

“Only plain truth shall I tell you, child.
 Great seafarers, the Phaeacians, gave me passage
 as they give other wanderers. By night
 over the open ocean, while I slept,
 90 they brought me in their cutter,^o set me down
 on Ithaca, with gifts of bronze and gold
 and stores of woven things. By the gods’ will
 these lie all hidden in a cave. I came
 to this wild place, directed by Athena,
 95 so that we might lay plans to kill our enemies.
 Count up the suitors for me, let me know
 what men at arms are there, how many men.
 I must put all my mind to it, to see
 if we two by ourselves can take them on
 100 or if we should look round for help.”

90 cutter: a single-masted sailboat.

The Beggar at the Manor

The next morning Telemachus returns home and tells Penelope about his travels but not about his father’s homecoming. Odysseus, disguised again as a beggar, also returns to his own house. No one recognizes him except his faithful old dog, which lifts up its head, wags its tail, and dies. In the great hall, Telemachus permits the “beggar” to ask for food. The suitors give him bread and meat, as is the custom, but one of their leaders, a man named Antinous (an tin’ ō əs), is particularly insulting. He refuses to offer any food, and while Odysseus is talking, he angrily interrupts.

But here Antinous broke in, shouting:

“God!

What evil wind blew in this pest?

Get over,

5 stand in the passage! Nudge my table, will you?
 Egyptian whips are sweet
 to what you’ll come to here, you nosing rat,
 making your pitch to everyone!
 These men have bread to throw away on you
 10 because it is not theirs. Who cares? Who spares
 another’s food, when he has more than plenty?”

With guile Odysseus drew away,^o then said:

12 With guile . . . away: Odysseus is slyly provoking Antinous.



15 “A pity that you have more looks than heart.
You’d grudge a pinch of salt from your own larder
to your own handy man. You sit here, fat
on others’ meat, and cannot bring yourself
to rummage out a crust of bread for me!”

Then anger made Antinous’ heart beat hard,
and, glowering^o under his brows, he answered:

20 “Now!
You think you’ll shuffle off and get away
after that impudence? Oh, no you don’t!”

25 The stool he let fly hit the man’s right shoulder
on the packed muscle under the shoulder blade—
like solid rock, for all the effect one saw.
Odysseus only shook his head, containing
thoughts of bloody work,^o as he walked on,
then sat, and dropped his loaded bag again
upon the door sill. Facing the whole crowd
30 he said, and eyed them all:

“One word only,
my lords, and suitors of the famous queen.
One thing I have to say.
There is no pain, no burden for the heart
35 when blows come to a man, and he defending
his own cattle—his own cows and lambs.
Here it was otherwise. Antinous
hit me for being driven on by hunger—
how many bitter seas men cross for hunger!
40 If beggars interest the gods, if there are Furies
pent in the dark to avenge a poor man’s wrong, then may
Antinous meet his death before his wedding day!”^o

Then said Eupheithes^o son, Antinous:

45 “Enough.
Eat and be quiet where you are, or shamble elsewhere,
unless you want these lads to stop your mouth

19 **glowering**: scowling; looking at angrily.

26–27 **containing thoughts of bloody work**: keeping murderous thoughts under control. Odysseus imagines killing Antinous, but holds his temper.

34–42 **There is . . . wedding day**: A man isn’t really hurt, the beggar says, when he is injured defending his property; but when he is attacked for being hungry, that’s another matter. Odysseus’s curse upon Antinous calls upon the **Furies**—three female spirits who punish wrongdoers—to bring about his death.
43 **Eupheithes** (yoo pē’ thēz)

Vocabulary

impudence (im’ pyə dāns) *n.* speech or behavior that is aggressively forward or rude

pulling you by the heels, or hands and feet,
over the whole floor, till your back is peeled!”

50 But now the rest were mortified, and someone
spoke from the crowd of young bucks to rebuke him:

“A poor show, that—hitting this famished tramp—
bad business, if he happened to be a god.
You know they go in foreign guise, the gods do,
55 looking like strangers, turning up
in towns and settlements to keep an eye
on manners, good or bad.”

But at this notion

Antinous only shrugged.

Telemachus,

60 after the blow his father bore, sat still
without a tear, though his heart felt the blow.
Slowly he shook his head from side to side,
containing murderous thoughts.

Penelope

65 on the higher level of her room had heard
the blow, and knew who gave it. Now she murmured:

“Would god you could be hit yourself, Antinous—
hit by Apollo’s bowshot!”⁶⁸

And Eurynome⁶⁹

70 her housekeeper, put in:

“He and no other?

If all we pray for came to pass, not one
would live till dawn!”

Her gentle mistress said:

75 “Oh, Nan, they are a bad lot; they intend
ruin for all of us; but Antinous
appears a blacker-hearted hound than any.

Vocabulary

mortified (môr' tə fīd') *adj.* deeply embarrassed, shamed, or humiliated
rebuke (ri būk') *v.* to scold sharply; criticize
guise (gīz) *n.* outward appearance; false appearance

68 **Apollo's bowshot:** Among other things, Apollo is the archer god and the god of truth. His sacred silver bow can kill literally with an arrow, and figuratively with the truth.

