And the adulterous spouse,
In peace enjoy the fruits
Of broken vows?—spoken by Hera, Iliad, Book II  

Myths are seldom simple and never irresponsible. Robert Graves  

The myths of ancient Greece stated that one evening Leda, Queen of Sparta, wife to Tindareus, was bathing in a pool when she saw a majestic white swan floating toward her. It was Zeus, who, in that form, subsequently ravaged her. That same night Leda lay with her husband as well, and she later bore two eggs. In one were Polydeuces and Helen, the children of Zeus, and in the other were Castor and Clytemnestra, the children of Tydareus.  

46 Graves, II, p. 56.  
47 Vermeule, p. 73.  
48 Richmond Lattimore, translator, The Iliad of Homer (Chicago, 1959), p. 56.  
49 Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. viii.  
50 Ibid., p. 111.
Yet another tradition asserted that Zeus became enamoured of the goddess Nemesis, the daughter of Nys (Night). Nemesis took many shapes to evade him, but he finally overtook her—she in the shape of a goose and he in the shape of a royal swan. Nemesis discarded the egg that resulted from this union, but it was found by Hermes, who entrusted it to Leda. Two children were hatched from the egg, Helen and Polydeuces (or, in some versions, Castor), and Leda raised them as her own.

Dictys described the scene in which Helen listed her ancestors to the Trojans in a bid for their support:

Danaus and Agenor were the progenitors, respectively, of Priam's line and hers. The daughter of Danaus was Hesione, who had given birth to Electra by Atlas; Electra had given birth to Dardanus by Jupiter; and from Dardanus were descended Tros, and, in order of succession, the other Kings of Troy. As for Agenor, he had begotten Taygite; and she had given birth to Lacedaemon by Jupiter; Lacedaemon had begotten Amyclas, and he had begotten Argalus, the father of Oebalus; it was well known that Oebalus was the father of Tyndareus, and he, it seemed, was her father. She also recited the relation of her mother's family with Hecuba, for the son of Agenor, Phoenix, was the ancestor of both Leda and of Hecuba's father, Dymus.

Agenor was the grandfather of Europa, whose child was the first Minos, and Agenor was the father of Cadmus, King of Thebes. Her relation to Agenor indicated that Helen was a Phoenician-Agean of the Minoan culture, as opposed to an

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52 Frazer, pp. 27-28.
Achaean Greek, despite the several intrusions of the Greek Zeus into her line. One source suggested that Helen's parents were of Aetolian descent,\(^5^3\) which was one of the groups that had settled in Crete originally.\(^5^4\) This would have made Helen a princess of the small, dark Pelasgian people the Achaean kings ruled.

Helen was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the world. At the age of twelve she was kidnapped by Theseus and carried off by him to Athens. Whether it was a friendly visit with cousins or a rape, she was eventually returned to her home by her brothers, Castor and Polydeuces.\(^5^5\) Theseus, and indeed all Greece, praised her beauty.

When it came time for her to marry, the Homeric tradition stated it was her beauty that inspired all the Greek princes to vie for her hand. Among them were Philoctetes, a famous archer and warrior leader; Menestheus, a prince of Athens; Lycomedes, a wealthy leader of Crete; Ajax, son of Telamon of Salamis; Elephenor of Euboea, off the northern shores of Attica; Antilochus, son of Nestor, King of Pylos; Agapenor, a leader of the Arcadians; Amphimachus, Thalpius, Meges, Schedius, Epistrophus, Polyxenus, Peneleus, the Boeotian leader, and Leitus, all of them heroes; Ajax, son of Oeleus, known as the Lesser Ajax; Ascaphalus and Ialmenus.

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\(^5^3\) Grant, p. 262.  
\(^5^4\) Hawkes, p. 28.  
\(^5^5\) Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 201.
sons of Ares, god of war; Eumelus, a companion of Aeneas; Polypoetes, Leonteus, and Eurypalus, famous warriors; Teucer, the famous archer; Achilles' friend, Patroclus; the physicians Podalirus and Machaon, sons of Asclepius, a healer and demi-god; and Menelaus, brother to King Agamemnon, King of Mycenae. Podarces, son of Iphiclus, the Argonaut, and Protesilaus, a Thessalian leader, sent letters offering costly gifts. Ulysses of Ithaca was there, too, but early in the proceedings he realized that she would be given to Menelaus.56

Fearing quarrels, Helen's family denied no suitor, but also refused to accept anyone's gift. Ulysses, or Odysseus, offered to help in the dilemma in exchange for the hand of Penelope, the daughter of Icarius and cousin to Helen. The family agreed to the bargain, and in return he devised a solution. Tyndareus was to have all the suitors swear to unite behind and defend the man who had the good fortune to be chosen Helen's husband. Subsequently, a horse was sacrificed, jointed, and the suitors stood on the bloody pieces to repeat the oath. Helen, as Odysseus foresaw, was married to Menelaus, who became the King of Sparta.57

Helen was the second daughter of Leda to be married to a son of Atreus. A few years prior to Helen's marriage to

56 Pollard, pp. 31-32.
57 Graves, II, p. 269.
Menelaus, Agamemnon had kidnapped Clytemnestra, killed her husband, and carried her to Mycenae, where he married her. Castor and Polydeuces had tried to rescue their sister, but either their army had been defeated or diplomacy had triumphed, because Clytemnestra remained married to Agamemnon and later pursued her own personal revenge against him.

Castor and Polydeuces were killed in a dispute over cattle with fellow twin-princes of Messena. According to one myth, both sets of twins were killed, leaving the cities of Pylos and Sparta without heirs in their ruling families. This left the way open for the Achaean Nestor to take over Pylos and for Menelaus to rule Sparta without interference from brothers-in-law. After their death, Castor and Polydeuces were declared Dioscuri, or "young sons of Zeus," and also declared immortal. The Gemini constellation was named for them, and they became patrons of sailors. No mention is made of the deaths of Helen's parents, Leda and Tyndareus.

Helen remained married to Menelaus for nine years, and at this point, the Judgment of Paris became part of the story.

58 Ibid., p. 51.
59 Graves, I, p. 248.
60 Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 205.
61 Graves, II, p. 70.
At the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the Goddess of Discord, Eris, tossed an apple made of gold and inscribed "For the Fairest" into the divine assembly. Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite disputed among themselves for ownership of the apple. Refusing to judge, Zeus commanded that Paris, a prince of Troy, be arbitor. The three goddesses went to the lad, who was tending his cattle on Mount Gargarus, and each goddess offered him a bribe to award her the prize. He chose Aphrodite's gift, the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, and this promise later prompted his abduction of Helen.  

Dares describes the voyage of the "Phrygian Alexader" (as he called Paris) to Greece with a royal fleet to avenge Heracles' murder of Paris' grandfather and abduction of an aunt, Hesione. When he stopped at the island of Cythera to sacrifice to the goddess (Cythera Aphrodite), Paris met Helen, who had come to the island for the same religious purpose. Late that night, he and his men surprised her and some of her ladies-in-waiting and carried them off. Dares says Helen was not unwilling to accompany Paris.  

Another story was that Paris came to Sparta as an envoy, and he and his retinue were treated as befitted a prince of the richest and most powerful city in Asia. Menelaus had


63. Frazer, p. 141.
been called away to Crete, but he had no fear of leaving Helen in charge of his guests. Aphrodite, however, persuaded the queen to flee with her lover and return with him to Troy. Helen abandoned her daughter, Hermione, who was then nine years old, but took her son, Pleisthines. Helen also departed with the greater part of the palace treasury and with three talents worth of gold from Apollo's temple. She was accompanied by five serving women, including Aethra, mother of Theseus, and Peirithous' sister, Theisadië.65

All of the princes of Greece, faithful to their oath, joined Agamemnon and Menelaus in the third organized Greek expedition, this time against Troy. After a ten-year siege, the walls of the citadel were breached by the trickery of Odysseus' wooden horse. Troy was sacked and burned, and Helen returned to Menelaus.

She set out with her husband for Sparta, but ill winds caused them to be shipwrecked on the Egyptian coast, and there they lived for a period of time, from five to eight years.67 They arrived in Sparta on the very day that Orestes avenged Agamemnon's murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.68

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64 Pollard, p. 46.
65 Graves, II, p. 274.
66 The first two organized Greek campaigns were "The Seven Against Thebes" and the "Epigoni" (see above, pp. 14-15).
67 Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, p. 205.
68 Graves, II, p. 346.
After the return of Helen and Menelaus, according to Homer, they ruled Sparta in peace until their deaths. In the Odyssey, when Telemachus visits them, he finds Helen happy, still very beautiful, and active in court. Helen's daughter, Hermione, was married to Orestes, and their son, Tisamenis, Helen's grandson, was defeated in the Dorian invasion by the old enemies of his great-grandfather, the Heraclidae. 69

After Menelaus' death, Helen took her place with the Dioscuri among the stars, herself a divinity. 70 Another account stated that Polyxo, the widow of Tlepolemus, King of Rhodes, avenged his death at Troy by sending serving women disguised as Erinyes to hang Helen. 71

Homer's depiction of Helen, and the one most followed in later literature, is that of a noble queen whose adultery was caused by the Goddess of Love, Aphrodite. Homer shows Helen chiding Paris for his cowardly desertion of the field when confronted by Menelaus in personal combat, and also has her begging forgiveness of her Trojan friends. She will not go to Paris' bed until forced to do so by Aphrodite.

Euripides' Helen is a regretful wife, and the Helen in Giradoux's The Trojan War Will Not Take Place is the blushing

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69 Zairopulo, p. 87.
70 Pollard, pp. 104-105.
71 Graves, II, p. 68.
adulteress. But always she is "fair Helen," forgiven because of her beauty and ennobled by her contrition. Marlowe's Faustus deifies her, but again it is for her beauty and inspiration of love.

The historic Helen has been lost, and many scholars deny that she ever existed. One writer declared that "Helen" (which means "moon") was the name of the Spartan Moon-goddess. Menelaus became king after his ritual marriage to her accompanied by a horse sacrifice. It might be that the mnēstēres tēs Helenēs, the "suitors of Helen," were really mnēstēres tou Hellespontou, "those who were mindful of the Hellespont," and the oath that the Greek princes took was to support the "rights of any member of the confederacy to navigate the Hellespont, despite the Trojans and their Asiatic allies." 72

Most scholars agree that the Trojan War was economic in nature, dealing with disputes over trade-routes, 73 and also involved the enforcement of the belief in Zeus, the father, and the patriarchal form of government. 74 Robert Graves pointed out that the Hellespont bore the name of the Trojan goddess, Helle, and the story of Helen's abduction may have come from the Ugarit epic Keret. 75

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72 Graves, II, p. 277.
73 Kitto, p. 38.
74 Graves, II, pp. 56, 302, and 312.
75 Ibid., p. 277.
Whether Helen of Troy lived or not, in her myth there can be found many shreds of truth, and it can be taken as giving evidence of a woman's life, a queen's life, during the period of the Achaean takeover in the Late Bronze Age of Greece.

III

Man has used the idea of God to dictate his personal conduct, to obtain power over his fellows, to excuse his crimes, and for innumerable other purposes, including that of realising himself as God.
Aleister Crowley

The playscript of Helen, Later assumes that Helen lived around 1200 B.C., that she was the Queen of Sparta and wife of Menelaus, and that the chief events of the Iliad and the Odyssey actually occurred: Helen's going to Troy, the Trojan War, the deaths of Hector and Achilles, the Wooden Horse, and Odysseus' long journey home. The play takes the myths of the heroes, the death of Agamemnon, and the story of Orestes to have some basis in historic fact. For instance, Orestes might not have actually killed his mother, but the power of the myth that built up around him indicates that he did something against his mother. Whatever he did, it would have been an important religious and political act on his part as an Achaean prince.

The gods and goddesses are seen as symbols of the religious and political forces of the time. As the divine beings quarrel and choose sides, their earthly priests and priestesses, who controlled wealthy temples and numerous followers, can be imagined shifting their influence and manipulating policy.

Derived from both the myths and ancient history, from the techniques of science, and from the opinions of scholars, the play offers a picture of the Mycenaean Age. In that picture, Helen is shown as both a woman and a queen.

She is not Greek. The Greeks have been living in the Peloponnesus for several hundred years and the Achaean kings have ruled Mycenae for one generation by the time Helen is born. She speaks Greek, Minoan, and Egyptian (the Trojan tongue might have been the contemporary Minoan-Greek blend of most of the major "Greek" cities). It is likely that Helen's home, Sparta, was one of the last strongholds of Minoan culture, although proof of this is lacking since excavation at Sparta has been unrewarding; but it is suggested by the importance of Helen's marriage. Apparently the Achaeans did not control Sparta and the rich Lacedonian plain until that marriage and the death of the Dioscuri.

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77 Zairopulo, p. 137.
78 Graves, Part I, p. 248.
The premise of the playscript is that Helen did not go to Troy for love. The ancient view that she was under the influence of Aphrodite is seen as mythic shorthand: Helen was advised to defect to Troy by the priestesses of the goddess later to be known as Aphrodite in the Greek Pantheon. Aethra, Helen's nurse and once Queen of Athens, was most likely one of these priestesses. So Helen shifted her influence and wealth to Troy and its allies. The importance of her essentially political act is readily seen in that it sparked an already explosive situation into a major war.

Why did she defect? Because she was the daughter of one of the last of the Minoan matriarchies, and her Achaean husband had usurped her powers. Myth symbolizes the Achaean takeover of Sparta by Zeus' rape of Leda and his supposed paternity of Helen and Polydeuces or Castor. The Trojans were distant Aetolian-Minoan cousins to Helen, and she must have hoped that if they were victorious over the Achaeans, she would regain her throne.

As a Pelasgian, Helen was small and dark-complexioned. She had black hair, while Menelaus is variously described as tall and brown- or red-haired. Could there have been a racial prejudice? It is possible. Even though they married into the Minoan royal families, the Aryan Achaeans evidently remained aloof from their Pelasgian subjects.  

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79 Frazer, p. 174.  
80 Kitto, p. 22.
There is the possibility that Helen was involved in or a pawn of a conspiracy on the part of her mother, Leda, and possibly other high priestesses and matrons of Sparta. Here the connection between Helen and Nemesis is made clear:

Now Nemesis' chief shrine was at Rhamnous in Attica, where the base of her image contained a representation of Helen being presented to the goddess by Leda. The carving was by Agorakritos, Phidias' pupil, and so dated from the time of Pericles.81

This carving is usually interpreted as evidence that Nemesis was Helen's mother. But the picture of the Queen of Sparta, Leda, dedicating her youngest and most beautiful daughter to a goddess of justice and revenge conjures a scenario of conflict and intrigue. Thus presented to the goddess, Helen would have been sponsored by her; Nemesis would become her "divine mother," and aid her in the bitter struggle for justice. But upon whom would Leda be revenged?

Jacquetta Hawkes described the Mycenaean Age as a blending of male and female influences, specifically those of the Achaeans and Minoan cultures, but the myth of Hera's marriage to Zeus hinted at a different relationship. Zeus ravished Hera, and forcibly took both crown and sceptre from her. That he appeared as a bedraggled cuckoo to trick Hera into receiving him is an especially revealing symbol, for the cuckoo is the bird that lays her eggs in another bird's

nest, and whose offspring, upon hatching, destroys the foster siblings.

The Minoan culture worshipped a Mother-goddess who was usually a nature symbol. Family names and holdings were traced through the female. This was a practical method, because the father's role is procreation was unknown and a communal sexual society was dominant.

In the Minoan culture either men obeyed women or the two sexes were close to equal. A queen ruled with a council of elders, more than likely powerful matrons, and these councils held the authority of tribal customs as represented by the Moirai—or fates. The sex of the Erinyes is also explained by the matrilineal institutions of pre-Hellenic Greece, and Aeschylus says in the beginning the world was ruled by the "three-fold Moirai and the unforgetting Erinyes." Even Zeus could not overthrow the Fates.

The Minoan style of dress reveals a freedom and ease for the women of the culture. Minoan ladies dressed in well-cut jackets that exposed their breasts and in flounced, multi-colored skirts that cascaded to the ground. Their hair


84 Thomson, pp. 51-52.
was coiled and curled, and they were richly be-jeweled.\textsuperscript{85} Durant describes the Minoan culture as "charming . . . and surprisingly urban."\textsuperscript{86} The frescoes discovered at Knossos seem to picture a life-style that was full of ebullience, festivals, and dancing.

The mainland Minoans were not the traders that their Cretan cousins were, but the mainland farms had prospered and the cities had grown. Raw metals were rare and had to be imported, but several mainland cities developed artisan groups that turned raw materials into fine finished goods. Aggression was channeled into athletic events, and the real battleground for the society was the market-place.\textsuperscript{87}

Menelaus and other Achaean kings were descendants of warrior-herdsmen who were patriarchal, and who had developed male ownership of herds, women, and children by the example of bulls, rams, and billies. Frequent fratricidal conflicts had honed their fighting skills and made them fine warriors. They knew how to fortify their cities and to plan campaigns of war. They invented history, standing armies, and the Greek language, an organizational tool of the highest order.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{85} Hawkes, p. 31.  
\textsuperscript{86} Durant, p. 11.  
\textsuperscript{87} Hawkes, pp. 64-65.  
\textsuperscript{88} Graves, \textit{Mammon and the Black Goddess}, p. 6.
The Greek god, Zeus, originated as a tribal "father" god, as opposed to the nature goddesses of the South. When the Minoan matriarchs, among them Leda, and the Achaean Greeks met, a very fundamental battle over the division of labor and power ensued. The old goddesses fought the "sons of Cronus" tooth and nail. Many of these goddesses pre-dated Zeus and bore names that were not Greek in origin. That they were included in the Greek Pantheon illustrates their power.

