

14

In Eumaeus' Hut

Book Fourteen

A ragged beggar climbs to a hut in the hills and finds in a poor swineherd the hospitality that kings have denied him. Eumaeus shares his bread and his grief, curses the suitors eating his master out of house and home, and listens – half believing, half wary – to a stranger's tall tale of Crete and Troy and Egypt. It is a quiet book of loyalty and disguise, the still centre before the storm to come.

NAME

SET

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BOOK FOURTEEN

In Eumaeus' Hut

The farmstead of the swineherd Eumaeus, where the disguised Odysseus finds a poor man's perfect hospitality – and tests it with a web of invented tales.

WHAT HAPPENS

- Disguised as a beggar, Odysseus reaches the hut of his loyal swineherd Eumaeus, who saves him from the dogs and takes him in.
- Eumaeus feeds him, laments his lost master and rails at the suitors devouring the estate.
- Odysseus tells a long false story – a Cretan adventurer's life – and swears the master will return; Eumaeus, too often deceived, won't believe it.
- Eumaeus kills a hog and honours his guest with the best portion, keeping the rites with care.
- By a tale of a cold night at Troy, Odysseus wins a cloak; Eumaeus goes out to guard his boars through the night.

WHO WE MEET

Odysseus

the beggar-guest, testing loyalties with invented tales

Eumaeus

the faithful swineherd, model of true hospitality

The Suitors

absent here, but the target of every complaint

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 14 is the great study of *xenia* from below: Eumaeus, a slave, keeps the guest-code and honours the gods more faithfully than the highborn suitors ever do. Note Homer's tender direct address to Eumaeus, the second of Odysseus' 'Cretan lies', and the theme of loyalty that runs to the poem's end. **Unprescribed**: read for the story and its essay background, not examined in context.

In Eumaeus' Hut

— TO THE SWINEHERD

Odysseus turned his back on the harbour and followed a rough track leading through the woods and up to the hills towards the place where Athene had told him he would meet the worthy swineherd, who of all the servants Odysseus had acquired had shown himself to
 5 be the most faithful steward of his property.

He found him **sitting in the porch of his hut** in the farmyard, whose high walls, perched on an eminence and protected by a clearing, enclosed a fine and spacious courtyard. The herdsman had made it himself for his absent master's swine, without help from his mistress
 10 or the aged Laertes, building the wall of quarried stone with a hedge of wild pear on top. Outside he had fenced the whole length on both sides with a closely set stockade made of split oak which he had taken from the dark heart of the logs. Inside the yard, to house the pigs at night, he had made twelve sties, all near to one another, in
 15 each of which fifty brood sows were penned, and slept on the ground. The boars slept outside the yard; and of these there were far fewer, since their numbers were constantly reduced by the frequent banquets of the courting noblemen, for whom the swineherd used at regular intervals to send down the pick of his fatted hogs. There
 20 were three hundred and sixty of them. They were guarded every night by four dogs, as savage as wild beasts, trained by the master swineherd.

He himself was busy shaping a pair of sandals to his feet, cutting them out of a piece of good brown leather. Three of his men had gone
 25 in various directions with the pigs to their pastures. He had been obliged to send the fourth to town with a hog for the arrogant Suitors to slaughter and feed on the flesh.

— THE DOGS

Suddenly the baying dogs caught sight of Odysseus and flew at him, barking loudly. He had the sense to sit down and drop his staff. Even
 30 so he would have suffered ignominious injuries then and there, at his own farm, had not the swineherd, letting the leather fall from his fingers, dashed through the gateway, shouted at the dogs and sent them scurrying off in all directions with a shower of stones.

