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CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

J199
For first teaching in 2017

The Homeric World (J199/21)

Version 1

www.ocr.org.uk/gcseclassicalcivilisation

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Homer, *Odyssey* Book 9

Book 9: 1–62 Odysseus tells his tale: The Cicones

Resourceful Odysseus answered the king, saying: 'Lord Alcinous, most illustrious of men, it is a fine thing, in truth, to hear a bard such as this, with a godlike voice. I say myself there is nothing more delightful than when all the people feel this joy, and the banqueters sit in their rows, listening to the minstrel in the hall, tables in front of them laden with meat and bread, while the steward pours wine from the bowl, and carries it round and fills the cups. It seems the loveliest thing of all to me.

But your heart prompts you to ask of my sad troubles, and make me weep and groan the more. How shall I start and end my tale? First let me give you my name, so you all know, and if I escape from pitiless fate later, I will play host to you, though I live far off. I am Odysseus, Laertes' son, known to all for my stratagems, and my fame has reached the heavens. My home is under Ithaca's clear skies: our Mount Neriton, clothed with whispering forest is visible from afar: and clustered round it are many isles, Dulichium and Same and wooded Zacynthus. Ithaca itself lies low in the sea, furthest towards the west, while the others are separate, towards the dawn and the rising sun. It's a rugged land, but nurtures fine young men: and speaking for myself I know nothing sweeter than one's own country. Calypso, the lovely goddess, kept me there in her echoing caves, because she wished me for her husband, and in the same way Circe, the Aeaean witch, detained me in her palace, longing to make me hers: but they failed to move my heart. Surely nothing is sweeter than a man's own parents

Notes

and country, even though he lives in a wealthy house, in a foreign land far from those parents. But let me tell you of my sad voyage back from Troy, that Zeus had willed.

The wind carried me from Ilium to Ismarus, city of the Cicones. I sacked the city and slew the men, and the women and riches we split between us, so that as far as I could determine no man lacked an equal share. Then as you might imagine I ordered us to slip away quickly, but my foolish followers wouldn't listen. They drank the wine, and slaughtered many sheep and shambling cattle with twisted horns. Meanwhile the Cicones rounded up others, their neighbours further inland, more numerous and braver, men skilled at fighting their enemies from chariots and on foot, as needed. At dawn they came, as many as the leaves and flowers of the spring: and disaster sent by Zeus overtook us, doomed, as we were, to endless trouble. Drawing up their ranks by the swift ships, they fought us, each side hurling bronze-tipped spears at the other. Through that morning, while the sacred light grew stronger, we held our ground and kept their greater force at bay. But as the sun fell, at the time when oxen are unyoked, the Cicones succeeded in routing the Acheans, and six of my well-armoured comrades died from each ship, but the rest of us cheated death and evil fate.'

Book 9: 63–104 Odysseus tells his tale: The Lotus-Eaters

'From Ismarus we sailed, with heavy hearts for the loyal friends lost, though happy to have escaped death ourselves: nor would I let the curved ships leave till we had called three times in ritual to each of our luckless comrades, who died there on the plain, at the hands of the Cicones. But Zeus, the Cloud-Gatherer, stirred the north wind against our ships, in a blinding tempest, hiding the land and sea alike in cloud, while darkness swept from the sky. Headlong the ships were driven, sails torn to shreds by the force of the gale. In terror of death we lowered the masts on deck, and rowed the vessels wildly towards land.

There we stayed for two days and nights, troubled at heart with weariness

Notes

and grief. But when Dawn of the lovely tresses gave birth to the third day, we upped masts, hoisted the white sails, and took our seats aboard, and the wind and helmsman kept us on course. Now I would have reached home safely, but as I was rounding Cape Malea, the north wind and waves and the ocean currents beat me away, off course, past Cythera.

For nine days I was driven by fierce winds over the teeming sea: but on the tenth we set foot on the shores of the Lotus-eaters, who eat its flowery food. On land we drew water, and my friends ate by the ships. Once we had tasted food and drink, I sent some of the men inland to discover what kind of human beings lived there: selecting two and sending a third as herald. They left at once and came upon the Lotus-eaters, who had no thought of killing my comrades, but gave them lotus to eat. Those who ate the honey-sweet lotus fruit no longer wished to bring back word to us, or sail for home. They wanted to stay with the Lotus-eaters, eating the lotus, forgetting all thoughts of return. I dragged those men back to the shore myself by force, while they wept, and bound them tight in the hollow ships, pushing them under the benches. Then I ordered my men to embark quickly on the fast craft, fearing that others would eat the lotus and forget their homes. They boarded swiftly and took their place on the benches then sitting in their rows struck the grey water with their oars.'

Book 9: 105–151 Odysseus tells his tale: The Land of the Cyclopes

'From there we sailed with heavy hearts, and came to the land of the Cyclopes, a lawless, aggressive people, who never lift their hands to plant or plough, but rely on the immortal gods. Wheat, barley, and vines with their richly clustered grapes, grow there without ploughing or sowing, and rain from Zeus makes them flourish. The Cyclopes have no council meetings, no code of law, but live in echoing caves on the mountain slopes, and each man lays down the law to his wives and children, and disregards his neighbours.

A fertile island lies slantwise outside the Cyclopes' harbour, well wooded and

Notes

neither close to nor far from shore. Countless wild goats inhabit it, since there is nothing to stop them, no hunters to suffer the hardship of beating a path through its woods, or to roam its mountaintops. There are no flocks, and no ploughed fields: but always unsown, and untilled it is free of mankind and nurtures only bleating goats. The Cyclopes have no vessels with crimson-painted prows, no shipwrights to build sound boats with oars, to meet their need and let them travel to other men's cities, as other races visit each other over the sea in ships, no craftsmen that is who might also have turned it into a fine colony. For this island is by no means poor, but would carry any crop in due season. There are rich well-watered meadows there, along the shore of the grey sea, where vines would never fail. There is level land for the plough with soil so rich they could reap a dense harvest in season. And there's a safe harbour where there's no need for moorings, neither anchor stones nor hawsers: you can beach your ship and wait till the wind is fair and the spirit moves you to sail.

Now, at the head of the harbour a stream of bright water flows out from a cave ringed by poplars. We entered, and some god must have guided us through the murky night, since it was too dark to see, a mist shrouded the ships, and the moon covered with cloud gave not a gleam of light. No one could see the land, or the long breakers striking the beach, until we had run our oared ships aground. Once they were beached we lowered sail and went on shore, then we lay down where we were to sleep, and waited for the light of dawn.'

Book 9: 152–192 Odysseus tells his tale: The Cyclops' Cave

'As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, we explored the island, marvelling at what we saw. The Nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, disturbed the mountain goats, driving them towards my hungry comrades. Quickly we brought our curved bows and long spears from the ships, and splitting three ways began to hunt them, and the god soon gave us a fine enough kill. Nine goats were given to each of the twelve ships in my command, and there were ten left for me.

Notes

So all day long till the sun set we sat and feasted on copious meat and mellow wine, since each of the crews had drawn off a large supply in jars when we took the Cicones' sacred citadel, and some of the red was left. Looking across to the land of the neighbouring Cyclopes, we could see smoke and hear their voices, and the sound of their sheep and goats. Sun set and darkness fell, and we settled to our rest on the shore.

As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, I gathered my men together, saying: "The rest of you loyal friends stay here, while I and my crew take ship and try and find out who these men are, whether they are cruel, savage and lawless, or good to strangers, and in their hearts fear the gods."

With this I went aboard and ordered my crew to follow and loose the cables. They boarded swiftly and took their place on the benches then sitting in their rows struck the grey water with their oars. When we had reached the nearby shore, we saw a deep cave overhung with laurels at the cliff's edge close to the sea. Large herds of sheep and goats were penned there at night, and round it was a raised yard walled by deep-set stones, tall pines and high-crowned oaks. There a giant spent the night, one that grazed his herds far off, alone, and keeping clear of others, lived in lawless solitude. He was born a monster and a wonder, not like any ordinary human, but like some wooded peak of the high mountains, that stands there isolated to our gaze.'

Book 9: 193–255 Odysseus tells his tale: Polyphemus returns

'Then I ordered the rest of my loyal friends to stay there and guard the ship, while I selected the twelve best men and went forward. I took with me a goatskin filled with dark sweet wine that Maron, son of Euanthes, priest of Apollo guardian god of Ismarus, had given me, because out of respect we protected him, his wife and child. He offered me splendid gifts, seven talents of well-wrought gold, and a silver mixing-bowl: and wine, twelve jars in all, sweet unmixed wine, a divine draught. None of his serving-men and maids knew of

Notes

this store, only he and his loyal wife, and one housekeeper. When they drank that honeyed red wine, he would pour a full cup into twenty of water, and the bouquet that rose from the mixing bowl was wonderfully sweet: in truth no one could hold back. I filled a large goatskin with the wine, and took it along, with some food in a bag, since my instincts told me the giant would come at us quickly, a savage being with huge strength, knowing nothing of right or law.

Soon we came to the cave, and found him absent, he was grazing his well-fed flocks in the fields. So we went inside and marvelled at its contents. There were baskets full of cheeses, and pens crowded with lambs and kids, each flock with its firstlings, later ones, and newborn separated. The pails and bowls for milking, all solidly made, were swimming with whey. At first my men begged me to take some cheeses and go, then to drive the lambs and kids from the pens down to the swift ship and set sail. But I would not listen, though it would have been best, wishing to see the giant himself, and test his hospitality. When he did appear he proved no joy to my men.

So we lit a fire and made an offering, and helped ourselves to the cheese, and sat in the cave eating, waiting for him to return, shepherding his flocks. He arrived bearing a huge weight of dry wood to burn at suppertime, and he flung it down inside the cave with a crash. Gripped by terror we shrank back into a deep corner. He drove his well-fed flocks into the wide cave, the ones he milked, leaving the rams and he-goats outside in the broad courtyard. Then he lifted his door, a huge stone, and set it in place. Twenty-two four-wheeled wagons could not have carried it, yet such was the great rocky mass he used for a door. Then he sat and milked the ewes, and bleating goats in order, putting her young to each. Next he curdled half of the white milk, and stored the whey in wicker baskets, leaving the rest in pails for him to drink for his supper. When he had busied himself at his tasks, and kindled a fire, he suddenly saw us, and said: "Strangers, who are you? Where do you sail from over the sea-roads? Are you on business, or do you roam at random, like pirates who chance their lives to bring evil to others?'"

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Book 9: 256–306 Odysseus tells his tale: Trapped

'Our spirits fell at his words, in terror at his loud voice and monstrous size. Nevertheless I answered him, saying; "We are Achaeans, returning from Troy, driven over the ocean depths by every wind that blows. Heading for home we were forced to take another route, a different course, as Zeus, I suppose, intended. We are followers of Agamemnon, Atreus' son, whose fame spreads widest on earth, so great was that city he sacked and host he slew. But we, for our part, come as suppliant to your knees, hoping for hospitality, and the kindness that is due to strangers. Good sir, do not refuse us: respect the gods. We are suppliants and Zeus protects visitors and suppliants, Zeus the god of guests, who follows the steps of sacred travellers."

His answer was devoid of pity. "Stranger, you are a foreigner or a fool, telling me to fear and revere the gods, since the Cyclopes care nothing for aegis-bearing Zeus: we are greater than they. I would spare neither you nor your friends, to evade Zeus' anger, but only as my own heart prompted.

But tell me, now, where you moored your fine ship, when you landed. Was it somewhere nearby, or further off? I'd like to know."

His words were designed to fool me, but failed. I was too wise for that, and answered him with cunning words: "Poseidon, Earth-Shaker, smashed my ship to pieces, wrecking her on the rocks that edge your island, driving her close to the headland so the wind threw her onshore. But I and my men here escaped destruction."

Devoid of pity, he was silent in response, but leaping up laid hands on my crew. Two he seized and dashed to the ground like whelps, and their brains ran out and stained the earth. He tore them limb from limb for his supper, eating the flesh and entrails, bone and marrow, like a mountain lion, leaving nothing. Helplessly we watched these cruel acts, raising our hands to heaven and weeping. When the Cyclops had filled his huge stomach with human flesh, and

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had drunk pure milk, he lay down in the cave, stretched out among his flocks. Then I formed a courageous plan to steal up to him, draw my sharp sword, and feeling for the place where the midriff supports the liver, stab him there. But the next thought checked me. Trapped in the cave we would certainly die, since we'd have no way to move the great stone from the wide entrance. So, sighing, we waited for bright day.'

Book 9: 307–359 Odysseus tells his tale: Offering the Cyclops wine

'As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, Cyclops relit the fire. Then he milked the ewes, and bleating goats in order, putting her young to each. When he had busied himself at his tasks, he again seized two of my men and began to eat them. When he had finished he drove his well-fed flocks from the cave, effortlessly lifting the huge door stone, and replacing it again like the cap on a quiver. Then whistling loudly he turned his flocks out on to the mountain slopes, leaving me with murder in my heart searching for a way to take vengeance on him, if Athena would grant me inspiration. The best plan seemed to be this:

The Cyclops' huge club, a trunk of green olive wood he had cut to take with him as soon as it was seasoned, lay next to a sheep pen. It was so large and thick that it looked to us like the mast of a twenty-oared black ship, a broad-beamed merchant vessel that sails the deep ocean. Approaching it, I cut off a six-foot length, gave it to my men and told them to smooth the wood. Then standing by it I sharpened the end to a point, and hardened the point in the blazing fire, after which I hid it carefully in a one of the heaps of dung that lay around the cave. I ordered the men to cast lots as to which of them should dare to help me raise the stake and twist it into the Cyclops' eye when sweet sleep took him. The lot fell on the very ones I would have chosen, four of them, with myself making a fifth.