Although the mythic accounts of Zeus' numerous rapes of goddesses and women and the many offspring that resulted may be the ancient historians' way of saying: "Who his father was only Gods know," Zeus' fatherhood in the myths was a symbol of Greek or Achaean control. Even the ancient pythoness goddess, known as Neith, or the Palestinian Anath, or the Attican Athene fell under his influence.

The mythic battle for possession of Athens, for example, sheds some light on the changes that were occurring in Greece during the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy.

Poseidon (an Achaean god in his position of God of the Ocean and brother to Zeus) claimed possession of Athens one day by thrusting his trident into the acropolis. A well of seawater spilled forth. Later, during the reign of Cecrops,

89 Kitto, p. 19.  
90 Ibid., p. 20.  
91 Graves, The Greek Myths, Part II, p. 70.
King of Athens, Athene came and took possession of Athens by planting an olive tree. Infuriated, the Sea God challenged her to personal combat. She was about to accept when Zeus intervened and demanded that they submit to arbitration. The divine court was divided: all the gods favored Poseidon, all the goddesses, Athene. Since the goddesses had a majority at that time, Athene kept the city by one vote. Then the enraged Poseidon sent hugh waves against the citadel in protest. To appease the god's wrath, King Cecrops agreed that the women of Athens would be deprived of their vote, and the men would cease to bear their mothers' names. Cecrops also recognized paternity, instituted monogamy, and abolished certain bloody sacrifices in favor of barley-cake offerings.  

The Mycenaean world must have been one of great conflict and massive change. One piece of evidence for this is the gargantuan fortifications built by the Achaean kings. The citadel of Tiryns, for example, is castle-like in construction, and foreshadows the towering fortifications of medieval Europe. And yet Mycenaean influence and trade were formidable. Imports included goods and materials from all over the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas and even farther: "ostrich eggs from Africa, ivory probably from Syria, Anatolian silver,  

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93Hawkes, p. 203.
lapis lazuli from Mesopotamia, and northern amber—including beads undoubtedly manufactured in Britain."^9^4

From the presence of the great fortresses, it can only be assumed that the Achaean kings felt that their position was tenuous. Still, after the fall of Knossos, c. 1400 B.C., and the fall of Troy, c. 1200 B.C., the Minoan civilization was gone. But the Greeks might have been correct in their paranoia, for the Minoan goddesses lived on even though subdued by the sons of Cronus and the sons of Zeus. To an extent the ladies went "underground," and centuries later, the ancient pythoness was the patroness of the finest achievements of classical Greece, in her city, Athens.

But what of Helen, Leda's revenge? For her the loss to the Achaeans was immediate. Upon her return to Sparta, she found her world in chaos. Her sister had killed her husband, Agamemnon; Helen's nephew had supposedly gone mad after killing his mother; and Helen had a daughter in her late twenties whom she barely knew and a city which had been neglected for over ten years. The Trojan War had severely dissipated Greek manpower and revenues. Civil disorder was not uncommon, and many of the Achaean kings were murdered or lost. The concept of a unified Greece held by Atreus and Agamemnon was no longer viable, and pirate raids were

^9^4 Ibid., p. 181.
increasing. Also, the Dorian Greeks were beginning their gradual invasion from the north.

Sparta was still a great city, however, and its goddess continued to have power, for the mythic end of Helen is generally happy. She must have co-existed with the Achaean conquerors, possibly dominating them after they acknowledged her divinity as a daughter of their own god, Zeus.

The Achaeans had instituted the separation of the sexes in the household; Crecrops had told the ladies of Athens they could no longer vote, and that their copulative activity was confined to one husband so he could impose his name on the progeny. This alone must have involved a substantial redistribution of wealth, primarily in favor of the husband's family. Many ladies had rebelled; Helen's own sister, Clytemnestra, had cut her husband's throat.

The playscript, *Helen, Later*, deals with Helen's life after her return from Troy. It portrays her as a lady initially depressed and defeated, but still at war with her foreign husband, and shocked at the changes occurring around her. Upon marrying Menelaus, she had been told that she must cover her breasts, confine her sexual activities and freedom of movement, and, most definitely, halt or curb the orgiastic rituals involved in the worship of the goddess. These demands would have been reiterated upon her return from Troy.

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95 Durant, p. 28.
At the beginning of the play, Helen is in her summer palace, to which she has retired from Sparta. Living in the past, she has retreated to the religious and philosophical bosom of the Mother-goddess, and to opium, which was used in her worship. 96

As the play progresses, Helen realizes that in the future women would be vessels to men, but she herself will be a goddess, protected, revered, and obeyed, if she can establish an alliance with her husband, however tenuous, and if her daughter can ascend to the throne of Sparta.

IV

They say, I hope the story's true,
That one day Leda found an egg of hycinthine blue.
Sappho 97

Mythographers relegated Helen to one of the most beautiful and famous adulteresses, when in fact she was a symbol of the matriarchy under stress and change. Her life after the Trojan War would have caused her to make tremendous adjustments and the frivolity attached to her by poets inclined toward a patriarchal system is unfair. Neither wanton nor vain, she was a queen and a considerable religious and political force.

Yet, ironically, the Dorian invasion would wipe out any victory Helen might have won, but mercifully it occurred after her actual death. The patriarchal Dorian Greeks

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96 Hawkes, p. 126.  
solidified the male dominance begun by the Achaeans, and it was several millenia before the women of Athens and the rest of western Europe would regain the franchise. Helen and her contemporaries had lost the war, and it was up to them to preserve female esoterica through the dark ages before them. Helen and her goddess survived to capture the hearts and souls of men, and to reassure women in their struggles for freedom and love.
HELEN, LATER

An Original Play

by

Cheryl Ann Throop
CAST OF CHARACTERS

HELEN, Queen of Sparta, also "Helen of Troy," 45 to 50 years old

NANA, Queen Aethra, Theseus' mother, about 80

DAMON, a young Dorian traveler of about 19 years

MENELAUS, King of Sparta, Mycenaean Prince, about 59

PIARA, an Aetolian Princess taken captive by Menelaus and enslaved as a child; presently 27 years old

XANTHUS, a boy saved from the sacking of Troy as an infant and raised as a singer by the slave Lycus, about 19

LYCUS, a cripple or a dwarf, originally an Egyptian; now a performing slave to Menelaus, about 40

CAPTAIN, a Spartan, the Captain of the King's Guard, about 38

SERVANTS: a steward, guards, a eunuch or two, etc.

SCENE

The Royal Palace in the city of Sparta and the Royal Spartan Summer Palace on the Grecian coast near the mouth of the Eurotas River. The time is a night and day in Spring around 1150 B.C.
SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1 - Menelaus' bedroom in the royal palace at Sparta. It is late in the evening.

Scene 2 - Moments later, in another part of the palace, the room of the performers.

Scene 3 - Helen's bedroom in the royal summer palace on the coast. It is dawn the next day.

Scene 4 - The entrance hall of the summer palace, about six hours later.

ACT II

Scene 1 - Helen's bedroom a few moments later.

Scene 2 - An hour later in Helen's gardens.

Scene 3 - Helen's gardens, seconds later.

ACT III

Scene 1 - The performer's dressing room in the summer palace, several hours later.

Scene 2 - The great hall of the summer palace, moments later.

Scene 3 - The great hall, moments later.
ACT I

Scene 1

(The King's quarters of the Palace at Sparta. It is late evening. PIARA is awaiting MENELAUS and he is late. She prepares his bed and lays out bed clothes. She prims a moment, and then turns to gaze out over the city through a large window. MENELAUS enters, exhausted from a long meeting. He and PIARA greet warmly.)

MENELAUS

There you are my little bird, my flower!

PIARA

Good evening, my lord. I'm here to tuck you into bed.

MENELAUS

(Laughs and embraces her.)

Are the children asleep?

PIARA

Yes, but it gets more difficult to get them to bed every day.

MENELAUS

Little boys never want to go to sleep. There's too much for them to do, too many games to play.

PIARA

The council meeting was a long one.

MENELAUS

Indeed it was. I'm sorry my dear.

(With her help, he begins to undress.)
PIARA

I was looking out over Sparta, sleeping under the bright stars. Your city is beautiful tonight, my lord.

(She goes to the window.)

MENELAUS

I hope the weather holds.

(Goes to her, holds her and looks out the window with her.)

Do you ever miss your homeland?

PIARA

Sparta is my home, my lord. It is your city.

MENELAUS

You are so lovely. I thank the gods everytime I hold you in my arms.

PIARA

I am your slave, my lord, yours and yours alone.

MENELAUS

I wish that were true. I never think of you as a slave, and I know that someday you, too, will leave me.

PIARA

(It is a sore point, and she moves away from him.)

It is way past supper. Are you hungry?

MENELAUS

No, we dined in council.

PIARA

Did all go well?
What happened in council?

MENELAUS

Nothing.

(Shakes his head and pauses, then the talk rushes from him.)

Absolutely nothing happened. It's ridiculous. They can't agree, not with each other, not with me. After five hours of arguing, nothing was achieved. It's Theisadiē's doing mostly; she feeds the schisms and fosters the disagreements. Ah, but I have a plan. Tonight, I have a plan.

PIARA

(Carefully suppressing her curiosity.)

Would you like some wine, my lord?

MENELAUS

Yes, please.

(She pours wine and settles next to him.)

I am a good king, wouldn't you say?

PIARA

You are a great king, my lord Menelaus. But they think of you as a foreigner.

MENELAUS

But I love the Spartan people; we've fought side by side. These priests, the politicians on the council are not of the people. They are men and women with niggling ambitions, and no thoughts of the future. They hoard their gold from me,
when I so desperately need it. I must fortify Sparta! You see that, don't you?

PIARA

Yes, my lord, you must fortify Sparta.

MENELAUS

I will build a wall—a wall greater than that built by my father, Atreus, in Mycenae, and Sparta will be safe from any who come to her in enmity.

PIARA

Menelaus, what is your plan?

MENELAUS

Have you ever seen a city burned to the ground, ravaged and destroyed by those who breached her wall? It will not happen to Sparta.

PIARA

No, my lord. Will you have more wine?

MENELAUS

Yes, thank you. But what does my council do? They thwart me at every turn. Apollo's effeminate priests want all their lands exempt from taxes; but just let the pirates set fire to their fields of grain and you'll see them crying for my soldiers! And Theisadië refuses to do anything at all until the Spring Rituals are reinstated. She sits in that council like a stone around my neck!

PIARA

The people want the rituals, my lord. They already observe them in secret.
MENELAUS

I know. But I can't let the rituals take place. Not openly and with my sanction. They disrupt the people; all discipline breaks down. We must be alert; we must prepare. Don't you agree?

PIARA

Yes, my lord.

MENELAUS

I tell them what is going to happen: the Dorian raids will increase. And these Northern men grow stronger as we waste our time. But the council will not believe me. They bow to my face and plot behind my back.

PIARA

I'm sorry it went so badly.

MENELAUS

Oh, but there's more. This came.

(Hands her a scroll, and she reads.)

It was like seeing a ghost.

PIARA

Ulysses\(^3\) is alive! I can't believe it! It's been almost fifteen years!

MENELAUS

He was shipwrecked, and lost his memory apparently.

(PIARA laughs.)

Why do you laugh?
PIARA
I was only a child, but I remember Ulysses. He feigned madness to avoid going to fight at Troy. He was plowing the seashore, raving and foaming at the mouth. Then King Agamemnon put Ulysses' baby son, Telemachus, in the horse's path. When Ulysses drew up his horse to avoid trampling the boy, he revealed his sanity. Do you suppose . . .

MENELAUS
That he lost his memory on purpose? For fifteen years? But why would he? He wanted to come home to Ithaca and his family. However, he did not want to go to Troy.

PIARA
It was an idle thought, I suppose.

MENELAUS
I acknowledge the fact that my friend, Ulysses, is a liar. But this time, I think he tells the truth. Did you read this?

(He takes the scroll and reads from it.)

"I am quite concerned about the state of the Achaean Kingdoms. I will be in Sparta in one month's time to meet with you and the Queen."

PIARA
He's coming here?

MENELAUS
Yes, but my plan will take my two problems, the council and Ulysses, with one blow.
PIARA
What is your plan, my lord?

MENELAUS
I leave at dawn tomorrow for the summer palace. I intend to bring the Queen back to Sparta.

PIARA
No!

MENELAUS
I know your thoughts on the matter, my dear, but it is my only solution.

PIARA
If you invite her to return to the city, won't you imply that she will return as the Queen?

MENELAUS
She will return as Queen. But I am King; she will obey me.

PIARA
Do you believe that?

MENELAUS
Helen will obey me.

PIARA
And what of me and our children? She is your wife; I am not. If the Queen is in the city with her worshippers behind her, Hermione will sit on the throne after your death, I know it!

MENELAUS
My death is not so near, lady, that you can count on it.
PIARA
Forgive me, my lord, but I must think of my babies!

MENELAUS
They are my sons. Do not fear for them.

PIARA
(A pause.)
May I go with you?

MENELAUS
To the summer palace?

PIARA
Yes.

MENELAUS
Why would you?

PIARA
To help you in your plan, my lord. I would speak to the Queen.

MENELAUS
Do you suppose she knows about us?

PIARA
I don't see how she could have avoided it. We are not discreet.

MENELAUS
It doesn't make any difference; she doesn't care.

PIARA
No. She doesn't care, my lord.
MENELAUS
She was always very fond of you; perhaps I could use your help. I am a little concerned about what she will think when I arrive unannounced after—what has it been?

PIARA
Almost five years.

MENELAUS
I haven't seen her for five years! Well, I've been very busy.

PIARA
I will help you make your excuses. But more important, you'd best have a good reason for her to return to Sparta.

MENELAUS
I have one.

PIARA
What is it?

MENELAUS
All in good time, my dear. All in good time.

(He laughs.)
With Helen at my side, I will smash the council and woo Ulysses. Greece will be united against the Dorians!

PIARA
Will she stand beside you, my lord?

MENELAUS
She must! Yes, it is a good idea that you come along. You will bear a message of greeting from Hermione, and you will
talk to her--woman to woman. You will tell her--in your own words--that her people need her.

PIARA

(She is weeping softly.)

I will, my lord.

MENELAUS

My dear little flower, don't cry. Piara, you are my strength. I love you; I love our children. I will not desert you.

(They embrace.)

We should get some sleep. We will go by boat down the river; it's quickest. You won't get sick on the water will you?

PIARA

No, my lord.

MENELAUS

We will take the two performing slaves as gifts for the Queen. I've commanded them to put on a show for her.

PIARA

The crippled little man and the young singer?

MENELAUS

Yes.

PIARA

They are very good. They should please her.

MENELAUS

Don't worry, my dear.
PIARA

I'm afraid. I can't help it.

MENELAUS

You are my joy. Our babies are the future for which I build my kingdom.

PIARA

Thank you, my lord.

MENELAUS

I've got to get some rest; goodnight, my dear.

(He goes to his cot. PIARA brings him a final sip of wine. He reaches for her hand.)

Stay until I fall asleep.

(He closes his eyes.)

PIARA

Yes, my lord.

(Kisses him.)

Sleep well, my King.

(She tucks him in and sits watching him. Then she goes back to the window. Expressionless, she gazes over the sleeping city as the curtain falls.)

Scene 2

(It is another chamber in the Palace at Sparta that same evening, the room where the slaves, LYCUS and XANTHUS live. The CAPTAIN of the Guard is there, giving the entertainers final instructions for the morning's trip.)
CAPTAIN
We will leave at dawn. You will be at the boat slightly before that in order to stow all of your belongings. Are your costumes ready? Are you ready to perform for the Queen tomorrow night?

LYCUS
Yes, Sir! We are well rehearsed.

CAPTAIN
Your performance had better be your best.

LYCUS
We are ready and eager! The boy has written a beautiful song for the Queen.

CAPTAIN
Good. You must understand that this is a delicate situation.

LYCUS
We are the soul of tact and discretion.

CAPTAIN
Very well. I will see you in the morning. Get some sleep, you'll need it. Do you have any questions?

LYCUS
We know what to do. Your news has brought us great happiness, my Captain, Sir. Many thanks.

CAPTAIN
Yes, yes. Well, have a good night.

(He exits.)
LYCUS

And a good night to you, too, Sir!

(As the door closes behind the CAPTAIN, LYCUS can no longer restrain himself. He whoops with glee, and he and XANTHUS dance around the room.)

Finally! Finally, we are to be brought before the Queen. How lucky we are, my lad! This is a great opportunity! It will be a gentle service; and with Helen as your patroness, you will be able to study, practice, experiment.

XANTHUS

The song I have written for her--are you sure it is good?

