

16

Odysseus Meets His Son

Book Sixteen

In a swineherd's hut a beggar becomes, for a few moments, a king again. Athene strips away the disguise, and Odysseus stands revealed before the son who last saw him as an infant; they weep like robbed eagles and fall to plotting. Two men against a hundred – but with a goddess at their side, a secret to keep and a hall to disarm. In the town the suitors' murder plot curdles, and a mother's anger holds it back a while longer.

NAME

SET

Translation by E. V. Rieu, revised by D. C. H. Rieu.

BOOK SIXTEEN

Odysseus Meets His Son

Eumaeus' hut, where father and son meet at last. Athene lifts the disguise, the two weep and plot the suitors' downfall, while in the town the foiled suitors debate murder.

WHAT HAPPENS

- Telemachus reaches the hut; Eumaeus welcomes him like a returning son and is sent to tell Penelope.
- Athene restores Odysseus' true form; he reveals himself, and father and son weep and embrace.
- They reckon the odds – 108 suitors against two – and plan to hide the hall's weapons and keep the secret.
- The suitors' ambush ship returns empty; Antinous urges murder, but Amphinomus and Penelope's rebuke stay their hand.
- Eumaeus returns, and Athene turns Odysseus back into the beggar.

WHO WE MEET

Odysseus

revealed to his son, then hidden again

Telemachus

who finds his father and a cause

Antinous & Eurymachus

the ringleaders, plotting murder

Amphinomus

the one suitor with a conscience

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 16 is the emotional hinge of the second half: the recognition of father by son and the forging of their alliance. Note the theme of disguise and revelation, the daunting odds that make divine help essential, the weapons-plan, and the moral shading of the suitors (Antinous against Amphinomus). **Prescribed:** examined in context – know it closely.

Odysseus Meets His Son

— MORNING AT THE HUT

In the hut Odysseus and the worthy swineherd were now preparing their breakfast in the dawn light, after stirring up the fire, and sending the herdsmen off with the pigs to the pastures. As Telemachus approached the hut the baying dogs began wagging their
5 tails, but they did not bark. Odysseus noticed them wagging their tails, and the sound of footsteps also came to his ears. He turned to Eumaeus with winged words: 'Eumaeus, you have a visitor: He must be a friend of yours or someone familiar here, for the dogs are fawning instead of barking. And I can hear his footsteps.'

— TELEMACHUS ARRIVES

10 The last words were not yet out of his mouth when his own son appeared in the doorway. Eumaeus jumped up in amazement and the bowls in which he had been busy mixing the sparkling wine tumbled out of his grasp. Running forward to meet his master, he kissed his forehead, his fine eyes, and both his hands, while the tears streamed
15 down his cheeks. *Like a fond father welcoming back his son* after nine years abroad, his only son, the apple of his eye for whom he has sacrificed much, the admirable swineherd threw his arms round Telemachus the godlike youth and showered kisses on him as though he had just escaped from death.

20 'so you are back, Telemachus, light of my eyes!' he said in tears, and his words flew. 'And I thought I would never see you again, once you had sailed for Pylos! Come in, come in, dear child, and let me feast my eyes on the wanderer just home. We herdsmen see little of you here on the farm: you are always in the town. It seems as though you
25 found it amusing to watch that pernicious gang of Suitors!'

'Just as you say, old friend,' said Telemachus. 'I came here because of you. I wanted to see you myself and find out from you whether my mother is still in the palace or whether she has married again and Odysseus' bed is empty and hung with dusty cobwebs.'

30 'Certainly she is still at home,' said the prince among swineherds. 'She has a patient heart, though her eyes are never free from tears as the slow nights and days pass sorrowfully by.'

As he spoke he took his bronze spear from him, and Telemachus crossed the stone threshold into the hut. At his entrance, Odysseus
35 his father rose to give him his seat. But Telemachus from the other side of the room checked him with a gesture and said:

'Don't get up, stranger. Somewhere in our farm we'll find something

LINE 15

Like a fond father welcoming back his son A warm **simile**: Eumaeus greets Telemachus as a fond father welcomes an only son home after nine years abroad.

to sit on; and here is the man to arrange it.'

