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Athene Visits Telemachus

Book One

Ten years after the fall of Troy, Odysseus still has not come home. He is held captive on a distant island while, back in Ithaca, a crowd of suitors devours his household and pressures his wife to remarry. His son Telemachus, barely more than a boy, has all but given up hope. Then a stranger arrives at the gates, and everything begins to change.

NAME

SET

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BOOK ONE

Athene Visits Telemachus

Ithaca, in the twentieth year of Odysseus' absence. The gods meet on Olympus while his household is eaten alive by the Suitors.

WHAT HAPPENS

- The gods in council resolve at last to bring Odysseus home from Calypso's island.
- Athene goes down to Ithaca disguised as a stranger, Mentès, and is welcomed by Telemachus.
- She rouses him to act: to call an assembly, and to sail in search of news of his father.
- Penelope silences the bard's song of the homecomings; Telemachus asserts himself and sends her upstairs.
- He stands up to the Suitors for the first time, and lies awake, changed, planning his journey.

WHO WE MEET

Telemachus

a boy on the edge of manhood

Athene

his divine mentor, disguised as Mentès

Penelope

the waiting wife, worn by grief

Antinous & Eurymachus

the Suitors' ringleaders

Zeus

who sets the homecoming in motion

WHY IT MATTERS FOR ESSAYS

Book 1 opens the poem twice over, on Olympus and in Ithaca, and sets almost everything in motion: hospitality and its abuse, the Agamemnon parallel, the gods and fate, and the first stirring of Telemachus' courage. A **prescribed** book, examined in context, so know it closely.

Athene Visits Telemachus

— THE PROEM

Tell me, **Muse**, the story of that resourceful man who was driven to wander far and wide after he had sacked the holy citadel of Troy. He saw the cities of many people and he learnt their ways. He suffered great anguish on the high seas in his struggles to preserve his life and bring his comrades home. But he failed to save those comrades, in spite of all his efforts. It was their own transgression that brought them to their doom, for in their folly they devoured **the oxen of Hyperion** the Sun-god and he saw to it that they would never return. Tell us this story, goddess daughter of Zeus, beginning at whatever point you will.

— ON OLYMPUS

All the survivors of the war had reached their homes by now and so put the perils of battle and the sea behind them. Odysseus alone was prevented from returning to the home and wife he yearned for by that powerful goddess, the Nymph **Calypso**, who longed for him to marry her, and kept him in her vaulted cave. Not even when the rolling seasons brought in the year which the gods had chosen for his homecoming to Ithaca was he clear of his troubles and safe among his friends. Yet all the gods pitied him, except Poseidon, who pursued the heroic Odysseus with relentless malice till the day when he reached his own country.

Poseidon, however, was now gone on a visit to the distant **Ethiopians**, in the most remote part of the world, half of whom live where the Sun goes down, and half where he rises. He had gone to accept a sacrifice of bulls and rams, and there he sat and enjoyed the pleasures of the feast. Meanwhile the rest of the gods had assembled in the palace of Olympian Zeus, and the Father of men and gods opened a discussion among them. He had been thinking of the handsome Aegisthus, whom Agamemnon's far-famed son Orestes killed; and it was with Aegisthus in his mind that Zeus now addressed the immortals:

— ZEUS SPEAKS

'What a lamentable thing it is that men should blame the gods and regard us, as the source of their troubles, when it is their own transgressions which bring them suffering that was not their destiny. Consider **Aegisthus**: it was not his destiny to steal Agamemnon's wife and murder her husband when he came home. He knew the result would be utter disaster, since we ourselves had sent Hermes, the keen-eyed Giant-slayer, to warn him neither to kill the

LINE 1

Muse Greek epics always open by calling on the **Muse** (the goddess of poetry) to tell the story – the poet's way of saying the tale comes straight from the gods. 'Resourceful' here translates *polytropos*, 'the man of many turns': the key Odysseus word, the man who survives on his wits.

LINES 7–8

the oxen of Hyperion Hyperion is the Sun-god. Odysseus' crew killed and ate his sacred cattle (the full story's in Book 12), and it cost them their lives. Notice, too, that we're starting twenty years after the war, right in the middle of the action – the technical term for that is *in medias res*, 'into the middle of things'.