LYCUS

It is very good. You have a great talent; the muse is in you. Ah, my lad, there is a library at the summer palace. I will teach you to read and write like a gentleman. You will become the greatest of singers; and some day you will buy your freedom. You will travel and perform, famous wherever you go, my little horse.

XANTHUS

I will write other songs for her.

LYCUS

Of course you will! It will please her, and what pleases her will please the King.

XANTHUS

What does she look like? Have you ever seen her?
LYCUS

No. But they say she is the most beautiful woman in the world.

XANTHUS

Is she really a goddess?

LYCUS

That is none of our affair. We are foreigners, and we are slaves. If the King says she is, then she is. The Achaean Greeks believe she is a goddess.

XANTHUS

And you?

LYCUS

I believe in the food in my belly and the clothes on my back—in my work, my art. I believe in you, and my own eyes. That's all I believe in, and I do not speak of it often. Neither should you.

XANTHUS

I will be careful.

LYCUS

You are a good boy. Fortune smiles on you.

(Embraces XANTHUS.)

My boy! My little horse! You were a little bloody baby I found crawling in a Trojan street, wailing your heart out.

XANTHUS

You rescued me. I owe you my life.
LYCUS
Nonsense. It is you who bears me on your shoulders. Old Lycus wouldn't be doing as nicely himself if it weren't for his Xanthus! I needed a lad like you.

XANTHUS
I still wear the scar where the soldier's sword bit into me. It was you that stopped it.

LYCUS
I was only playing the fool, as I always do. You owe me nothing. You will leave me in a moment, should the Lady offer you more.

XANTHUS
I will never leave you. We're partners, like a father and son.

LYCUS
We are performers. We entertain. Simply that.

XANTHUS
We are slaves.

LYCUS
All performers are slaves. But we are Lycus, the ugly little man who does tricks, and the beautiful lad, Xanthus, who sings like a god!

XANTHUS
I am impatient! I want to see her!
LYCUS

Ah, but remember, my boy, she will, at the same time, see you. She will judge you. It must be the best performance you have ever given.

XANTHUS

It will be—but, I hope my song pleases her.

LYCUS

Still yourself lad and be easy in your heart. We face nothing but success. We have worked hard and long, and your song is perfect. You must rest. I am out on my feet.

(He lays on his mat. XANTHUS kisses the old man and goes to his mat. He picks up his lyre and tunes it.)

Go to sleep.

XANTHUS

In a moment.

(He strums and sings softly.)

The god's daughter, the star-born Helen
Her song is love.
The god's daughter, laughing in music,
Helen, I sing for you.

(Curtain.)

Scene 3

(HELEN's bedroom in the summer palace, and the gardens and back wall beyond it, NANA is snoring softly on her cot, HELEN lies in her bed, but she is wakeful. She reaches for her teapot on a tray nearby, but it is empty.)
She sets it down, and traces of irritation and boredom cross her incredibly beautiful face. At this moment pipes start playing outside the high wall. NANA awakens.)

NANA

What is it?

HELEN

Silence! Listen!

(She gets out of bed and grabs a wrap.)

NANA

What are you doing?

HELEN

I am going to see who it is that plays so sweetly.

NANA

I'll go with you.

HELEN

You stay here. Make me some tea.

NANA

There might be danger. I'll call the guards.

HELEN

No! Leave off, will you! There's no danger I cannot handle in that music.

NANA

(Block HELEN's path.)

Please madame . . .

HELEN

Are you trying to annoy me? Get out of my way!
(HELEN goes out, crosses a patio, and climbs the back wall stairway. At the top, blinded by the rising sun she thinks she sees her dead brother and cries out.)

Polydeuces!

(The boy stops playing and turns. HELEN recovers.)

What are you doing?

DAMON

Playing my pipes, madame.

HELEN

I can see that. Who are you?

DAMON

(Rises, astonished, realizing to whom he is speaking.)

You are Helen!

HELEN

Who are you?

DAMON

I am Damon . . . of Sicyon. A student just beginning my travels.

HELEN

Sicyon? You are far afield to be "just beginning" your travels.

DAMON

But it is here they begin, my lady.

HELEN

Is that a riddle?
(Laughs.)

Why is your hair wet?

DAMON

I beg your pardon?

HELEN

You are causing me to repeat myself, student. What is the matter with you?

DAMON

I am dazed, madame . . . by your beauty, which is all and more than people say.

HELEN

My beauty was once a private matter.

DAMON

(Confused.)

Forgive me, madame! I did not mean to offend you.

HELEN

Why is your hair wet?

DAMON

I was bathing in the sea . . . earlier this morning.

HELEN

You climbed up the cliffs?

DAMON

I did, madame.

HELEN

What a strong young man you are! Mornings are cold here, Damon of Sicyon. Where are your clothes?
Below, on the beach.

HELEN
You might become chilled. Do you see that gate?

DAMON
Yes, madame.

HELEN
Go to it, and wait there.

DAMON
Yes, madame.

(HELEN descends the steps and re-enters her rooms, where NANA waits, making tea. HELEN is almost girlish.)

HELEN
Nana, for a moment I thought I was seeing a vision! It was my brother, Polydeuces, sitting there, looking out to sea.

NANA
The Great Mother, save us from ghosts!

HELEN
I was blinded a moment by the sun.

NANA
Who is it, then?

HELEN
A strange boy. A student. He says he is from Sicyon. That is ten days travel from here. How do you suppose he came to be on the cliffs? Now he is at the gate. Go let him in.
NANA
Madame, I do not think this is wise.

HELEN
Oh, Nana, I am tired of looking at your wrinkled old face. The Fates have sent me a new face . . . a handsome face and a charming young man to play with. A visitor. Go let him in.

NANA
But madame . . .

HELEN
A visitor, Nana. I haven't had a visitor in a long time, and I am bored. Go let the boy in.

NANA
Yes, madame.

(She exits. HELEN has dressed a bit more thoroughly and poured herself some tea. She begins rummaging for a towel. NANA re-enters with DAMON.)

HELEN
(Hands DAMON a linen towel.)
Dry your hair with this. Nana, he will need some clothes.

(NANA exits.)

DAMON
I am grateful, madame.

(As he dries his hair, his brief garment slips to reveal a jeweled dagger. HELEN is immediately incensed.)

HELEN
You dare to come before me armed?

(DAMON kneels.)
DAMON
Madame, I mean it as a gift for the Divine Helen.
(Offers it to her.)

HELEN
The Divine Helen?

DAMON
For you.

HELEN
(Accepts it.)
Thank you. It is very beautiful.

DAMON
It is steel.⁴

HELEN
Steel? Ah, yes. I am pleased. You may rise. What can I do for you?

DAMON
I want only to worship you.

HELEN
Worship me? You impudent young man! What makes you think I will allow you to worship me?

DAMON
A goddess cannot help but be worshipped. And I am not like the other pilgrims who plead at your front gate only to be turned away by your guards. I traveled too far to be turned
away. So I climbed the cliffs, and I sent my music, my prayer, to your ears and your ears alone.

HELEN

I could still call my guards.

DAMON

But you will not.

HELEN

No, I won't.

DAMON

(Notices the embroidery.)

This is exquisite!

HELEN

I'm glad you like it. I have been working on it for many years; it is almost finished.

DAMON

It is the death of Hector and King Priam pleading for the body.

HELEN

Yes. But it is not truly realistic. I left out the blood. After Achilles had drug Hector's body several times around the walls of Troy, the body looked like chopped meat. I chose to remember the great Prince of Troy in all his beauty.

DAMON

Were you fond of Hector?
HELEN

I was sorry he died. You are high born, are you not, Damon of Sicyon?

DAMON

I am. But I am preceded by four brothers.

HELEN

And your older brothers will receive your father's holdings when he dies?

DAMON

They will, madame, and they are the warriors. I have chosen the path of the scholar.

HELEN

I hope you have not chosen your path too soon. Brothers are easily lost.

(NANA enters with clothes.)

What have you found?

NANA

These were in a trunk that belonged to Polydeuces.

HELEN

(Registering some surprise.)

I remember them.

DAMON

(Is totally taken aback.)

Madame, your brother's . . .
NANA

Castor and Polydeuces have been dead for over twenty-five years. What is wrong, boy? Are you superstitious about wearing a dead man's clothes? There are no holes in them.

HELEN

Be silent, Nana. What is it, Damon?

DAMON

The Dioscuri--your brothers, madame, are gods!

HELEN

My dear boy, you are carrying this a little too far. The Dioscuri are Achaean gods. Do you follow Achaean gods in Sicyon? Have no fear, Damon. He was only a man when he wore this. Put it on.

DAMON

Yes, madame. As you wish.

HELEN

My brothers were killed by the Achaeans. The bodies were hidden, and the story was let out that the twins had been made immortal. They had been placed amongst the stars in the sky by All Father Zeus. The Achaean Zeus. Do you feel that I blaspheme, Damon? I speak truth.

(She goes to her jewel box.)

Let me see . . . here. Wear this.

DAMON

Thank you, my lady, but I do not wear golden trinkets in my hair. 'Tis a fashion for women.
HELEN

Is it? I see. I admit I have not been paying enough attention to modern fashion. Is your hair dry yet?

DAMON

Yes, madame.

HELEN

Good. Then we will breakfast on the terrace. Nana, prepare our table.

(NANA exits. DAMON follows HELEN out of the room and into the gardens.)

Do you like my gardens?

DAMON

Your gardens are exquisite, madame. I have never seen so many poppies!

HELEN

I love their color. You are very fair of complexion, Damon of Sicyon. To what tribe do you belong?

DAMON

I am a Dymanes.

HELEN

Then Sicyon is not your original home.

DAMON

No, I study there.

HELEN

The Dymanes are a northern mountain tribe, are they not?
DAMON
Yes. My family lives in Epirus.

HELEN
Yet you worship Achaean gods?

DAMON
The Doscuri are the gods of sailors. We learn the ways of the sea, not the ways of the Achaeans.

HELEN
The sea? The Achaeans are jealous of their control of the seas.

DAMON
And they are losing it, madame.

HELEN
Losing it? Is that the truth? My exile from Sparta has put me out of the stream of things. Still, I do not wish to return to the city.

DAMON
You need not return. Your presence is felt.

HELEN
It is so nice, so pleasant to talk with a traveler. I do hear rumors on occasion. My nurse tells me the mountain men have made a new god for themselves. Heracles! Whom I always thought was a madman. Do you follow this new god?

DAMON
I believe he was a hero. My family offers worship to Apollo.
HELEN

But do you follow Heracles?

DAMON

I emulate him. He was the son of Almighty Zeus, just as you . . .

(Hesitates.)

HELEN

Go on.

DAMON

Just as you are Zeus' daughter.

HELEN

Whom do you worship?

DAMON

Our Father. And you.

HELEN

Do you really believe I am divine? Do you believe that you are about to breakfast with a goddess?

DAMON

I believe it.

HELEN

Then you are a fool. Why am I a goddess?

DAMON

The legends say Zeus visited your mother, Leda, in the form of a swan.
HELEN

It is a lie.

DAMON

But the legends describe you . . .

HELEN

I find it very annoying to be called a legend.

DAMON

Forgive me.

HELEN

Is that what you study? Legends?

DAMON

I study the past.

HELEN

Do you? What for?

DAMON

To avoid repeating old mistakes in the future.

HELEN

A wise notion, young man! But you will need the truth, not legends. Men who create legends seldom speak of their mistakes.

DAMON

Would you tell me the truth?

HELEN

What truth would you hear?
DAMON
I would have you tell me about Troy.

HELEN
Troy? It is rubble. A pile of blackened stones in the midst of the great plain by the Hellespont.

DAMON
In my studies, madame, I have a special interest.

HELEN
What is that?

DAMON
The Trojan War.

HELEN
Ah, now I see! And you came here to meet its cause. You did say your journeys begin here.

DAMON
I must protest . . .

HELEN
Isn't that what the legends say? I was the reason so many lost their lives and Troy fell?

DAMON
I do not know the truth.

HELEN
Well said, young man.

(NANA enters with tea pot and cups.)
NANA
Will you have some tea, madame?

HELEN
Yes, thank you. Damon?

DAMON
Thank you, no.
(NANA pours one cup.)

HELEN
Where do you go on your travels after here?

DAMON
First to Mycenae, then to Ithaca, and on to the ruins of Troy.

HELEN
Why will you visit Ithaca? It is out of the way.

DAMON
To catch a glimpse of the great Ulysses. Perhaps seek an audience with him.

HELEN
Ulysses was lost at sea.

DAMON
You do not know?

HELEN
What?

DAMON
Ulysses has returned.
(NANA drops the tea tray. HELEN goes white.)
HELEN

(To NANA.)
He's returned? Did your spies know of this?

NANA
No, madame.

DAMON
As news has it, he was shipwrecked for several years and lost his memory. Then . . . madame, are you all right?

HELEN
My heart was at peace when I believed that man to be dead. Now I must rail like an old woman that there is no justice! The liar is back! Is he ill? Is he dying?

DAMON
No, he is well. He has regained his kingdom and his family once again.

NANA
Curse his eyes!

DAMON
What is it, my lady?

HELEN
An old hatred reborn. You want to hear the truth about the Trojan War? It was Ulysses who devised the pact between the Achaean Princes that forced me to marry Menelaus instead of Achilles, to whom I was betrothed. It was Ulysses' cunning that taught him to feign madness to avoid fighting
in a war he had so nonchalantly devised. He lied, he cheated, and he murdered, and goaded Agamemnon and Menelaus on to more. The wooden horse was one of his tricks, and when the gates of Troy were breached, the liar went to Queen Hecuba. He promised her that those who did not resist would go unharmed. She agreed to surrender her guard; there was no battle at the palace of Troy.8

DAMON

But all were killed.

HELEN

Yes. All killed, except for a few taken as slaves. The palace halls ran with the blood of children. They tore Hector's infant son from Andromache's arms and threw him off the main tower. I was sick and ashamed. Ulysses!

(It is a growl.)

DAMON

It was so long ago.

HELEN

Time does not heal these things, boy. You bring me ill tidings.

(NANA has cleared up the things she broke, exited, and returned with more tea. HELEN goes to the tray and pours another cup. NANA exits.)

DAMON

Forgive me.
HELEN
You are lucky I do not kill you. Ulysses! Alive!

DAMON
(Goes to pour himself some tea. He is a bit shaken, but also angry.)

In my studies, I have learned an important lesson.

HELEN
What is that?

DAMON
It is easy to be imprisoned by the past. It is easy to forget that there is a future. You are a goddess and a woman. Your future should always be love.

HELEN
Are you angry?

DAMON
I do not like to be threatened. You should not involve yourself in the affairs of men, madame.

(He finally takes a sip of the tea.)

What is this?

HELEN
It is made from poppies.

DAMON
Poppies! Madame, please, take no more. Too much is not good for you.
HELEN
If I am a goddess, I cannot imagine anything being bad for me!

DAMON
Please.
(Takes the cup from her hands.)

HELEN
I find the drug soothing.

DAMON
We will eat in a moment.

HELEN
Are you concerned for me?

DAMON
Very much so. My lady, I love you.

HELEN
That is hardly necessary. It is difficult enough to find good company. You are a sweet boy.

DAMON
I am a man.

HELEN
So you are. I was going to seduce you, but you ruined my mood with your bad news.

DAMON
I am deeply disappointed, madame.

HELEN
Aren't you afraid of the love of a goddess?
DAMON

No.

HELEN

You may kiss me.

(DAMON kisses HELEN, and then a second time.)

DAMON

I must tell you something.

HELEN

What is it?

DAMON

I must assure you that you need not fear Ulysses; he can do you no harm. His kingdom was ill-used in his absence, and the war depleted his treasury. He has no ships, no army. Ithaca would be easily conquered.

HELEN

Is this the truth?

DAMON

I swear it.

HELEN

How do you know this?

DAMON

I know it.

HELEN

Then all I have to battle is Ulysses' guile.
DAMON

You do not have to battle anything. You are Helen! Lady, you are, of all of the women, the most beautiful.

(As he speaks these last words, HELEN caresses his lips, stopping them as he forms the word "beautiful." NANA enters.)

NANA

The food is ready, madame.

HELEN

Shall we?

(She kisses him.)

Come with me, Damon of Sicyon.

(They exit.)

Scene 4

(The palace's entry hall or atrium. MENELAUS and his entourage enter. It includes LYCUS, XANTHUS, PIARA, GUARDS, and the CAPTAIN. Other SERVANTS scurry in and out carrying baggage.)

LYCUS

(Tumbling in front of MENELAUS.)

It is a beautiful house. A Queen's domicile.

MENELAUS

You are witty, Lycus. But stay out of sight; be subtle.

I have told you, you are to be a surprise.

(LYCUS, bowing and contrite, takes himself and XANTHUS, and their baggage, discreetly to the side. PIARA comes forward.)

Well, my dear, do you remember the place?
PIARA

Yes. It is as I recall it.

MENELAUS

How old were you when you were last here?

PIARA

Seven or eight. Madame had just . . . departed for Troy. Hermione and I came here to live with the old King. He was dying. The best part I remember was the gardens. We loved to play there. We would play with our dolls in the gardens all day and into the night. They had to catch us to make us come indoors. The gardens have changed, I notice. There did not use to be so many poppies.