He returned at evening, shepherding his well-fed flocks. He herded them

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swiftly, every one, into the deep cave, leaving none in the broad yard, commanded to do so by a god, or because of some premonition. Then he lifted the huge door stone and set it in place, and sat down to milk the ewes and bleating goats in order, putting her young to each. But when he had busied himself at his tasks, he again seized two of my men and began to eat them. That was when I went up to him, holding an ivy-wood bowl full of dark wine, and said: "Here, Cyclops, have some wine to follow your meal of human flesh, so you can taste the sort of drink we carried in our ship. I was bringing the drink to you as a gift, hoping you might pity me and help me on my homeward path: but your savagery is past bearing. Cruel man, why would anyone on earth ever visit you again, when you behave so badly?"

At this, he took the cup and drained it, and found the sweet drink so delightful he asked for another draught: "Give me more, freely, then quickly tell me your name so I may give you a guest gift, one that will please you. Among us Cyclopes the fertile earth produces rich grape clusters, and Zeus' rain swells them: but this is a taste from a stream of ambrosia and nectar.'"

Book 9: 360–412 Odysseus tells his tale: Blinding the Cyclops

'As he finished speaking I handed him the bright wine. Three times I poured and gave it to him, and three times, foolishly, he drained it. When the wine had fuddled his wits I tried him with subtle words: "Cyclops, you asked my name, and I will tell it: give me afterwards a guest gift as you promised. My name is Nobody. Nobody, my father, mother, and friends call me."

Those were my words, and this his cruel answer: "Then, my gift is this. I will eat Nobody last of all his company, and all the others before him".

As he spoke, he reeled and toppled over on his back, his thick neck twisted to one side, and all-conquering sleep overpowered him. In his drunken slumber he vomited wine and pieces of human flesh. Then I thrust the stake into the

Notes

depth of the ashes to heat it, and inspired my men with encouraging words, so none would hang back from fear. When the olivewood stake was glowing hot, and ready to catch fire despite its greenness, I drew it from the coals, then my men stood round me, and a god breathed courage into us. They held the sharpened olivewood stake, and thrust it into his eye, while I threw my weight on the end, and twisted it round and round, as a man bores the timbers of a ship with a drill that others twirl lower down with a strap held at both ends, and so keep the drill continuously moving. We took the red-hot stake and twisted it round and round like that in his eye, and the blood poured out despite the heat. His lids and brows were scorched by flame from the burning eyeball, and its roots crackled with fire. As a great axe or adze causes a vast hissing when the smith dips it in cool water to temper it, strengthening the iron, so his eye hissed against the olivewood stake. Then he screamed, terribly, and the rock echoed. Seized by terror we shrank back, as he wrenched the stake, wet with blood, from his eye. He flung it away in frenzy, and called to the Cyclopes, his neighbours who lived in caves on the windy heights. They heard his cry, and crowding in from every side they stood by the cave mouth and asked what was wrong: "Polyphemus, what terrible pain is this that makes you call through deathless night, and wake us? Is a mortal stealing your flocks, or trying to kill you by violence or treachery?"

Out of the cave came mighty Polyphemus' voice: "Nobody, my friends, is trying to kill me by violence or treachery."

To this they replied with winged words: "If you are alone, and nobody does you violence, it's an inescapable sickness that comes from Zeus: pray to the Lord Poseidon, our father."

Book 9: 413–479 Odysseus tells his tale: Escape

'Off they went, while I laughed to myself at how the name and the clever scheme had deceived him. Meanwhile the Cyclops, groaning and in pain, groped around and laboured to lift the stone from the door. Then he sat in the

Notes

entrance, arms outstretched, to catch anyone stealing past among his sheep. That was how foolish he must have thought I was. I considered the best way of escaping, and saving myself, and my men from death. I dreamed up all sorts of tricks and schemes, as a man will in a life or death matter: it was an evil situation. This was the plan that seemed best. The rams were fat with thick fleeces, fine large beasts with deep black wool. These I silently tied together in threes, with twists of willow on which that lawless monster, Polyphemus, slept. The middle one was to carry one of my men, with the other two on either side to protect him. So there was a man to every three sheep. As for me I took the pick of the flock, and curled below his shaggy belly, gripped his back and lay there face upwards, patiently gripping his fine fleece tight in my hands. Then, sighing, we waited for the light.

As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, the males rushed out to graze, while the un-milked females udders bursting bleated in the pens. Their master, tormented by agonies of pain, felt the backs of the sheep as they passed him, but foolishly failed to see my men tied under the rams' bellies. My ram went last, burdened by the weight of his fleece, and me and my teeming thoughts. And as he felt its back, mighty Polyphemus spoke to him:

"My fine ram, why leave the cave like this last of the flock? You have never lagged behind before, always the first to step out proudly and graze on the tender grass shoots, always first to reach the flowing river, and first to show your wish to return at evening to the fold. Today you are last of all. You must surely be grieving over your master's eye, blinded by an evil man and his wicked friends, when my wits were fuddled with wine: Nobody, I say, has not yet escaped death. If you only had senses like me, and the power of speech to tell me where he hides himself from my anger, then I'd strike him down, his brains would be sprinkled all over the floor of the cave, and my heart would be eased of the pain that nothing, Nobody, has brought me."

With this he drove the ram away from him out of doors, and I loosed myself

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when the ram was a little way from the cave, then untied my men. Swiftly, keeping an eye behind us, we shepherded those long-limbed sheep, rich and fat, down to the ship. And a welcome sight, indeed, to our dear friends were we, escapees from death, though they wept and sighed for the others we lost. I would not let them weep though, but stopped them all with a nod and a frown. I told them to haul the host of fine-fleeced sheep on board and put to sea. They boarded swiftly and took their place on the benches then sitting in their rows struck the grey water with their oars. When we were almost out of earshot, I shouted to the Cyclops, mocking him: "It seems he was not such a weakling, then, Cyclops, that man whose friends you meant to tear apart and eat in your echoing cave. Stubborn brute not shrinking from murdering your guests in your own house, your evil deeds were bound for sure to fall on your own head. Zeus and the other gods have had their revenge on you.'"

Book 9: 480–525 Odysseus tells his tale: Telemus' prophecy

'He was enraged all the more by my words, and shattering the crest of a tall cliff, he hurled it at us, so that it fell seaward of our blue-prowed vessel, and almost struck the steering oar. The water surged beneath the stone as it fell, and the backwash like a tidal swell from the open sea, carried the ship landward and drove it onto the shore. But seizing a long pole in my hands, I pushed the boat off, and rousing my men ordered them with urgent signs to bend to the oars and save us from disaster. They bent to their oars and rowed, but as soon as we had put water behind us and doubled our distance I began shouting to the Cyclops, though the men round me called out on every side, trying to deter me with their appeals: "Why provoke the savage to anger in this stubborn way? The rock he threw into the sea just now drove the ship back on shore, and we thought we were done for. If he had been able to hear us speak but a word, he would have hurled another jagged stone, and crushed our heads and the ship's timbers with the power of his throw."

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So they argued, but could not daunt my ardent spirit, and I shouted to him again in anger: "Cyclops, if any man asks how you came by your blindness, say that Odysseus, sacker of cities, Laertes' son, a native of Ithaca, maimed you."

At this he groaned, and said in answer: "Alas! The truth of that prophecy spoken long ago is fulfilled! Telemus, the seer, son of Eurymus, a tall fine man, lived here once, the greatest of prophets, and grew old here as soothsayer among the Cyclopes. He told me that all of this would come to pass one day, and I would lose my sight at Odysseus' hands. But I always expected some tall fine man, one of great strength, and now a puny good-for-nothing weakling blinds my eye, after plying me with wine. Come here, Odysseus, nevertheless, so that I might grant you guest gifts, and urge the great Earth-Shaker to see you home, since I am his son, and he says he is my father, and he, of his will, can heal me, where no other of the blessed gods or men can."

I replied, saying: "I wish I could rob you of life and spirit, and send you to the House of Hades, as surely as the Earth-Shaker will fail to heal your eye."'

Book 9: 526–566 Odysseus tells his tale: Polyphemus' curse

'At my words, he stretched out his hands to the starry heavens, and prayed to the Lord Poseidon: 'Hear me, Poseidon, dark-tressed Earth-Bearer, if I am your son, if you say you are my father, let Odysseus, sacker of cities and son of Laertes, never reach his home on Ithaca: yet if he is destined to see his friends and his fine house in his own country, may he come there late and in sore distress, in another's ship, losing all comrades, and let him find great trouble in his house."

So he prayed, and the dark-tressed god heard him. Then the Cyclops lifted an even larger rock, swung it in the air, and hurled it, with all his strength. It fell not far behind our blue-prowed ship, narrowly missing the tip of the steering oar, and the sea surged up around the falling stone, and its wave carried the ship forward and drove it to the far shore.

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So we reached the island where our other oared ships lay, with our friends round them, watching for us, and weeping. There we beached our vessel, and went on shore. We landed the Cyclops' flocks from the hold and divided them among us, so that as far as I could determine no man lacked an equal share. The ram my comrades in arms granted to me, as a separate gift, and when the flocks had been divided there on the shore I sacrificed to Zeus of the dark clouds, son of Cronos, lord of all, and I burned the thigh pieces. But he ignored my sacrifice, planning instead the destruction of my oared ships and my faithful friends.

All day long till sunset we sat feasting on our plentiful supplies of meat and sweet wine, and when the sun was down and darkness fell we settled to sleep on the sand. As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, I roused my men, and ordered them to embark and loose the hawsers. They boarded swiftly and took their place on the benches then sitting in their rows struck the grey water with their oars.

So we sailed on, with heavy hearts for the loyal friends lost, though happy to have escaped death ourselves.'

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Homer, *Odyssey* Book 10

Book 10: 1–55 Odysseus tells his tale: The Bag of Winds

'So we came to the floating island of Aeolia, where Aeolus lived, son of Hippotas, dear to the deathless gods. A wall of unbroken bronze surrounds it, and the cliffs are sheer. In those halls his twelve children live as well, six daughters and six fine sons, and he has given his daughters to his sons in marriage. They are always feasting with their brave father and good mother, with endless good food set before them. All day long the house is full of savoury smells, and the courtyard echoes to the banquet's sound, while at night they sleep by the wives they love, on well-covered well-strung beds.

We came, then, to their city with its fine palace, and Aeolus entertained me there for a month, questioning me on everything: Troy, the Argive fleet, and the Achaean return. And I told him the whole tale in order. When I asked, in turn, to depart with his help, he too denied me nothing. He gave me a leather bag, made from the flayed hide of a nine-year old ox, and imprisoned all the winds there. The son of Cronos had made him the winds' keeper, able to raise or calm them as he wished. He placed the bag in my hollow ship and tied it tight with shining silver wire, so not even the smallest breath might escape. But he first called on the West Wind to blow and set my ships and their crews on our homeward course, though it was not to benefit us, ruined by our own foolishness.

Nine days and nights we sailed, and on the tenth our own land was in sight, near enough to see men tending fires. Then sweet sleep came to me in my weariness, since I had hauled on the sheets ceaselessly, handing over to none of my crew, in order to reach home more swiftly. Now my men talked among themselves, speculating about the treasures of gold and silver that Aeolus, mighty son of Hippotas, had given me. As they exchanged glances they said:

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"How honoured and loved Odysseus is by the men of every land and city! He carries home fine things from the spoils of Troy, while we who went the same journey return empty-handed. Now Aeolus, for love alone, gives him all these gifts. Come on, let's see how much gold and silver there is in the bag."

Among them, talking like this, wicked thoughts prevailed. They opened the bag and all the winds rushed out. Then a tempest seized us, and carried us out to sea away from our own land. Then I woke, and debated in the depths of my heart whether to hurl myself from the ship and drown, or suffer in silence among the living. I stayed and suffered: wrapping my head in my cloak, I lay down on the deck. So, as my men groaned, the ships were carried back to the Aeolian island by a wicked gale.'

Book 10: 56–102 Odysseus tells his tale: The Laestrygonians

'We went ashore and replenished our water, my men eating a meal quickly by the swift ships. When we had eaten and drunk, I set out for Aeolus' fine palace, taking with me a herald and one other of my men. I found the king feasting with his wife and children. We entered and sat down at the threshold by the doorposts. They were amazed, asking me: "Odysseus, how do you come to be here? What cruel god opposed you? We sent you off with care, heading for your home and country, as you wished."

Sad at heart, I answered: "Sleep and my foolish crew brought me harm, but you, my friends, have the power to set all to rights." They were silent at my speech, despite its flattering words. Then the father replied, saying: "Leave our island, now, lowest of living men. It would be against religion for me to set a man on his course when the blessed gods revile him. Go, for you come as one the immortals hate."

With this, he dismissed me from his palace, I groaning deeply. Grieving at heart, we sailed away. The men's spirits were depressed by the heavy work of rowing,

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since never a breeze came to help us on our way, because of their foolishness.

Six days and nights we sailed, and on the seventh we reached Telepylus, the great Laestrygonian citadel of Lamus, where the herdsman driving in his flock at the day's end calls to the herdsman driving his out as the day begins. There night and day is one, and a man who needs no sleep could earn a double wage, one for herding the cattle, one for grazing the white sheep. We reached a fine harbour, with a stretch of sheer cliff on both sides, and narrow access between the opposing headlands, jutting out at its mouth. My captains took their curving ships inside, and moored them close together in the cavernous harbour, since all around us was shining calm, with never a wave, great or small. But I, alone, moored my black ship outside, near the cliffs, making fast to a rock. Then I climbed the rugged headland, and stood there to look out: no cattle could be seen or buildings, only a trace of smoke rising inland. So I sent a party of my men to find out what sort of beings lived there. I chose two to go and a third as herald.'