LINE 14

Calypso Calypso is a nymph (a minor goddess) whose name comes from the Greek word for 'to hide'. She's kept Odysseus trapped on her island for seven years. The thing he longs for – getting home – has a name of its own: *nostos*, the homecoming.

LINE 22

Ethiopians Homer's **Ethiopians** are a legendary people living at the very edge of the world. The gods like to travel out to enjoy their sacrifices there.

LINE 34

Aegisthus Some backstory you need. While King **Agamemnon** (leader of the Greeks at Troy) was away at the war, **Aegisthus** seduced his wife Clytemnestra and then murdered him when he finally came home. Years later Agamemnon's son **Orestes** grew up and took revenge. The poem comes back to this story again and again.

man nor to court his wife. For Orestes, as Hermes told him, was bound to avenge Agamemnon as soon as he grew up and thought
 40 with longing of his home. Yet with all his friendly counsel Hermes failed to dissuade him. And now Aegisthus has paid the final price for all his sins.'

— ATHENE REPLIES

The goddess of the flashing eyes, Athene, answered him at once: 'Father of ours, Son of Cronos, King of Kings, Aegisthus' end is just
 45 what he deserved. May all who act as he did share his fate! It is for Odysseus that my heart is wrung, the wise and unlucky Odysseus, who has been parted so long from all his friends and is pining on a lonely island far away in the middle of the seas. The island is well-wooded and a goddess lives there, the child of the malevolent **Atlas**,
 50 who knows the depths of all the seas and supports the great columns that hold earth and sky apart. It is his daughter who is keeping the unhappy man from home, grieving. Day after day she does her best to banish Ithaca from his memory with soft, persuasive words; and Odysseus, who would give anything for the mere sight of the smoke
 55 rising up from his own land, can only yearn for death. Yet your Olympian heart is quite unmoved. Tell me, did the sacrifices he made you by the Argives' ships on the plains of Troy find no favour in your sight? Why are you at odds, with Odysseus, Zeus?'

'Nonsense, my child!' replied the Gatherer of the Clouds. 'How could
 60 I ever forget the admirable Odysseus? He is not only the wisest man alive but has been the most generous in his offerings to the immortals who live in the wide heaven. It is Poseidon, Sustainer of the Earth, who is so implacable towards him on account of **the Cyclops**, godlike Polyphemos, the most powerful of the Cyclopes,
 65 whom Odysseus blinded. His mother was the Nymph Thoosa, daughter of Phorcys, Lord of the Salt Sea Waves; and it was Poseidon who gave her this child when he slept with her in her cavern hollowed by the sea. That is why, ever since Polyphemos was blinded, Poseidon the Earth-shaker has kept Odysseus in exile, though he
 70 stops short of killing him. But come now, let all of us here together contrive a plan to bring him home. Poseidon will relent. For he will not be able to struggle on alone against the united will of the immortal gods.'

— ATHENE'S PLAN

Bright-eyed Athene answered him: 'Father of ours, Son of Cronos,
 75 King of Kings, if it is now the pleasure of the blessed gods that the wise Odysseus shall return to Ithaca, let us send our Messenger, **Hermes** the Giant-killer, to the isle of Ogygia, so that he can immediately tell Calypso, the Nymph with the plaited tresses, of our

LINE 49

Atlas **Atlas** is the Titan who holds up the sky. Calypso is his daughter.

LINES 63–64

the Cyclops Here's why **Poseidon** hates Odysseus so much: Odysseus blinded Poseidon's son, the one-eyed giant **Polyphemos** (the famous story, told in Book 9). Homer assumes you already know it.

LINE 77

Hermes **Hermes**, the messenger god, will be sent to set Odysseus free – though not until Book 5. First, Athene goes to work on the son. Books 1 to 4 follow Telemachus, and are nicknamed the *Telemachy*.

unalterable decision that the patient Odysseus must now set out for
 80 home. Meanwhile I myself will go to Ithaca to instil more spirit into
 Odysseus' son and encourage him to call the long-haired Achaeans
 to an assembly and speak his mind to that crowd of Suitors who
 spend their time in the wholesale slaughter of his jostling sheep and
 his shambling cattle with their twisted horns. After that I shall send
 85 him to Sparta and to sandy Pylos to seek news of his father's return.
 It is possible that he may hear of him, and so win the praise of men.'