Then he addressed his master. 'Old man, that was a narrow escape!
 35 The dogs would have almost torn you to pieces in a moment, and you would have given me the rough side of your tongue. As though the gods hadn't already given me enough pain and grief! Here I sit, yearning and mourning for the best of masters and fattening his

LINE 6

sitting in the porch of his hut This is Eumaeus, Odysseus' chief **swineherd** and the model of a loyal servant. Though only a slave now, he was born a prince (his story comes in Book 15). He has built this farmstead with his own hands and guards his master's pigs faithfully through all the years of absence.

hogs for others to eat, while he himself, starving as like as not, is lost
 40 in foreign lands and tramping through strange towns – if indeed he
 is still alive and can see the light of day. But follow me, old man, let's
 go to my hut. When you have had all the bread and wine you want,
 you shall tell me where you come from and what your troubles are.'

— A BEGGAR MADE WELCOME

The good swineherd led the way to his hut, ushered Odysseus in and
 45 invited him to sit down on some brushwood that he piled up for him
 and covered with the shaggy skin of a wild goat, large and thick,
 which served as his own mattress. Odysseus was delighted by this
 welcome and thanked him, saying: 'My good host, may Zeus and the
 other gods grant you your dearest wish for receiving me so kindly.'

50 *And you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, said in reply*, 'Stranger, it is not
 right for me to turn away any stranger, even one in a worse state
 than you are, for *strangers and beggars all come in Zeus'* name, and
 a gift from folk like us is none the less welcome for being small.
 Servants cannot make larger gifts when they are always in fear of
 55 their overbearing masters. I mean these new ones; as for my old
 master, the gods have set their faces against his return. He would
 have looked after me properly and given me possessions, a cottage
 and a bit of land, and a wife that any man would be glad to have, as a
 kind master does for a servant who has worked hard for him and
 60 whose work heaven has prospered, as it prospers the job I toil at here.
 Yes, the King would have rewarded me well for this, had he grown old
 in Ithaca. But he is dead and gone. And I wish I could say the same of
 Helen and all her breed, for she has been the death of many a good
 man. My master, you see, was one of those who went to Ilium, the
 65 land of horses, to fight the Trojans in Agamemnon's cause.'

The swineherd broke off, hitched up his tunic under his belt, and
 went out to the sties where the young porkers were penned in
 batches. He selected two, carried them in, and slaughtered them
 both. Next he singed them, chopped them up, and skewered the
 70 meat. When he had roasted it all, he served it up piping hot on the
 spits, set it in front of Odysseus, and sprinkled it with white barley-
 meal. He then mixed some mellow wine in an olive-wood bowl, took
 a seat facing his guest, and encouraged him to eat.

— EUMAEUS' LAMENT

'Stranger,' he said, 'do have some sucking pig, which is all we servants
 75 can offer you. For our fatted hogs are eaten up by the Suitors, who
 have no fear of the wrath to come and no pity in their hearts. Yet the
 blessed gods don't like wicked acts. Justice and fair play are what
 they respect in men. Even bloodthirsty pirates, when they've raided
 a foreign coast and been allowed by Zeus to carry off some loot, are

LINE 50

And you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, said in reply Homer does something rare here: he turns aside to address **Eumaeus** directly, in the second person – 'and you, Eumaeus...'. This device (**apostrophe**) is used for only a few characters, and recurs through the book.

LINE 52

strangers and beggars all come in Zeus Even a poor servant like Eumaeus keeps the hospitality code (*xenia*) perfectly, because he believes **Zeus** himself protects every stranger and beggar. His humble generosity is the deliberate opposite of the suitors' greed.

80 haunted by the fear of retribution as they make for home with their ships full of plunder. So these Suitors must have somehow discovered, maybe through some heaven-sent rumour, that my master has come to a disastrous end – which explains why they will neither pay court to his widow in the regular way nor go home and
85 mind their own business, but sit there instead at their ease and eat up all his livelihood in this high-handed style – no scrimping or saving for them. For I tell you they slaughter beasts every single day and night that Zeus sends, never just one or even two at a time, and they draw and swill wine like water.