Book 10: 103–132 Odysseus tells his tale: Escape from the Cannibals

'Once ashore, they found a well-worn track down which wagons carried wood to the city from the mountain heights. Near the citadel they came across a girl drawing water, the sturdy daughter of Laestrygonian Antiphates. She had come to Artacia's flowing stream, from which the city drew its water. They approached her and asked who was the king of her people, and who the people were whom he ruled. She pointed at once to her father's lofty house.

On entering his fine palace, they found his wife there, massive as a mountaintop, and they were shocked. She called her husband, mighty Antiphates, straight from their gathering place, and he embarked on their cruel destruction. He promptly seized one of my men, and prepared to eat him, while the other two sprang up and fled to the ships. Then Antiphates roused the city, and hearing his cry the huge Laestrygonians crowded in from all sides,

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a countless host of Giants not men.

From the cliffs they pelted us with the largest rocks a man could lift, and from all the ships there rose the groans of dying men and the splintering of timbers. Spearing the men like fishes, they carried them off to their loathsome feast. While they were killing those in the harbour's depths, I drew my sharp sword and cut the cable of my dark-prowed vessel. Then calling to my men I ordered them to the oars, so we might escape from danger. With the fear of death on them they thrashed the sea with their blades, and to our joy the ship shot away from the towering cliffs, leaving the rest to founder where they were.'

Book 10: 133–197 Odysseus tells his tale: Circe's Island

'So we sailed on, with heavy hearts for the loyal friends lost, though happy to have escaped death ourselves, and came to the island of Aeaea, where Circe of the lovely tresses lived, a fateful goddess with a human voice, sister to dark-minded Aeetes: both children of the Sun that lights the world, and Perse, daughter of the Ocean. Here our ship closed the shore in silence, entering a harbour fit for vessels, guided by a god. When we had gone ashore we lay there for two days and nights consumed by weariness and grief.

But when Dawn of the lovely tresses gave birth to the third day I took my sharp sword and spear and climbed swiftly from the ship to a high lookout point, hoping to see signs of men, and hear their voices. I reached a rocky height with a wide view, and standing there I saw smoke rising through thick scrub and woodland, from the wide clearing where Circe's halls lay. Seeing that smoke from a fire, I pondered whether to go and explore, but it seemed better to return to the ship and the shore, and allow my men a meal, then send them to investigate.

Then as I neared the swift ship some god took pity on me in that solitude, and sent a huge stag with great antlers right across my trail. The power of the sun had troubled him and sent him down from his woodland pasture to drink at

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the river's edge. As he came from the water I struck him on the spine with my bronze-spear, in the centre of his back, and it pierced right through, so he fell in the dust with a groan, and his spirit passed. Then I planted my foot on his carcass, drew the bronze spear from the wound, and laid it on the ground while I gathered willow shoots then wove a rope, six foot long, by splicing them together end to end. Next I tied the great creature's feet together, and carried him down to the black ship on my back, using my spear to lean on, since he was too large to sling over my shoulder and steady with my hand. I threw him down in front of the ship and cheered my crew with comforting words, tackling each man in turn:

"We're not bound for the Halls of Hades ahead of time, my Friends, despite our troubles. Come, while there's still food and drink in our swift ship, let's think about eating, not waste away with hunger."

They soon responded to my words. They drew their cloaks from their faces to marvel at the stag's huge size, as he lay on the barren shore. When they had sated their sight with gazing, they washed their hands and readied a fine feast. All day long till the sun went down we sat and feasted on meat in plenty, and drank sweet wine. But once the sun had set and darkness fell, we lay down on the sand to sleep. When rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, I called the men together and addressed them all:

"Listen, Friends, and understand our plight. We have no idea how far East or West we are, how far it is to where the light-giving sun rises or where he sinks below the earth. Though we should consider what options we have left, I suspect we have few. I climbed to a rocky lookout point and could see that the island is low-lying, ringed by the boundless waves. And in the centre I saw smoke rising through thick scrub and woodland."'

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Book 10: 198–250 Odysseus tells his tale: The Magic Spell

'At this, their hearts sank, remembering Laestrygonian Antiphates, and the fierce violence of the man-eating Cyclops. They groaned aloud, and wept great tears. But all their lamentation did no good.

I split my armed comrades into two groups, each with its own leader. I took command of one, and the other was led by noble Eurylochus. Then we shook lots in a bronze helmet, and brave Eurylochus's lot leapt out. Off he went with twenty-two tearful men, leaving us behind with our grief. They found Circe's house of polished stone, in a clearing in the forest glades. Round it wolves and mountain lions prowled, bewitched by Circe with her magic drugs. Instead of rushing to attack my men, they rose on their hind legs and wagged their tails. Like dogs fawning round their master, back from a feast, bringing them the titbits they enjoy, the wolves and sharp-clawed lions fawned round my men, while they seeing these dread creatures were gripped by fear. They stood there at the gate of the goddess with lovely tresses, and they could hear Circe's sweet voice singing inside, as she went to and fro in front of a vast divine tapestry, weaving the finely-made, lovely, shining work of the goddesses.

Then Polites, the dearest and most trusted of my friends, a man of initiative, spoke: "Friends, a woman, a goddess perhaps, is singing sweetly within, walking to and fro in front of a great tapestry, and the whole place echoes. Let's call out to her, now."

At that, they shouted, and called to her, and Circe came to open the shining doors, and invite them to enter: and so they innocently followed her inside. Eurylochus alone, suspecting it was a trap, stayed behind. She ushered the rest in, and seated them on stools and chairs, and mixed them a brew of yellow honey and Pramnian wine, with cheese and barley meal. But she mixed in wicked drugs, as well, so they might wholly forget their native land. When they had drunk the brew she gave them, she touched them with her wand, and herded them into the pigsties. Now they had the shape and bristly hide, the

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features and voice of pigs, but their minds were unaltered from before. There they wept in their pens, and Circe gave them acorns, beech mast, and cornel fruit to eat, such as pigs feed on as they churn the mud.

But Eurylochus ran back to the swift black ship, to convey the news of his friends and their sad fate. Much as he wished to, he could not speak a word, his heart was so full of anguish, and his eyes filled with tears, and his mind with sorrow. Only when we questioned him, amazed, did he manage to say what had happened to his friends:'

Book 10: 251–301 Odysseus tells his tale: Help from Hermes

"'We went through the woods, noble Odysseus, as you ordered. In a clearing in the forest glades we found a fine palace built of cut stone. Someone inside, a woman or a goddess, was singing in a clear voice as she walked to and fro, in front of a huge tapestry. The men shouted and called to her, and she came to open the shining doors, and invited them to enter: and so they innocently followed her inside. But I, suspecting it was a trap, stayed behind. Then they all disappeared, and no one emerged again, though I sat a long time watching."

At Eurylochus' words, I slung my great bronze silver-embossed sword over my shoulders, and my bow as well, and told him to take me there by the selfsame road. But he clutched at me with his hands, and clasped my knees, and spoke winged words, through his tears: "Favourite of Zeus, leave me here: don't force me to return unwillingly. I know you and our comrades will never come back. Let us escape quickly with those who are still here, and we may still evade the day of evil."

I replied: "Eurylochus, by all means stay here by the black ship's hull, eating and drinking, but I, bound by necessity, will go."

With this I climbed away from the ship and the shore. But as I walked through the sacred grove, towards the great house of Circe, a goddess skilled in magic

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potions, Hermes of the Golden Wand, in the likeness of a young man at that charming age when down first covers the cheeks, met me as I approached. He clasped me by the hand and spoke to me:

"Wretched man, where are you off to, wandering the hills of an unknown island all alone? Your friends are penned in Circe's house, pigs in close-set sties. Have you come to free them? I tell you, you won't return, you'll end up like the rest. But I will save you and keep you free from harm. You must take a powerful herb with you, and go to Circe's house, and it will ward off the day of evil. I will tell you all Circe's fatal wiles. She will mix a drink for you, blending drugs with the food, but even so she will fail to enchant you: the powerful herb I will give you will prevent it. Let me tell you the rest. When Circe strikes you with her length of wand, draw your sharp sword and rush at her, as if you intend to kill her. She will be seized with fear. Then she'll invite you to her bed, and don't refuse the goddess' favours, if you want her to free your men, and care for you too. But make her swear a solemn oath by the blessed gods that she won't try to harm you with her mischief, lest when you are naked she robs you of courage and manhood.'"

Book 10: 302–347 Odysseus tells his tale: Encountering Circe

'With this the Slayer of Argus pulled the herb from the ground, and gave it to me, pointing out its features. It was black at the root with a milk-white flower. Moly the gods call it, difficult for mortals to uproot, though the gods of course can do anything. Hermes headed off through the wooded isle to high Olympus, while I approached the house of Circe, thinking black thoughts as I went along.

There I stood, at the gate of the goddess of the lovely tresses, and I called to her and she heard my voice. She came out straight away to open the shining doors, and invited me to enter. I did so, with a troubled heart. Once inside she brought me a beautiful silver-embossed chair, richly made, and with a stool for

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my feet. Then she mixed me a drink in a golden cup, and with evil intent added her drugs. When she gave it me, and I drank it down, though without feeling its enchantment, she struck at me with her wand, and cried: "Off to your sty now, and lie there with your friends."

At this, I drew my sharp sword and rushed at her, as if I meant to kill her, but with a cry she slipped beneath the blade to clasp my knees, and weeping spoke to me with winged words: "What man are you, and where are you from? What city is yours? And who are your parents? I wonder that you drank my potion, and were not bewitched. No other man when once he drank, and swallowed it, has ever withstood the spell. Surely your mind is not one to be swayed. You must be Odysseus, that man of many resources whom the Slayer of Argus, with the Golden Wand, told me would come from Troy here, travelling homewards, in his swift dark ship. Come, sheathe your sword, and let us two go to my bed, so we may learn to trust one another by twining in love."

Those were her words, and I replied: "Circe, how can you demand that I be tender to you, you who have turned my friends to animals in your house, and now detain me, drawing me to your room, to your bed, with cunning intent, to rob me of courage and manhood when I am naked. I have no desire to go to bed with you, goddess, unless you swear a solemn oath by the blessed gods not to try and harm me with your mischief.'"

Book 10: 348–399 Odysseus tells his tale: Circe Frees the Crew

'When I had done, she quickly swore an oath not to harm me, as I required. And when she had sworn the oath I went with Circe to her fine bed.

Meanwhile her four handmaids, who serve her round the house, were busy in the hall. One of those children of springs, groves and sacred rivers that run to the sea threw linen covers over the chairs and spread fine purple fabrics on top. Another drew silver tables up to the chairs, and laid out golden dishes, while a

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third mixed sweet honeyed wine in a silver bowl, and served it in golden cups. The fourth fetched water and lit a roaring fire beneath a huge cauldron. When the water boiled in the shining bronze, she sat me in a bath, and bathed me with water from the great cauldron mixed with cold to suit, pouring it over my head and shoulders till she drew the deep weariness from my limbs.

When she had bathed me and rubbed me with oil, and dressed me in a fine tunic and cloak, she led me into the hall, and seated me on a beautiful silver-embossed chair, richly made, and with a stool for my feet. Then a maid brought water to wash my hands in a lovely golden jug, and poured it out over a silver basin so I could rinse them, and drew up a shining table beside me. The faithful housekeeper brought bread, and set it before me with heaps of delicacies, giving freely of her stores. Then she begged me to eat, though I had no heart for eating. My mind was full of other thoughts and my spirit was full of forebodings.

When Circe saw me sitting there, not stretching out my hands to the food, but weighed down with sorrow, she approached and spoke with winged words: "Odysseus, why do you sit as if you were dumb, eating your heart out, not touching the food or drink? Are you suspicious of some new ruse? Have no fear, I have sworn you a solemn oath already not to do you harm."

To this I answered: "Circe, what decent man could bring himself to eat and drink before he had freed his men, and seen them face to face? If you wish me in truth to eat and drink as you ask, then set them free and let me see my loyal friends with my own eyes."

At this, Circe, taking her wand, went out of the hall and opened the gates of the sty, and drove out what seemed to be full-grown pigs. They stood there and she went among them smearing each one with a fresh potion. Then the bristles, that Circe's previous hateful spell had made them sprout, fell from them, and they became men again, younger and handsomer and taller by far than they were before. They knew me now, and each man clasped my hands, and

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all were wracked with weeping, till the walls echoed, mournfully, and even the goddess was moved to pity.'

Book 10: 400–448 Odysseus tells his tale: He Gathers his Men

'Then the lovely goddess drew near, and said: "Odysseus, of many resources, scion of Zeus, Laertes' son, go now to your swift ship and the shore. Drag your ship on land: store your tackle and goods in the caves. Then return with your loyal friends."

To this my proud heart consented, and I went down to the swift ship and the shore, and there by the speedy vessel I found my faithful comrades, lamenting and shedding tears. Like calves in a farmyard that frisk around the herd of cows that return from grazing, free from their pens and gambolling together, lowing constantly round their mothers, so those men, at the sight of me, crowded round weeping, and in their hearts they felt as though they were home again in rugged **I**thaca, in the town where they were born and bred. Still grieving, they spoke with winged words: "We are as happy, favourite of Zeus, as though we were back in **I**thaca, but tell us the fate of the rest of our friends."

I replied with calming words: "First drag the ship on land, and store our tackle and goods in the caves, then hurry, follow me, and you'll see your friends eating and drinking in Circe's halls, where there's enough food and drink to last for ever." They quickly responded to my words. Only Eurylochus of all my friends hung back. And he spoke to them with winged words: "Wretched fools, where are you off to? Are you so in love with trouble you'll visit Circe's house, she who will change you all to pigs, or wolves, or lions to guard her great hall under duress? Remember how Cyclops too behaved, when our friends entered his cave with reckless Odysseus, this man through whose foolishness they died."