— DOWN TO ITHACA

This said, Athene bound on her feet her lovely sandals of
 untarnishable gold, which carried her with the speed of the wind
 over the water or the unending land, and seized her heavy spear with
 90 its point of sharpened bronze, the huge long spear with which she
 breaks the ranks of noble warriors when she, the Daughter of the
 mighty Father, is angry with them. She flashed down from the
 heights of Olympus, and on reaching Ithaca she took her stand on
 the threshold of the court in front of Odysseus' house; and to look
 95 like a visitor she assumed the appearance of a family friend, the
 Taphian chieftain **Mentes**, bronze spear in hand.

— THE SUITORS

She found the **insolent Suitors** sitting in front of the door on hides
 of oxen they themselves had slaughtered, playing with counters;
 their squires and pages were busy round them, some blending wine
 100 and water in the **mixing-bowls**, and others carving meat in lavish
 portions and wiping down the tables with sponges before they set
 them ready.

The first to see her was Telemachus the godlike youth, who was
 sitting disconsolate among the Suitors, imagining how his noble
 105 father might come back out of the blue, drive the Suitors headlong
 from the house, and so regain his royal honours, and reign over his
 own once more. Full of these visions he caught sight of Athene and
 set off at once for the porch, ashamed that a stranger should be kept
 standing at the gates. He went straight up to his visitor, grasped his
 110 right hand, took his bronze spear and gave him cordial greetings.
 'Welcome, friend!' he said. 'You can tell us what has brought you here
 when you have had some food.'

With this he led the way and Pallas Athene followed. Once inside the
 lofty hall, he took her spear and put it by one of the great pillars in a
 115 **wooden rack** among the many spears of the patient Odysseus. He
 then conducted her to a beautiful carved chair, over which he spread
 a linen cloth, and seated her there with a stool for her feet. For
 himself he drew up an ornate easy-chair, well away from the crowd of
 Suitors, for fear that his guest might take offence at the uproar, and

LINE 96

Mentes The gods often wander about disguised as ordinary people – so you'd better treat every stranger well, in case one turns out to be a god. Looking after guests like this is called *xenia*, and Zeus himself protects it. It's the great moral test running through the whole poem.

LINE 97

insolent Suitors The **Suitors** are 108 young nobles who've moved into the palace, each demanding Penelope marry him, and eating through Odysseus' wealth every single day. They're wrecking his *oikos* (his household and estate) – hospitality abused on a huge scale.

LINE 100

mixing-bowls The Greeks always watered their wine down. Drinking it neat marked you out as a savage.

LINE 115

wooden rack Textbook hospitality: the weapon is put away safely, the guest gets the best chair, and food comes first with questions saved for afterwards.

120 finding himself in such ill-mannered company turn with distaste from his meal. Moreover, he wished to question him about his absent father.

— THE FEAST

Presently a maid came with water in a fine **golden jug** and poured it out over a silver basin for them to rinse their hands. She then drew a
125 polished table to their side, and the faithful housekeeper brought some bread and set it by them with a choice of delicacies, helping them liberally to all she could offer. Meanwhile a steward served them plates of various meats he had selected from his board, and put gold cups beside them, which a steward filled with wine as he passed on
130 his frequent rounds.

— TELEMACHUS CONFIDES

The Suitors came swaggering in and sat down in rows on the seats and chairs. Their squires poured water on their hands and the maids put piles of bread in bowls beside them, while the pages filled the mixing-bowls to the brim with wine. They helped themselves to the
135 good things spread before them; and when all had satisfied their hunger and thirst, the Suitors turned their thoughts to other activities, music and dancing, which add to the pleasures of a banquet. A herald brought a beautiful lyre and handed it to **Phemius**, the minstrel whom they had forced into their service. He had just
140 struck the first notes for some delightful song, when Telemachus spoke to bright-eyed Athene, with his head close to hers so that the others could not hear:

‘Friend, will you be angry if I say something? How easy it is for that gang over there to think of nothing but music and songs! They are
145 living free off another man – a man whose **white bones** are rotting in the rain upon some distant land or rolling in the salt sea waves. One glimpse of him in Ithaca, and they’d pray for a faster pair of legs rather than gold or rich clothes! But as it is, he has come to some dreadful end. No one on earth can bring us a spark of comfort by
150 telling us that he’ll come back. The day for that is gone for ever.