LYCUS

(Insinuating himself into the grouping.)

Red Poppies! It is by the color that you can tell they will soothe the blood and let one sleep.

MENELAUS

I told you to stay out of sight.

LYCUS

Begging your indulgence, Great King Menelaus, but we would be well hidden if we had a place to hide. May we have a room, a small room, in which to prepare ourselves? We must organize our bag of tricks, so please you my lord, the better to entertain your wife?
MENELAUS

I want your best.

LYCUS

You shall have it, my lord! It will be our hearts' blood.

MENELAUS

I am a harsh critic. It could mean your lives.

LYCUS

Our lives are yours to take, my lord.

MENELAUS

(To XANTHUS.)

You will be sure to sing the Song of Paris.

XANTHUS

I will not forget my lord.

MENELAUS

You will have your room.

(To a SERVANT.)

You! Take the slaves! Show them a place where they can prepare.

LYCUS

Thank you, my lord.

(Bundles himself, XANTHUS, and the SERVANT off stage.)

PIARA

Is that wise?

MENELAUS

Is what wise?
PIARA
The Song of Paris sung at dinner. It is not very subtle, my lord. It might offend.

MENELAUS
I want to see her reaction, and use it if I can.

PIARA
I see, my lord.

MENELAUS
My plan will succeed. Don't you worry. I will reason with her as best I can. I will woo her with gifts and songs. If these do not work, I will attack her and shame her. But she will be made to see her duty. When she realizes what must be done, she will help. She has always done what she thought was right. You should go to your room.

PIARA
Please, my lord, let me stay.

MENELAUS
My child, I must meet first with Helen alone.

PIARA
The mother of your two sons is not a child, my lord.

MENELAUS
Keep your voice down; we are surrounded by spies.

PIARA
Yes, my lord. I want to help you, you and our babies. You did promise I would make my greeting to the Queen.
MENELAUS

So you will. At supper.

PIARA

Not before?

MENELAUS

No. I must prepare her. Don't worry.

PIARA

How can I help but worry?

MENELAUS

My summer palace is a very pleasant place. We should visit it more often. Little Piara, after the Queen returns to Sparta, we should vacation here. Would you like that?

PIARA

Very much, my lord.

MENELAUS

Go now, please.

PIARA

Yes, my lord.

(She curtsies and exits. MENELAUS calls the CAPTAIN forward.)

MENELAUS

Deploy the Guard. Take word to the Queen that I will meet with her in the gardens.

CAPTAIN

Do you want me to take a look around?
MENELAUS

Yes, but be cautious. The old Queen Aethra--the nurse, watch out for her.

(The CAPTAIN salutes; MENELAUS exits. Lights down.)
ACT II

Scene 1

(A few hours later. HELEN and DAMON are in her bed. DAMON is asleep. NANA enters. HELEN motions her to be silent and leave. NANA stands her ground.)

NANA

Madame?

HELEN

Go away!

NANA

Madame, please, I must speak with you.

HELEN

Oh, very well.

(She gets up and moves downstage. NANA places a screen around the bed and the sleeping boy, while HELEN dresses.)

Since you are here, you can make me more tea.

NANA

Yes, my lady. But I will need more of the distillate.

HELEN

Bring me the box.

(NANA goes out of sight, and returns with a fairly large golden box. HELEN opens it, takes out a vial, and hands it to NANA.)

Here. We will harvest soon, and I will make more.
NANA exits with the vial and box. HELEN continues to attend to her toilette. She notices DAMON's gift, the dagger, lying on her dresser and picks it up, studying it. NANA re-enters with tea.)

HELEN

(As NANA pours.)
Thank you.

(Takes her cup.)
What do you want?

NANA

The King is here.

HELEN

(The cup does not reach her lips.)
Here?

NANA

He and his entourage arrived only moments ago.

HELEN

What time is it?

NANA

A little after noon, madame.

HELEN

Did you know he was coming?

NANA

No, I did not, my lady.

HELEN

Your spies are rather lax these days!
NANA
It must have been a sudden decision on Menelaus' part, madame.

HELEN
He's here because of Ulysses, I am sure of it.

NANA
It would seem logical.

HELEN
(Playing with the dagger.)
I must not get involved in the affairs of men!
(Laughs.)
How naive Damon is! Did you see this? It is the boy's gift for the Divine Helen.

NANA
It is very beautiful.

HELEN
Yes. It is strange, but the design on the hilt reminds me of someone, but I cannot recall who it is. The blade is of steel.

NANA
An evil omen, madame. The King wishes to meet with you in the gardens.

HELEN
When I am ready. Let him wait. It appears that his manners have not improved over the years. How long has it been since I have seen him?
NANA

It seems to me it has been about five years.

HELEN

How does he look?

NANA

He looks older. He has brought a girl with him.

HELEN

Who is she?

NANA

Piara.

HELEN

(Thinks for a moment.)

Piara! I remember her. A slave from Aetolia. She was just a child—Hermione's playmate. How old is Hermione, now?

NANA

Nearing thirty. 9

HELEN

By my Mother! She is thirty?

NANA

This girl, Piara, is a few years younger.

HELEN

Why did he bring her?

NANA

To offend you.
I do not care if he has a mistress.

She has borne him twin sons.

I did not know that.

It was very recent.

But that is the kind of gossip I like to hear about, Nana. Why didn't you tell me?

(Pause.) Were you planning to have the babies murdered?

It was suggested.

You will forbid it.

You consider my influence to be far-reaching, madame.

I am only just realizing its full extent. Would you butcher children in their cradles?

They are boys. You know the importance the Achaeans put on their sons. Menelaus might determine that they will sit on Sparta's throne.
HELEN
This can be avoided without murdering infants. You would use Achaean methods.

NANA
I would use Clytemnestra's method against a false husband and tyrannical king.

HELEN
Enough children have died. Besides, it is of no matter; she is a slave.

NANA
She is a captured Aetolian princess.

HELEN
I forbid it!

NANA
How would you know if it were done? You did not know of their birth.

HELEN
Do you challenge me, Nana? I admit I was unaware that pilgrims have come to my gate only to be turned away. A bit inhospitable of me, don't you think?

NANA
I did not think you wanted to see them. They are vagabonds, mostly.

HELEN
We should at least offer them food and a place to sleep.
NANA
Madame! There isn't room to accommodate them!

HELEN
Isn't room? How many pilgrims come to my gates?
(NANA doesn't answer.)
It seems I must be more attentive! Prepare my bath now.
(NANA bows and starts to exit.)

NANA
What of the boy?

HELEN
He will remain in my apartment. We will find something to amuse him.

NANA
Yes, madame.
(Exits. HELEN moves the screen aside, and goes to DAMON. She kisses him gently and awakens him.)

HELEN
The sun is high, Damon of Sicyon.

DAMON
There you are. My goddess!

HELEN
Beware of pride, my boy! Can one possess a goddess?

DAMON
No, one cannot.

HELEN
You are very wise.
DAMON

But I will make a sacrifice at your temple in Therapne. I will make a rich gift to your priestess in honor of our meeting.

HELEN

My temple? Do I have a temple?

(Laughs.)

I hope my priestesses are beautiful.

DAMON

Of course they are! It is a requirement. But none so beautiful as you!

HELEN

You are sweet. But I am afraid I must interrupt our charming encounter by telling you that my husband is here.

DAMON

(Reacting as though he'd been stung.)

Madame, I must go.

HELEN

I apologize. I had no idea he was coming.

DAMON

I must leave. It would be dangerous for me to stay.

HELEN

No, it would be more dangerous for you to go. Calm yourself. You will remain here, in my apartment. My servants will see to your every comfort. This only means that I have to
attend the King for a few hours this evening. Afterward, I will return to you and tell you tales of Troy.

(She fondles him.)

I am a very civilized lady. I have a library, including some books from Egypt. Would you like to see it?

DAMON

I would very much.

HELEN

You are not to worry. You are a guest in my house; you need have no fear.

DAMON

I am your servant, lady.

HELEN

How kind you are! Tell me, Damon, when did you hear of Ulysses' return?

DAMON

Only a day or so ago. I met the messenger on his way to Sparta. We entered the city together.

HELEN

How did you travel here?

DAMON

By boat down the river.

HELEN

Did you tell anyone you were coming here? Did anyone see you on the beach?
DAMON

No, but I did encounter some fishermen. I asked them the way.

HELEN

There's no harm there. I should send someone for your clothes.

DAMON

No! I buried them under some rocks. They are well hidden.

HELEN

Good.

DAMON

Are you sure that everything will be all right?

HELEN

Everything is fine.

DAMON

Truth?

HELEN

No matter what ill is spoken of me, it cannot be said that I lie. I always speak truth, sometimes to my own disadvantage. Adultery, however, is another invention of the Achaeans. A queen may love whom she will, and her lover fears nothing at all.

DAMON

I am not afraid.
HELEN
Then enjoy yourself, my pet. I feel very good thanks to you.

DAMON
Then--before you go--tell me: What was Troy like before it fell?

HELEN
(Laughs.)
It was the center of the Universe. Troy commanded the great plain of the Scymander, and it controlled the Hellespont. Through it flowed all the riches, all the goods of the world. The walls were wide enough to hold chariot races on them, and the museums, the libraries, the palaces, the baths, the boulevards were beyond belief. Troy was the center of the compass, a city of languages, the home of aristocrats, travelers, and the learned human beings of all the civilized world. When you visit the ruins, you must imagine it well—the high walls, the gilded roofs, the statuary. You would have loved it. There was so much there to see and to learn.

DAMON
And you sailed there in the arms of love!

HELEN
Hardly! No, my dear, it was not love I sailed with. I was a prisoner in my own city of Sparta. My father was confined here, at the summer palace, and my mother and brothers were dead. I endured the Achaean tyranny for nine long years. I
bore two children to a man I hated. When Paris and his envoy came to Sparta, Menelaus had gone to Crete to play political games with his brother. I was left to entertain his guests. Paris was a gentle man, a sympathetic man. I persuaded him to take me and my son to Troy.

DAMON

You had a son?

HELEN

A frail boy. He died on the journey.

DAMON

But you left your daughter behind?

HELEN

Hermione is my heir. I could not risk her life; besides she was safer in Sparta without me. So I took the Spartan treasury to pay my passage and my care, and perhaps to buy allies and regain my throne.

DAMON

But you were Queen.

HELEN

(Laughs.)

You delight me! You are so simple. But you asked me of Troy. It was there I found freedom, a few sympathetic friends, and for a time, a new life. But love? That is another Achaean fairy tale.

(NANA enters.)
NANA

Your bath is ready, madame.

HELEN

Thank you.

(Bends to kiss DAMON.)

Enjoy my library, Damon of Sicyon. I will return to you later.

(NANA and HELEN exit. Lights go down.)

Scene 2

(MENELAUS is standing, looking out over the gardens. Then he starts to pace. He's been waiting some time. Finally, HELEN enters.)

MENELAUS

My lady.

HELEN

My lord.

MENELAUS

It is a pleasure to see you once again.

HELEN

You might have given me more warning.

MENELAUS

My apologies, madame. But the business of state is more hectic than usual.

HELEN

So? Why is that?
MENELAUS

There are problems.

HELEN

Are there? Then you should be in Sparta, tending them. Or is there a problem here?

MENELAUS

I felt a visit was long overdue.

HELEN

Don't apologize! Not seeing you for several years was a pleasure for me.

MENELAUS

You are older.

HELEN

That is true. So are you, my lord.

MENELAUS

It matters little to me. But I hate to see your beautiful face grow drawn and finally wither.

HELEN

To me, it matters not at all. You seem tired.

MENELAUS

Was it only six years ago that we were in Egypt?

HELEN

That is right.

MENELAUS

It seems longer than that. At the time, I begrudged the
ill winds that prevented our sailing home, but now I think of Egypt as a precious moment, a hiatus. I am tired.

HELEN

It is a common malady. But . . . you still have the strength to carry all that gold on your body. Isn't it heavy?

MENELAUS

No. I adore gold.

HELEN

How well I know it!

(She laughs.)

I'll never forget—when I heard the Achaeans had landed, I stood on the walls of Troy and looked out over the plain. The sea was too distant; I couldn't make out anything. Then I saw a sparkle on the horizon. I thought to myself, "That will be Menelaus, decked out in gold, bejeweled and betinseled like a holiday decoration." It's a bit too much, though. Now, somehow, it looks unmanly.

MENELAUS

Gold is the blood of the gods.

HELEN

Blood for purchase.

MENELAUS

It will buy men, power, pleasure, even love. And it is rare.

HELEN

I find it a pusillanimous metal.
MENELAUS

Its integrity is its weight. But its beauty is its divinity.
Both gold and Helen are divine.

HELEN

So it would seem.

MENELAUS

Who was your favorite amongst your lovers?

HELEN

What a question! But then I forget the extent of your bad manners. Each of my lovers has had his own particular talents, my lord. I had no favorites.

MENELAUS

How many were there?

HELEN

We have been through this before, Menelaus. Why do you ask? How can it be so important to you?

MENELAUS

You are my wife. Will you answer my question?

(HELEN starts laughing.)

Is it funny, my lady?

HELEN

Yes! You see, I don't remember. I honestly don't remember. You have one great problem, my lord.

MENELAUS

What is that?
HELEN

Your sex.

MENELAUS

How do you mean?

HELEN

It is all external. You are easily impressed and therefore easily fooled.

MENELAUS

The old woman has poisoned you. You have come to hate men.

HELEN

Not at all! I love men. But I do hate you.

MENELAUS

Why do you hate me?

HELEN

You took my city from me!

MENELAUS

I did nothing of the sort. I am King of Sparta.

HELEN

You are my consort! You have no right to rule!

MENELAUS

My army gives me the right to rule.

HELEN

So it does, my lord.

MENELAUS

Please. You must understand. My life has been composed of actions it was not my will to do. You and I were swept into
a destiny that we must share without choice. Do you believe that when I saw you, I could do anything but love you?

HELEN

You did what your brother and Ulysses told you to do. Love me? Oh, I am sure you did, but not enough to return my kingdom to me.

MENELAUS

How could I have done that? All the princes of Greece were at my back, and Helen's soft arms were before me.

HELEN

And my treasury.

MENELAUS

You took that with you when you sailed for Troy, as well as three talents of gold from Apollo's temple.

HELEN

It was mine to take.

MENELAUS

Not Apollo's gold.

HELEN

As I recall, you had your plans for it, and for anything else you could leech out of my kingdom.

MENELAUS

(He grows angry.)

Madame, if I could, I would return all of these things you say I have taken. How might I do that? You may have it all back! All of it!
(He appears to be choking.)

By Zeus, you may have it all back!

HELEN

No, it is too late. You have spent it. Menelaus, are you ill?

(He's having difficulty breathing.)

What is it?

(HELEN helps MENELAUS to the bench and kneels beside him genuinely concerned.)

MENELAUS

Will you return to Sparta with me? I need you there.

HELEN

(She draws back, stands. She is stunned for a moment, then walks away.)

No, no. I don't believe it. That was well done. I am impressed. Was that little trick your idea? Maybe it was suggested to you by one more accomplished in lies. Ulysses, perhaps?

MENELAUS

(Surprised.)

Ulysses?

HELEN

I have heard he is back in Ithaca.

MENELAUS

How did you know?
HELEN

I am aware of much more than you realize. Menelaus, I will not go back to Sparta. I prefer to stay here and be a goddess.

MENELAUS

You are in contact with the temple at Therampne—aren't you?

(HELEN says nothing.)

I suspected as much. You will be pleased to know that your priestesses thwart me at every turn. I'll bargain with you. If you return to Sparta, I will let them lead the harvest rituals. They are doing it in secret as it is.

HELEN

That is not much of a bargain, Menelaus.

MENELAUS

Then I will offer you more . . . the Spring blessing of the newborn . . .

HELEN

(Laughs.)

Do not offer the housewife the rug you stole from her. She wove it and knows each thread. The Lady is the Harvest, the Spring, Love. We have no bargain.

MENELAUS

Think again, madame. The priests of Apollo begin to usurp your place. They call him Helios, the Sun, like the god in Egypt. People go to his priests for cures and rebirth. They
grow more powerful, and they do not feel they should pay for the army that protects them. Then there is the matter of the new god.

HELEN
Heracles!

MENELAUS
Yes.

HELEN
I think you have started a fashion.

MENELAUS
I?

HELEN
You and Agamemnon told my people I was the daughter of your god, Zeus. Then you told them I had been kidnapped, bewitched by love. They believed you! My mistake was allowing myself to be used as an excuse for a war. Of course, I did not think you would win it.

MENELAUS
Why did we fight the war, then?

HELEN
To grind Troy into the earth so you would control the Hellespont.

MENELAUS
That is not why I fought the war.
HELEN

Why did you, then?

MENELAUS

For my honor. But many men fought for you.

HELEN

You do still control the Hellespont, don't you?

MENELAUS

Yes, but not for long without your help.

HELEN

I am surprised you even ask! You will get no help from me, Menelaus.

MENELAUS

Then think of your people.

HELEN

I never really knew them. Besides, they do not need my help, so it would appear.

MENELAUS

(His face is ashen, and the breathing difficulty reappears.)

You must return to the city.

HELEN

You aren't well, are you?

MENELAUS

My health is perfect.