90 ‘My master, you see, was enormously rich; there wasn’t a lord on the fertile mainland or in Ithaca itself to touch him. He’s worth more than twenty others rolled into one. Let me give you some idea. On the mainland, twelve herds of cattle, as many flocks of sheep, as many droves of pigs and as many scattered herds of goats, all tended
95 by hired labour or his own herdsmen; while here in Ithaca eleven herds of goats graze up and down the coast with reliable men to look after them. And every one of these men has day by day to choose the best of his fatted goats and drive it in for the Suitors; I too, who tend and keep these pigs, carefully pick out the best and send it down to
100 them.’ While Eumaeus was talking, Odysseus eagerly ate the meat and drank the wine, avidly and in silence, but his brain was teeming with thoughts of what he would do to the Suitors. When he had finished supper and felt satisfied, he filled the bowl he had been using and handed it to his host brim-full with wine. Eumaeus
105 accepted with pleasure and Odysseus now said to him with winged words:

‘Tell me, my friend, who was the man who bought you with his wealth, this lord whom you describe as so exceedingly rich and powerful? You said he had lost his life in Agamemnon’s cause. Tell me
110 his name, describe him – I may find that I know him. Heaven knows whether I can tell you I’ve met him; but I’ve certainly roved all over the world.’

— NO NEWS BELIEVED

‘Old friend,’ answered the master swineherd, ‘no wanderer who comes here and claims to bring news of Odysseus could convince
115 his wife and son. Beggars in need of creature comforts find lying easy, and to tell a true tale is the last thing they want to do. Whenever a tramp comes to Ithaca he goes straight to my mistress and **tells a pack of lies**. She welcomes him graciously and asks him every detail, point by point, while tears of distress stream down her
120 cheeks, as is natural for a woman whose husband has met his end abroad. Even you yourself, old friend, would be quick enough to invent a tale if someone gave you a cloak and tunic to put on!

LINE 118

tells a pack of lies Eumaeus won’t believe good news of Odysseus because so many tramps have played on Penelope’s hopes with lies.

‘As for my master, he is dead and gone: the dogs and the birds of the air must by now have torn the flesh from his bones; or the fish have
 125 eaten him in the sea, and his bones lie there on the shore with the sand piled high above them. Yes, that is how he met his end, and his death has meant nothing but grief for his friends, and for myself above all. For I shall never find so kind a master again wherever I may go, not even if I return to my parents’ house, where I was born and
 130 bred. And much as I grieve for them and long to be back in my own country and set eyes on them again, it is for the lost Odysseus that my heart aches and yearns. Even in his absence I can hardly bring myself to mention his name. He cared for me and loved me dearly. But even though he is far away, I still call him my beloved master.’

135 ‘Friend,’ said the patient, good Odysseus in reply, ‘since you won’t accept what I say, and since you have so little faith that you cannot believe he will ever return, I will not merely state that Odysseus is coming back, I will swear to it. Directly he comes and sets foot in his own house I will claim the reward for the good news and you can
 140 dress me in a fine new cloak and tunic. But till that moment, destitute as I am, I will accept nothing; for I loathe **like the Gates of Hades** the man who is driven by poverty to lie. I swear now by Zeus before all other gods, and by the board of hospitality, and by the good Odysseus’ hearth, which I am approaching, that everything will
 145 happen as I say. This very month Odysseus will be here. Between the waning of the old moon and the waxing of the new, he will come back to his home and will punish all who dishonour his wife and his noble son.’

And you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, said in reply, ‘Old friend, that
 150 reward I will never have to pay, nor will Odysseus ever come home again. Drink in peace and let us turn to other matters. Don’t remind me of my troubles, for I tell you my heart is wrung when anyone reminds me of my dear King. As for your oath, let us forget it. And may Odysseus still come home, as I pray he will, and as Penelope
 155 does, and old Laertes and godlike Telemachus. Ah, there’s another cruel anxiety for me – Odysseus’ son Telemachus. The gods made him grow **like a young sapling**, and I had thought he would become as good a man in the world as his father, a fine-looking man, when suddenly some god or perhaps man deprived him of his wits – and off
 160 he went to holy Pylos on his father’s trail. And now those lordly Suitors are lying in ambush for him on his way home, hoping that godlike Arceisius’ line may be wiped out of Ithaca and the very name be forgotten. Well, we must leave him to his fate, whether they catch him, or whether Zeus stretches out his hand to save him.