Those were his words, and I felt like drawing the long sword strapped to my sturdy thigh and striking his head to the ground, though he was a kinsman of

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mine by marriage, but my friends each checked me with soothing words: "Scion of Zeus, let's leave him behind, if you will, to stay and guard the ship, while you lead us to Circe's sacred house."

So we left the ship and shore, but Eurylochus did not stay behind by the hollow hull, he came with us, fearing my stern rebuke.'

Book 10: 449–502 Odysseus tells his tale: He Seeks to Leave

'Meanwhile my friends had been bathed in Circe's house, through her kind ministrations, and had been rubbed with rich oil, and dressed in tunics and fleece-lined cloaks, and we found them feasting happily in the hall. When my two companies saw each other face to face, they wept and moaned in recognition, and the whole house echoed. Then the lovely goddess approached me, saying: "Odysseus, man of many resources, scion of Zeus, son of Laertes, calm this outpouring of grief. I know myself all you have suffered on the teeming waves, and all the wrongs that enemies have done to you on land. But, come now, eat my food and drink my wine, till you each regain the spirit you had when you left your homes on rugged Ithaca. You are spiritless, and drained by endless thought of your harsh journey, and your hearts are always joyless, for in truth you have suffered."

Our proud hearts yielded to her words. And so we stayed there, day after day, eating food in plenty, and drinking the sweet wine. But when a whole year had gone by, as the months and seasons passed, and the longer days had returned my loyal friends took me aside and said: "Man who is kin to the gods, remember your native country, now, if it is still your fate to escape, and reach your lofty house, and your own land."

My proud heart yielded to their words. A further long day, till sunset, we feasted on meat in plenty and drank sweet wine. When the sun sank and darkness fell, they settled down to sleep in the shadowy hall, but I went to Circe's lovely

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bed, and clasped her knees, and the goddess listened as I spoke winged words: "Circe, keep the promise you gave and send me on my way, since my spirit is eager for home, and so too are my friends', who weary me with their grief whenever you happen to be absent."

To this the lovely goddess replied swiftly: "Odysseus, man of many resources, scion of Zeus, son of Laertes, don't stay here a moment longer against your will, but before you head for home you must make another journey. You must seek the House of Hades and dread Persephone, and consult the ghost of the blind Theban seer, Teiresias. His mind is still unimpaired, for even in death Persephone grants him mental powers, so that he alone has wisdom, while the others flit like shadows."

At her words my spirits fell, sitting there on the bed I wept, and I no longer wished to live, and see the sunlight. But when I was wearied with weeping and wringing my hands, I answered her, saying: "Circe, who will guide us on the way? No man yet has ever sailed to Hades in a black ship.'"

Book 10: 503–574 Odysseus tells his tale: The Death of Elpenor

'The lovely goddess replied swiftly: "Odysseus, man of many resources, scion of Zeus, son of Laertes, don't think of finding a pilot to guide your vessel, but raise your mast and spread your white sail, and take your seat aboard, and the North Wind's breath will send her on her way. When you have crossed the Ocean stream, beach your ship by the deep swirling waters on a level shore, where tall poplars, and willows that shed seed, fill the Groves of Persephone. Then go to the moist House of Hades. There is a rock where two roaring rivers join the Acheron, Cocytus, which is a tributary of the Styx, and Pyriphlegethon. Draw near then, as I bid you, hero, and dig a trench two feet square, then pour a libation all around to the dead, first of milk and honey, then of sweet wine, thirdly of water, sprinkled with white barley meal. Then pray devoutly to the powerless ghosts of the departed, swearing that when you reach Ithaca you

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will sacrifice a barren heifer in your palace, the best of the herd, and will heap the altar with rich spoils, and offer a ram, apart, to Teiresias, the finest jet-black ram in the flock.

And when you have petitioned the glorious host of the dead, with prayers, sacrifice a ram and a black ewe, holding their heads towards Erebus, while you look behind towards the running streams. Then the hosts of the dead will appear. Call then to your comrades, and tell them to flay and burn the sheep killed by the pitiless bronze, with prayers to the divinities, to mighty Hades and dread Persephone. You yourself must draw your sharp sword and sit there, preventing the powerless ghosts from drawing near to the blood, till you have questioned Teiresias. Soon the seer will come, you leader of men, and give you your course, and the distances, so you can return home over the teeming waters."

Circe finished speaking, and with that came golden-throned Dawn. Then the Nymph dressed me in a tunic and cloak, and clothed herself in a beautiful long white closely-woven robe, and clasped a fine belt of gold around her waist, and set a veil on her head. Then I walked through the halls, rousing my men with cheerful words, speaking to each in turn: "My lady Circe has explained what I need to know: don't lie there culling the flower of sweet sleep: let us be on our way."

Those were my words, and their proud hearts yielded. But even now I could not get my men away unscathed. The youngest of all was Elpenor, not one of the cleverest or bravest in battle. Heavy with wine he had climbed to the roof of Circe's sacred house, seeking the cool night air, and had slept apart from his friends. Hearing the stir and noise of their departure, he leapt up suddenly, and forgetting the way down by the long ladder, he fell headlong from the roof. His neck was shattered where it joins the spine: his ghost descended, to the House of Hades.

My crew were already on their way, as I addressed them: "No doubt you think

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you are heading home, but Circe has set us on a different course, to the House of Hades and dread Persephone where I must consult the ghost of Theban Teiresias." At this their spirits fell, and they sat right down where they were and wept, and tore at their hair. But their lamentations served no purpose.

While we made our way to our swift vessel and the shore, grieving and shedding tears, Circe went on ahead of us, and tethered a ram and a black ewe by the black ship. She had easily slipped by us: who can observe a goddess passing to and fro, if she wishes otherwise?'

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Homer, *Odyssey* Book 19

Book 19: 1–52 Odysseus and Telemachus hide the weapons

So, noble Odysseus remained in the hall, planning with Athena's aid how to kill the Suitors. At once he spoke to Telemachus winged words: "We must hide the weapons away, all of them, Telemachus. If the Suitors miss them and question you, deceive them with placatory words, and say: "I've moved them out of the smoke from the fire, since they no longer look as they did when Odysseus left them behind and sailed for Troy, but are all grimy where the draught from the hearth has reached them. Zeus, son of Cronos, has filled my heart with an even greater fear, that you might start a quarrel amongst yourselves, and wound each other, and so bring shame on the feast and your cause. Iron itself draws a man towards it.'"

Telemachus responded to his brave father's words, and called for Eurycleia, the nurse, saying: "Nurse, I want the women shut in their rooms, while I store my father's weapons away, fine weapons that have lain around the hall, neglected and darkening with the smoke, ever since he left in my childhood. Now I wish to store them where the draught from the fire won't reach them."

"Yes child," Eurycleia, the loyal nurse, replied, "and I wish you'd always show such care for the house, and look after its treasures. But who is to fetch and carry a light for you, since you won't have the maids here who might have done so?"

"The Stranger, here, will do it," wise Telemachus replied, "since I'll not have a man idle who eats from my table, now matter how far he's travelled."

Silently then she locked the doors of the great hall. At once, Odysseus and his fine son began carrying away the helmets, the bossed shields, and the sharp spears. Pallas Athena herself, carrying a golden lamp before them, shed a

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beautiful light. Seeing it, Telemachus, said: 'Father, what wonder is this I see? The walls, and the fine panelling, the pine-wood beams, and the tall pillars shine to my eyes as if in the light of a blazing fire. One of the gods who rules the wide sky must surely be here.'

Resourceful Odysseus answered him: 'Silence, and let such thoughts go by without question: this is the way of the gods who rule Olympus. Go and sleep and leave me here to rouse the curiosity of your mother and her maids: in her sorrow she will ask me everything.'

At this, Telemachus went off through the hall and the glow of the blazing torches, to rest in his room where sweet sleep would usually come to him. There he lay now till bright Dawn, while noble Odysseus remained in the hall, planning with Athena's aid how to kill the Suitors.

Book 19: 53–99 Penelope prepares to question the Stranger

Now wise Penelope came down from her chamber, looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite, and they placed a chair by the fire for her in her usual place, one inlaid with whorls of ivory and silver, that Icmalius the craftsman had created. He had fastened a foot-rest beneath it too, and a thick fleece covered it. Wise Penelope sat down, and the white-armed maids came from their hall to clear away the remains of the meal, the tables and the noblemen's drinking cups. They raked the ashes from the braziers onto the ground, and heaped them with fresh wood for light and warmth.

But Melantho began to abuse Odysseus again, saying: 'Stranger, will you stay and plague us all night long, roaming the house, spying on us women? Get out, you wretch, and be glad of what supper you had, or you'll soon be on your way with a blazing torch behind you.'

Resourceful Odysseus glowered at her, and replied: 'God-crazed woman, why attack me in your anger? Is it because I'm grimy and dressed in rags, a beggar

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who wanders the island? Well, needs must: beggars and travelling folk are all like this. I too once had a home of my own, I was a wealthy man with a fine house, and I gave hospitality to every wanderer who came, whoever he was, whatever his needs. I had countless servants too, and everything else that lets men live in comfort, and be called rich. But Zeus, the son of Cronos, brought me down, as he wished to do no doubt. So beware, woman, lest your mistress is angered and disgusted with you or Odysseus returns, of which there is still hope, and you lose all your beauty and pre-eminence among the maids. Even if he is dead, as seems likely, and will never return, he has a son Telemachus like himself, by Apollo's grace. And the sins of the women in this palace don't escape his notice: since he's no longer a child.'

Wise Penelope heard his words, and turned on the handmaid: 'Bold, and shameless creature, be sure your wild behaviour's evident to me. Be it on your own head: you yourself will cleanse its stain. You know perfectly well, you heard me say, that I wish to question this Stranger, here in my house, about the husband I sorrow for.'

Book 19: 100–163 Penelope and Odysseus converse

At this, Eurynome swiftly brought a gleaming chair and set it down, throwing a fleece across it. Noble long-suffering Odysseus sat there, and listened as wise Penelope spoke: 'Stranger, I must first ask you. Who are you, and where do you come from? What is your city, and who are your parents?'

'Lady,' subtle Odysseus replied, 'there isn't a mortal being on the wide earth who could find fault with you. Your fame rises to high heaven, like the fame of a peerless king, who, fearing the gods, rules many brave men and upholds the law. The people prosper under his leadership, and the dark soil yields wheat and barley, the trees are heavy with fruit, the ewes never fail to bear, and the sea is full of fish. Question me then in your house about anything, but don't ask about my people or native country, lest you pain my heart more with thinking of them. I am a man of many sorrows. Nor is it right for me to sit wailing and

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crying in another's house, endless grief is wearisome. I don't want you or your maids to lose patience with me, and say that my tears flow from a mind clouded by wine.'

Wise Penelope answered: 'Stranger, all my excellence of form and beauty the gods robbed me of that day when the Argives sailed for Ilium, my husband Odysseus with them. If only he might return and cherish this life of mine, I might deserve a greater and more glorious fame. But so many are the troubles a god has heaped upon me, I only grieve. All the princes who rule the islands, Dulichium, Same, and wooded Zacynthus, and those who live round me, on Ithaca open to the view, all court me without my wishing it, and ruin my house. So I neglect strangers and suppliants, and heralds on public business, and waste my heart instead in longing for Odysseus. They urge me to wed, and I weave a web of deceit. For a god first inspired me to set up a great loom in the hall, and begin weaving with long fine thread. Then I said to the Suitors: "My lords, my Suitors, though Odysseus is dead and you are eager for me to marry, have patience till I complete this work, I do not want it wasted, this shroud for noble Laertes, ready for when pitiless death's cruel end overtakes him: since I fear some Achaean woman of this land would blame me, if he who won great wealth lay there without a shroud."

So I spoke, and though proud they agreed. Then day after day I wove the great web, but at night, by torchlight, I unmade it. So for three years I cunningly kept the Achaeans from knowing, and so tricked them. But when the fourth year began, as the seasons rolled by, and the months passed, and the endless days ran their course, through the fault of my shameless, irresponsible maids, they caught me at my unravelling, and reproached me angrily. So unwillingly I was forced to finish the web. Now I can neither escape marriage, nor find a reason for delay. My parents urge me to wed, and my son frets as these men openly consume his wealth. He is a man now, and capable of running a house that Zeus honours. But tell me of your family, since you did not spring from a tree or

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a stone as in the ancient tales.'

Book 19: 164–219 Odysseus tells a false tale

Resourceful Odysseus replied: 'Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son, must you ask me of my lineage? Very well, I will tell you, though you only add more pain to that I already suffer, as is ever the case when a man has been as long away from home as I have, roaming sadly from city to city. Nevertheless I will answer your questions.

Out in the wine-dark sea lies a land called Crete, a rich and lovely island. It is filled with countless people, in ninety cities. They are not of one language, but speak several tongues. There are Achaeans there, and brave native Cretans, Cydonians, three races of Dorians, and noble Pelasgians too. One of the ninety cities is mighty Cnossus, where Minos ruled, and every nine years spoke with mighty Zeus. He was brave Deucalion's father, and so my grandfather. Deucalion had two sons, Lord Idomeneus and me. Idomeneus, my older brother, and a better man than I, sailed with the sons of Atreus in the curved ships to Ilium, so I the younger, Aethon is my name, was left behind, there to meet and entertain Odysseus. The wind had driven him to Crete as he headed for Troy, and blew him off course by Cape Malea. He anchored at Amnisus, a tricky harbour, near the cave of Eileithyia, and barely escaped shipwreck.

He came straight to the city, asking for Idomeneus, calling him his beloved and honoured friend. But it was now the tenth or eleventh morning since Idomeneus had sailed for Troy, so I invited him to the palace, and wined and dined him from the house's rich store. I doled out barley meal and glowing wine, and bulls for sacrifice to his friends too, out of the public stores, to their hearts content. Those noble Achaeans stayed twelve days, hemmed in by a northerly gale sent by some hostile god that blew them off their feet as they walked the shore. But on the thirteenth day the wind dropped, and they put out to sea.'