So Odysseus sat down again, and the swineherd made a pile of green
 40 brushwood for Telemachus, with a fleece spread on top, and there
 Odysseus' dear son sat down. Eumaeus then put beside them platters
 of roast meat that had been left over from their meal of the previous
 day, and with eager hospitality piled baskets high with bread and
 mixed them some sweet wine in an olive-wood bowl. This done, he
 45 himself sat down opposite the godlike Odysseus, and they helped
 themselves to the good food in front of them. When they had
 satisfied their hunger and thirst, Telemachus turned to the worthy
 swineherd and said: 'Old friend, where does this guest of yours come
 from? Some ship's crew must have brought him here. How did it
 50 happen and who did they claim they were? I am quite sure he didn't
 walk to Ithaca.'

Then you, Eumaeus the swineherd, said in reply, 'My child, you shall
 have nothing but the truth from me. He claims to be a native of the
 large island of Crete and says he has tramped as an outcast through
 55 half the towns in the world – that seems to be his destiny. But quite
 recently he managed to escape from a Thesprotian ship and came to
 my farm here. I will hand him over to you, to deal with as you like, for
 he has decided to throw himself on your mercy.'

'Eumaeus, this is very mortifying to me,' the thoughtful Telemachus
 60 replied.

'How can I possibly receive the stranger in my house? In the first
 place I myself am young and I do not yet have the physical strength
 to cope with anyone who might care to pick a quarrel with me. Then
 again my mother is in two minds whether to stay at home and keep
 65 house for me, out of respect for her husband's bed and public
 opinion, or whether to go away with that one of her Suitors who is
 most distinguished and most lavish with wedding presents.
 However, as the stranger has sought refuge in your home, I will give
 him a good cloak and tunic, a two-edged sword and sandals for his
 70 feet, and send him wherever he wishes to go. But if you want to,
 keep him here at the farm and look after him. I'll send you the clothes
 and all the food he'll need, so that he shan't be a burden to you and
 your men. But I should not like to permit him to come down there
 and meet the Suitors. Their reckless violence goes beyond all
 75 bounds, and if they insulted him, as I fear is likely, that would distress
 me deeply. But it is difficult for a man to do anything single-handed
 against a crowd, however strong he may be. They have an
 overwhelming advantage.'

'I feel sure, my friend,' the steadfast good Odysseus put in, 'that you
 80 will allow me to join in your discussion. My indignation has been

LINE 52

*Then you, Eumaeus the swineherd, said in
 reply* **Apostrophe:** Homer turns aside to
 speak to **Eumaeus** directly – 'then you,
 Eumaeus...' – a device he uses for only a few
 characters.

deeply stirred by what I have learnt from you both of the outrageous conduct of these Suitors, which you, such a fine person, have had to endure. Tell me, do you take this lying down; or have the local people been turned into enemies of yours through hearing an oracle from
 85 the gods? Or have you been let down by your brothers, whom a man can normally rely on in a feud, however deadly it becomes? Ah, I wish I were as young as you or as young as I feel; or that I were the noble Odysseus' son, or Odysseus himself, back from his travels. I would be ready here and now to let anyone cut my head off, if I didn't go
 90 straight down to the palace of Laertes' heir Odysseus and kill the lot of them. And if they did overwhelm me by numbers, single-handed as I would be, I would rather die by the sword in my own house than witness the perpetual repetition of these outrages, the brutal treatment of visitors, men hauling the maids about for their foul
 95 purposes in that lovely house, wine running like water, and those villains gorging themselves, just for the sport of the thing, on and on, and not likely to get anywhere.'