69 **Eurynome** (yoo rin' ə mē)



Here is a poor man come, a wanderer,
 driven by want to beg his bread, and everyone
 80 in hall gave bits, to cram his bag—only
 Antinous threw a stool, and banged his shoulder!”

So she described it, sitting in her chamber
 among her maids—while her true lord was eating.
 Then she called in the forester and said:

85 “Go to that man on my behalf, Eumaeus,^o
 and send him here, so I can greet and question him.
 Abroad in the great world, he may have heard
 rumors about Odysseus—may have known him!”

85 Eumaeus (yoo mē' əs)

Lively action continues in the great hall, where another beggar attempts to bully Odysseus. Antinous mockingly arranges a boxing match between the two, which Odysseus wins. Telemachus orders the disorderly crowd to leave for the evening. Surprised by his authority, the suitors obey, giving Odysseus and Telemachus time to remove all weapons from the hall as part of their preparation for battle. Then Odysseus goes to meet his wife for the first time in nearly twenty years.

Carefully Penelope began:

90 “Friend, let me ask you first of all:
 who are you, where do you come from, of what nation
 and parents were you born?”

And he replied:

95 “My lady, never a man in the wide world
 should have a fault to find with you. Your name
 has gone out under heaven like the sweet
 honor of some god-fearing king, who rules
 in equity^o over the strong: his black lands bear
 both wheat and barley, fruit trees laden bright,
 100 new lambs at lambing time—and the deep sea
 gives great hauls of fish by his good strategy,
 so that his folk fare well.

98 equity: fairness and justice.

O my dear lady,

this being so, let it suffice^o to ask me
 105 of other matters—not my blood, my homeland.
 Do not enforce me to recall my pain.
 My heart is sore; but I must not be found
 sitting in tears here, in another’s house:

104 suffice: be enough.



Odysseus Reunited with Penelope. Terra-cotta relief. Louvre Museum, Paris.

it is not well forever to be grieving.

110 One of the maids might say—or you might think—
I had got maudlin^o over cups of wine.”

And Penelope replied:

“Stranger, my looks,
my face, my carriage,^o were soon lost or faded
115 when the Achaeans crossed the sea to Troy,
Odysseus my lord among the rest.

If he returned, if he were here to care for me,
I might be happily renowned!
But grief instead heaven sent me—years of pain.

120 Sons of the noblest families on the islands,
Dulichium, Same, wooded Zacynthus,
with native Ithacans, are here to court mē,
against my wish; and they consume this house.

125 Can I give proper heed to guest or suppliant^o
or herald^o on the realm’s affairs?

How could I?

wasted with longing for Odysseus, while here
they press for marriage.

111 **maudlin**: excessively and foolishly emotional.

114 **carriage**: manner of moving or holding the head and body.

124 **suppliant** (sup’ lē ənt): one who humbly begs or requests something.

125 **herald**: court messenger.

Vocabulary

renowned (ri nound’) *adj.* famous; widely known



Ruses^o served my turn

130 to draw the time out—first a close-grained web
 I had the happy thought to set up weaving
 on my big loom in hall. I said, that day:
 ‘Young men—my suitors, now my lord is dead,
 let me finish my weaving before I marry,
 135 or else my thread will have been spun in vain.
 It is a shroud I weave for Lord Laertes^o
 when cold Death comes to lay him on his bier.^o
 The country wives would hold me in dishonor
 if he, with all his fortune, lay unshrouded.’
 140 I reached their hearts that way, and they agreed.
 So every day I wove on the great loom,
 but every night by torchlight I unwove it;
 and so for three years I deceived the Achaeans.
 But when the seasons brought a fourth year on,
 145 as long months waned,^o and the long days were spent,
 through impudent folly in the slinking maids
 they caught me—clamored up to me at night;^o
 I had no choice then but to finish it.
 And now, as matters stand at last,
 150 I have no strength left to evade a marriage,
 cannot find any further way; my parents
 urge it upon me, and my son
 will not stand by while they eat up his property.
 He comprehends it, being a man full grown,
 155 able to oversee the kind of house
 Zeus would endow^o with honor.

129 Ruses: tricks; schemes.

136 It is . . . Laertes: Penelope has claimed to be weaving a burial cloth (shroud) for Odysseus's father.

137 bier: a platform on which a corpse or coffin is placed before burial.

145 waned: drew to an end.

146–147 through . . . night: After outwitting the suitors for more than three years, Penelope is finally betrayed by some of her own sneaky (slinking) maids, who crept into her room at night and caught her in the act of undoing her weaving.

156 endow: provide or equip.

The Test of the Bow

Resigned to ending the suitors' reign over her home, Penelope cries herself to sleep that night, dreaming of the husband she believes is lost forever. The next day the suitors return to the hall, more unruly than ever. Penelope appears, carrying the huge bow that belongs to Odysseus. Her maids follow, bearing twelve iron ax heads. Penelope has a proposition for the suitors.

“My lords, hear me:
 suitors indeed, you commandeered this house
 to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband

Vocabulary

commandeer (kom' ən dēr') *v.* to seize by force or threats