

CHARACTERS

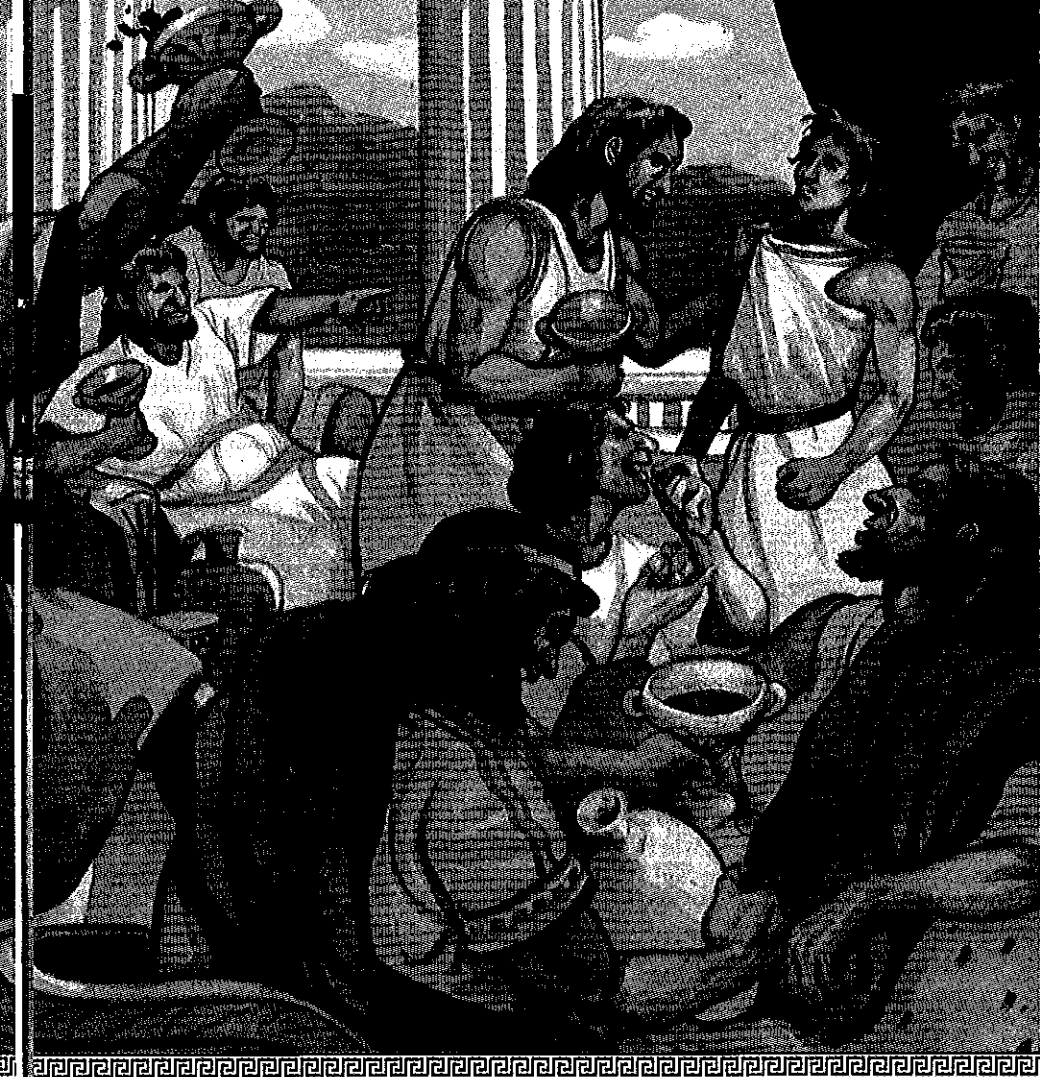
Narrators 1, 2

Antinous (an-TIN-oh-us),*Penelope's suitor***Telemachus** (te-LEM-e-kus),*son of Odysseus***Eurymachus** (yoo-RIM-e-kus),*Penelope's suitor***Clarisse**, a servant girl

Old Nurse

Penelope, faithful wife of*Odysseus***Athena**, goddess of wisdom and*prudent warfare*

Helen of Troy, Menelaus' wife

Menelaus (men-e-LAY-us), king of*Sparta***Zeus** (ZOOS), Athena's father and*ruler of the gods***Odysseus** (oh-DIS-ee-us), Greek*hero of the Trojan War***Eumaeus** (yoo-MAY-us), a swine-*herd*

RETURN OF THE HERO

by
Catherine
Gourley

SCENE 1

Narrator 1: On the ancient Greek island of Ithaca, Penelope's suitors linger all day in the banquet hall. They

drink wine and feast on Odysseus' sheep and goats.

Narrator 2: Raucous, they challenge one another to javelin and discus

throws in the gardens. They abuse the servants and treat Penelope's son, Telemachus, with contempt.

Antinous: (to Telemachus) Come here, boy. Fetch me something to eat.

Telemachus: Get your hands off me.

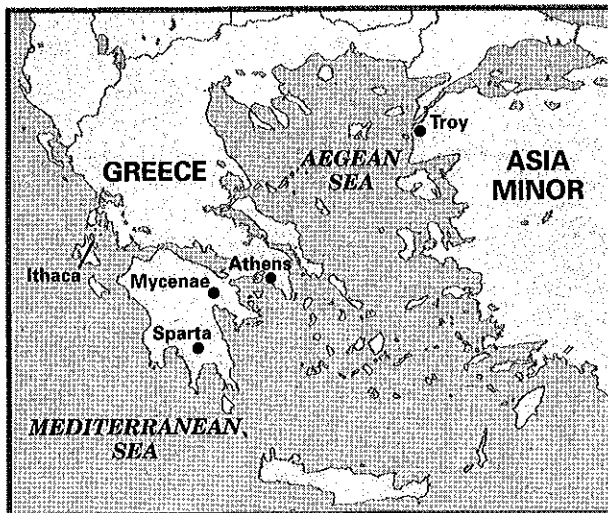
Antinous: Be careful how you speak to me, boy. Any day now I shall become your father.