'My friend,' said the thoughtful Telemachus, 'I will tell you the truth of the matter. The people as a whole have no grievance and no hostility
 100 towards me. Nor have I been let down by my brothers, whom a man can normally rely on in a feud, however deadly it becomes. For Zeus has made only sons the rule in our family. Laertes was the only son of Arceisius, and Odysseus of Laertes, while I was the only son who had been born to Odysseus when he left his home – and little joy he had
 105 of me. As a result, the house is infested by our enemies. Of all the island chieftains in Dulichium, in Same, and in wooded Zacynthus, and of all the princes here in rocky Ithaca, there is not one that isn't courting my mother and plundering my house. As for her, she cannot bring herself to the final step of rejecting all the Suitors or accepting
 110 one of them, though she hates the idea of remarrying. Meanwhile they are eating me out of house and home. And they'll soon destroy me. However, this is all in the lap of the gods.'

— EUMAEUS SENT TO PENELOPE

'And now, old friend, will you go quickly down and tell my wise mother, Penelope, that she has me safely back from Pylos. I will wait
 115 here till you return after delivering your message – which is for her ears alone. Let none of the others hear it. There are plenty of them plotting to harm me.'

Then you, Eumaeus the swineherd, said in reply: 'Agreed; understood... A word to the wise! But give me clear instructions on
 120 this point – shall I make one journey of it and tell Laertes the news too? The poor man, for all his great grief for Odysseus, used till lately to keep an eye on the farm and eat and drink with the farmhands when the spirit moved him. But ever since you sailed for Pylos, they

say that he has not so much as taken a bite or a drink, nor cast an eye
 125 over the work on the farm, but sits there moaning and groaning in
 his misery, with the flesh withering on his bones.’

‘That can’t be helped,’ replied the prudent Telemachus. ‘I’m sorry, but
 we can’t do anything for my grandfather just now. If men could have
 anything for the asking my first wish would be for my father’s return.
 130 However, deliver your message and come straight back. Don’t go
 wandering about the countryside after Laertes, but ask my mother to
 send her housekeeper, quickly and secretly. She could tell the old
 man.’

His words spurred on the swineherd, who picked up his sandals,
 135 bound them on his feet and set off for the town. His departure from
 the farm was not unobserved by Athene, who now approached in the
 guise of a tall, beautiful and accomplished woman, and, halting just
 outside the door of the hut, made herself visible to Odysseus, though
 Telemachus did not see her or become aware of her presence; it is by
 140 no means to everyone that the gods grant a clear sight of
 themselves. Only Odysseus and the dogs saw her, and the dogs did
 not bark but ran whimpering in panic to the other side of the farm.
 Athene gestured with her eyebrows; Odysseus saw this, and leaving
 the house went through the walled yard and presented himself
 145 before her. Athene spoke: ‘Son of Laertes, favourite of Zeus,
 Odysseus of the nimble wits, speak now to Telemachus and hide
 nothing so that the pair of you can plot the downfall and death of the
 Suitors, and then make your way to the great town. I will not leave
 you alone for long: I am eager for the fight.’

— THE DISGUISE LIFTED

150 As she spoke, **Athene touched him with her golden wand**. First she
 clothed him in a fresh cloak and tunic, then restored his stature and
 his youthful vigour. His bronze tan returned; his jaw filled out; and
 the beard grew dark on his chin. Her work done, Athene disappeared,
 and Odysseus went back into the hut. His son gave him a look of
 155 amazement, then withdrew his eyes for fear that he might be a god,
 and said with words that were winged: ‘Stranger, you are not the
 same now as before. Your clothes are different; your complexion is
 changed. Surely you are one of the gods who live in the broad sky. Be
 gracious to us, and we will make you pleasing sacrifices and
 160 offerings of wrought gold. Have mercy on us.’

— FATHER AND SON

‘**I am no god**,’ said the patient, good Odysseus. ‘Why do you take me
 for an immortal? But I am your father, on whose account you have
 endured so much sorrow and trouble and suffered persecution at
 men’s hands.’

LINE 150

Athene touched him with her golden wand

Athene lifts the beggar disguise and restores Odysseus to his true, godlike appearance, so that he can reveal himself to his son. The disguise goes back on before anyone else sees him.

LINE 161

I am no god Telemachus’ first reaction is to think this transformed man must be a **god** – a natural guess, since sudden changes of shape are what gods do. Odysseus has to insist that he is only his father, home at last.