HELEN

As you say, my lord. Would you like some wine?
MENELAUS

Yes, thank you.

HELEN

(Claps her hands and a SERVANT appears.)

Bring us wine.

(The SERVANT bows and exits.)

MENELAUS

It is a beautiful afternoon.

HELEN

How was the trip down the river?

MENELAUS

Fast. The river is high and rushing. There will be flooding again this year.

HELEN

There will be a good barley crop for it.

(The SERVANT enters, serves wine, exits.)

Tell me, my lord, how is our daughter?

MENELAUS

Ah, Hermione is as well as can be expected. There is, perhaps, the most important reason you should return to Sparta.

HELEN

Is something wrong?

MENELAUS

She is still unmarried.
HELEN

That is your fault. She should have been married long ago.

MENELAUS

The question is who should she marry.

HELEN

I can't imagine there being any dearth of suitors.

MENELAUS

There have been many suitors, but none who are right for her.

HELEN

--None who are right for her father.

MENELAUS

I would propose Telemachus or Orestes.

HELEN

My daughter will not marry Ulysses' won! I won't have it!

MENELAUS

Orestes, then. It would unite Mycenae and Sparta under one family, one king.

HELEN

Orestes is not King of Mycenae. He murdered his mother!

MENELAUS

He did not kill Clytemnestra! Your spies have not been discerning; they listen to old gossip.

HELEN

How did my sister die, then?
MENELAUS

She committed suicide. Some blamed Orestes, and he feels guilty for it. But the worst he did was turn his mother over to the civil courts and refuse to speak on her behalf. She hanged herself in sanctuary.¹³

HELEN

Is this the truth?

MENELAUS

I swear it!

HELEN

Did Orestes truly go mad?

MENELAUS

No. But he lives in exile. He travels most of the time. I have not heard from him lately.

HELEN

Many of the young people are doing that.

MENELAUS

He cannot regain his throne or marry without the priestesses' consecration.

HELEN

It could be arranged.

MENELAUS

You would do that?

HELEN

I will consider it.
MENELAUS

It would reunite our cities!

HELEN

That does not concern me, but Hermione does. She is my heir, and she will receive the power that is due her. If she marries, as is the Spartan custom, you will abdicate.

(There is a long pause.)

MENELAUS

I cannot.

HELEN

You will, or once again we have no bargain.

MENELAUS

If I did this, I must still control the army. They need an experienced leader.

HELEN

What for?

MENELAUS

To fight the Doriens.

HELEN

The mountain people? The men of Epirus?

MENELAUS

They call themselves the Sons of Heracles. They claim direct descent. I do not know what reports you might have heard, but the situation is bad and continually worsening. They raid our outposts constantly. They disrupt our trade routes.
It has even reached the point that the mountain men have taken to ships and are encroaching on our seas. They are ruthless. They rape women, kill children. I have seen them terrible in battle, wild-eyes and murderous. They give no quarter.

HELEN

You never did. Menelaus, the mountain people are barbarians. They cannot be that well organized.

MENELAUS

No? The three major tribes of Doris--the Hyllieds, the Dymanes, and the Pamphylooi--have signed treaties and are joined in their efforts. Barbarians? Yes! But well organized and wily. Their spies infiltrate the city; and with each raid, we find more and more Dorian warriors carrying weapons of steel.

HELEN

(This information registers with Helen, but she hides it.)

You could be defeated by these Dorians, couldn't you?

MENELAUS

An invasion is imminent. I need supplies, weapons, money.

HELEN

Sell some of your clothes.

MENELAUS

I need support from the council. You could help me there. I need men, warriors; I must build fortifications, and the people must believe in me.
HELEN
You have already killed all of their sons, Menelaus.

MENELAUS
(An angry burst.)
Then let Sparta be overrun!

HELEN
It won't be a novel experience for them.

MENELAUS
Then what kingdom do you think your daughter will inherit, madame?

HELEN
(Studies him.)
You are distraught. Your face is very flushed. Sit down. Have some more wine.
(Pours for him.)
Now, what does Ulysses say of all this?

MENELAUS
He seeks unification with us. He will be here to visit next month. 14

HELEN
Here?

MENELAUS
In Sparta. He wants to see you, as well.

HELEN
I am not to be summoned by that liar.
MENELAUS
You must be there.

HELEN
Why?

MENELAUS
To convince him of our solidarity. Otherwise, he will pull in his defenses and sit on his island. We need his help. You must put aside your personal feelings and work for the good of the city.

HELEN
Is that what you did when you plunged Sparta into a ruinous ten-year war?

MENELAUS
I worked for the best for Sparta then, and that is what I do now.

HELEN
You have got to be joking.

MENELAUS
Please, Helen.

HELEN
Do you wish me to return to Sparta as your wife?

MENELAUS
It would please me greatly, but I would not ask it. You have become very popular, you know.
HELEN
They think I am a goddess.

MENELAUS
You will return to Sparta as its Queen.

HELEN
And you?

MENELAUS
I am the King.

HELEN
No, Menelaus, I will not go back.

(Pause.)

Surely, you have taken a mistress.

MENELAUS
(Surprised.)

Not really. I have had several women of necessity. What have you heard?

HELEN
Nothing. Who is this girl you have brought?

MENELAUS
(Laughs.)

Oh, her! She is the child, Piara. Don't you remember her? Our little slave princess, Hermione's playmate.

HELEN
Yes, I remember. What is she doing here?
MENELAUS
She brings you a message from Hermione. She will join us at supper, with your permission.

HELEN
So! We will have a small dinner party this evening. How pleasant. However, I would rather first see the girl this afternoon, if you don't mind, in my chambers.

MENELAUS
But she will see you at supper. Her message is brief.

HELEN
Is it? But you must understand I cannot give full attention to my daughter's message in the midst of the clatter of a dinner party. I will want to be enjoying myself. In this house, visitors are so rare. I will see the girl this afternoon.

MENELAUS
But, my dear Helen . . .

HELEN
You will send her to me when we are through here.

MENELAUS
Yes, madame.

HELEN
Thank you, Menelaus. I am looking forward to this evening.

MENELAUS
I have brought you gifts.
Gifts! How generous of you! If you wouldn't mind, I should like to invite my houseguest to join us at supper; you will enjoy him.

MENELAUS
A man?

HELEN
No, a boy. A student. He ... visits me on occasion. I like to hear about his travels. I am sure he will find Piara most attractive. I hear she is very beautiful.

MENELAUS
Yes, she is. Is he your lover?

HELEN
I am very flattered, but he is just a boy. I would no more take him as my lover than you would--Piara, for instance.

(MENELAUS turns away and looks out over the gardens.)

MENELAUS
The gardens have changed. I don't remember so many poppies. Won't you come back to Sparta with me?

HELEN
To see Ulysses?

MENELAUS
For our daughter's wedding.

HELEN
That has not been settled.
MENELAUS

But, madame . . .

HELEN

We will talk more of it at supper. You should get some rest.

MENELAUS

Perhaps so.

HELEN

I will await Piara in my chambers. --You are dismissed.

MENELAUS

Madame.

(He bows curtly and exits. NANA enters.)

HELEN

Hiding in the bushes, Nana?

NANA

You must not go back to Sparta.

HELEN

We will talk of it later. Bring Damon to me.

(NANA bows and exits. HELEN reaches under her robes and withdraws the dagger. She turns it over in her hands, studying it, until she hears NANA returning with DAMON. HELEN replaces the weapon in its sheath under her robes. DAMON and NANA enter.)

(To DAMON.)

Sit down.

(To NANA, who is leaving.)

Stay here. Damon, tell me about the temple at Therapnae.15
DAMON

What do you want to know?

HELEN

Everything you do. When was it built?

DAMON

Three or four years ago. The little village of Therapnae has grown since. They make a great deal of money off the pilgrims.

HELEN

To whom is the temple dedicated?

DAMON

Why, to you, my lady. Gold is laid on your altar, and prayers made to you.

HELEN

What favors do I grant my supplicants?

DAMON

You are the Lady, all seasons, all things. You grant good harvest, easy childbirth. You ease pain of love, and lovers are advised by you.

HELEN

My temple is a place of love, is it not?¹⁶

DAMON

Yes.

HELEN

And my priestesses?
DAMON

They receive the supplicants.

HELEN

What do they call me?

DAMON

Helen-Cythera-Aphrodite. 17

HELEN

(To NANA.)

Did you instigate this?

NANA

I did not have to. The meat and bone of the belief was already there.

HELEN

So you built a temple.

NANA

It was a way to revitalize the old religion, and put things to right. It was not hard to find followers, and we grow more powerful. The people turn from the King and seek our favors. The Harvest Rituals have been reinstated in secret.

HELEN

For how long?

NANA

Two years. And the harvests have been better than they have for some time.
HELEN

There has been more rain. Do you run this new religion from here?

NANA

It is the old religion, madame; it just has a new viewpoint. Theisadié is High Priestess, and we have a system of messengers that go between us. The old times are returning.

HELEN

I have serious doubts as to whether that is true. Theisadié is High Priestess!

(Laughs.)

I thought all my priestesses were beautiful! How is the old pig these days?

NANA

We control the people; we will defeat the Achaeans.

HELEN

What of the Dorians?

NANA

Bah! They are barbarians! Menelaus uses them as an excuse to draft the young men and squander our gold.

HELEN

(Suddenly.)

You may go, Nana.

NANA

(Surprised, she obeys.)
Yes, madame.

(Bows, exits.)

HELEN

(Turns to DAMON.)

So. You are a Dorian! You do not look like one of the wild-eyed mountain butchers. Still, you are an enemy.

DAMON

(Kneels.)

My life is in your hands.

HELEN

Get up. You have nothing to fear. You are still a guest in my house. I am not a barbarian.

DAMON

Nor are we, madame. We are an educated people.

HELEN

I am sure you are; but you have been attacking our outposts.

DAMON

Your outposts seem to conveniently appear across our trade routes. We are stopped by your soldiers and toll is taken. Sometimes we are beaten and robbed. Many good men of ours have been murdered. So we fight the Achaean and the Spartan. We--

HELEN

Enough, enough. The story is an old one. The Trojans were once the blackguards, the thieving bastards that limited our
access to the seas. They exacted high tolls for passage through the Hellespont, and then laid back and enjoyed the booty. We called them decadent, too. Is that what you would say of us now? That we are decadent? You see, the Trojans called us the barbarians.

DAMON

Do you continue to insult me, madame? I am a prince and the Divine Helen has lain with me.

HELEN

So she has. I have gone to bed with many a fine enemy. It seems to be one of the better ways to handle the situation. Are you a spy?

DAMON

I am a student.

HELEN

Are you a spy?

DAMON

One must always seek after knowledge. But I would not spy on you, my lady. You must believe that. I am an honorable man. Do you believe me?

HELEN

Don't be so sensitive. You have answered my question. Damon, I want you to join me for supper.

DAMON

In the presence of the King?
HELEN
And his lady.

DAMON
I thought I should avoid him.

HELEN
I have changed my mind. I told him about you.

DAMON
But madame!

HELEN
I have told him you were a Greek student who visits me on occasion. Nothing more. Do you hesitate, Son of Heracles? I should think you would be curious to meet the Golden King, Menelaus.

DAMON
I am curious.

HELEN
You think of all of us as belonging to the past, don't you?

(DAMON does not answer.)

Well, you must continue my pretense. You will be unarmed, of course; but if you mind your manners, you will keep your head. And perhaps you will learn something. Give me a kiss.

(He kisses her.)

Now, go and dress. I prefer you in blue.

DAMON
Then blue it will be. We could be good friends, lady. Very good friends.
HELEN

Friends. I have never had many friends. I bring them bad luck.

(DAMON kisses her, and the exits. NANA enters.)

NANA

Here is your tea, madame.

HELEN

I don't want it.

NANA

But madame, you have not had any of the drug since early this morning.

HELEN

I have control of myself.

NANA

Hermione cannot marry Orestes.

HELEN

No?

NANA

He went against his mother! It is the greatest of sins, and it will remain so. No matter how the Achaeans try to change the gods. The council will not absolve him. He will never be king of Mycenae.

HELEN

It seems to me that I could persuade them to change their minds. Hermione will be Queen of both Sparta and Mycenae.
NANA
It cannot be! The House of Atreus must be destroyed!

HELEN
My daughter is a member of the House of Atreus, Nana. Why didn’t you tell me what you were doing? Did you think I would stop you? Have you been feeding me this drug to keep me passive and unaware?

(NANA does not answer.)
Speak, old woman!

NANA
You are selfish and self-indulgent. Your mother charged you to revenge her against the Achaeans, but you abandoned your people and found peace with foreigners. Then, when you finally come home, you hide here and abandon them once again.

HELEN
I fled to Troy for my life. I raised allies. I killed my son. But I was defeated, Nana. I stood on a ship and watched Troy burn.

NANA
Troy was not your city. Sparta is. You were not defeated. You brought the poppies here from Egypt for your own self-pity. You ignored my advice, my plans; so I went on my own urgings. I would have served you, but now I keep you like a pet cat.
HELEN

No longer, old woman.

NANA

I am glad! For I am old. And soon you will have to do my work, madame.

HELEN

I have my own work to do.

NANA

You have your mother's work to do! You are Queen! When your mother, Leda, dedicated you to the Goddess Nemesis, her hopes, her plans were that you would revenge us against the Achaeans.

HELEN

(Drawing the dagger.)

Look at this! This is the gift the boy brought me; not gold or jewels or perfume, but this! A weapon! It does man's work, the work of war and killing. The world is changing, Nana. A new age is upon us, and times will never be as they were. Never again.

NANA

If the old gods are dying, the new ones are born of greed!

HELEN

And steel! It will become an iron world; and in it, I do not know whom to trust.
NANA
Then chaos is upon us!

HELEN
We will deal with it. Did Orestes kill Clytemnestra?

NANA
No.

HELEN
I am relieved. I would still believe a King's oath!

NANA
You will not return to Sparta, will you?

HELEN
I will do as I please. What gifts has Menelaus brought me?

NANA
Two slaves. Performers. One is an old cripple who does trucks. The young one is a singer.

HELEN
Performers. How strange! You will see to them.

NANA
Yes, madame.

HELEN
Where is Damon?

NANA
In the library.

HELEN
Good. I hope he is enjoying himself. Oh, he will join us
for dinner tonight. But for the time being, see that he stays in the library. I will receive the girl in my chambers.

NANA

The girl?

HELEN

Piara. She will be here any moment. You will attend her, and bring her to me.

(HELEN starts to leave.)

NANA

Madame?

HELEN

What is it?

NANA

You are love. Love will not alter in its course no matter how the times of men may change. Whether in ecstasy or pain, you are love. It was folly for the Achaeans to deny you.

HELEN

(Laughs.)

They did not deny me; they created me.

(HELEN exits and NANA moves out of sight.)

Scene 3

(MENELAUS enters with PIARA.)

MENELAUS

Do you understand?
PIARA

Yes, my lord.

MENELAUS

Remember, be brief. Be general. The Dorian problem is becoming more serious, but our army acquits itself well. Oh, and tell her . . . that I have been wounded, slightly. And that is why I am not feeling well.

PIARA

Yes, my lord. I will tell her that you are a great King. I love you.

MENELAUS

Sweet flower, don't be afraid. Answer her questions, but don't prattle.

PIARA

I won't, my lord.

MENELAUS

Tell her the people need her. And for gods' sake, don't tell her about us!

PIARA

She doesn't know?

MENELAUS

Apparently not. But take care. Think of your children. Their lives could depend on this. I need Helen.

PIARA

Yes, my lord.
(NANA emerges and PIARA gives a startled cry.)

NANA

Come with me, girl.

MENELAUS

(Glowering.)

Go with her.

(NANA and PIARA exit to HELEN's chambers.)

But this is mine, old woman. I am still the King!

(MENELAUS exits.)

(In the apartment, PIARA approaches HELEN. NANA withdraws to an inobtrusive spot, but stays onstage.)

PIARA

Madame?

HELEN

Come in.

(PIARA does so, curtsies.)

You may be seated.

PIARA

Thank you, madame. My mistress sent this token of her affection.

(Gives HELEN a package. HELEN opens it. It contains a large ring, which HELEN looks at for a long time, then places on her finger.)

Aren't you pleased, madame?
HELEN
Yes, of course. This was my mother's.

(Pause.)

Go on.

PIARA
Hermione sends her greetings and begs an audience with you.

HELEN
She could have come out here at any time. Or could she?

PIARA
The time was not right.

HELEN
And now the time is right.

PIARA
Yes, madame.

HELEN
When will she come?

PIARA
She begs that you attend her . . . in Sparta.

HELEN
Is she a prisoner?

PIARA
(Shocked.)

No, madame, she is not. She is the Royal Princess. She manages the palace and presides over the court when the King is absent.
HELEN

Is he ill often?

PIARA

Madame, the King is well. You see, the Princess Hermione is very active. It is you, madame, who have imprisoned yourself.

(Pause.)

Please forgive me.

HELEN

Is that all?

PIARA

Yes, except, she sends her love and she is well.

HELEN

Good. Now, tell me some news. Has she a lover?

PIARA

No, madame!

HELEN

No? That is disappointing.

PIARA

It would not be proper.