‘But tell me honestly who you are and where you come from. What is your native town? Who are your parents? And since you certainly cannot have come on foot, what kind of vessel brought you here? How did the crew come to land you in Ithaca, and who did they claim
155 to be? And tell me the truth – I’d like to know – is this your first visit to Ithaca, or has my father received you before – he used to entertain in our house just as often as he visited abroad.’

— THE STRANGER'S TALE

‘I will tell you everything honestly,’ answered the bright-eyed

LINE 123

golden jug This washing-and-feasting description comes back almost word for word all through the poem. Repeated set pieces like this are called **type-scenes** – oral poets performed from memory and built their poems out of reusable blocks.

LINE 138

Phemius **Phemius** is a bard – a professional singer of tales – forced to perform for the Suitors. Homer’s own poems were performed exactly like this, so the scene is really showing us how it was done.

LINE 145

white bones Telemachus pictures his father’s body lying unburied somewhere. For the Greeks this was a horror: no burial meant no rest for the dead and no memorial to keep their name alive.

goddess Athene. 'My father was the wise prince Anchialus. My own
 160 name is Mentès, and I am chieftain of the sea-faring Taphians. As for
 my arrival in Ithaca, I came with my own ship and crew across the
 wine-dark sea. We are bound for the foreign port of Temesa with a
 cargo of gleaming iron, which we mean to trade for bronze. My ship
 is not berthed near the city, but over there by the open country, in
 165 Rheithron Cove, under the woods of Neion. As for our families, the
 ties between them go a long way back, as the old lord Laertes would
 tell you if you went and asked him. For I gather that he no longer
 comes to the town, but lives a miserable existence on his distant
 farm with an old woman-servant, who puts his food and drink before
 170 him when he has tired himself out by dragging himself up and down
 his vineyard on the hill.

'The reason for my presence here is this. I actually heard that he, was
 home – I mean your father. But the gods must be hindering his
 return, because the good Odysseus is not dead, but alive somewhere
 175 on this earth. He must be on some distant island out in the sea, in
 the hands of enemies, savages no doubt, who keep him there by
 force. Now I am no seer or soothsayer, but I will venture on a
 prophecy to you which the immortal gods put into my mind. I am
 certain it will come true. Your father will not be exiled much longer
 180 from the land he loves so well, not even if he's kept in iron chains. He
 will think of a way to return – he is endlessly resourceful.

'But are you really Odysseus' son? How you have grown! You
 certainly have his head and fine eyes. The likeness is startling to one
 who met him as often as I did, though that was before he and the
 185 other great men of Argos all set out for Troy in their hollow ships.
 From that day to this, Odysseus and I have never set eyes on each
 other.'

'My friend,' answered the courteous Telemachus, 'I will be honest too.
 My mother certainly says I am Odysseus' son; but for myself I cannot
 190 tell. No man can be certain of his parentage. Ah, if only I were the
 son of some lucky man overtaken by old age among his own
 belongings! As it is, and since you ask me, the man whose son they
 say I am is the most unfortunate man that ever lived.'

'And yet,' said the goddess of the flashing eyes, 'with Penelope for
 195 your mother, I cannot think that your house is doomed to an
 inglorious future. But here is another matter I should like you to
 explain. What is the banquet for? Who are all these people? How are
 you, concerned? Is it a private dinner or a wedding feast? Obviously
 these men have not brought their own food. At any rate these
 200 banqueters in your house strike me as domineering and insolent.
 Any decent man would be disgusted at the sight of such disgraceful
 behaviour.'

LINE 162

wine-dark sea Probably the most famous phrase in all of Homer. Stock descriptions like this are called **formulas** (and 'bright-eyed Athene' is an **epithet**, a fixed nickname) – more of oral poetry's reusable building blocks.

LINE 163

gleaming iron A little glimpse of real ancient trade: sailing a cargo from port to port and swapping one metal for another, iron for bronze.

LINE 166

Laertes **Laertes** is Odysseus' father – still alive, worn down by grief, and scraping a living out on his farm.

LINE 182

How you have grown! Odysseus left for Troy when Telemachus was still a baby, so the boy has never actually known his father.