165 ‘But now, old friend, you must tell me about your own troubles. Tell me the truth; I want to know everything. Who are you and where do

LINES 141–142

like the Gates of Hades A powerful **simile**: Odysseus swears he loathes a liar ‘like the Gates of Hades’ – that is, as much as death itself – ironic, since he is lying as he says it.

LINE 157

like a young sapling A tender **simile**: Eumaeus remembers the boy Telemachus growing up ‘like a young sapling’.

you come from? What is your city? Who are your family? And since you certainly can't have come on foot, what kind of vessel brought you here? How did its crew come to land you in Ithaca; and who did they claim to be?

— A CRETAN TALE

The inventive Odysseus launched into his story. 'I will give you a true account of all you ask. If only you and I had an endless supply of food and wine, here in the hut, and so could eat in peace while the rest got on with the work! I would find it easy to talk to you for a whole year without coming to the end of my sorrows and all the hardships that the gods have made me endure.

'I am a native of the broad lands of Crete, and the son of a rich man. He had a number of other sons who were born and brought up in the house; but they were the lawful issue of his wife, whereas my mother was a concubine he had bought. In spite of this difference my father, Castor son of Hylax, put me on an equal footing with his legitimate sons. The Cretans of his day respected and honoured him like a god for his good fortune, his riches, and his splendid children, but his time came and Death bore him off to Hades' Halls. His high-handed sons then split up the estate and cast lots for the shares, assigning to me a meagre pittance and a house to match. However, I won a wife for myself from a rich land-owning family on my own merits, for I was neither a fool nor a coward. Now it has all gone, yet I think you will still be able to see by the stubble what the harvest was like.

'since then I have been overwhelmed by troubles, but in the old days Ares and Athene had endowed me generously with the daring that breaks the battle-line; and when it came to planning an attack against the enemy and I had picked my men for an ambush, my proud heart never had a foreboding of death, and I would leap out before all the rest and kill with my spear any enemy who was slower on his feet than I. That was the kind of man I was in battle. But I did not like work on the land, nor the domestic pursuits that make for a fine family of children. What I always loved was ships with oars, and fighting, and polished javelins and arrows – terrible things, which make other people shudder. I suppose that my inclinations were all implanted in me by the gods, for different men find satisfaction in very different ways of earning a living. Anyhow, before the Achaean expedition ever set foot on the coasts of Troy, I had nine times had my own command and led a well-found fleet against a foreign land. As a result, large quantities of loot fell into my hands. From this I used to select what I liked, and a great deal more came my way by lot. In this way my estate increased rapidly and my fellow-countrymen soon learned both to fear and to respect me.

LINE 177

a native of the broad lands of Crete Odysseus spins another false life-story (his 'Cretan lies'): a Cretan lord's bastard son who fought at Troy, raided Egypt and was cheated by a Phoenician. He weaves in real events – and even a 'sighting' of Odysseus – to give Eumaeus hope while keeping his own name hidden.

— AT TROY AND AFTER

‘The time came, however, when all-seeing Zeus devised the dreadful
210 adventure which laid so many men low; and they pressed me and the
famous Idomeneus to lead our ships to Ilium. There was no way of
avoiding it: public opinion was too much for us. So for nine years we
Achaeans campaigned at Troy; and after sacking Priam’s city in the
tenth we sailed for home and our fleet was scattered by a god. But for
215 my unhappy self the inventive brain of Zeus was hatching more
mischief. I had spent only a month in the delights of home life with
my children, my wife and my possessions, when the spirit moved me
to fit out some ships and sail for Egypt with heroic companions. I got
nine vessels ready and the crews were soon mustered.