Notes

He made this pack of lies so convincing, that tears ran down Penelope's cheeks as she listened. As the snow that the West Wind pours on the high mountains melts when the East wind thaws it, and fills the streams with its water till the rivers overflow, so her lovely cheeks were drenched as she sorrowed and wept for her husband, who was even then sitting by her side. But though Odysseus pitied his wife's distress, he gazed steadily from beneath eyelids that might have been made of horn or iron, and deceitfully repressed his tears.

When she had finished weeping, and could speak, she said in answer: 'Now Stranger, I am forced to test you, and find out if you really entertained my husband and his godlike friends in your house, as you say. So describe what he was wearing, and what sort of man he seemed, and tell me about the comrades who were with him.'

Book 19: 220–307 Odysseus prophesies his own return

Resourceful Odysseus replied: 'My Lady, it is difficult to recall, especially for someone who has been wandering so long. It is twenty years now since he sailed from there, and left my island. But I will picture him to you as far as I can remember. Noble Odysseus wore a purple cloak, fleecy and doubly-folded, and its golden brooch was pinned with double clasps. There was a curiously made device on the face: a hound holding a fawn under its paws, tearing at it as it writhed. Everyone marvelled at how the hound seemed to throttle and tear the fawn, and how the fawn seemed to writhe at its feet trying to escape, though they were only made of gold. I noticed his tunic too, gleaming like the sheen on a dried onion's skin, smooth and sleek, glistening like the sun. All the women were fascinated. You may know whether Odysseus dressed like this at home, or whether some friend gave him the tunic when he took ship, or whether it was some stranger's gift, since Odysseus had many friends, and few Achaeans ranked as high. I gave him a bronze sword myself, and a fine purple cloak, doubly-folded, and a fringed tunic, when I saw him off with full honours, aboard his oared ship. Then there was a squire who served him, a little older

Notes

than himself, and I'll describe him to you. He was dark-skinned, curly-haired, and round-shouldered. Eurybates was his name, and Odysseus honoured him above the rest, because they were of one mind.'

His words only made her want to weep the more, recognising as she did the truthfulness of what he said. When she had finished crying, she turned to him: 'In truth, my Friend, though I pitied you before, now you shall be loved and honoured in my house. I myself gave him those clothes you described. I took them folded from the store-room, and pinned the golden brooch there to delight him. Now I will never welcome him home to his own country. It was an evil fate that sent him off in the hollow ship to Ilium the Evil, that it would be better not to name.'

'Honoured Lady, wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son, do not spoil those lovely cheeks now, or pain your heart weeping for your husband. Not that anyone should blame you: any woman would weep at losing her man, whom, wedded to, she has lain with, and whose children she conceived, though he be a lesser man than Odysseus, whom they liken to the gods. But dry your tears, and hear me, because I speak the truth, without concealment.

Not long ago I heard that Odysseus is alive, and has returned. He is nearby, in the rich Thesprotian land, and is bringing back great treasures, gifts to him as a guest wherever he goes. His faithful friends and his hollow ship were lost on the wine-dark sea, as he sailed from Thrinacia. Zeus and Helios wished him harm because his men killed Helios' cattle, and so they drowned his friends in the raging sea, though he clung to the keel of his ship and was thrown on-shore by the waves in the land of the Phaeacians, who are kin to the gods. The Phaeacians honoured him like a god, and showered him with gifts, and they themselves were glad to be sending him home unharmed. Odysseus would have been home long ago indeed, but it seemed to him wiser to roam the wide world and gather riches, and who knows better how to do that than him. Pheidon, the Thesprotian king, told me all this. And as he poured libations in

Notes

the palace, he swore to me the ship was launched, and the crew ready to bring him home. But he sent me on ahead, because a Thresprotian vessel happened to be heading for Dulichium's wheat country. He showed me the treasures Odysseus had garnered too, enough in truth to feed his descendants to the tenth generation, all that great wealth heaped up there in the King's house. But he said Odysseus had gone to Dodona, to hear Zeus' will from the god's high-crowned oak-tree, as to how he should return to his own country after such an absence, openly or in secret.

So he is safe, as I say, and will soon be here: he is close by, and won't be far from friends and his native land much longer. Even so, I'll swear it on oath as well. Zeus, the greatest and best of gods, be my witness, and peerless Odysseus' hearth to which I have come: all I have said shall truly come to pass. Odysseus will be here this month, between this moon's wane and next moon's waxing.'

Book 19: 308–360 Penelope offers hospitality

'My friend,' wise Penelope replied, 'How I wish your words might prove true! Then you would have kindness and many a gift from me, so that everyone you meet would call you blessed. But my heart is filled with foreboding that in truth Odysseus will not return, and you will not gain your passage from here, for there are no leaders of men like Odysseus, as was, to welcome strangers and help them travel onwards. But, come, my maids, wash the strangers' feet and make his bed, with blankets and bright rugs over the bedstead, so he may rest till golden-throned Dawn in warmth and comfort. In the morning early, bathe and oil him, so he is ready to breakfast in the hall, sitting by Telemachus' side. And if any man vexes him and pains his spirit, so much the worse for that man's prospects: he'll gain nothing here, rage as he might. How can you know, Stranger, whether I truly surpass other women in intellect and careful judgement, if you're forced to sit and eat in my house bedraggled, and clothed in rags? Man's life is short. To him who is harsh, and hard-hearted, all living men wish suffering till he dies, and mock him when he's dead. But the fame of a

Notes

good man, with a kind heart, his guests spread far and wide among men, and people sing his praise.'

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her, saying: 'Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son, bright rugs and blankets have been hateful to me since I first left Crete's snow-covered peaks behind in the wake of my long-oared ship. I am happy to lie as I did through all those past sleepless nights. Many's the time I've lain on a wretched pallet waiting for bright-throned Dawn. And having my feet washed by one of the serving-women in your palace would give me no pleasure: none of them shall touch my feet, unless there's some loyal old woman whose heart has known as much suffering as mine. I'd have no objection to her.'

To this wise Penelope replied: 'Dear Friend, of all the strangers from afar, never has my house welcomed a more discerning guest, so wise and thoughtful are your words. I have just such a servant here, an old woman of great discretion, my poor husband's nurse, who held him in her arms as a new-born babe, and nursed him tenderly and reared him. Weak with age though she is, she shall wash your feet. Come now, wise Eurycleia, kneel here and wash the feet of a man of your master's age. No doubt Odysseus' hands and feet look like his now, since men age quickly when times are hard.'

Book 19: 361–475 Eurycleia recognises Odysseus

At this, the old woman hid her face in her hands and shed hot tears, voicing her grief: 'Oh, Odysseus my child, I can be no help to you. Zeus must have hated you more than other men, though you were pious. No mortal ever offered the Thunderer so many fat thigh-pieces, such choice sacrifices, praying that you might reach a ripe old age and rear a noble son. Yet you alone he denies a homecoming!

Perhaps the women of some great house mocked at him in a far-off foreign land, just as these shameless hussies here mock you, sir. You will not let them

Notes

wash your feet, for fear of their insults, but wise Penelope, Icarius' daughter, knowing my willingness, has asked me to wash them. So I shall wash your feet for Penelope's sake and yours, while my heart is stirred with sadness. But listen to one thing I must say. Many a long-suffering traveller have we welcomed here, but never a man resembling another as you resemble Odysseus in looks and voice – even your feet.'

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her, saying: 'That is what everyone says who has met us both, old woman, that we are very alike, as you remark.'

With this, the old woman, preparing to wash his feet, poured cold water into the shining basin then added hot. Odysseus swiftly sat down by the hearth, and turned towards the shadows, though he had a sudden premonition that as she handled him she would notice his scar and the truth would be out. As she approached and began to wash him, so it was: she immediately knew the scar Odysseus had received from a white-tusked boar, while hunting on Parnassus, when visiting his mother's father, noble Autolycus, the greatest of all in thievery and oath-making. This Autolycus owed to the god Hermes himself, to whom he made favourable offerings, the thighs of lambs and kids, so that Hermes acted as his willing friend.

Now Autolycus once visited wealthy **I**thaca, to find that his daughter had just produced a son. Eurycleia placed the baby on his knees as he was finishing supper, and said to him: 'Autolycus, you must give a name to your grandchild: he has been long desired and prayed for.'

'My son-in-law, my daughter,' Autolycus replied, 'here's a name for you. Since I am one who's wished suffering to many men and women on this fertile earth, then let the child be named Odysseus, man of suffering. And for my part, when he is a man and comes to the great house of his mother's kin on Parnassus, where my wealth lies, I will give part to him, and send him home happy.'

So Odysseus went there, to receive Autolycus' promised gift. And Autolycus and

Notes

his sons grasped his hands, and welcomed him with warm words. Amphithea, his maternal grandmother, clasped him in her arms, kissing his brow and gleaming eyes. Then Autolycus called on his fine sons to prepare a meal, and they responded. In they brought a five-year old bull, which they slaughtered, and flayed, butchered and dressed. They pierced the neatly jointed meat with spits, roasted it carefully, and served the portions. Then they feasted all day long till sunset, sharing everything and delighted by it all. And when the sun vanished and darkness fell, they lay down and received the gift of sleep.

As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, Autolycus and his sons went hunting with hounds, and noble Odysseus went too. They climbed the thickly-wooded slopes of Parnassus, and were soon deep among its wind-blown valleys. Just as the sun, rising from the smooth-sliding, deep-flowing Ocean, lit the fields, the beaters reached a certain glade. The hounds swarmed ahead, following the scent, with the sons of Autolycus in hot pursuit, among them Odysseus, close behind the pack, brandishing his long spear. A wild boar lay in his lair nearby: a thicket so dense the power of the wind, rain, and bright sunlight could never enter, deep in fallen leaves.

Then the sound of the men and dogs as they urged the chase reached the boar, and he stormed from his lair, back bristling and eyes aflame, then stood at bay facing them. Odysseus was first to attack, his long spear raised in his great hand, eager to strike, but the boar was too swift for him, charging sidelong, catching him above the knee, and tearing a long gash in the flesh with its tusk, though it failed to reach the bone. Odysseus' blow stabbed it deep in the right shoulder, and the point of the gleaming spear went clean through, bringing the boar to earth with a grunt, and ending its life. Autolycus' brave sons bound up peerless, godlike Odysseus' wound, staunching the flow of dark blood with an incantation, then busied themselves over the carcass, and headed straight back to their noble father's house.

When Autolycus and his sons had ensured Odysseus' recovery, and loaded him

Notes

with fine presents, they sent him back joyful to Ithaca, his own land, with speed. His father and dear mother were happy on seeing him again, and questioned him about his journey, and how he had incurred his wound. He explained how the boar had gashed him with its white tusk, as he hunted Parnassus with Autolycus' sons.

It was this scar the old woman felt as she passed her hands over his leg, and recognising it she let his leg fall. The bronze rang as his foot struck the basin, upsetting it, and spilling the water on the ground. Joy and pain filled her heart at the same moment, her eyes filled with tears and her voice caught in her throat. She touched Odysseus' face and said: 'It is Odysseus, it must be. Child, I did not know you, until my hands had touched my master's limbs.'

Book 19: 476–507 Odysseus tells Eurycleia to conceal his identity

As she spoke, she glanced towards Penelope, ready to tell her that her dear husband was home. But Penelope failed to meet her look with recognition, because Athena had distracted her attention. At the same instant Odysseus' felt for the woman's throat and gripped it with his right hand, while he drew her closer with the other, and whispered: 'Nurse, will you destroy me, you who suckled me at your breast? I am home indeed after twenty years of toil and sorrow, but now a god has inspired you and you have found me out be quiet and keep it from all the rest of the house. Otherwise I say, and it shall be so, that if a god delivers the noble Suitors into my hands, I will not spare you, though you nursed me, when I kill the other serving women in the palace.'

'My child', wise Eurycleia replied, 'what are you saying? You know how strong and steady my spirit is. I will be silent as solid stone or iron. And I will say this, and do you remember. If a god delivers the noble Suitors into your hands, I will pick out the women in the palace who have been disloyal from those who are innocent.'

Notes

Resourceful Odysseus answered: 'Nurse, why speak of that? There is no need for your involvement. I will find out about each one, and take good note. Keep all this to yourself, and leave the outcome to the gods.'

At this, the old woman went off through the palace to fetch water for his feet, since what was there had been spilt. When she had washed them, and rubbed them with oil, Odysseus pulled his stool to the fire to warm himself again, covering the scar with his rags.

Book 19: 508–553 Penelope's dream

Wise Penelope was first to break the silence: 'Friend, I have one more thing to ask you, a little thing since it will soon be time for soothing sleep, at least for those who can find rest despite their grief. Some god brings me instead measureless sorrow. My only pastime day after day is weeping and sighing, while I tend to my household chores and those of my maids, and when night comes and others sleep, I lie awake, and bitter cares crowd thick upon my beating heart, troubling my sadness.

As Pandareus' daughter, the nightingale in the greenwood, sings sweetly in early spring, perching in the dense leaves, pouring out her intricate trills, in sorrow for her child Itylus, King Zethus' son, whom she mistakenly killed with a sword: so my heart quivers, with uncertainty. Should I stay with my son and protect my servants, my belongings, and this great high-roofed house of ours, respecting my husband's bed, deferring to popular feeling, or should I go with the best of the Achaeans, one of the Suitors in the palace who offer countless wedding gifts? So long as my son was too young to take on responsibility, I could not leave my husband's house and marry: but now my child has reached manhood, he himself urges me to leave the palace, concerned at how the Achaeans squander his inheritance.