165 With that he kissed his son and the tears ran down his cheeks to the ground; till then he had kept a firm control on his feelings. But Telemachus could not yet accept that it was his father, and said, 'You are not my father, you are not Odysseus; some divine power is playing me a trick to make my grief all the more bitter. No mortal

170 man could do such a thing by design, though I know that any god who wished could easily make a man young or old. Only a moment ago you were an old man in shabby clothes, and now you look like one of the gods who live in the wide heavens.'

'Telemachus,' replied the resourceful Odysseus, 'you ought not to feel

175 any excessive surprise at your father's home-coming, or be so taken aback. Be quite certain of this, no second Odysseus will return. No, I am the man, just as you see me, back in my own country in the twentieth year of misfortune and wandering. As for these changes in me, they are the work of the warrior goddess Athene, who can do

180 anything, and make me look as she wishes, at one moment like a beggar and at the next like a young man finely dressed. It is easy for the gods in heaven to glorify or debase a man.'

Odysseus sat down, and Telemachus flung his arms round his noble father's neck and burst into tears. And now a passionate longing for

185 tears arose in them both and they cried aloud piercingly and more convulsively than birds of prey, **vultures or crooked-clawed eagles**, bereaved when villagers have robbed the nest of their unfledged young. So did these two let the piteous tears run streaming from their eyes. And sunset would have found them still weeping, if

190 Telemachus had not suddenly asked his father a question. 'But, my dear father,' he said, 'what ship can have brought you to Ithaca at this time, and who were the men on board? It is obvious that you did not come on foot.'

— THE PLAN

'My son,' said the patient, noble Odysseus, '**I will tell you exactly**

195 **how** it was. The Phaeacians brought me here, those renowned sailors who provide any stranger who lands on their coasts with his passage home. Well, they brought me across the sea on one of their fast ships and landed me in Ithaca – I was asleep the whole time. They gave me splendid presents too, bronze and vast quantities of gold and woven

200 cloth, all of which, with help from the gods, lie hidden in a cave. Finally, I came up here at Athene's prompting so that we could plan the destruction of our enemies. Now count and list them for me one by one, so that I may know exactly who and how many they are. Then I will turn my mind to deciding whether we two could take

205 them on by ourselves or whether we should seek help.'

LINE 186

vultures or crooked-clawed eagles The reunion breaks into a stark **simile**: father and son weep more wildly 'than birds of prey, vultures or eagles, robbed of their young'.

LINES 194–195

I will tell you exactly how Odysseus explains the mystery of his arrival: the **Phaeacians** brought him home by their magic ship, laden with treasure, and set him ashore asleep – which is why no one saw him land.

— COUNTING THE SUITORS

‘Father,’ the prudent Telemachus replied, ‘I have always heard of your great reputation as a fighter in combat and tactician in counsel. But this time you speak of the impossible. I am overwhelmed! Two men could not possibly take on so many determined fighters. There are
 210 not just ten Suitors, or twenty, but many times more than that. I can tell you their strength here and now. **From Dulichium there are fifty-two**, the pick of its young men, with six serving-men. From Same there are twenty-four, and from Zacynthus twenty noblemen; from Ithaca itself a dozen of its best, and with them Medon the
 215 herald, and an inspired minstrel, besides two servants, expert carvers. If we meet them inside the palace in full force, I am afraid it may be you who pay a cruel and terrible price for the outrages you have come to avenge. So think hard about any ally you can find, who will fight heart and soul on our side.’

220 ‘I will tell you,’ said the steadfast Odysseus. ‘Listen carefully; and ask yourself whether Athene with Father Zeus will be help enough, or must I find some other ally.’

‘**The champions you mention are a powerful couple**,’ said the
 225 circumspect Telemachus. ‘They may sit up there in the clouds, but they rule the whole world of men and gods.’

‘And so,’ said the patient, good Odysseus, ‘when the scene is set in the palace for ordeal by battle between us and the Suitors, it will not be long before those two are in the thick of the fight. However, at the first sight of Dawn, you go home and rejoin these arrogant Suitors.
 230 Later, the swineherd will bring me down to the city disguised as a wretched old beggar. If I meet with insults in the house, you must steel your heart to my maltreatment, and even if they haul me out of the place by the feet or throw things at me, you will have to look on and bear it. Talk to them soothingly and ask them to give up their
 235 wild behaviour. They won’t listen to you of course, but their day of judgement is at hand.’