220 ‘For six days my good men gave themselves up to festivity and I
provided beasts in plenty for their sacrifices and for their own table.
On the seventh we embarked, said goodbye to the broad fields of
Crete and sailed off with a fresh and favourable wind from the North,
which made our going as easy as though we were sailing with the
225 current. Not a single one of my ships came to harm: we sat there safe
and well while the wind and the steersman kept them on their
course. On the fifth day we reached the great River of Egypt, and
there in the Nile I anchored my curved ships. Then I ordered my
good men to stay by the ships on guard while I sent out some scouts
230 to reconnoitre from the heights. But, carried away by their own
violence they went on a rampage, and immediately began to plunder
some of the fine Egyptian farms, carrying off the women and
children and killing the men. The hue and cry soon reached the city,
and the townsfolk, roused by the alarm, poured out at dawn. The
235 whole place was filled with infantry and chariots and the glint of
arms. Zeus the Thunderer struck abject panic into my party. Not a
man had the spirit to stand and face the enemy, for we were
threatened on all sides. They ended by cutting down a large part of
my force with their sharp weapons and carrying off the survivors to
240 work for them as slaves.

‘As for myself, a sudden inspiration saved me – though I still wish I
had faced my destiny and fallen there in Egypt, for trouble was in
store for me. I quickly took off my fine helmet, let the shield drop
from my shoulder, and threw away my spear. Then I ran up to the
245 King’s chariot and clasped and kissed his knees. Moved to pity, he
spared my life, gave me a seat beside him, and so drove his weeping
captive home. Many of his people, of course, were lusting for my
blood and lunged at me with their ash-wood spears, for they were
thoroughly roused; but he kept them away, for fear of offending Zeus,
250 the Strangers’ god, whose wrath is aroused by deeds of cruelty.

— EGYPT AND THE PHOENICIAN

‘I passed several years in the country and made a fortune among the Egyptians, who were generous to me, one and all. But in the course of the eighth, I fell in with a rascally Phoenician, a thieving rogue who had already done a deal of mischief in the world. I was persuaded
 255 by his plausible talk to join him in a voyage to Phoenicia, where he had a house and estate; and there I stayed with him for a whole year. But when the days and months had mounted up, and a second year began its round of seasons, he put me on board a ship bound for Libya, on the pretext of wanting my help with the cargo he was
 260 carrying, but really to sell me for a handsome sum when he got there. Full of suspicions but having no choice, I followed him on board. ‘With a good stiff breeze from the North the ship took the central route south of Crete. But Zeus had planned their destruction. When we had passed Crete, and no other land nor anything but sky and
 265 water was to be seen, he brought a dark cloud to rest above the ship. The sea below it was blackened, Zeus thundered and in the same moment struck the vessel with lightning. The whole ship reeled to the blow of his bolt and was filled with the smell of sulphur. The men were all flung overboard; and round the black hull they floated like
 270 sea-gulls on the waves. There was no homecoming for them; the god saw to that. But in this hour of my affliction Zeus himself thrust into my arms the great mast of the blue-prowed ship, to allow me once again to avoid disaster. I coiled myself round it and became the sport of the accursed winds. For nine days I drifted, and on the tenth
 275 night, in pitch darkness, a great roller washed me up on the coast of Thesprotia, where Lord Pheidon, King of the Thes-protians, gave me hospitality, asking for nothing in return. His own son found me fainting from exposure and exhaustion, pulled me up by the hand, and took me home with him to his father’s palace, where he gave me
 280 a cloak and tunic to wear.