HELEN

Not proper? I see.

PIARA

She has become a very fine weaver.
HELEN
Weaver?

PIARA
It is her favorite pastime.

HELEN
Is it? And what does she catch in her nets?

PIARA
Do you sew or weave, madame?

HELEN
Occasionally. But I have no talent for such things.

PIARA
I thought you would. You and Hermione resemble each other
in so many ways.

HELEN
Is she beautiful?

PIARA
Of course she is! She has your eyes.

HELEN
Good.

(Smiles.)

My specialty lies in--I suppose you would call it--chemical
manipulation.

PIARA
Chemical?
HELEN
Medicines, herbs, yeast cultures, and, of course, poisons. Queen Hecuba at Troy introduced me to it. She was an old one, eh, Nana?

NANA
Yes, madame.

HELEN
Then, I learned more during the time I spent in Egypt. I make very good beer. Would you like some? Or perhaps some tea?

PIARA
Beer would be fine.

HELEN
Good. I'll have some too, Nana.

(NANA exits.)

(To PIARA.)

Do you have children?

PIARA
(Blanches.)

No, madame.

HELEN
Are you married?

PIARA
No, I am a slave.
HELEN

Nonsense. You are one of the family. I can see that and I am glad. Do you want children?

PIARA

Yes!

HELEN

Ah! When you have them, my dear, your heart will break for the love of them.

PIARA

Are all your other children dead? Oh, forgive me, I . . .

HELEN

It is all right. Yes, they are dead. I bore three sons and a daughter in Troy. They were killed there.

PIARA

(Aghast.)

Not by King Menelaus?

HELEN

No. It was an accident. The roof of their nursery collapsed on them.

PIARA

I am sorry, madame.

HELEN

Are those tears in your eyes?

(NANA enters and proceeds to serve.)

Nana, salt her beer. The girl is too sweet.
(They are served. PIARA drinks. NANA moves to her previous place onstage.)

PIARA

This is very good.

HELEN

Thank you. Now, tell me what is really happening in Sparta.

PIARA

The Dorian attacks are becoming more serious, madame; but the army meets them. My lord King Menelaus has acquitted himself well in these battles. He was wounded not long ago. No doubt that is why he looks pale. He is tired.

HELEN

Now tell me the truth.

PIARA

It is very confusing, madame; I do not understand most of it. The men do it. I am not privy to council.

(HELEN waits.)

There are many factions vying for power, and with Ulysses coming here . . . the people want you. Lady, my lord King Menelaus is a good king. He works too hard, but he works for Sparta.

HELEN

You love him very much, don't you?

PIARA

No madame! I mean, of course, I love him. He is the King.
HELEN

Thank you, my dear. That will be all.

PIARA

Yes, madame.

(Rises.)

I wanted to say one thing more . . .

HELEN

Yes?

PIARA

Even if you choose not to return to Sparta, my lord, Menelaus, is convinced he needs your support. If you could send a message to your High Priestess, Theisadié . . . she makes things impossible. Nothing can get done. It hurts him more than you can know; he wants Sparta to prosper. If you ever loved him, please . . .

HELEN

I have enjoyed our little chat. It is gratifying to see that the pretty little girl who used to scamper through my palace playing soldier has turned into such a delicate and charming young woman. Do you have many lovers?

PIARA

No, madame.

HELEN

No?
PIARA
None at all, madame.

HELEN
Have you been to my temple?

PIARA
Yes. I offered prayer.

HELEN
Did you pray for help in love, or did you hope I would stay away?

PIARA
I have worshipped you, my lady. You are Helen.

HELEN
Thank you, my dear. You are dismissed.

(PIARA curtsies and exits.)

NANA
She is pitiful. What will happen to the women under men’s rule? Will they bake the bread and then have to plead with their husbands for the privilege of eating it?

HELEN
No. They will not starve. We must not forget love.

(NANA appears sceptical.)

Yes! Love! I think Menelaus loves that girl, in his own way. He adores women.

NANA
And gold. Menelaus was not wounded recently.
I did not believe it. Put quite simply, my enemy is dying, even without my help.

Will you go to Sparta?

You really don't want me to go, do you? Why? It is better to keep the cat in her cage?

It is better, perhaps, to keep the cat aloof. The people are demanding. For you to go in public--

Are you saying I will not live up to report?

No, madame. You are still beautiful. You are the goddess.

Did you see how frightened she was? Has he threatened her? Does my daughter live in fear like that?

Hermione is a princess.

So was this girl.

More like the girl was frightened of you, madame.
HELEN

Oh me? I don't want that! Or am I being sentimental?

NANA

Beware of sentimentality, Helen.

HELEN

You are so strong! I was a little girl when I first saw you. King Theseus had brought me to Athens, to his palace, and there you were. You did not look old enough to be his mother. You were standing at the top of the grand stair. I can still see you there: gorgeous, commanding, a bitch! I hated you; yet you became one of my ideals. I was grateful you came to serve me when my mother died.

NANA

Bah! You screamed at me and pulled my hair.

HELEN

Those were bad times, but I want you to understand that I am grateful. When you consented to return to my service after the war, I was relieved. You have done well by me. I thank you. But you will never lie to me again.21

NANA

Yes, my lady. Helen, your people worship you! We will destroy the Achaeans! You are Leda's revenge!

(HELEN walks over to her embroidery of Hector's death and almost casually draws the dagger and cuts the work down the middle. NANA is aghast.)
HELEN
You are living in the past, Nana.

NANA
Helen, what are you doing!

HELEN
My daughter is a weaver.

NANA
Your hands are shaking. Take some of the tea!

HELEN
No! Please go. I want some time alone.

NANA
I will draw another bath for you. It will refresh you.

(Receiving no answer, she exits.)

HELEN
(After a long pause, she begins to cry.)

Oh, mother! I am not a legend, nor am I a goddess. I have forgotten how to be a queen. But I am Helen and I am alive. Do you hear? I don't care about you any more! Oh, lady, Cythera-Aphrodite, will I always be tossed about like a toy in your hands?

(Suddenly angry, she strides into the garden.)

You! Sun who travels hotly across the sky, I tell you, I disregard Apollo, and I laugh at Zeus. I spit on Heracles! I am Helen!

(Her bravado crumbles.)

Help me! I saw worship in Damon's eyes and fear on that
girl's face. Adoration and fear. They are what gods inspire, aren't they? But I, who have never loved, am a goddess of love? How can it be? What have these men made of me? A travesty! Well, they are caught in their own trap, aren't they? I am not. I do not want godhood. I refuse it! If that is my destiny, I deny it. Free me from my duty to you, Mother! Free me!

(NANA enters discreetly and, with surprising gentleness, touches HELEN.)

NANA

Helen, your bath is ready.

HELEN

Thank you.

(NANA exits. HELEN crosses to where the dagger lies and picks it up.)

It reminds me of someone gentle and tragic. A voice that cried out, but no one heard.

NANA

(Shespops back in.)

Madame?

HELEN

I am coming.

(Shes putsthe dagger down and follows NANA.)

(Curtain.)
ACT III

Scene 1

(LYCUS and XANTHUS are discovered in a room dressing for their evening's performance.)

LYCUS

This is good. It is good to finally be here, isn't it boy? Ah! This place reminds me of my home. I like being near the sea! If luck stays with us, we will do well, and I will spend my final days here in peace.

(He adjusts XANTHUS' girdle.)

Tie that tightly, and pull your shoulders back. Are you all right?

XANTHUS

My heart is beating very fast.

LYCUS

Calm yourself, boy. My little horse.

XANTHUS

I am a man, now.

LYCUS

So you are! And an impatient one at that!

(Laughs.)

It is fitting that Helen of Troy is to be your patroness.

XANTHUS

If she will accept me!
LYCUS

She will accept you. Don't think otherwise; we have worked too hard. You are not afraid?

XANTHUS

No!

LYCUS

Remember, she is said to be Aphrodite incarnate, and we must serve her accordingly. It will please the King.

XANTHUS

Could she really be the goddess?

LYCUS

Bah! There are no goddesses, only men and women working their will. Your whole life was changed by her. If she had not started a war, you would not be an orphan. But it doesn't take a goddess to start a war, only a woman. A golden woman. Now that we are hers, we will prosper under her care. That is all that matters. But you must remember, it is the King who can kill. Not the lady. She would only be the cause.

XANTHUS

I will remember.

LYCUS

I want to practice the jump. Here—stand there. Now, this is difficult for me, boy. Legs a little wider; there! Good! Ready?
(LYCUS executes a flip and jump, landing on XANTHUS' shoulders. LYCUS takes balls from his pockets and juggles. NANA enters without knocking. Only a slight hesitation betrays LYCUS' surprise. He jumps down and somersaults to her. He plays his fool.)

LYCUS

Great mistress, enter! Come in and welcome!

NANA

I am Aethra, Nurse to the Queen.

(LYCUS and XANTHUS bow deeply.)

What are your names?

LYCUS

I am Lycus, the small and tricky.

NANA

So I see.

LYCUS

He is Xanthus, the singer.

NANA

A singer? Xanthus. It is the name given to . . . ah, yes, I remember . . . one of the horses that drew the chariot of Achilles. A horse. It is a fitting name for a singer, or is it a joke?

LYCUS

When I named him I thought to make him strong.

NANA

But where is his voice?
XANTHUS

(Angry.)
I am here, madame.

NANA
Take care, slave.

LYCUS
He is only a boy, my lady, but he is a great singer. His voice is as sweet as the summer winds.

NANA
He is warned.

(They bow, LYCUS prodding XANTHUS.)
My lady's house is a comfortable place, if everyone does his share of the work. There are only a few rules here. You approach the Queen only when you are invited. You will speak when you are spoken to; you will cause no offense--to anyone. These are not your permanent quarters. You will live behind the kitchen.

LYCUS
A warm place to live, madame. We thank you.

NANA
You have free run of the place. However, I do not favor cripples, little man. You would do best to avoid me.

(LYCUS bows and remains bowed. XANTHUS stands straight.)
You will perform after supper. You will go now to report to the Steward. He will see to you.
(NANA exits.)

XANTHUS

That stupid old crone!

LYCUS

Keep your temper, boy. She is very old, and she was once a Queen. She is the mother of Theseus, and now she is second only to Helen. Take her advice; be careful.

XANTHUS

I will try.

LYCUS

Please Helen, my son, and you will be blessed by her.

XANTHUS

I want to please her!

LYCUS

Then do your will. You are lucky! Ah! It is the beginning of a new life for us, if we take up the chance! It will be a good life. You will sing so sweetly the very wind will be silenced!

XANTHUS

I will!

LYCUS

And I will daze her with my sleight of hand. I will flatter her, beguile her, and you will woo her!

XANTHUS

I will! I will do anything for her!
LYCUS

And King Menelaus will say it is good. The lad--his songs--are good.

XANTHUS

Yes!

LYCUS

Oh, my boy! Your life lies glorious before you! Before you, my son.

(They embrace. Then they gather together their equipment and exit as the lights fade.)

Scene 2

(It is the great hall of the palace, where banquet couches have been set and tables are being laid by bustling servants. There are antechambers to the sides, a large fireplace, and center-stage entrance, a side entrance from the kitchens, and a grand stair leading to an upper floor. MENELAUS descends the stairs and looks over the proceedings. LYCUS and XANTHUS enter from the kitchens and, seeing the King, they halt and bow. MENELAUS approaches them.)

MENELAUS

Are you ready?

LYCUS

We are, my lord.

MENELAUS

(To XANTHUS.)

Sing your sweetest this night, my boy.
XANTHUS

I will, my lord. I have composed a special song for the Queen's enjoyment.

MENELAUS

Good, but do not forget the Song of Paris.

XANTHUS

I will not, my lord.

(The CAPTAIN enters through the arch. LYCUS and XANTHUS bow and move away as he approaches MENELAUS.)

CAPTAIN

My lord, I have news.

MENELAUS

(Moving himself and the CAPTAIN aside.)

What have you found out?

CAPTAIN

We encountered some fishermen drying their nets. The peasants hereabouts are closed-mouthed on anything that concerns the Lady, Sir.

MENELAUS

Go on.

CAPTAIN

After some persuasion, we learned they saw a stranger this morning just before dawn as they were pulling in their nets. He asked the way here.
MENELAUS

A boy or a man?

CAPTAIN

More like a man, Sir.

(MENELAUS walks away in thought.)

There is something further.

MENELAUS

What is it?

CAPTAIN

He was dressed in a cape of fur after the fashion of the mountain men. He was most likely a Dorian, Sir. He did not go by the road, but rather, walked up the beach. He must have climbed the cliffs, because, later, a little after dawn, a man was seen entering the back gate here. He was naked.

MENELAUS

How did he enter?

CAPTAIN

At the Queen's invitation, Sir.

MENELAUS

Who told you this?

CAPTAIN

A goatherder we found tending his flock on the sea cliffs. He, too, was stubborn and took considerable persuasion.

(MENELAUS looks questioningly at the CAPTAIN.)
He is dead, Sir.

MENELAUS

Damn! Have you searched the beach?

CAPTAIN

We have.

MENELAUS

Search again, and this time look for that which is hidden!

Search the gardens as well. I need tangible proof. Go.

(The CAPTAIN exits, just as PIARA enters overhead.)

Good evening, my dear. You look lovely.

PIARA

Thank you.

(Descends the stair and kisses him. MENELAUS takes her hands in his, but quickly separates as he sees NANA enter.)

MENELAUS

Wait for me in there, my dear. I will join you in a moment.

(He motions to the antechamber. PIARA curtsies and exits into the side room, closing the door. LYCUS has seen NANA coming and has withdrawn into the opposite antechamber. XANTHUS busies himself with equipment.)

MENELAUS

(To NANA.)

Is the Queen ready?

NANA

Not yet.
(No further words are spoken. They glare at one another, then MENELAUS turns on his heel. He goes to a table, pours wine for himself, flustering the SERVANTS who try to help him. He growls and they scatter. MENELAUS exits into the antechamber that contains PIARA.

NANA stands still as stone until he is gone. Then she walks about the room checking this and that. XANTHUS continues to arrange and organize. NANA watches him. When he is done, he bows to her and exits. Then she takes a final look over the room and exits.)

Scene 3

(The lights come up in the antechamber. MENELAUS and PIARA are kissing. They separate, and he picks up his wine flagon and takes a long drink. PIARA eases it from his hands.)

PIARA

Not too much before supper, my King.

(Kisses him.)

I love you.

MENELAUS

I love you, little flower. Are you ready?

PIARA

Yes.

(MENELAUS picks up his wine and finishes it. He walks to the door, opens it, and shouts at a SERVANT.)

MENELAUS

Bring more wine.

(A SERVING GIRL enters with a pitcher. MENELAUS takes it from her and pours.)
Get out of here.
    (The girl complies.)
Close the door.
    (The door closes softly.)
There are spies everywhere.

PIARA
I think she knows about us.

MENELAUS
I think not.

PIARA
Lying to her is not wise.

MENELAUS
What do you mean?

PIARA
Is it so important that the Queen return to Sparta?

MENELAUS
She must return!

PIARA
But you have Ulysses to aid you!

MENELAUS
Ulysses!
    (Laughs.)
He has outdone himself this time. He wanders back after fifteen years and demands his rights. No, Ulysses and I are only Kings. Helen has become a goddess. We can only
try to collect taxes, and there is not much left for us after the people have visited Helen's temple.

PIARA
You have only the people's good at heart. They would not go against their King!

MENELAUS
Not if Helen were at his side. Sweet flower, don't look so worried.

PIARA
Did you and the Queen ever love each other?

MENELAUS
She bore me two children. But no, we never loved. There was an unexpected bonus for me today. She has agreed to Hermione's marriage to Orestes.

PIARA
Hermione will marry Orestes? Then Hermione will go to Mycenae, and you will rule Sparta.

MENELAUS
(Laughs.)
What will we do with Helen?

PIARA
I do not believe she will go back with you.

MENELAUS
No?
But it doesn't matter. I will keep your house, you will rule Sparta, and everything will work out. You will see. I will make you very happy, and our sons will grow to manhood. They will be young princes, and someday . . . someday, Sparta will be their city and they will serve her as their father did before them.

Would that please you?

Yes, my lord! Yes!

We must try—at least—to persuade Helen to return for Hermione's wedding.

Of course, and afterwards, she can return here if she wishes.

Your body is so soft. I want you every time I hold you. All women should be as you are, gentle and loving.

Why? So I would have more competitors?

Would you fight for me?
PIARA

Yes, I would!

(There is a knock at the door. MENELAUS answers it, then returns to PIARA.)

MENELAUS

She is here. You will enter beside me.

PIARA

Thank you, my lord.

(They exit.)

Scene 4

(The lights come up on the great hall as PIARA and MENELAUS enter. HELEN, NANA, and a few LADIES emerge at the upper hall, and descend the stairs. DAMON follows after.)

MENELAUS

Madame, a good evening!

HELEN

Good evening, my lord.

(HELEN goes to her couch. DAMON follows.)

This is Damon of Sicyon, my lord. Damon, this is a friend of the family, the Princess Piara.

DAMON

My lord.

(Bows.)

My lady.

(Bows.)
MENELAUS

You live in Sicyon?

DAMON

Yes, sir.