— HIDE THE WEAPONS

‘And here is something else; remember it. When that clever strategist, Athene, prompts me, I shall give you a nod. Directly you see the signal **gather up the weapons of war that are in the hall** and
 240 stow them away in a corner of a room upstairs – all of them – and when the Suitors miss them and question you, you must lull their suspicions with some plausible tale. You can say: “I rescued them from the smoke, since they look quite different from when Odysseus left them and sailed for Troy. The fire had got at them and damaged
 245 them badly. There’s another reason too, a more serious one, which Zeus put in my mind – that you might start quarrelling after drinking

LINES 211–212

From Dulichium there are fifty-two The daunting odds, spelled out: **108 suitors** in all (52 from Dulichium, 24 from Same, 20 from Zacynthus, 12 from Ithaca), besides their servants. Two men against a hundred – which is why divine help is essential.

LINE 223

The champions you mention are a powerful couple The ‘powerful couple’ are **Athene** and **Zeus**. Odysseus is counting on the two of them to even the odds – and, as Telemachus says, gods who rule heaven and earth are ally enough.

LINE 239

gather up the weapons of war that are in the hall The key stratagem: at a signal, Telemachus is to clear the **weapons** out of the great hall and hide them upstairs (keeping just a couple back), with a cover-story about saving them from the smoke. When the fighting starts, the suitors will have nothing to hand.

too much and wound each other, thus spoiling your festivities and disgracing yourselves as Suitors. There's a force in iron that lures men on." But just for us two, leave a couple of swords and spears and
 250 two leather shields ready to hand, where we can make a dash and pick them up. Pallas Athene and Zeus the Wise Counsellor will lull the Suitors when the time comes.

'One more word; pay close attention. If you really are my son and have my blood in your veins, see that **not a soul hears that Odysseus**
 255 is back. Tell neither Laertes, nor the swineherd, nor any of the household staff, nor Penelope herself. You and I alone will discover what the attitude of the women is. And we might also sound out one or two of the men-servants, to find out which are loyal and respect us, and which have no concern for us and look down on you as you
 260 now are.'

'Father,' his noble son replied, 'you will come to know in due course what I'm made of, and I am certainly not stupid. But I feel that we would gain nothing by acting as you suggest and I urge you to think once more. You will waste a lot of time going round the various farms
 265 and sounding out the men one by one, while the Suitors are in our house blithely eating up our stores in their insolent way, stinting themselves of nothing. I certainly think you ought to find out which of the women-servants are guilty or innocent of disloyalty towards you; but, as to the men, I am against going round the farms to sound them out, and would like to postpone that till later, if it is really true that you have had some intimation of the will of Zeus who bears the aegis.' So father and son discussed the situation, and the good ship that had brought Telemachus and his men from Pylos began to approach the harbour of Ithaca. When they reached its deep water
 275 they dragged her up on to the beach. Their eager squires carried off their equipment and removed the valuable gifts to Clytius' house. They then dispatched a messenger to Odysseus' palace to tell the wise Penelope that Telemachus had gone to the country and had ordered them to sail round to the city, so that the good Queen might
 280 not take alarm and start weeping. As it happened, this messenger and the worthy swineherd, conveying the same news to the lady, met on the way. But when they reached the royal palace, the messenger blurted out his news among all the women-servants: 'Your son is back, my Queen!' The swineherd, however, sought
 285 Penelope's own ear and told her everything her son had instructed him to say. His message faithfully delivered, he turned his back on the palace and its precincts and returned to his pigs.

To the Suitors the news came as a shock that cast a gloom over their spirits. They streamed out of the hall through the high-walled
 290 courtyard, and there in front of the gates they held a meeting.

LINE 254

not a soul hears that Odysseus Secrecy above all. Odysseus insists that not a soul must know he is home – not Laertes, not Eumaeus, not even Penelope – for he means to test the household's loyalty himself first.