— TELEMACHUS EXPLAINS

‘My friend,’ the courteous Telemachus replied, ‘you may well ask. There was a time when this house was by way of being prosperous and respectable, when Odysseus was still among us. But since then, the gods have had other and more sinister designs; and they have served him as they never served a man before: they have made him vanish. His death itself, if he had fallen among his men at Troy or died in friendly arms at home with all his fighting done, would have caused me less distress. For in that case the whole Achaean nation would 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 famous end for him; the Storm-Fiends have snatched him away. He has gone where he cannot be seen or found and to me has left nothing but sorrow and tears. Nor is it only on his account that I am sighing and grieving, for the gods have gone on piling other troubles on my head. Of all the island-chieftains in Dulichium, in Same, and in wooded Zacynthus, all the nobles in rocky Ithaca, there is not one that isn’t courting my mother and wasting my property. As for her, though she hates the idea of remarrying, she cannot bring herself to take the final step of rejecting all the Suitors or accepting one of them. Meanwhile they are eating me out of house and home. And they will very soon destroy me too.’

Pallas Athene was moved. ‘How disgraceful!’ she cried. ‘O how you miss your father, how much you need him to lay hands on this dissolute mob! If only he could show himself at this moment at the palace gates, with his helmet, his shield, and his two spears, just as he was when I first saw him, drinking and in happy mood in our house, that time he came up from Ephyre after a long visit to Mermerus’ son Ilus. He had sailed there in search of a deadly poison to smear on the bronze tips of his arrows, and Ilus, a god-fearing man, refused to supply him; but my father, who loved him dearly, gave it to him. Yes, if only Odysseus, as he then was, could confront these Suitors, there’d be a quick death and a sorry wedding for them all. But such matters, of course, lie in the lap of the gods. They must decide whether or not he’s to come back and settle accounts in his palace.’

— ATHENE’S ADVICE

‘Meanwhile I do urge you to find some way of ridding the house of these Suitors. Listen carefully to what I suggest. Tomorrow morning call the Achaean lords to Assembly and announce your decision to them all, asking the gods to witness what you say. Tell the Suitors to leave and go home. As for your mother, if she is set on marrying, let her go back to her father’s house. He is a man of consequence, and the family will arrange a marriage and see that she has a generous dowry, as is only right for a beloved daughter.’

LINES 211–212

a great name A key idea: *kleos* means glory – your name living on in stories after you die. A heroic death at Troy would have won Odysseus *kleos* and a proper tomb, and his son would have inherited the fame. Simply vanishing gives the family nothing.

LINE 213

Storm-Fiends These are the **Harpies** – snatching wind-spirits, blamed whenever someone disappeared without trace.

LINE 217

Dulichium Along with Same, Zacynthus and Ithaca, this island makes up Odysseus’ small kingdom. Every one of them has sent Suitors.

LINE 230

deadly poison Poisoned arrows were looked on as underhand, so the god-fearing Ilus refused to supply any.

LINE 239

call the Achaean lords to Assembly Athene’s first step: call a public meeting (an assembly) and shame the Suitors in front of everyone. This happens in Book 2. (‘Achaean’ is simply Homer’s word for the Greeks.)

LINES 243–244

a generous dowry If Penelope remarries, she goes back to her father Icarus, who arranges the match and the wedding gifts. Marriage here was really a deal between families.

245 'For yourself, here is my advice. It is sound, and I hope you will take it. Choose your best ship, man her with twenty oarsmen, and set out to inquire after your long absent father. Someone may be able to tell you about him, or you may pick up one of those rumours from Zeus that so often turn out to be true. [Go to Pylos first](#) and question the

250 excellent Nestor; then on to Sparta to see auburn-haired Menelaus, since he was the last of the bronze-armoured Achaeans to reach home. If you hear that your father is alive and on his way back, you should reconcile yourself to a year more of this wastage. But if you hear that he is dead and gone, return to your own country, build a

255 mound with all the proper funeral rites, and give your mother in marriage to a new husband. This settled and done, you must think of some way of destroying this mob in your house, either by cunning or in open fight. You are no longer a child: you must put childish thoughts away. Have you not heard what a name Orestes made for

260 himself in the world when he killed the cunning Aegisthus for murdering his noble father? You, my friend – and what a tall and splendid young man you have grown! – must be as brave as Orestes. Then future generations will sing your praises.

'But my crew must be tired of waiting for me, and I must now go to

265 my good ship. I leave the matter in your hands. Think over what I have said.'