But hear this dream of mine, and interpret it to me. A great eagle with curving beak flew down from the mountain and broke the necks of twenty geese

Notes

I keep, whom it warms my heart to see, who leave their pond to eat the grain. There they lay dead, piled in the yard, while he was carried up through the clear sky. Though it was a dream, I wept and cried out, and the lovely-tressed Achaean women gathered, to find me sobbing piteously because the eagle had killed my geese. But the bird returned and perched on a jutting roof-beam, and checked my tears with mortal speech. "Be happy, daughter of famous Icarius: this was no dream, but a true vision of justice that is to come. The geese are the Suitors, and I, your husband, the eagle, have returned once more now to prepare a dark fate for them all."

With his words sweet sleep left me, and gazing round I saw the geese feeding on grain, by the trough in the yard, as ever.'

Book 19: 554–604 Penelope proposes a challenge for the Suitors

'Lady,' resourceful Odysseus replied, 'there is no way of twisting this dream to give some other meaning. Odysseus himself has told you how he will bring it about, for sure. The Suitors' destruction is plainly intended. All of them will be killed: none of them shall escape the death which is their fate.'

Wise Penelope replied: 'My friend, dreams are puzzling things whose meaning is obscure, and what is in them does not always happen to us mortals. There are two gates that open for shadowy dreams: one is made of horn, the other of ivory. Dreams that come through the gate of carved ivory deceive us with promises that are unfulfilled. But those that come through the gate of gleaming horn tell the dreamer of what will come to pass. I fear my strange dream did not come that way. If it had, how welcome it would be to me and my son!

Let me tell you something else for you to note. The day of evil is drawing near that will sever me from the house of Odysseus. I will declare a contest. Odysseus used to set up a line of axes in the hall, a row of twelve like the props

Notes

under a ship being built. Standing some way off he would shoot an arrow through them all. That can provide a test for the Suitors. Whoever makes the best attempt at stringing Odysseus' bow, and shooting an arrow through the twelve axes, is the one I will go with, leaving this house where I was first a wife, this lovely house filled with riches, a house I know I will always remember in my dreams.'

'Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,' resourceful Odysseus replied, 'don't delay this contest in the palace, since Odysseus will be here, full of resource, before these men can string the polished bow in their hands, or shoot an arrow through the iron.'

"My friend," said wise Penelope, "if you were to sit here and speak such words of joy forever, sleep would never touch my eyelids. But no man can do without sleep, and the deathless ones appointed a time for everything on the fertile earth. For myself, I must go to my room, and lie down on that bed which has become a bed of tears to me, always damp with my weeping, since the day Odysseus left for Ilium the Evil, that it would be better not to name. I will lie there, and you shall lie here in the hall. Spread bedding on the floor, or let the maids set up a proper bed for you."

With this she went to her brightly-lit room, and not alone but with her maids. When she and her maids had gone to that upper chamber, she wept there for Odysseus, her dear husband, till bright-eyed Athena closed her eyes in sleep.

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Homer, *Odyssey* Book 21

Book 21: 1–79 Penelope declares the contest

Now, the goddess, bright-eyed Athena, prompted wise Penelope, Icarius' daughter, to confront the Suitors in Odysseus' palace with his bow and the grey iron axes, as a challenge and a means to their destruction. Penelope climbed the high stair to her room, and with a firm hand, took up a bronze key, finely-shaped with an ivory handle. She made her way with her women to the distant storeroom, where her husband's treasure lay, gold and bronze and hammered iron. There lay the curved bow, and quiver full of fatal arrows, given him when he visited Lacedaemon, by godlike Iphitus, Eurytus' son.

They had met in Messene, at the house of wise Ortilochus. Odysseus was there to collect a public debt, because Messenians had stolen three hundred sheep and their shepherds too from **I**thaca, loading them aboard their oared ships. Odysseus had been sent by his father and other elders to resolve the matter, though he was still quite young. Iphitus was there in search of a dozen brood mares he had lost, along with the sturdy little mules they were suckling. But his search caused his death, when he came upon Heracles, Zeus' lion-hearted son, well-versed in mighty labours. Ruthless Heracles killed him, though he was a guest in his house. Careless of the gods' anger and the sanctity of the dinner-table, he killed him there and then, and hid the heavy-hoofed mares in his own stables.

But back when Iphitus was searching for them, he had met Odysseus, and given him the bow that mighty Eurytus carried of old, and that, dying in his palace, he had left to his son. And Odysseus had given Iphitus in return a sharp sword and a fine spear as a token of the start of a loving friendship. But before they could meet again at table, Zeus' son had killed godlike Iphitus, Eurytus' son, the giver of the bow that noble Odysseus had never taken with him aboard his black ship

Notes

to war, leaving it behind in his palace as a memento of a good friend, to use only at home.

Now Penelope, that lovely woman, reached the storeroom and set foot on the oaken sill, once skilfully planed and trued to the line by some carpenter of old, who also set the doorposts in it, and hung the gleaming doors. Quickly she unhooked the thong, slid in the key and with a sure touch shot back the bolt. With a groan like a bull bellowing in a grassy meadow, the polished doors flew open at the touch of the key. Then she mounted to the high platform loaded with chests of fragrant clothes. Here, reaching up, she lifted the bow, in the gleaming case, from its peg. Then she sat down with the case on her knees, and weeping aloud drew out her husband's bow. Yet once her tears and sighs were done, she went to the hall and the crowd of noble Suitors, carrying the curved bow and the quiver full of fatal arrows. And the maids followed with a chest full of bronze and iron won by her man. When the lovely woman reached the Suitors, she stood by a pillar of the great hall, with a shining veil in front of her face, and a loyal maid stood on either side. Then she issued her challenge.

'Noble Suitors, listen to me. You have battened on this house, with its master long gone, eating and drinking endlessly, and you could find no better excuse to offer than the desire to win me as a wife. Well come now, my Suitors, your prize stands here before you, clear to see. Godlike Odysseus' mighty bow is the test. Whoever makes the best attempt at stringing the bow and shooting an arrow through the rings of a dozen axes, with that man I will go, and leave this house that saw me a bride, this lovely and luxurious house, that I will always remember in my dreams.'

Book 21: 80–135 Telemachus sets up the axes

With this she ordered Eumaeus the master-swineherd to set out the bow and the axes with their handle-rings of grey iron for the Suitors. Eumaeus was in tears as he laid them down, and the cowherd wept too, at the sight of his master's bow. Antinous turned on them in anger: 'Stupid yokels, living in the

Notes

past! Your tears, you wretches, lower your mistress' spirits, as though her heart wasn't already troubled by her husband's loss. Sit and eat in silence, or go outside and snivel, and leave the bow here to test us, her Suitors: I doubt this gleaming bow will be easy to string, since I once saw Odysseus, and there's no man here to equal him. Yes, I remember him, though I was but a child.'

Such were his words, but he nursed the hope in his heart that he himself would string the bow and shoot an arrow through the iron rings. Yet in truth he was to be the first to feel the blow of an arrow from peerless Odysseus whom he was now abusing in the palace, while urging on his friends to do the same.

Then royal Telemachus intervened: 'Zeus must have addled my wits, indeed! My dear mother, in her wisdom, says she will take another husband and leave this house, and I laugh like a happy idiot! Come, my lords, since your prize is here, a lady who has no equal in all Achaea, not in Pylos, Argos, or Mycenae, nor in **I**thaca itself, nor on the dark mainland. You know that yourselves, what need have I to sing my mother's praises? No excuses now: let's have no delay in stringing the bow, and then we'll see. I might even try the bow myself, later. If I can string it and shoot an arrow through the iron rings, I shan't be so upset by my dear mother's departure for another house, seeing I myself will be a man capable of winning fine prizes like my father.'

Saying this, Telemachus threw off his purple cloak, and springing up removed the sharp sword slung from his shoulder. Then he set all the axes in a long trench, in a straight line, stamping the earth in around them. The onlookers were amazed that never having seen them before he arranged them so correctly. Then he took up his stand on the threshold and tried the bow. Three times it quivered in his hands as he made a fierce effort to string it, and three times he had to relax his grip, though he had hoped deep down to succeed and shoot an arrow through the iron handle-rings. Now exerting all his power he might have strung it at the fourth attempt had Odysseus not shaken his head, and checked his eagerness.

Notes

'Alas' royal Telemachus exclaimed, 'it seems I shall always be a coward and a weakling. But perhaps I am still too young, and haven't the strength yet to defend myself against whoever picks quarrels for no reason. You then, who have more strength than I, try the bow, and decide the contest.'

Book 21: 136–185 The Suitors try the bow

With this, he placed the bow on the ground, leaning it against the gleaming panels of the door, and the feathered arrow against the door-handle, and then resumed his seat. Antinous, Eupeithes' son, called out: 'Come forward, all of you Suitors, one by one, from left to right, beginning from where the wine-steward sits.' They welcomed his words, and the first to rise was Leodes, Oenops' son, their seer, who always sat by the huge mixing bowl in the depths of the hall: he alone despised the Suitors' acts of wantonness, and they filled him with indignation. Now he was first to take up the feathered arrow and the bow, stride to the threshold, and try to string it. But he failed, his smooth and delicate hands quickly drained of strength. He spoke to the Suitors, saying: 'My Friends, I cannot do it: let someone else try. This bow will break the heart and spirit of many a man here. Still, it is better to die trying, than live on without winning the prize that brings us here each day, in endless expectation. Many must hope and long to wed Penelope, Odysseus' wife, but when they have tried the bow, and failed, let them go woo some other Achaean woman in her lovely robe, and try and win her with their gifts. And let Penelope wed the man who offers her most, and is destined to be her husband.'

With this, he set the bow aside, leaning it against the gleaming panels of the door, and the feathered arrow against the door-handle, and then resumed his seat. But Antinous criticised him, saying: 'Leodes, what dark and monstrous words have crossed your tongue! I'm angered by your suggestion that "this bow will break the heart and spirit of many a warrior here", merely because you failed to string it. Your dear mother didn't bear you for drawing a mighty bow, and shooting arrows, perhaps, but others of the noble Suitors will soon succeed.'

Notes

Then he called to the goatherd, Melanthius: 'Quick, light a fire in the hall, Melanthius, and put a large fleece-covered chair beside it, and bring a big piece of tallow from the stores, so that we youngsters can heat the bow and grease it, before we try it and settle the contest.' Melanthius, swiftly obeyed. He revived the glowing fire, put the large fleece-covered chair beside it, and brought a big piece of tallow from the stores. The youths then warmed the bow and tried to string it, but those who tried were too weak to succeed.

Book 21: 186–244 Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus

Antinous and godlike Eurymachus, however, the leaders of the Suitors, and the most capable, continued the contest. Meanwhile noble Odysseus' cowherd and swineherd slipped out of the hall together, and Odysseus followed them. When they were beyond the courtyard gates he sounded them out carefully:

'Cowherd, swineherd, Can I share something with you or should I keep it to myself? My heart tells me to speak. If Odysseus suddenly returned, brought by some god, would you be the men to fight for him? Would you be for the Suitors or Odysseus? Say what your heart and spirit tell you.'

'Father Zeus,' the cowherd prayed, 'may that come true! May the hero return, with a god's guidance! Then you would see the strength I can still show in my hands.' And Eumaeus also prayed, to all the gods, that wise Odysseus might come home.

Once Odysseus was sure, he opened his mind to them, saying: 'Well, I am home. Here I stand before you, I myself, back in my own country in the twentieth year after many painful trials. I know that of all my servants you both welcome my return, but I've not heard a single one of the others praying I might reach home. I'll tell you truly what I intend for you. If a god brings the noble Suitors down, I'll find you each a wife, give you goods, and build you a house near mine: and I'll always regard you as friends and brothers of Telemachus. Now, so you can be certain in your hearts that it is I, let me show you a sign you'll know, the scar

Notes

from the wound the white-tusked boar gave me, when I hunted Parnassus with Autolycus' sons.'

So saying, he drew his rags apart to show the long scar. When the two had examined it carefully, they clasped their arms about wise Odysseus' neck, and weeping kissed his head and shoulders in loving recognition. Odysseus likewise kissed their heads and hands. And the twilight would have seen them still weeping if Odysseus had not restrained them: 'Stop wailing now, in case someone comes from the house and sees us, and tells those inside. Let's go back in, now, one after the other, not together. Follow me, and here's the signal we will act on. The others, the noble Suitors, will refuse to allow me to handle the bow and quiver, but as you carry the bow round the hall, Eumaeus, set it in my hands, and tell the women to shut their hall doors tight. Say that if any of them hear men shouting or groaning in here, they are not to rush out, but to stay there and silently carry out their tasks. And good Philoetius, I charge you with barring the gate of the courtyard, and lashing it tight.'

With this, he entered the royal palace, and resumed his seat. And the two servants followed.

Book 21: 245–310 Odysseus seeks to try the bow

The bow had reached Eurymachus, who was turning it in his hands before the fire to warm it. But despite that he failed to string it, and groaning inwardly he said, in anger: 'Oh, I'm not just bitter about this myself, but for all of you, too. It's not that I'm bothered about the marriage, though it grieves me. There are plenty of other women in Achaea, in **I**thaca's isle, and in other places. No, it's more that our strength falls so short of godlike Odysseus' that we can't even string his bow. It's a disgrace that posterity will hear of.'

'No, Eurymachus,' Antinous, Eupeithes' son, replied, 'that's not so, and do you know why? Today is the feast of Apollo, throughout the island, his holy day. Should we be bending bows? Set it aside, softly. As for the axes, why not leave

Notes

them there? No one will steal them: not from a house owned by Odysseus, Laertes' son. Come, let the steward pour wine for libations, and put the bow down. In the morning tell the goatherd, Melanthius, to bring us the best she-goats in the flock, so we can lay thigh-pieces on Apollo's altar, the famous Archer, then try the bow, and decide the contest.'