‘It was there that I heard of Odysseus. The King told me that he had entertained and befriended him on his homeward way and showed me what a fortune in copper, gold and wrought iron Odysseus had amassed. The amount of treasure stored up for him there in the
 285 King’s house would keep a man and his heirs to the tenth generation! He added that Odysseus had gone to Dodona to learn the will of Zeus from the great oak-tree that is sacred to the god, and to discover how he ought to approach his own rich island of Ithaca after so long an absence, openly or in disguise. Moreover, he swore in my
 290 presence over a drink-offering in his own house that a ship was waiting on the beach with a crew standing by to convey Odysseus to his own country. But he sent me off before him because a Thesprotian ship happened to be starting for the corn island of Dulichium. He told its crew to treat me well, and take me to Acastus,

LINE 253

a rascally Phoenician The **Phoenicians** were the great traders and seafarers of the age. In Homer they’re usually cast as sharp, greedy dealers – exactly the ‘thieving rogue’ of the beggar’s tale.

LINES 269–270

like sea-gulls on the waves In the tale the drowning crew are tossed on the sea ‘like sea-gulls on the waves’ – a vivid **simile** for men swept helplessly to their deaths.

LINE 286

Dodona Dodona was one of the oldest oracles in Greece, where the will of **Zeus** was read from the rustling leaves of a sacred oak-tree.

295 the King.

‘The crew, however, saw fit to hatch a wicked plot against me, to plunge me deeper still into misery. When the ship on her journey had left land far behind, they set about their scheme to reduce me to slavery. They stripped me of my own cloak and tunic and replaced
300 them with a filthy set of clothes, the very rags, in fact, which you see before you now.

‘They arrived in Ithaca when the fields lay under a clear evening sky. They lashed me down tightly under the ship’s benches with a strong rope, disembarked, and hastily took their supper on the beach. But
305 the gods found no difficulty in untying my knots for me. I wrapped my rags round my head, slipped down the smooth landing-plank, quietly breasted the water, and struck out with both hands. Very soon I was out of the sea and beyond their reach. I then made my way inland to a thicket of flowering shrubs and crouched down in
310 hiding. They searched around for me with a great deal of shouting, but soon decided that nothing was to be gained by prolonging their search, and so climbed on board their ship once more. The gods made it quite easy for me to remain unseen, and ended by guiding my steps to the home of a man of understanding. So then, I am not
315 yet meant to die.’

— STILL UNCONVINCED

And you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, said in reply: ‘My poor friend! You have certainly touched my heart with the story of your hardships and wanderings. It is when you come to Odysseus that you go wrong, to my way of thinking; you won’t get me to believe that. What call is
320 there for a man like you to tell such pointless lies? As though I didn’t know all about my master’s disappearance, and how the gods showed their utter hatred of him by allowing him neither to fall in battle against the Trojans nor to die in his friends’ arms when all the fighting was over. Had he done so, the whole Achaean nation would
325 have joined in building him a mound, and he would have left a great name for his son to inherit. But there was to be no glorious end for him: the Storm-Fiends have spirited him away.

‘As for myself, I am a hermit here with my pigs, and never go to the town, except perhaps when news has arrived from somewhere and
330 the wise Penelope invites me. On such occasions everyone gathers round the newcomer and plies him with questions, whether they are those who are pining for their long-lost King or those who have the satisfaction of eating for nothing at his expense. But I personally have lost all interest in such probing and questioning since the day
335 when a fellow from Aetolia deceived me with his tale. He had killed a man, and after being pursued all over the world found his way to my

door. I received him kindly and he told me that he had seen Odysseus with Idomeneus in Crete, repairing the damage his fleet had suffered in a gale. He said Odysseus would be back, either in the summer or
 340 by autumn, bringing back a fortune and his gallant company. Now a god has brought you to my door, my long-suffering friend, but don't you try to gratify or soothe my heart with any falsehoods. It is not for that reason that I shall respect and entertain you, but because I fear Zeus, the patron of strangers, and pity you.'