MENELAUS

How did you become acquainted with the Queen?

HELEN

As most people become acquainted: by happenstance. Shall we sit down?

(Everyone does so. Food is served. DAMON eats with gusto. PIARA picks at her food, but HELEN and MENELAUS do not eat at all. However, MENELAUS continues to drink.)

MENELAUS

You are a student?

DAMON

Yes, my lord. I am also a traveler.

MENELAUS

Do you study, or do you travel?

DAMON

I study my journey, my lord.

MENELAUS

Ah, now I see how it was you met the Queen. In the midst of your studies, you happened to be passing by here.

HELEN

He was invited. He is my guest.
MENELAUS
Have you encountered the new god in your travels?

DAMON
Whom do you mean?

MENELAUS
Come, come lad! Heracles, the son of Zeus.

HELEN
There are so many sons of Zeus! I would have my gods be less libidinous.

MENELAUS
Would you?

HELEN
Yes. They should be loving.

MENELAUS
(To DAMON.)
What do you think of this new god, Heracles?

DAMON
He was a hero.

MENELAUS
A hero! The man murdered his infant sons! Only a madman would do that, don’t you agree?

DAMON
Death is seldom a successful end to anything, my lord.

MENELAUS
Yet Heracles is being worshipped as a god! What can this foretell?
HELEN

A lot of sons will die.

MENELAUS

It foretells a loss of honor, that is what it foretells. Some say he may join the Olympian host.

(To DAMON.)

Do you think he will?

DAMON

He may well do so.

MENELAUS

Which of the twelve high-gods will he replace, do you think?

DAMON

I could not begin to guess. I am only a student.

HELEN

I can.

MENELAUS

Who, then?

HELEN

One of the goddesses.

MENELAUS

Not Aphrodite?

HELEN

(Smiles.)

No, not Aphrodite. Damon has a specialty, Menelaus. A favorite subject: The Trojan War. That is why I wanted
him to meet you. His information is often inaccurate and full of rumor and legend. But you were there; you know the truth.

MENELAUS

What truth should the young man hear, my Queen?

HELEN

I have no preferences. Do you have a question you would like to ask the King?

(A pause.)

Go ahead, Damon. Ask him about Troy.

DAMON

My lord, what was Troy . . .

(Hesitates.)

MENELAUS

What was Troy? It was a city.

DAMON

That is not what I meant--

MENELAUS

They were our enemies.

HELEN

There you have it, Damon--the truth.

PIARA

But they were our enemies, madame. They stole you from us.

DAMON

Another truth, my Queen.
HELEN
What makes it so?
DAMON
Because it is believed.
HELEN
An interesting definition, my young friend.
DAMON
I have another question for the King, if it pleases him to answer.
MENELAUS
I will answer. Of course, I'll answer.
DAMON
How did Achilles die?
MENELAUS
The arrow hit him in the heel.
HELEN
He knows that. That is not what he is asking.
(To DAMON.)
I remember! The invulnerable Achilles! He was the most beautiful man I have ever seen. Even taller than my lord Menelaus. Paris made a lucky shot. I saw the arrow hit. Achilles died like a bird in flight dies: a glorious animal reaching for life.
DAMON
(To MENELAUS.)
What did you see, my Lord? How did Achilles die?
MENELAUS

Suddenly. He died suddenly. It was incongruous. For a split second, none of us believed it. Then we found ourselves in pitched battle over possession of the corpse.

HELEN

All of you coveted his armor.

MENELAUS

We fought through the rest of the day for the body of our comrade. It was a hard fight. There was a man who ought to have been made a god.

HELEN

He must have been one to gain such praise from an old enemy.

MENELAUS

We fought side by side.

HELEN

But you did not like it.

PIARA

(Very ill at ease.)

My lord, my lady. These memories are old. They are over.

HELEN

Quite so, my dear. Menelaus, why isn't Piara married?

MENELAUS

She is betrothed to a lord in my court.

HELEN

Is she? She didn't tell me. Best wishes, my dear.
PIARA
Thank you, madame. I am very happy.

HELEN
Are all the women in your court so late to marry? She will have difficulty bearing children.

(To PIARA.)
I had Hermione when I was a girl, and it was easy. But I bore my last child when I was thirty-five and it was painful.

PIARA
I will not have any difficulty. I will have many healthy sons.

HELEN
Sons, again! Don't you want a little girl?

DAMON
Little girls are more of a burden.

HELEN
A burden?

DAMON
They cannot fend for themselves.

HELEN
That is because you are not letting them do it. What do you do? Keep your women in cages? If so, it is a serious mistake, young man.

MENELAUS
Little boys grow up to be warriors.
DAMON

More than that, my lord. His sons are a man's legacy.

(To HELEN.)

We care for our women because we love them.

HELEN

Do they love you? Piara, do you love your fiance?

PIARA

Yes, madame. Very much. I love only him.

HELEN

You are very generous.

PIARA

My lord, perhaps it is time for some entertainment.

MENELAUS

Yes! Yes! Helen, I told you I brought you gifts.

HELEN

So you did.

MENELAUS

May I present them to you?

HELEN

Please do!

(MENELAUS claps his hands. LYCUS and XANTHUS enter. They tumble, and LYCUS does a sleight of hand, all of this in a quick succession of tricks. They finish with a flourish, stand, and bow. LYCUS steps forward.)
LYCUS

There come before you
Two clowns--
Slaves--
Who would share your love and bounty.
We beg to be received with kindness.

XANTHUS

We come, Great Queen of Sparta,
To grace your life as gifts;
Possessions of the mind
And our art's ecstasy.
We bring thought and magic.
Song and Joy.

LYCUS

To make our welcome all the warmer
We bear tokens, rare and wonderful
From far-off lands,
To assure our Lady's love
And find our happy end.

XANTHUS

From a long dead sea now dried to sand--a pearl.

(LYCUS approaches HELEN carrying a small box. He opens it, and it is empty. He feigns a moment of panic, then does a trick and in his hand is a large baroque pearl. He puts it on its cushion in the box and offers it.)
LYCUS

The god's memory is locked in this tear.

(HELEN, laughing, takes it.)

XANTHUS

A veil of threads spun by worms who died for their spinning.

(LYCUS pulls a long scarf from his sleeve. It is a bright vermillion silk. He gives it to HELEN.)

LYCUS

To sacrifice oneself for beauty is holy.

(Then he pulls another veil from his sleeve. It is of many colors and he flips it as XANTHUS speaks.)

XANTHUS

A gold-caged bird and his songs that yearn for lost jungles.

(LYCUS does the scarf trick, and bird and cage appear. He gives them to HELEN who passes them to NANA.)

LYCUS

To know another's sorrow is to free him.

(LYCUS and XANTHUS group and bow. HELEN applauds them.)

HELEN

Thank you. Proceed.

XANTHUS

(Takes up his instrument and sings.)

They told me tales of a golden Helen Wrought of metal, pure and glorious. Helen, they told me, sent men to death For loving too dear and losing.
The god's daughter, the star-born Helen,
Her song is love.
The god's daughter, laughing in music.
I sing her song.

Deep are the shadows when sunlight is leaving
Dark grows the earth and every man's heart.
Helen, they told me, is gone forever,
Weep now; mourn now; cry out to stars!

(Repeat chorus.)

LYCUS

(Steps forward to recite.)
The Lady nodded to me
Slowly, gently, barely moving
Her great headdress of Isis-Aphrodite-Star.
Barley tilting the moon's horns
The Lady nodded.
With her left hand
She parted the veil.
Her right hand rose from its book
And brushed against me.
I was flung into shadow.
A second, only that,
I stood beyond the veil
With beings beyond light.
Then I awakened
To time and gentler dimensions.
The Lady sat
Smiling the pale brightness
Of the Egyptian cat that sits
In the half light of the temple of man.
And I wondered at my heart,
Blushed with love.
There is nothing
And all things
Beyond veils.

XANTHUS

(Sings.)
But from the shadows laughter exultant
Rises and glides on her silvery flight;
Lovers kiss deeply and cry out to moonlight,
Oh, joy! Our Lady Helen returns!

The god's daughter, the star-born Helen,
Her song is love.
The god's daughter, laughing in music,
I sing her song.

(They bow. Everyone applauds.)

HELEN

I am well pleased with my gifts, Menelaus.

(MENELAUS bows. HELEN turns to LYCUS and XANTHUS.)
Come here. What is your name?

LYCUS

I am Lycus, my lady.

HELEN

Well done, Lycus.

LYCUS

I hope my form does not offend.

HELEN

Beauty and ugliness, like life and death, ride side by side in the hunt, Lycus. I welcome you to my house.

(To XANTHUS.)

And you?

XANTHUS

I am Xanthus.

HELEN

Xanthus.

(She puzzled a moment.)

Xanthus?

MENELAUS

It is the name of a horse.

HELEN

A horse. Who names you?

XANTHUS

My father, Lycus.
HELEN
You?

LYCUS
He was a foundling, madame.

HELEN
How did you come to name him after a horse?

LYCUS
It was no mere horse, madame. It was the immortal steed that drew the chariot of Achilles.\(^2\)

HELEN
Yes, I remember. I watched that horse run one day. He and his fellows pulled Achilles and his cart three times around the walls of Troy. They were magnificent, so was Achilles, and the body of Hector tied to the cart dragged behind them in the dirt.

LYCUS
It was during the sack of Troy that I found the boy . . . he was a baby, his family killed.

HELEN
You were there?

LYCUS
I was a warrior's slave, madame.

HELEN
Did you do tricks and make jokes?
LYCUS

I did, madame. It is my living.

HELEN

Who was his family? (Indicating XANTHUS.)

LYCUS

His father was a merchant. I never knew their names.

HELEN

(To XANTHUS.)

You are a Trojan, lad. Are you not uncomfortable in the company of your enemies?

XANTHUS

I am your slave, my lady.

(Being very cautious.)

My only enemies are your enemies.

HELEN

Then we will protect each other. Sing for me.

XANTHUS

Yes, my lady.

(Sings.)

His mother before his birth one night
Dreamed of a fiery sword.
A son who would send her own sweet shade
To the end of the dark green vale.
To the end of the dark green vale, de la,
To death in the dark green vale.
Her house, her husband, her other sons
Would fall at the hands of men
Brought by the deeds of the fiery one,
If she should let him live.
If she should let him live, de la,
If she should let him live. 23

HELEN
(Interrupts.)
What is that song?

MENELAUS
(Jumping on it.)
It is the Song of Paris. It goes on to tell of the golden
apple, and how Aphrodite won it with the bribe of Helen.

HELEN
(To XANTHUS.)
I do not like the song. Do something else.

XANTHUS
As you please, my lady.
(He goes to LYCUS and they confer.)

MENELAUS
Hard memories, Helen?

HELEN
Are you trying to irritate me?

MENELAUS
Only toward your duties as a Queen . . . and a goddess.
HELEN

Your gifts have pleased me, Menelaus, but I must show you another gift I received recently.

(HELEN takes the dagger and its sheath from her robes and tosses it to MENELAUS.)

MENELAUS

(Examining it.)

Steel! Where did this come from?

HELEN

Damon.

MENELAUS

What craftsman made this? What is its source?

DAMON

I do not know.

MENELAUS

Where did you get it?

HELEN

His brother took it from the body of a dead mountain man.

(HELEN smiles. MENELAUS returns the dagger to her. She sets it on the table in front of her, and turns her attention to LYCUS and XANTHUS who are ready to begin.

They go through a routine of tumbling and magic tricks. MENELAUS continues drinking, with PIARA watching him carefully. HELEN and DAMON enjoy the performance, laughing with glee when LYCUS pulls an egg from NANA's ear. NANA had come forward from her retiring position of orchestrating the smooth serving of dinner to offer HELEN some delicacy in an attempt to get her to eat. NANA was
trapped into the trick by proximity, and she is not amused.

Near the end of the routine, the CAPTAIN enters and signals MENELAUS, who exits. He returns shortly with a bundle. He walks in the midst of LYCUS' and XANTHUS' performance, silencing and stopping them. He throws the bundle before HELEN.)

HELEN

What is this?

MENELAUS

Proof!

(He rummages through the bundle, and locates and holds up a medallion on a chain.)

This is a symbol worn by the Dymanes, my lady. Your little student has duped you. He is a Dorian spy!

(He thrusts the medallion at her.)

This night you would have called him to your bed—and met dawn with this dagger in your throat.

(DAMON partially rises, but HELEN puts a hand on his arm. He sits. Everyone else is frozen. HELEN rises.)

HELEN

Please, my lord Menelaus, sit down and be quiet. You have disturbed the performance.

(To LYCUS and XANTHUS.)

Proceed.

(She takes her seat. To NANA, referring to the bundle of clothes on the floor.)

Get that out of the way.
(NANA moves to do so, but MENELAUS physically prevents her.)

NANA

Beware, son of Atreus.

MENELAUS

(He stops. Then he avoids NANA and turns to HELEN.)

I am trying to save your life! This man is one of the enemy! He is a spy! Captain, come here.

HELEN

Menelaus, you are drunk. Sit down.

(The CAPTAIN approaches the group gingerly.)

MENELAUS

(Confronting HELEN.)

I am your King and you will hear me out.

NANA

(She is livid. She sees the CAPTAIN.)

Captain, you do not come in the presence of the Queen bearing arms. Remove your sword.

MENELAUS

(Whirls.)

Be silent, old woman!

(To the CAPTAIN.)

Leave your sword where it is. Come here.

CAPTAIN

But, my lord!
MENELAUS

I command it!

NANA

Madame, order this King and his Aetolian slut from your house!

MENELAUS

I will show you who rules this house, you bitch!

(To the CAPTAIN.)

Draw your sword!

HELEN

Lay down your sword, Captain.

(She speaks softly.)

Now!

MENELAUS

Obey me!

CAPTAIN

But, my lord, she is Helen.

(He lays his sword on the table.)

MENELAUS

Get out!

(The CAPTAIN exits. Then, to HELEN.)

You knew this man was a Dorian.

HELEN

I did, and he is my guest.
MENELAUS

How is it that you always play hostess to my enemies? You are a whore!

DAMON

(Standing, shouting.)

No! But you, sir, are a cuckold!

MENELAUS

(His temper snaps.)

Kill him!

(He looks wildly about, grabs XANTHUS and drags him to the CAPTAIN's sword.)

XANTHUS

I am a singer, my lord. I know nothing of killing.

PIARA

Please, my lord, stop this!

MENELAUS

Kill him! He is a Dorian!

HELEN

He is my guest. I forbid it!

MENELAUS

Take up the sword or you will die!

(Grabs the sword and tries to make XANTHUS take it.)

XANTHUS

I cannot. The Queen has forbidden it.

MENELAUS

Will you defy me? Kill him!
HELEN

(To NANA.)

Call my guards.

(NANA exits.)

MENELAUS * LYCUS

(Beside himself.) * Xanthus! Obey!

Kill him! Obey me!

XANTHUS

No.

(To LYCUS.)

I am sorry, father.

(At this point, the action is simultaneous. MENELAUS raises the weapon above his head as LYCUS grabs the dagger from the table and leaps at DAMON. DAMON is taken completely by surprise as LYCUS cuts his throat. MENELAUS' blow descends, the LADIES scream, and XANTHUS lies dying. LYCUS, unaware of the forestage activity turns triumphant from his kill and cries out.)

LYCUS

My lord, you are obeyed!

(Then he sees XANTHUS, and runs to him, cradling him in his arms as the boy dies. NANA re-enters with guards and there is a general hubbub.)

HELEN

Silence!

(Everyone freezes. There is a long pause. HELEN turns to MENELAUS, who in the midst of the confusion and so many witnesses has let the sword fall.)

I am Cythera-Aphrodite. You have killed a guest of my house.
MENELAUS

Helen . . .

HELEN

You have blasphemed! Kneel! Kneel before me.

(He hesitates.)

Do it!

(MENELAUS kneels.)

MENELAUS

Forgive me! 24

HELEN

(She turns slowly and takes her seat.)

I will return to Sparta on the morrow. I will meet with Ulysses and attend my daughter's wedding.

MENELAUS

Will you remain in the city?

HELEN

I will take up residence in the palace.

MENELAUS

Thank you, my Queen!

HELEN

Don't be hasty. There are two conditions to my return to the city. First you will abdicate upon Hermione's marriage to Orestes.

PIARA

No, my lord! You mustn't!
HELEN
But you will retain control of the army.

NANA
Madame!

MENELAUS
Agreed!

HELEN
Second, I will have recompense for the murder of my guest and my slave.

MENELAUS
I would be absolved. Ask whatever you wish.

HELEN
(Indicating PIARA.)
She will die.

MENELAUS
No, Helen!

HELEN
Nana, fetch my box of potions.

(NANA exits.)

PIARA
What does she mean?

MENELAUS
Helen, please . . .

HELEN
Those are my terms. I am gentle, and I will see no more
blood. She will drink a simple poison; there will be no pain.

PIARA

Please, my lord! I am the mother of your sons! You cannot let me die at her hands!

MENELAUS

Helen?

(He gets no response from the Lady.)

Let it be done.

PIARA

Will you abandon me so easily?

MENELAUS

It is not easy, my love.

PIARA

No. No, my lord!