They all agreed with Antinous. So, while the squires sprinkled water over their hands, pages filled the mixing bowls and served them all, first pouring a few drops of wine for libation into each man's cup. When they had made their libations and quenched their thirst, resourceful Odysseus spoke with subtle intent: 'Suitors of the glorious Queen, hear me, so I might express what is in my mind. I aim my plea primarily at Eurymachus, and godlike Antinous, who made such a good suggestion, to forget the bow for today, and leave the issue to the gods. Come morning the god will grant victory to whoever he wishes. So, lend me the polished bow, and I can see what strength is in my hands, and if I still possess the power I used to have in limbs once supple, or whether poor nourishment and endless wandering has reduced it.'

The Suitors were greatly angered by his words: all afraid he might string the gleaming bow. Antinous addressed him with scorn: 'Wretched beggar, you're out of your mind. Isn't it enough for you we allow you to dine in peace in our noble company, letting you share in what's on the table, privileged to listen to our talk, unlike other beggars and strangers. The wine, the honeyed wine, has addled your brain as it does others who gulp it down without restraint. It was wine that maddened Eurytion, the famous Centaur, in brave Peirithous' palace, when he visited the Lapithae. Crazed with drink he caused uproar in Peirithous' own house. The outraged hosts leapt to their feet, and dragged him through the gate then cut off his nose and ears with the cruel bronze, leaving him to wander off, bearing the burden of tragic error caused by his foolish urge. So began the feud between the Centaurs and men, but he was the first to meet disaster, drunk with the wine. I promise you the same, if you string the bow.

Notes

You'll find no help from anyone here. We'll pack you off in a black ship to King Echetus, the maimer of men, and you'll not escape with your life. So, have done, and drink your wine, and don't try and compete with younger men.'

Book 21: 311–358 Telemachus asserts his authority

But wise Penelope intervened: 'It is neither right nor just, Antinous, to deny his due to a man who came to Telemachus' house as a guest. Do you really think that if the stranger, trusting in the strength of his hands, strings Odysseus' bow, he will take me home as his wife? He could never harbour such a hope. So let none of you sit at this feast in trepidation: that would be wrong.'

Eurymachus, Polybus' son, answered her: 'Icarius' daughter, wise Penelope, we had no thought of his taking you home, that would certainly be wrong, but we shudder at the thought of idle gossip, of some wretch among the Achaeans saying: "Those are weaklings that woo the wife of a peerless man. They can't even string his gleaming bow, though a wandering beggar did so easily, and shot an arrow through the axes." So they would say, and shame us.'

"Eurymachus" said wise Penelope, "no one thinks well, in any case, of men like you who ruin and dishonour a King's house, so why worry about further shame? The stranger is tall and well-built, and says he comes of good stock. Well then, hand him the gleaming bow, and let us see. Hear what I say, and I'll surely do this too: if Apollo brings him glory and he strings the bow, I'll dress him in a fine new cloak and tunic, and give him a sharp spear to keep off dogs and men, and a double-edged sword, and sandals for his feet, and help him travel wherever his heart and mind dictate."

It was wise Telemachus who spoke to her then: "Mother, none of the Achaeans – those who rule in rocky Ithaca or in the islands seaward of the horse pastures of Elis – have more right than I to give or refuse the bow to whoever I wish. None of them can challenge my will even if I choose to give the bow to the stranger, here and now, to take away with him. So go to your quarters now, and attend

Notes

to your own duties at loom and spindle, and order your maids about their tasks: let men worry about such things, and I especially, since I hold the authority in this house."

Seized with wonder she retired to her own room, taking her son's wise words to heart. Up to her high chamber she went, accompanied by her maids, and there she wept for Odysseus, her dear husband, till bright-eyed Athena veiled her eyelids with sweet sleep.

Book 21: 359–403 Odysseus receives the bow

Meanwhile the worthy swineherd had picked up the curved bow and was walking off with it, when the Suitors cried out in protest. One proud youth called out: 'Where do you think you're going with that, you wretch, your mind must be addled? If Apollo and the rest of the gracious gods are good to us, the hounds you've bred yourself will finish you off, out there alone, far from men, among the swine.'

At this, Eumaeus dropped the bow he was carrying, on the spot, terrified by the uproar in the hall. But Telemachus shouted harshly at him from the other side: 'Stick to the bow, old man – you'll be full of regret if you listen to them all – or, young as I am, I'll shower you with stones, and chase you through the fields. My strength is greater than yours. I only wish the power of my hands was greater than the Suitors' in my hall, then I'd soon send a few of them off in a way they wouldn't enjoy, the trouble makers.'

On hearing this, the Suitors laughed out loud at Telemachus, and so blunted the edge of their anger, while the swineherd carried the bow through the hall, and reaching wise Odysseus, set it in his hands. Then Eumaeus spoke softly to the nurse Eurycleia, saying: 'Wise Eurycleia, Telemachus orders you to shut the hall doors tight, and if any of the women hear men shouting or groaning in here, they are not to rush out, but to stay where they are and silently carry out their tasks.'

Notes

So he spoke, and without a word she went and locked the doors of the great hall. At the same time, Philoetius slipped out quietly to bar the gates of the courtyard. He lashed them to, with a ship's cable twined from papyrus reed that was lying beneath the portico, then slipped back inside, and resumed his seat, keeping his eyes fixed on Odysseus. He meanwhile was handling the bow, turning it this way and that, fearing the pieces of horn bound to the wood might have become worm-eaten while he was away. The Suitors glanced at each other, and one commented: 'This fellow must be an expert, or a cunning dealer in bows. Or if he hasn't got bows like this stored away at home, the wretched beggar must be setting out to make one: he studies it so carefully.'

Another arrogant youth replied: 'I'd guess he'd have as much luck at that as he will at trying to string this bow.'

So they chattered, but once wily Odysseus had flexed the great bow and checked it all over, he strung it easily, as a man skilled in song and the lyre stretches a new string onto its leather tuning strap, fixing the twisted sheep-gut at either end. Then grasping the bow in his right hand, he plucked the string that sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow's note.

The Suitors were mortified, and their faces were drained of colour, while Zeus sounded a peal of thunder as a sign. Noble long-suffering Odysseus was pleased at this omen from the son of devious Cronos, and he picked up the feathered arrow that lay alone on the table next to him, while the others the Achaeans were destined to feel were still packed in their hollow quiver. He set it against the bridge of the bow, drew back the notched arrow with the string, and still seated in his chair let fly with a sure aim. The bronze-weighted shaft flew through the handle hole of every axe from first to last without fail, sped clean through and out at the end. Then he turned to Telemachus saying: 'The guest in your hall has not disgraced you. I have not missed the target, nor did it take me long to string the bow. My strength is undiminished, not lessened as the Suitors' taunts implied. Well now it is time for the Achaeans to eat, while

Notes

there is light, and afterwards we shall have different entertainment, with song and lyre, fitting for a celebration.'

As he spoke he gave the signal, and Telemachus, the godlike hero's steadfast son, slung on his sharp-edged sword, grasped his spear, and stood beside his father, armed with the glittering bronze.

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Homer, *Odyssey* Book 22

Book 22: 1–67 The death of Antinous

Throwing off his rags, resourceful Odysseus sprang to the wide threshold with the bow and the full quiver, poured the arrows out at his feet, and addressed the Suitors: 'Here is a clear end to the contest. Now I'll see if I can hit another target no man has as yet, and may Apollo grant my prayer!'

So saying, he aimed a deadly shaft at Antinous, who was handling a fine golden two-handled cup, about to raise it to his lips and sip the wine, his thoughts far from death. How should he guess among the feasting crowd, that one man however powerful he might be could dare to bring a vile death and a dark doom on him? But Odysseus took aim and shot him through the neck. The point passed clean through the tender throat, and Antinous sank to one side, the cup falling at that moment from his hand, while a thick jet of blood gushed from his nostrils. His foot kicked the table away, dashing the food to the floor, and the bread and meat were fouled.

When the Suitors saw the man fall, there was uproar throughout the hall, and they leapt from their seats in fear, running to the walls to find a shield or a stout spear of which there were no sign. Then they turned on Odysseus angrily: 'Stranger you'll pay for choosing a man as your target: no more contests for you, your time is up. You have killed the best of Ithaca's young men, and now the vultures will have you.' They imagined in truth that he had killed Antinous by accident, not realising that the net of fate had been thrown over them all. Resourceful Odysseus, glowered at them, and answered: 'You dogs! You thought I'd never return from the land of Troy, so you laid waste my house, forced my maids, and wooed my wife in secret though I was still alive, without fearing the gods who rule the wide sky, or that mortal vengeance would find you. Now the net of fate is thrown over you all.'

Notes

Fear blanched their cheeks at his words, and every man glanced round, looking to escape death's finality. Only Eurymachus replied, saying: 'If you are truly Odysseus of Ithaca come home, then what you say of the Achaeans is true – many foolish and wanton things have been done here and in your fields. But now Antinous is dead, and he was to blame for it all: he initiated it, not primarily through desire or need to wed, but with another aim that the son of Cronos thwarted: to be king in Ithaca's peaceful land. So he lay in wait for your son, to kill him. Now he is dead, as he deserved. Spare your people, then, and we will travel the island and organise recompense for everything we have eaten and drunk in your house, and each of us will make amends to the value of twenty oxen, and repay you with gold and bronze until you are satisfied. Until then, no one could blame you for being angry.'

Resourceful Odysseus glowered, and gave a fierce reply: 'Eurymachus, even if you Suitors handed over your inheritances, everything you own and whatever might come to you after, even then I'd not keep my hands from slaughter until you've all paid the price. Now you can choose to stand and fight or run, if you think a single one of you can cheat death and fate. I don't think you'll escape death's finality.'

Book 22: 68–115 The battle begins

At this, their hearts trembled and their knees shook, but Eurymachus spoke again, saying: 'Friends, since this man will not restrain his hands, but with the gleaming bow and quiver in his hands intends to fire from the smooth sill till he kills us all, to battle! Draw your swords, and use the tables as shields against his death-dealing arrows. Then let's rush him together, and try and push him from the threshold, run to the city and raise the alarm: then he'll have shot his bolt.'

With this he drew his sharp bronze two-edged sword, and sprang at Odysseus with a great cry. But at that very moment noble Odysseus let fly an arrow that struck him in the chest below the nipple, and the swift shaft pierced his liver. Eurymachus let the sword drop from his hand. Sprawling across the table he

Notes

doubled over and fell, spilling the food and the two-handled wine-cup to the floor. His forehead beat the ground in his last agony, his feet kicked out and rattled the chair, and the mist poured over his eyes.

Amphinomus, now, rushed at glorious Odysseus, attacking him with drawn sword, to force him somehow from the door. But before he could reach him Telemachus quickly threw his bronze-tipped spear, striking him behind between the shoulders, and driving it through his chest. He fell to the ground with a thud, striking his forehead full-on. Telemachus leapt back, leaving the long spear fixed in Amphinomus' body, fearing that if he stopped to pull the spear free, one of the Achaeans might rush him, and stab him with his sword, or catch him as he stooped over the corpse. So he ran swiftly to his steadfast father's side, and standing by him spoke with winged words: 'Father, I'll bring you a shield, two spears, and a helmet that fits you, arm myself and return with weapons for the swineherd and cowherd there: we would all be better armed.'

'Run' said resourceful Odysseus, 'bring them quickly, while I still have arrows left, lest they push me from the door while I'm alone.'

Telemachus obeyed his father, and hurried to the storeroom with its piles of armour. He chose four shields, eight spears, and four bronze helmets with thick horsehair plumes, and brought them swiftly back to his steadfast father. Then he clad his body in bronze, and the two servants likewise donned the fine armour, and stood either side of wise and cunning Odysseus.

Book 22: 116–159 Melanthius raids the storeroom

He, meanwhile, kept shooting steadily at the Suitors, killing them one by one, as long as he had arrows left, till the dead were heaped high. But when the arrows were gone, he propped the bow by the doorpost of the great hall against the gleaming wall of the entrance. Then he slung a shield, with four layers of hide, across his shoulders, set a strong helmet on his proud head, its horsehair plume nodding menacingly, and picked up two sturdy spears with bronze tips.

Notes

Now there was a raised entrance in the solid wall, closed by tight-fitting doors, providing access to a passage at the back of the great hall. Odysseus ordered the worthy swineherd to guard it closely. It allowed space for only one man at a time. Only after he had done so did Agelaus call out loud to the Suitors: 'Friends, someone must clamber through that door, raise the alarm and alert the people. Then this fellow will soon have fired his last shot.'

But Melanthius the goatherd said: 'It's impossible, Agelaus, favourite of Zeus, since the great door into the courtyard is dreadfully near, and the passage is narrow-mouthed. One brave man could stop us all from entering. Let me bring armour from the storeroom though, since I think Odysseus and his fine son have hidden the arms inside not outside.'

With this, Melanthius climbed the steps to Odysseus' storeroom, and came away with a dozen shields and spears, and as many bronze helmets with thick horsehair plumes and carrying them quickly brought them to the Suitors. Seeing them donning the armour and brandishing long spears in their hands, Odysseus' heart trembled and his knees shook, and the task ahead seemed huge. He spoke swiftly to Telemachus, with winged words: 'Telemachus, one of the women servants has stirred up trouble for us, or perhaps it was Melanthius.'

'Father' wise Telemachus replied, 'It is my fault, and no one else's. I left the door of the storeroom unlocked, and they kept a closer eye than I did. Worthy Eumaeus, go now, and close the storeroom door, and find out whether it is one of the women or Melanthius, Dolius' son, as I would guess.'

Book 22: 160–199 Melanthius is captured

As they were speaking, Melanthius the goatherd returned to the storeroom to fetch more fine armour. The worthy swineherd spotted him, and immediately told Odysseus nearby: 'Resourceful Odysseus, scion of Zeus, Laertes' son, the lethal wretch we suspected is there again, on his way to the storeroom. Should I kill him if I can, or bring him here, so he can pay for all the crimes he's

Notes

perpetrated in your house?'