'Sir,' said the thoughtful Telemachus, 'you have spoken to me out of the kindness of your heart like a father talking to his son; and I shall never forget your words. Though you are anxious to be on your way,

270 stay a little longer so that you can bathe and refresh yourself. Then you can go to your ship in a happy frame of mind, taking with you as [a keepsake](#) from myself something precious and beautiful, the sort of present that one gives to a guest who has become a friend.'

'No,' said the bright-eyed goddess. 'I am eager to be on my way; do

275 not detain me now. As for the gift you kindly suggest, let me take it home with me on my way back. Make it the best you can find, and you won't lose by the exchange.'

— ATHENE DEPARTS

The goddess spoke and the next moment she was gone, [vanishing like a bird](#) through a hole in the roof. In Telemachus' heart she had

280 implanted spirit and daring, and had brought the image of his father to his mind even more strongly than before. He felt the change and was overcome with awe, for he realized a god had been with him. Then, godlike himself, he rejoined the Suitors.

— PENELOPE APPEARS

He found them listening in silence to a song which their famous

LINE 249

[Go to Pylos first](#) Athene's second step: sail off and question the Trojan War veterans – **Nestor** at Pylos (Book 3), then **Menelaus** and Helen at Sparta (Book 4).

LINE 272

[a keepsake](#) Guest-gifts (*xeinía*) sealed a friendship between two households, and the bond was passed down to your children. Offering one shows Telemachus knows the rules.

LINES 278–279

[vanishing like a bird](#) Gods often leave in the form of a bird, and the strange exit half-gives-away who the visitor really was. Athene has put *menos* into Telemachus – a sudden surge of courage and fighting spirit.

285 bard was singing to them about the Achaeans' return from Troy and the disasters that Pallas Athene made them suffer. In her room upstairs, Penelope, the gracious daughter of Icarius, took in the words of his stirring ballad and came down from her quarters by the steep staircase, not alone, but with two waiting-women in attendance. When she came near her Suitors the great lady drew a fold of her **shining veil** across her cheeks and took her stand by a pillar of the massive roof, with one of her faithful maids on either side. Then, bursting into tears, she broke in on the inspired minstrel.

295 'Phemius,' she said, 'with your knowledge of the ballads that poets have made about the deeds of men or gods you could enchant us with many other tales, rather than this. Choose one of those now for your audience here, and let them drink their wine in peace. But give us no more of your present song. It is too sad; it never fails to wring my heart. For in that catastrophe no one was dealt a heavier blow than I, who pass my days in mourning for the best of husbands, the man whose name rings through the land from Hellas to the heart of Argos.'

— TELEMACHUS TAKES CHARGE

But the prudent Telemachus intervened. 'Mother,' he said, 'why grudge our loyal bard the right to entertain us as the spirit moves him? Surely it is not the poets who are responsible for what happens, but Zeus himself, who deals with each of us toilers on earth as he sees fit? We cannot blame Phemius if he chooses to sing of the Danaan's tragic fate, for it is always the latest song that an audience applauds the most. You must be brave and nerve yourself to listen, for Odysseus is not the only one who has never returned from Troy. Troy was the end of many another man. So go to your quarters now and attend to your own work, **the loom and the spindle**, and tell the servants to get on with theirs. Making decisions must be men's concern, and mine in particular; for I am master in this house.'

315 Penelope was taken aback, but she retired to her own apartments, for she took her son's sensible words to heart. Attended by her maids, she went upstairs to her bedroom, and there she wept for Odysseus, her beloved husband, till bright-eyed Athene closed her eyes in sweet sleep.

320 Meanwhile in the shadowy hall the Suitors burst into uproar, and each man voiced a prayer that he might sleep with her.

— FACING THE SUITORS

But the thoughtful Telemachus called them to order. 'Gentlemen,' he cried, 'from you who court my mother this is sheer insolence. For the moment, let us dine and enjoy ourselves, but quietly, for it is a

LINE 291

shining veil Respectable women covered themselves with a veil and brought maids along when they appeared in front of men. Penelope always does everything properly.

LINE 312

the loom and the spindle Telemachus sends his mother back upstairs to her weaving, telling her that speaking out is 'men's business'. In this society weaving and the household were the woman's sphere, while speech and public decisions were the man's. He's echoing, almost word for word, what the hero Hector says to his wife in Homer's other poem, the *Iliad*.