345 But the cunning Odysseus persisted. 'You certainly have a very suspicious nature,' he said, 'if not even my oath can bring you round and convince you of the truth. Come, let us make a bargain – with the gods of Olympus as witnesses to us both. If your master comes back to this house, you shall give me a cloak and tunic to wear and
 350 send me on to Dulichium, where I want to go. If on the other hand your master does not return as I say he will, you shall tell your men to throw me over a precipice, just to teach the next beggar not to tell lies.'

'Yes,' cried the honest swineherd, 'and what fame and fortune I would
 355 win for myself in the world, once and for all, if after taking you into my hut and showing you hospitality I was to rob you of your precious life! I would be a willing party to a crime against Zeus, son of Cronos, if I did that. However, it's supper-time, and I hope my men will be in before long, so that we can prepare a tasty meal in the hut.'

— THE EVENING MEAL

360 As they were speaking the herdsmen came up with their pigs. The men drove the animals in batches into their sties to sleep and the air was filled with the grunting of pigs settling down for the night. The worthy swineherd called out to his men.

'Bring your best hog. I want to slaughter it for a guest I have here
 365 from abroad. And we'll enjoy ourselves, after all we've put up with looking after the white-tusked boars all this time, while other people live for nothing off our work.'

He then chopped some firewood with his sharp axe, and his men dragged in a fatted five-year-old hog and held it by the hearth. The
 370 swineherd, who was a good and virtuous man, did not forget the immortals, but began the ritual by throwing a tuft of hair from the white-tusked victim into the fire and praying to all the gods that the wise Odysseus might come back to his home. Then he drew himself up and struck the animal with a piece of oak which he had left
 375 unsplit. The hog fell stunned. They slit its throat, singed its bristles, and deftly cut the carcass up. The swineherd cut pieces from all the limbs *as a first offering to the gods*, placed them with raw fat on the thigh bones, sprinkled them with barley-meal and threw them all on

LINE 377

as a first offering to the gods Notice the proper ritual: Eumaeus burns a first portion for the gods, sets aside a share for the nymphs and Hermes, and gives his guest the choicest cut. Even his simple meal is done with full piety

to the flames. Then they chopped up the rest of the meat, pierced it
 380 with spits, roasted it thoroughly, and after drawing it off the spits
 heaped it up on platters. The swineherd, with his characteristic
 fairness, stood up to divide it into helpings. He carved and sorted it
 all out into seven portions, one of which he set aside, with a prayer,
 for the Nymphs and for Hermes, Maia's son, and distributed the rest
 385 to the company. But he gave Odysseus the portion of honour, the
 hog's long chine.

This courtesy warmed the heart of his master, who turned to him and
 said:

'Eumaeus, I hope Father Zeus will look on you as kindly as I do for
 390 picking out the best portion for "a man like me"'

And you, Eumaeus the swineherd, said in reply: 'Do start, my strange
 guest, and enjoy such food as we can offer. The god will give and the
 god will take away, according to his will, for he can do everything.'
 Then he made a burnt offering to the immortal gods of the piece he
 395 had set aside and, after making a libation of sparkling wine, handed
 the cup to Odysseus, the sacker of cities, and sat down to his own
 portion. They were served with bread by Mesaulius, a servant whom
 Eumaeus had procured for himself during his master's absence,
 acting without help from his mistress or the old Laertes and buying
 400 the man from the Taphians with his own resources. All began to eat
 the good food spread before them, and when they had satisfied their
 hunger and thirst Mesaulius cleared away the food. Sated by now
 with bread and meat they began to prepare for bed.

Night came on, bringing foul weather. There was no moon, rain from
 405 Zeus set in for the night, and the wet West Wind blew hard.
 Odysseus now spoke to them, intending to put the swineherd to the
 test and see whether out of his obvious concern for his guest he
 would take off his cloak and lend it to him, or persuade one of his
 men to do so.

— THE CLOAK STORY

410 'Listen to me,' he said, 'Eumaeus and all of you. **I am going to boast
 and tell you a story.** This is the effect of wine – it makes people do
 crazy things; it sets the wisest man singing and giggling stupidly; it
 lures him on to dance and it makes him blurt out what's better left
 unsaid. However, since I've opened my mouth I might as well go on.