(NANA returns with the chest. HELEN takes her time mixing the wine and the potion, while PIARA weeps softly. HELEN hands the flagon to MENELAUS.)

HELEN

Tell her to drink it.

(MENELAUS takes it to PIARA. She turns away.)

MENELAUS

Drink it.

PIARA

My lord, you said you loved me. I won't do it. I won't.
MENELAUS

Do you want your sons to live?

PIARA

(A long pause.)

I hate you!

(Drinks. Then she sits, as though turned to stone.)

MENELAUS

(Places the flagon on a table, and faces HELEN.)

I will expect you to be ready to leave in the morning. Good night, Helen.

HELEN

Good night, Menelaus.

(He exits.)

NANA

Victory!

HELEN

Is that what you call it?

(She refers to the bodies.)

Have these cleared out of here. Dismiss the guards.

(NANA mobilizes the terrified SERVANTS, and as they drag the bodies out, NANA looks at LYCUS, sitting in the middle of the bloody floor like a catatonic.)

NANA

What of the abomination?

(HELEN shrugs.)

Give him to me.
So be it.

(NANA ties her girdle around LYCUS' neck and leads him out. HELEN moves a large chair up to the fireplace and helps PIARA into it. SERVANTS try to tidy up, but HELEN tells them.)

Leave us.

(They exit and PIARA and HELEN are left alone.)

PIARA

What will happen to my children?

HELEN

Nothing. I have had enough deaths.

PIARA

I will not be the last to die for you, my lady. How long will it take?

HELEN

Not long. You will fall asleep shortly.

PIARA

Why have you done this?

HELEN

As I said, to teach you a lesson.

PIARA

A lesson?

HELEN

Menelaus was your only lover, was he not?
PIARA
Yes, madame.

HELEN
I thought so. Knowledge of only one man has limited your sight, and even prejudiced you against your own kind.

PIARA
My own kind?

HELEN
Other women. What are women? How do you think of them?

PIARA
Madame?

HELEN
How do you think of them?

PIARA
Women are precious things . . . fragile. We are--

HELEN
Things? Pets?

PIARA
Worse than that, madame. We are merchandise.

HELEN
Then we had best set a high price on ourselves.

PIARA
I hate him!

HELEN
Don't bother. It is a waste of your time. And if you hate, you will breed hard-hearted children who are unable to give
themselves to joy. It is the children that are important.
Piara, will you serve my cause?

PIARA

If my dying serves you, lady, will you see to the care of
my little babies?

HELEN

No, you will.

PIARA

How can I? With ghostly hands and a broken heart?

HELEN

Your heart will mend, and you are not dying.

PIARA

Not dying?

HELEN

I did not poison you. The drug I gave you is powerful, but
all that will result is a good night's sleep. You will need
it.

PIARA

What will I do?

HELEN

You will help me to take care of Menelaus. I don't think
he will live very long.

PIARA

You won't kill him!

HELEN

I won't have to. He is very ill; you know that.
Yes, he is.

Actually, it is too bad. He is our best general. We will need him to fight the Dorians.

He is a good King.

No, he is not a good King.

He works so hard.

He has to. Do you still love him?

No. I wonder if I ever did.

Do you hate me?

My lady--

I will only hear the truth. Do you hate me?

I do not know, madame. My life has been turned around so many times! When I was taken as a slave, I knew I would never see my mother again. Now, once more, I have lost everything.
HELEN

Nonsense. You are doing very well, considering the circumstances. We are the children of change, you and I, struggling into a new age.

PIARA

What do you mean?

HELEN

I mean that I am sympathetic. Piara, I have need of you. Will you serve me?

PIARA

I am your slave.

HELEN

I grant you your freedom. Do you wish to return home?

PIARA

I am free to go?

HELEN

Yes.

PIARA

I have no home but Sparta.

HELEN

Good.

PIARA

I am at your service, madame.

HELEN

Thank you. I am sorry for your pain. Can I make reparation?
PIARA
You might tell me how to handle them.

HELEN

(Puzzled.)
Handle them?

PIARA
The men. They are large and dangerous animals, madame.

HELEN
You are afraid of them?

PIARA
Yes.

HELEN
How sad that is, my dear. Ah! I thought that I had never loved, but I was wrong. I have enjoyed men without fear. It is you who have never loved if you have been afraid. Love! I rule a kingdom far greater than that ever imagined by Agamemnon, Menelaus, or Ulysses. I regret the events of this evening. What happened here tonight was unthinkable. But twenty-five years ago I saw my mother stand, mouth agape, not believing the events surrounding her. A band of ruffian princes had camped in her city. They swore an oath to one another—swore over the body of a dead horse—an oath to support the husband of Helen. I was to
marry one of them; my mother would abdicate, and all the cities would be united.

Oh, there were other provisions: the Queen would no longer preside at the Harvest Rituals; the first born son would succeed to the throne; and I was to take no lovers other than my husband. As a matter of fact, I was segregated from all other males.

How dare they do this to the Queen of Sparta? It was very simple. They had defeated our army and my two brothers died when they tried to rescue Clytemnestra. Agamemnon had killed her husband and kidnapped her, forcing her to marry him.

Then I was told to marry Menelaus. I did it. We thought to save our lives and our throne, but it saved nothing.

Later I asked my mother what else we could have done. She did not know, but she said the first lesson was the oldest: ride out the wind.  

Are you asleep?

PIARA

No, madame. Their sons will rule, you know. Men are the warriors.

HELEN

It is man's work.

PIARA

It is the world's work, and men are doing it. They are the masters. Their strength must be praised.
HELEN

You can praise a little boy's strength up to the point where he breaks your crockery. Then you must teach him subtlety.

PIARA

Teach?

HELEN

Teach your sons. You were right, the sons will rule. Eventually. It is the new way. But it well may be that those who rule will be the Sons of Heracles.

PIARA

You must save us from the barbarians!

HELEN

I will try. But like you, I may have forgotten the legacy of our mothers.

PIARA

My mother is dead.

HELEN

But I am not. We will manage. I only hope my daughter is not afraid.

Love is so precious, so rare. Sweet boy—we had only a moment. Young man, young warrior. We do love them, don't we?

PIARA

I will serve you, but I will never worship at your temple again. I do not love anyone anymore.

(She falls asleep.)
HELEN

(Does not notice that PIARA is unconscious.)

But you must love! You are the future! Revenge is useless. You can't tell, perhaps you will find a truer love, a greater love. You must hope for it. But for now, at least you are free. I had to free you.

I did go to Troy for love, but the one I loved was myself. The men wouldn't have believed that if I had told them. So they said I was Helen-Cythera-Aphrodite, love itself. Perhaps it is true. But it will no longer be the way it was.

(HELEN laughs and turns to PIARA. She sees that the girl is asleep and calls a SERVANT.)

Put her to bed.

(The SERVANT carries PIARA out.)

Scene 5

(NANA enters.)

NANA

Would you like some tea?

HELEN

No.

NANA

You should get some sleep.

HELEN

I don't feel like sleeping.
NANA
Are you hungry? You didn't touch the dinner.

HELEN
Inform the High Priestess that I will require an anointing ritual.

NANA
It will be arranged.

HELEN
You will also tell Theisadië that she will serve me with complete loyalty and absolute honesty.

NANA
That goes without saying.

HELEN
Say it anyway.

NANA
Yes, madame. When will you be leaving in the morning?

HELEN
As early as possible.

NANA
Why are you doing this?

HELEN
I had to do something. I realized today that I've gotten fat.

NANA
I should start packing your things.
HELEN

Only the essentials. In the city, I will have clothing made in the new fashion.

NANA

You gave him the army!

HELEN

The army needs him. Besides, you saw the reaction of the Captain. It would be impossible for Menelaus to turn the soldiers against me.

NANA

How will you deal with the Doriens?

HELEN

The army will deal with them.

NANA

Against steel?

(HELEN walks over to the spot where LYCUS dropped the dagger. She picks it up, wipes it off, and shows it to NANA.)

HELEN

Look at it closely. Do you recognize that type of work?

NANA

Is it Egyptian?

HELEN

No. It is strange how one's mind works. I saw this in the hand of that crippled little man, and I saw Cassandra. I told you I was reminded of someone when I first saw the
dagger. It was she. Cassandra had a dozen bracelets made with this kind of inlay work. They were her favorites; she wore four or five at a time. It was expensive, but several of the Trojan women had jewelry made in this fashion.

(Laughs.)

Menelaus would have this information if he and his brother hadn't burned the city first. This dagger comes from the Orient. Spartans will have steel, because I know where to get it, and I control the Hellespont. It will take the Dorians a while to conquer us.

NANA

They will never conquer Sparta.

HELEN

I am not so sure. They have the power to make new gods. Heracles is a new god; I am only a new name for an old one.

NANA

What will you do in Sparta?

HELEN

I will be flexible, dear Nana.

NANA

I will be at your side.

HELEN

I want you to remain here.

NANA

I must go with you!
HELEN
No. You are an old cat; I would not move you. You will stay here and continue your machinations. I will go to Sparta alone.

NANA
But madame . . .

HELEN
I will go to Sparta alone.

NANA
As you wish.

HELEN
Go get my cloak, will you?

NANA
(Stifling her urge to protest.)

Yes, madame.

(NANA exits. HELEN walks around the room, viewing the carnage. She stops at the pool of blood on the floor, draws a scarf from her bosom, and wipes at it. She carries the stained scarf to the fireplace and throws it in the fire.)

HELEN
Mother! I invoke you with blood!

Hear me; I am Helen.

I am the earth, and the sea,
I am fire; I am the wind.
I am the face of the moon.
Cleanse me so my heart is free.
I am love.
(She pauses and looks at the blood on her hands. She goes to a finger bowl and washes, musing.)

I wonder, Menelaus, if it would have been possible for us to be friends?

(NANA enters with the cloak and places it on HELEN's shoulders.)

Thank you.

(Pause.)

I have enjoyed this day. Not the deaths; no, not the deaths. But I have enjoyed the life. There was life even when it was being lost. I enjoy feeling alive.

NANA

You are like a child.

HELEN

I have to be; I will live forever.

NANA

(Busying herself by tidying the room.)

Tomorrow will be interesting as well.

HELEN

Yes, it will! Sparta. Hermione. I will see my daughter tomorrow. And later, Ulysses.

NANA

You will have some time to prepare for that.

HELEN

I don't think it will be difficult at all now.
Will you reinstate the King's surrogate and his sacrifice?

I don't think it would be wise. The King will be Orestes.

What about the Harvest Rituals?

They are best done in secret. It makes them more attractive, I'm sure. If the Lady is to survive, she must use modern methods.

Take care, my Helen.

(HELEN embraces NANA, then she draws back, pulls her cloak about her.)

I am going for a walk through my gardens.

(She starts out, but turns.)

I will be back in to pack . . . in a little while.

Yes, my lady.

(Watches HELEN leave.)

(Curtain.)
NOTES

1. Assuming that Helen was in her mid-teens when she married Menelaus, she would have been about twenty-five when she left for Troy. After the ten-year siege of Troy, and about five years in Egypt, Helen would be about forty upon her return to Sparta. At least seven to ten years would then have to pass to correspond with the return of Ulysses, making Helen between forty-five and fifty during the events of the play.

2. Menelaus had twin bastards, Nicostratus and Megapenthes, by a slave-girl named Pieris.¹ The name resembled "Paris" too closely, and was altered to Piara. Her being a princess and a childhood companion of Hermione are inventions.

3. The play occurs at the time of Ulysses' homecoming which would have been about fifteen to twenty years after the Trojan War. The Roman form of Odysseus is used in the play because it is more familiar to the modern audience, and since the character does not appear but is important in the action, immediate recognition (i.e.: Kirk Douglas) is desirable.

4. This was roughly the time of the advent of the Iron Age. The word "steel" is used to give a feeling of finely wrought metal, because the word "iron" has a rougher connotation to a modern audience than it would have had in ancient times.

5. The Dorians are described as "fair in complexion, and big and strong of build." ²

6. The Dymanes are one of the three major Dorian tribes. ³

7. Heracles had begun to be worshipped as a god's son and father-ancestor by the Dorians. After his death (circa 1206 B.C.) Heracles' sons made their bargains with Atreus, and returned a hundred years later with Heracles' myth by that time substantially embellished. It is thought that Heracles might not have been a single man, but a group of wandering patriarchal Greeks who performed sundry labours. Heracles was later received on Mt. Olympus and became the Porter of Heaven. ⁴ Although it was Zeus' plan for Heracles to be one of the Twelve Olympians, and contrary to Menelaus' prediction in the play, it was to be Dionysus who replaced Hestia as one of the divine court. ⁵

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³ Graves, II, p. 211.
⁴ Ibid., p. 203.
8. Some versions of the sacking of Troy say that Helen welcomed the Greeks and even claim she helped them gain entrée into the city. These were ignored as unlikely to have been committed by Helen as she is depicted in the play.

9. The play occurs about fifteen to twenty years after the Trojan War. This would make Hermione twenty-five to thirty years of age at the time of the play.

10. The "books" in Helen's library would be clay tablets, or the more expensive scrolls of papyrus or leater. Remnants of leather "books" were found in the ruins of Troy.  

11. Homer describes Menelaus as being tall, and very fond of gold, wearing gold-plated armor and rings and plaits of gold in his long hair.

12. That the war was fought for the sake of the control of the Hellespont could not have escaped Helen.  

13. One report says the Orestes simply kicked Clytemnestra out of her palace and let her be tried publicly. This seemed more logical, though less dramatic, than the events depicted by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Clytemnestra's suicide is also conjectured.

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7 Graves, II, p. 302.
8 Ibid., p. 63.
9 Ibid., p. 69.
14. Telemachus (Ulysses' son) in the *Odyssey* meets with Helen and Menelaus upon their return from Egypt, roughly five to eight years after the fall of Troy. That Ulysses would visit them after his return seems likely.

15. There was a temple built to Helen at Therapne.\(^\text{10}\) When, how, or why are conjecture for the purposes of the play.

16. Helen was an orgiastic goddess. Much of her worship was in the form of sexual meditations. One festival involved the light whipping of pubescent boys to orgasm.\(^\text{11}\) Her priestesses, as temple prostitutes, can be imagined to have held considerable political clout. It can be understood that lovemaking was something Helen would consider her own (not her husband's) business. When the patriarchs told the conquered princesses that they would receive only their husbands in their beds, it must have angered the ladies. Helen's defection to Troy with Paris is one example of the ladies' defiance.

17. Cythera was another name of Aphrodite, and was the goddess Dares has Paris and Helen worshipping on the island named for her. "Helen-Cythera-Aphrodite" seemed the logical name choice for the "Goddess Helen" in the play.

18. The Erinyes would have been the "council" to which Nana refers.


\(^\text{11}\) Graves, II, p. 79.
19. In the matriarchal system, war and fighting were "men's work" in the same manner and slightly desultory connotation that housework is "women's work" in the patriarchal system.  

20. Helen bore Paris three sons, Bunomus, Aganis, and Idaus, and a daughter named Helen. They were killed when the roof of their nursery collapsed.  

21. After the Trojan War, Homer has Aethra returning to Athens with her kinsmen. Whether she returned to Helen's service later is unknown, and is invention for the play.  

22. Balius, Pedasus, and Xanthus were the three semi-immortal horses that drew Achille's chariot.  

23. Just before the birth of Paris, Hecuba dreamed she had given birth to a blazing faggot from which wriggled countless fiery serpents. A seer was consulted, and he predicted that the child would bring about the fall of Troy. According to the myth, upon his birth Paris was subsequently abandoned on a hillside by his parents and rescued by a shepherd. Later, Paris, as a young man returned to Troy, was recognized, and carried out his

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13Graves, II, p. 275.
14Ibid., p. 338.  
15Ibid., p. 309.
24. The murder of a guest was one of the most abominable acts of sacrilege in these ancient times.

25. While historically the demands Helen describes as being put on her mother, Leda, and herself in her marriage to Menelaus are not the specific points made by Agamemnon and Ulysses in their pact, they are the general changes wrought by the early patriarchies, and can be used to depict the general changeover in governmental forms.

26. Early knowledge of the smelting of iron ore is said to have come from Persia.\textsuperscript{17}

27. The Dorian invasion was gradual: the three major tribes united, and, under the leadership of the Heraclidae, they conquered. This was followed by a three-hundred-year dark age, during which the culture of the militaristic, communistic, and "spartan" Sparta developed.\textsuperscript{18} Helen's Sparta had no such inclinations.

28. The ritual of the sacrifice of the King surrogate ended with the patriarchy, and only surfaced in general symbolic form exemplified even today in the deposing, or "death," of the Fool King at Mardi Gras. Apparently

\textsuperscript{16}Herzberg, \textit{Myths and Their Meanings} (no place, no date), p. 279.

\textsuperscript{17}Savelle, p. 77.

the old queens, who frequently kept two or more "husbands," would rid themselves of their kings every year, or every seven years, either literally, or by proxy sacrifice and divorce. This practice ended at the changeover of the magical eon from the mother to the father. Later, the ladies were sacrificed on their husbands' funeral pyres. Realization of the coming and inevitable alteration in their scheme of things must have motivated the late matriarchs into their secretiveness and subterfuge. The Helens and Medeas survived in the new age as patriarchal examples of female infamy.

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