325 lovely thing to listen to a minstrel such as we have here, with a voice like a god's. But in the morning I propose that we all take our places in assembly, so that I can announce my demand that you quit my palace. Yes, you can feast yourselves somewhere else and eat your provisions in each other's homes. But if you think it a sounder
330 scheme to destroy one man's estate and not make restitution, then eat your fill, while I pray that Zeus will bring a day of reckoning, when in this house I, will destroy you –, and not make restitution.'

— ANTINOUS SPEAKS

It amazed them all that Telemachus should have the audacity to adopt this tone, and they could only bite their lips. But at last **Antinous**,
335 Eupheithes' son, spoke up in answer: 'It is obvious that the gods are teaching you this bold and haughty way of speaking. Being your father's son, you are heir to this island realm. Heaven grant that you may never be its king!'

'Antinous,' the prudent Telemachus answered, 'it may disappoint you
340 to learn that I would gladly accept that office from the hands of Zeus. Perhaps you argue that nothing worse could happen to a man? I on the contrary, maintain that it is **no bad thing to be a king** – to see one's house enriched and one's authority enhanced. However, the Achaeans are not short of princes; young and old they swarm in sea-
345 girt Ithaca. And since the great Odysseus is dead, let one of them, succeed him. But I intend at least to be master of my own house and the servants whom my royal father won for me in war.'

— EURYMACHUS SPEAKS

This time it was **Eurymachus** son of Polybus who answered him: 'Telemachus, the gods must of course decide who is to be our king in
350 sea-girt Ithaca. But by all means keep your own belongings and rule your own house. I pray that no one comes and lays violent hands on your property, as long as there are people in Ithaca. But, my dear Telemachus, do tell us something about that guest of yours. Where did the man come from? What account does he give of his country?
355 Who might his people be? And what is his native land? Does he bring news of your father's coming, or is he here on business of his own? He looked distinguished, but he jumped up and was gone so suddenly that he gave one no time to get to know him.'

'Eurymachus,' the sensible Telemachus replied, 'it is certain that my
360 father will never come back. So I no longer believe any rumours whatever their source, nor have I any use for the skill of such diviners as my mother may call in for consultation. As for my guest, he is an old friend of my father from Taphos. He introduced himself as Mentès, the son of wise Anchialus, and chieftain of the sea-faring
365 Taphians.' This is what Telemachus said, but in his heart he knew her

LINE 334

Antinous Meet **Antinous**, the nastier of the Suitors' two ringleaders – and the first of them to speak in the poem.

LINE 342

no bad thing to be a king There's a real question here: after twenty years with Odysseus gone, it isn't actually settled who should be king of Ithaca. Kingship didn't just pass automatically from father to son.

LINE 348

Eurymachus **Eurymachus** is ringleader number two – smoother and slipperier than Antinous. His 'friendly' questions about the stranger are really an interrogation.

for an immortal goddess.

— NIGHTFALL

From then till dusk they gave themselves up to the pleasures of dancing and the delights of song. Night fell and found them still revelling but at last they went off to bed, each to his own house.

370 Telemachus, busy with his thoughts, retired to his own bedroom, a lofty chamber in the fine courtyard with a clear view on every side. He was escorted by the faithful **Eurycleia**, who carried a blazing torch. This Eurycleia was the daughter of Ops and granddaughter of Peisenor. Laertes had procured her at his own cost long ago, when
375 she was still a girl, for the price of twenty oxen. He had treated her in his home with all the respect due to a loyal wife, though for fear of his wife's displeasure he had not slept with her. It was she who now served as torch-bearer to his grandson; and she who of all the household women loved him most, for she had nursed him as a child.

380 Telemachus threw open the door of his solidly built room, sat down on the bed and took off his soft tunic, which he put in the wise old woman's hands. After folding it and smoothing it out, she hung it on a peg by the wooden bedstead and withdrew from the bedroom, pulling the door to by the silver handle and shooting the bolt home by
385 means of its leather thong. And there, all the night long, under his woollen blanket, Telemachus lay planning in his mind the journey that Athene had suggested.

LINE 372

Eurycleia Eurycleia is the old nurse, bought long ago by Laertes for twenty oxen (a high price, showing how valued she was). She raised Odysseus and then Telemachus, and her loyalty pays off in Book 19, when she recognises the disguised Odysseus by an old scar.