'Telemachus and I will keep the noble Suitors in the hall,' resourceful Odysseus replied, 'however fiercely they fight, while you two tie Melanthius' arms and legs behind his back, and throw him into the storeroom, then strap him to a board, fasten him to a coil of rope and hoist him up by a roof-beam to the top of a tall pillar, and let him hang there a while in torment.'

They eagerly obeyed, setting off for the storeroom, unknown to Melanthius, who was inside searching for armour in the depths of the room. The two of them lay in wait on either side of the door. When Melanthius, the goatherd, was about to cross the threshold, carrying a fine helmet in one hand, and in the other an old wide mildewed shield – that belonged to Laertes in his heroic youth, but had lain there neglected with the seams of its straps decayed – the two of them sprang at him and seized him. They dragged him inside by the hair, and threw the terrified man to the floor, then tied his hands and feet behind his back with cruel knots, as noble long-suffering Odysseus, Laertes' son, had told them. Then they fastened a coil of rope to his body and hoisted him up by a roof-beam to the top of a tall pillar. There you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, taunted him, saying: 'Now you can keep watch all night, lying on the soft bed you deserve, then you won't miss the coming of golden-throned Dawn, rising from Ocean's streams, at the hour when you usually drive in the she-goats for the Suitors' feast in the hall.'

Book 22: 200–240 Athena intervenes

Putting on their armour, they left Melanthius there in his cruel bonds, locked the door and returned to wise and cunning Odysseus. There the four of them stood on the threshold, breathing defiance against the many braves in the hall. It was then that Athena, daughter of Zeus, appeared, with Mentor's voice and looks. Odysseus saw her, and was glad, and spoke to her saying: 'Mentor, help fight against disaster: remember me your steadfast friend, one who stood by you, often. You and I were once young together.'

Notes

He spoke so, believing it was in truth Athena, the stirrer of armies, while the Suitors for their part shouted abuse, and Agelaus, Damastor's son, was the leader in rebuking her, saying: 'Mentor, don't let Odysseus seduce you with his words to help fight against us. Here is how we would end this business. When we've killed this father and son, you will be next to die for your eagerness in action. You'll pay the price with your life. And when we've rendered the five of you powerless, we'll lump all your possessions, Mentor, together with those of Odysseus, bar your sons from your house, and your good wife and daughters from the streets of Ithaca.'

His speech angered Athena even more deeply, and she exhorted Odysseus with fiery words: 'Odysseus, your courage is wavering. Where is that brave spirit you displayed when you fought the Trojans for nine long years, all for Helen of the white arms, killing a host of men in cruel conflict, planning the capture of Priam's city of wide streets? Now when your own house and goods are at stake you tremble at the thought of showing your strength against these Suitors! No, dear friend, come take your stand by my side, and watch how I behave, so you know how Mentor, Alcimus' son, repays past kindness in the heart of the enemy ranks.'

Yet despite her words she still withheld from him the power to determine the course of the fight, and continued to test the strength and courage of Odysseus and his noble son. She herself now took the form of a swallow, and flew up to perch on the roof beam of the smoke-darkened hall.

Book 22: 241–309 The fighting continues

Now Agelaus, Damastor's son, Eurynomus and Amphimedon, Demoptolemus, Peisander, Polyctor's son, and wise Polybus rallied the Suitors, being the best and bravest still alive, and it was their lives they fought for. All the rest had been toppled by the shower of arrows from the bow. Agelaus called out urgently to them: 'Friends, this man's invincible grip is weakening now. Mentor has fled after uttering his empty boasts. They are isolated at the threshold. Don't hurl

Notes

your long spears together, but let six of you throw first in hopes that Zeus will let Odysseus be hit, and us win glory. The rest won't matter, once he's down!'

When he had ceased, the six hurled their sharp spears fiercely, but Athena deflected most of them. One hit the doorpost of the great hall, another lodged in the door, and a third man's ash spear tipped with solid bronze struck the wall. All four being untouched by the Suitors' spears, noble long-suffering Odysseus spoke promptly: 'Comrades, let's hurl our spears too, at this crowd of Suitors who hope to add to their other crimes by killing us.'

Taking careful aim, they hurled their spears together, on his command. Odysseus struck Demoptolemus; Telemachus killed Euryades; the swineherd hit Elatus; and the cowherd Peisander. All four bit the dust together snapping at the wide earth and the Suitors retreated to the depths of the hall, while Odysseus and the rest leapt forward to retrieve their spears from the corpses.

Once more the Suitors hurled sharp spears fiercely, and Athena again deflected most of them. One hit the doorpost of the great hall, another lodged in the door, and a third man's ash spear tipped with solid bronze struck the wall. But Amphimedon hit Telemachus a glancing blow on the wrist, and the bronze tip grazed the skin, while Ctesippus' long spear flew over Eumaeus' shoulder above his shield, scratching him, then falling to the ground. Then wise and cunning Odysseus gave the word for his comrades to hurl their sharp spears once more into the crowd of Suitors. Odysseus, sacker of cities, struck Eurydamas; Telemachus killed Amphimedon; the swineherd hit Polybus; and lastly the cowherd skewered Ctesippus through the chest, and exulting over his enemy, shouted: 'You prince of foul abuse, Polytherses' son, you'll never speak your foolish boasts again. Leave fine words to the gods, since they are greater than us by far. Take that as a guest gift, a match for the hoof you threw at godlike Odysseus when he begged through the hall!' So said the herdsman of the spiral horned cattle.

Now Odysseus wounded Agelaus, Damastor's son, with a thrust of his great

Notes

spear at close range, while Telemachus hurt Leocritus, Evenor's son, thrusting his bronze-tipped spear straight through his groin, so that he fell face forward, striking the ground with his forehead. Now from high in the roof Athena held out her fatal aegis, and the Suitors' minds were filled with panic. They fled through the hall like a herd of cattle goaded and stung by the darting gadflies in spring, when the long days arrive. Odysseus and the others, set upon them, like vultures from the mountains, with crooked talons and curving beaks, swooping on smaller birds that skim the plain beneath the clouds. The birds have no defence or means of escape, and men exult at the chase. So they set about the Suitors, striking left and right through the hall. Hideous groans rose from them, as heads were cleft, and the floor was drenched with blood.

Book 22: 310–377 Leoides and Phemius

But Leodes ran forward and clasped Odysseus' knees, and begged with winged words: 'Odysseus, respect the suppliant at your knees: I ask for mercy. I swear I have never wantonly wronged a woman of your house, in word or deed. Instead I tried to restrain others from doing so. But they would not listen, or keep their hands from evil, and so through foolish wantonness they meet a cruel fate. And I, though I am only their innocent priest, will die with them. It is true one gets no thanks for good deeds.'

Resourceful Odysseus gave him an angry look and said: 'If you were really their priest you must often have prayed that the day of my joyful return would be long delayed and that my loyal wife would go with you and bear you children. For that you will not escape a sorry death.'

With this he grasped the sword in his strong hand that Agelaus had dropped on the ground nearby as he fell, and struck Leodes hard on the neck, so that while he was still trying to speak his head bit the dust.

And now the minstrel, Phemius, Terpius' son, whom the Suitors forced to sing, tried to flee his dark fate. He stood by the side door, with the clear-voiced

Notes

lyre in his hands, uncertain whether to slip from the hall, and seat himself by the massive altar of Zeus, God of the Court, where Laertes and Odysseus had burned so many offerings, or whether to run forward and clasp Odysseus round the knees in supplication. He decided the better course was to clasp the knees of Odysseus, Laertes' son, so he set the pyre on the ground between the mixing-bowl and the silver-embossed chair, and rushing forward gripped Odysseus by the knees, and entreated him in winged words: 'Odysseus, respect the suppliant at your knees: I ask for mercy. Sorrow will come to you later if you kill a minstrel who sings for gods and men. I am self-taught, and the god has filled my mind with every kind of song. I am worthy of singing for you, as for a god. Don't be eager to cut my throat. Telemachus, your brave son, is my witness, too, that I never came to sing in your house willingly, but the Suitors dragged me here by force of numbers.'

Royal Telemachus heard his words, and spoke swiftly to his father nearby: 'Wait, don't put an innocent to the sword: and we should spare Medon, the herald, too, who used to care for me as a child in this house. Unless that is Philoetius or the swineherd has already killed him, or he has met with you as you raged through the hall.'

Medon, the wise, heard his words where he lay, covered in a newly flayed ox-hide, trying to evade his fate, by cowering beneath a chair. He rose at once and threw off the hide, then dashed forward and clasped Telemachus round the knees, and entreated him with winged words: 'Here I am, dear boy: stay your hand, and persuade your father to restrain his, lest he wounds me with that sharp bronze in an excess of strength, enraged by the Suitors who ravaged his house and foolishly denied you honour.'

But resourceful Odysseus smiled at him, saying: 'Be calm! My son has saved you so you might know in your heart, and say to others, how much better it is to do good than evil. Now go outside, and sit in the courtyard away from the killing, you and the versatile singer, till I have done what I must in this house.'

Notes

Book 22: 378–432 Eurycleia denounces the disloyal women

At this command, the two of them left the hall, and sat down by the altar of mighty Zeus, glancing from side to side, expecting death any moment. Odysseus too was gazing round the hall to see if any survivors were hiding, trying to escape their dark fate. But he saw that the whole crowd lay covered with blood and dust, like fish, enmeshed in a net the fishermen have dragged from the grey tide, onto the shore of the bay. There they all lie heaped on the sand, gasping for salt water, while the hot sun takes their life. So the Suitors lay there, piled on one another.

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke to his son: 'Telemachus, call Eurycleia, the nurse, here so I can give her my orders.' Telemachus quickly obeyed his brave father, and rattling the door, shouted to Eurycleia: 'Get up, old woman, and come here. You are in charge of the serving-women in this palace. My father has something to say to you. Come, to his call.'

She gave no reply but opened the doors of the great hall at once, and followed Telemachus. She found Odysseus standing among the corpses, spattered with blood and gore, like a lion come from feeding on a farm bullock, his face and chest drenched with blood, a gruesome spectacle. Odysseus was stained like that from head to foot. Yet she, on seeing the pile of bodies weltering in their blood, was ready to shout aloud in exultation at what had been done. Nevertheless Odysseus restrained her eagerness, and spoke to her winged words: 'Old woman, feel joy in your heart, but control yourself, don't shout it out. It is impious to rejoice at the sight of dead men. These men were destroyed by the gods and their own wicked deeds, respecting no one on earth, noble or base, who mingled with them. So by their foolish indulgence they brought on their shameful death. Now, though, name me the women in the halls, and say which ones are faithless and which are innocent.'

Then loyal Eurycleia replied: 'I will tell you it all as it is, my child. You have fifty

Notes

women serving the palace that we trained to slave away at their duties, and carding the wool. Twelve of them behaved shamelessly, without respect for Penelope or for me. Telemachus is only now a man, and his mother would not let him command the women. But let me run to the shining room above, and carry the news to your wife, whom some god has lulled to sleep.'

But resourceful Odysseus replied: 'Don't wake her yet. First, tell the women who behaved shamelessly to come here.'

Book 22: 433–501 Telemachus executes the serving-women

With this, the old woman went through the hall to tell the women the news and order them to appear, while Odysseus called Telemachus, and the cowherd and swineherd, to him, and spoke with winged words: 'Begin carrying out the bodies and tell the women to help, then sponge down the tables and good chairs. When the hall is straight, lead the women out of the house to the place between the round house and the solid wall of the court, and let your long sword take their lives, and their memories of the secret delights of Aphrodite among the Suitors.'

He spoke. Then the women flocked in together, weeping and wailing loudly. They carried the corpses out, and set them down under the portico of the walled yard, propping one against another. Odysseus himself commanded them, and urged them on, forcing them to the work. Then they sponged the tables and good chairs clean. Telemachus, and the cowherd and swineherd scraped the floors of the great hall with spades, and the women threw the refuse outdoors. But when they had set the hall in order, they lead the women out of the great hall to the place between the round house and the solid wall of the court, and penned them up in that narrow space from which none could escape. Then wise Telemachus spoke: 'These women who poured scorn on my mother's head and mine, while they slept with the Suitors, shall not die cleanly.

Notes

So saying, he took a cable from a dark-prowed ship, tied it to a tall pillar, high-up, and noosed it over the round house, so that their feet would not reach the ground. The row of women held up their heads, and the rope was looped round their necks so they might die pitiably, like long-winged thrushes or doves, that are caught in a snare as they try to roost in their thicket, and are welcomed to a grimmer nest. For a little while their feet twitched: but not for long.

Next they dragged Melanthius through the door and into the yard, cut off his nose and ears with the cruel bronze, ripped away his genitals as raw meat for the dogs, and lopped off his hands and feet in their deep anger. Finally, after washing their feet and hands, they returned to Odysseus with the business done.

Odysseus himself spoke to Eurycleia, his faithful nurse: 'Old woman, bring some sulphur, and make a fire, so I can purge the hall from this pollution. And tell Penelope and her maids to come here, and all the palace women.'

'My child,' the loyal nurse replied, 'all you say is fitting. But let me bring you a tunic and cloak to wear. It would be wrong to stand there in your hall with your broad shoulders clothed in rags.'

Resourceful Odysseus answered: 'Let me have that fire in the hall first.' Eurycleia, the loyal nurse, obeyed, and brought sulphur and made a fire. Then Odysseus purged the hall, the yard and the whole palace thoroughly.

The old woman went away then, back through the royal palace, to carry the news to the women and tell them to appear. Out of their hall they ran with torches in their hands. They crowded round Odysseus and embraced him. They clasped his head and shoulders and hands, and kissed them in loving welcome, so that a sweet desire to weep seized him, because he remembered them all in his heart.

Notes

The small print

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