Eurymachus, son of Polybus, was the first to speak.

‘My friends,’ he said, ‘Telemachus, **in his arrogance, has certainly scored** a success by safely bringing off this expedition that we swore would come to nothing. But come, let us launch the best
295 available ship, collect a crew of oarsmen, and quickly send word to our friends out there that they must come home at once.’

He was still speaking when Amphinomus, turning round, caught sight of their ship from where he sat. She was riding in the deep harbour and he could see some men taking down the sails, others
300 preparing to row her in. He gave a gleeful laugh and called out to the rest: ‘No need to send a message now! They’re back. Some god must have sent them word, or they themselves saw Telemachus’ ship slip by and couldn’t catch her.’

At this the whole company rose and went down to the beach. The
305 crew made haste to drag the black ship up on to land, and eager squires carried their equipment off. The Suitors then went in a body to the place of assembly, where they allowed no one else, young or old, to join them. And there Antinous, Eupeithes’ son, addressed them.

— THE AMBUSH FOILED

310 ‘Damnation take it! **The gods have saved Telemachus from certain death.** All day long we had a succession of scouts posted along the windy heights. We never slept ashore at night, but as soon as the sun set we went on board and stayed at sea till dawn in the hope of catching Telemachus and finishing him off. Meanwhile some god
315 brought him home. Telemachus must not slip through our fingers, but here and now we must think of some way of destroying him. I feel sure that while he lives we shall never bring this business of ours to a satisfactory end. He knows how to think and scheme and the people no longer look on us with any favour at all. I suggest action, before he
320 can call a general Assembly.

‘Mark my words, he won’t relax his efforts one bit, and it will be an angry man who rises up to denounce us and tell them all how we plotted his murder and then failed to catch him. They certainly won’t applaud his recital of our misdeeds. In fact they may do us
325 considerable harm and send us into exile among the foreigners abroad. We must forestall such a move and catch him either in the country well away from the town or on the road. We should then have his property and estates, which we would divide fairly between us, though we might let his mother and her new husband keep the
330 house. But if you disapprove of my suggestion and would rather see him alive and in possession of all his inheritance, I suggest that we no longer meet here, living in luxury at his expense, but that each of

LINES 292–293

in his arrogance, has certainly scored

Antinous is the harshest and most aggressive of the suitors, and their ringleader. Here he openly urges the others to murder Telemachus before he can turn the people against them.

LINES 310–311

The gods have saved Telemachus from certain death

The suitors’ sea-ambush has failed – Telemachus slipped past them in the night – and their warship returns empty-handed. **Antinous** is furious.

us must court the Queen and make his bridal offers from his own house. She could then marry the man who offers the richest gifts and
 335 is her destined husband.'

— AMPHINOMUS SPEAKS

A dead silence followed this speech. It was broken at last by *Amphinomus, the famous son of Lord Nisus* and grandson of Aretias. He was the leading spirit among the Suitors from the corn and grass lands of Dulichium. Penelope found his conversation especially
 340 agreeable, because he was a man of principle. He now began speaking, with their best interests at heart.

'My friends,' he said, 'I am not willing to put Telemachus to death; it is a dreadful thing to spill the blood of princes. Before all else, let us learn the gods' will. If the oracles of almighty Zeus approve the deed, I
 345 will be his executioner myself and urge on the rest of you. But if the gods say no I advise you to hold your hand.' They agreed with what Amphinomus said, and rose straight away, went to Odysseus' palace and sat down on their polished chairs. It was at this moment that a sudden idea came to Penelope – to confront her Suitors in all their
 350 brutal pride. She knew well enough that her son's murder had been plotted in the palace, for Medon the herald had heard of the plot and warned her. So now she gathered her ladies round her and went down to the hall. When she came near her Suitors the great lady drew a fold of her shining veil across her cheeks, took her stand by a pillar
 355 of the massive roof, and, turning on Antinous, lashed him with her tongue:

— PENELOPE'S REBUKE

'Antinous, you're *an arrogant and evil schemer* – and they say that in judgement and eloquence you're the best man among your contemporaries in Ithaca! Now I know you're not. You covetous fool,
 360 how dare you plot against Telemachus' life, showing no compassion to suppliants, even though they are under Zeus' eye. It's sacrilege for someone who has received mercy to plot against someone in need of mercy. Or do you not know that your father once sought refuge here from the fury of the mob, when their blood was up because he
 365 had joined the Taphian pirates on a raid on the Thesprotians, who were at peace with us? They would have killed him, and had his heart out, and helped themselves to his fortune too, had not Odysseus come to his rescue and controlled their violence – Odysseus, at whose expense you are living free, whose wife you are courting, and
 370 whose son you propose to kill. You are causing me great anguish. I command you now to put an end to all this and make the rest obey you.'

Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered the Queen. 'Penelope,' he

LINE 337

Amphinomus, the famous son of Lord Nisus

Amphinomus is the one half-decent man among the suitors – even Penelope thinks well of him – and it is he who talks the others out of murder. He will die with the rest.

LINE 357

an arrogant and evil schemer Penelope,

hearing of the plot, sweeps down and rounds on **Antinous**, reminding them all that Odysseus once sheltered Antinous' own father when a mob wanted him dead.

LINE 373

Eurymachus, son of Polybus, answered the Queen

Eurymachus is the smooth-tongued suitor: all reassurance to Penelope's face, while Homer tells us he is still plotting Telemachus' death.

said, 'wise daughter of Icarius, have no fear. Dismiss these terrors
 375 from your mind. The man does not exist, will not exist, and will
 never be born, who will lay violent hands on Telemachus your son, so
 long as I live and am on earth to see the light of day. I assure you, and
 time will prove it – such a man's black blood would soon be gushing
 round my spear. Didn't Odysseus, the sacker of cities, befriend me
 380 too and often take me on his knees to put a piece of roast meat in
 my fingers and lift the red wine to my mouth? That makes
 Telemachus my dearest friend on earth, and I assure him he need
 have no fear of death at the Suitors' hands. But there is no escape
 from what the gods decree.'

385 These encouraging words were on his lips, but death for Telemachus
 was in his heart. Penelope withdrew to her splendid apartment on
 the upper floor, and there she wept for Odysseus her beloved
 husband till bright-eyed Athene closed her eyes in sweet sleep.

— EUMAEUS RETURNS

That same evening the good swineherd returned to Odysseus and
 390 his son. They had killed a yearling pig and were preparing it for
 supper. Athene had come up to Odysseus, Laertes' son, and touched
 him with her wand, **changing him once more into an old man** in
 filthy clothes. She was afraid that the swineherd would recognize
 him if he saw him undisguised, and being unable to keep the secret
 395 would run down to tell Penelope the news.

It was Telemachus who greeted him: 'So here you are, my good
 Eumaeus! What news in the town? Are those proud Suitors back from
 their ambush? Or are they still out there watching for me on my way
 home?'

400 And you, Eumaeus the swineherd, said in reply: 'It wasn't my
 business to go down to the town and make inquiries about that; I
 was in too much of a hurry to deliver my message and get back here,
 and I had been joined on my way by a messenger whom your crew
 had sent running off to the palace. He was the first to give the news
 405 to your mother. But there's something that I do know, for I saw it
 with my own eyes. On my way back I had climbed up above the town
 as far as Hermes' Hill when I saw a ship coming into our harbour. She
 had a crowd of men on board and a whole armoury of shields and
 two-edged spears. I took it to be them, but I cannot say for certain.'
 410 When the great Telemachus heard this he glanced at his father with a
 smile which he was careful to hide from the swineherd.

They had now finished preparing the meal, so they sat down and
 thoroughly enjoyed their supper together. When their thirst and
 hunger were satisfied they thought of their beds and accepted the
 415 gift of sleep.

LINE 392

changing him once more into an old man

Before Eumaeus gets back, **Athene** turns Odysseus into the ragged old beggar again – the swineherd must not recognise him, in case he cannot keep the secret from Penelope.