415 'Ah, I wish I were still as young and strong as I was when we led that
 surprise attack against Troy! Odysseus and Menelaus, son of Atreus,
 were the leaders, and at their request I went in with them as third in
 command. When we came up to the frowning city walls we lay down,
 crouching under our armour in the dense undergrowth of marshland

LINES 410–411

I am going to boast and tell you a story

Odysseus drops a broad hint. His 'tale' of a freezing night at Troy – where a clever ruse got a shivering man sent back for a cloak – is really a polite way of angling for a cloak now. Eumaeus takes the hint and lends him one. (He even writes himself into the story as a comrade of 'Odysseus'.)

420 reeds. The North Wind dropped and a cruel frosty night set in. From
overhead the snow came down like hoar-frost, bitterly cold, and the
ice formed thick on our shields. All the rest had cloaks and tunics and
they slept in comfort with their shields drawn up over their
shoulders. But when I started out I had foolishly left my cloak with my
425 men, thinking I wouldn't be cold; and so I joined the party with
nothing but my shield and a bright waistband.

'In the third watch of the night, when the stars had passed their
zenith, I had a word with Odysseus, who was my neighbour. I nudged
him with my elbow. He was all attention. "Son of Laertes, favourite of
430 Zeus, inventive Odysseus," I said, "I shall be a dead man soon. This
cold is killing me, because I've got no cloak. A god tricked me into
coming with nothing but a tunic. And now there's no way out of my
plight." When I put this to him, Odysseus turned it over in his mind
and, like the schemer and soldier that he was, he had an idea, as you
435 will see. "Quiet!" he whispered in my ear. "Don't let any of the others
hear you." Then he raised his head on his elbow and called to the rest:

"Wake up, my friends. The gods have sent me a dream in my sleep.
We have come too far from the ships, and I want someone to take a
message to Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief, to ask if he will
440 send us reinforcements from the base." A man called Thoas,
Andraimon's son, immediately jumped up, threw off his purple cloak,
and ran off towards the ships – leaving me to snuggle down in his
cloak with a grateful heart till Dawn appeared on her golden throne.
Ah, I wish I were still as young and strong as I was then!"

445 And then you, Eumaeus the swineherd, said in reply: ‘Old friend, that is an excellent story you have told us. Not a word was ill-judged – or lost on us! Tonight you shan’t go without clothing or anything else that an unfortunate outcast has the right to expect from those he approaches. But in the morning you’ll have to wrap up in your own
450 rags once more. We have no stock of cloaks here or change of tunics: each man has to manage with a single cloak. But when Odysseus’ dear son arrives, he will give you a cloak and tunic to wear, and send you wherever you have set your heart on going.’

— REST FOR THE NIGHT

The swineherd jumped up, placed a bed for him by the fire and spread
455 on it the skins of sheep and goats. Odysseus lay down and Eumaeus covered him with a great thick cloak, which he kept as a spare garment for exceptionally cold spells.

— EUMAEUS KEEPS WATCH

So there Odysseus slept, with the young farmhands beside him. But the swineherd was **unwilling to sleep there away from his boars**. He
460 got himself ready for a night outside, and Odysseus was delighted to see his diligent concern for his absent master’s property. He began by slinging a sharp sword from his sturdy shoulders. He then wrapped himself in a good thick cloak to keep out the wind, picked up the fleece of a big full-grown goat, and finally took a sharp javelin
465 with which to ward off dogs and men. And so he went off to pass the night where the white-tusked boars slept, under an overhanging rock sheltered from the northerly winds.

LINE 459

unwilling to sleep there away from his boars

One last touch of devotion: even on a filthy night Eumaeus won’t leave the herd, but arms himself and goes out to sleep among the boars, guarding his absent master’s property to the last.