Telemachus: You? You are nothing like my father. Odysseus is an honor-

able man; you are a shameless free-loader.

Eurymachus: (laughing) He's right, Antinous. I will marry Penelope as soon as she finishes weaving that holy shroud.

Telemachus: You are no better than he is. You butcher my father's oxen. You burn his wood, drink his wine. You roll dice in the courtyard without regard for my mother. If Odysseus was



here, he'd sweep you all out with the goat droppings.

Eurymachus: But Odysseus is not here.

Antinous: Such big talk for such a little man. Dreaming of a hero father who is long dead. It is not *his* wine anymore. We have a right to take what we want.

Telemachus: Do *not* push me, Antinous. I am the master of this house now.

Antinous: Ooooh. I'm frightened.

Narr 1: Antinous grabs a servant girl and pulls her in front of him as a shield.

Antinous: Ooooh. Save me!

Narr 2: The others in the courtyard laugh uproariously. Telemachus clenches his fists and fumes but does nothing.

Clarisse: Don't tease him, Antinous. He's just a boy.

Telemachus: I am the son of Odysseus.

Narr 1: Antinous roughly grabs Telemachus by the front of his tunic.

Antinous: So, you are master. Prove it. Force your mother to choose a husband or, as the law states, I shall send her back to her father's house where she belongs.

Telemachus: I will not force her to

choose. Nor will you.

Antinous: There is little you can do to stop me from getting what I want, little master.

Narr 2: Feelings of anger and helplessness fill Telemachus until his hands shake.

Eurymachus: Now look what you've done, Antinous. (*sarcastically*) The master of the house is going to cry!

Telemachus: (*with cold fury*) I swear by the gods, one day you'll pay for your insults.

SCENE 2

Narr 1: That night in Penelope's chambers, the old nurse brings out the shroud that Penelope has woven during the day.

Narr 2: Penelope has put off her suitors by saying she cannot marry until she has woven an exquisite burial shroud for Odysseus' father, who has recently died. For a while, her clever plan works.

Old Nurse: They treat your son as if he were their slave. They grow more overbearing each day and more impatient for you to finish the shroud.

Penelope: I detest them.

Nurse: As do I, Mistress, but I fear for your safety.

Penelope: Only you know my secret, old friend. Do not give me away.

Nurse: I would die first. Soon they will get wise to your weaving during the day and unraveling the same threads at night. They are fools who bide their

time swilling wine and gorging on platters of roast meats. But soon their hunger will be for other things.

Penelope: By then Odysseus will return.

Nurse: Why do you insist that he will return? It has been ten years since the war's end.

Penelope: So, you have given up hope too? Like the others?

Nurse: Your son was in the cradle when Odysseus left 20 years ago, and not a word have you heard from him since.

Narr 1: The old nurse is about to say more but thinks better of it.

Penelope: What is it? What were you going to say? Tell me.

Nurse: The others on the island gossip that you are too proud to remarry.

Penelope: For them life goes on, but I am frozen in grief. Their warriors have returned from the war, but mine has not.

Narr 2: A scuttling noise beyond the curtain silences Penelope. Quickly, the nurse draws back the fabric, but no one is there. Still, when the nurse speaks again, she does so in whispers.

Nurse: If those boorish men learn your secret, what will happen to us?

Penelope: I don't know. I'll think up a new diversion to keep them out of my bedchamber.

Narr 1: Furiously, Penelope begins again to unravel the threads.

Penelope: I am afraid too. But not for me. For Telemachus. He is no longer a boy who can be hushed into submission.

Nurse: Just this morning in the courtyard, Antinous humiliated him in front of the others.

Penelope: I fear they will harm Telemachus if he opposes them.

Nurse: And he will, if he is anything like his father.

SCENE 3

Clarisse: She has tricked you, Antinous. I was behind the curtain. I saw her tearing out the threads.

Antinous: So, our little Penelope is as cunning as her husband once was.

Narr 2: He cups the girl's face in his hand.

Antinous: You have done well, and now I must claim my bride.

Narr 1: Eurymachus spies his rival hurrying away, and he grabs the servant girl's arm.

Eurymachus: What has happened? Where does he go?

Clarisse: To Penelope.

Eurymachus: Why? What have you told him?

Clarisse: The grieving widow is far more clever than you think. Penelope has no intention of marrying you or anyone.

Narr 2: Eurymachus pushes past her and follows Antinous to Penelope's chambers. Telemachus stands as the suitors approach. Behind him, his mother weaves her shroud on a large loom.

Telemachus: What is this intrusion? These are my mother's private chambers.

Antinous: Get out of the way. I have something to say to the widow of Odysseus.

Narr 1: Telemachus does not move. Angrily, Antinous grabs him with both hands and shoves him into the loom. It crashes to the floor.

Narr 2: The loom's wooden frame is broken. Telemachus sprawls among splintered wood and threads of wool. Penelope kneels beside him as the old nurse charges Antinous with a stick.

Nurse: Get out of here! Get out of here at once, you wild boar!



Penelope: (*whispering, to Telemachus*) Hold your temper, my son. Do not fight them. Not here. Not now.

Antinous: The time has come, Penelope. I know of your trickery. There will be no more shroud.

Narr 1: Other suitors have charged into the room. Penelope rises and faces them.

Penelope: You are right. In my grief I have deceived you all.

Telemachus: Mother, please, do not do this. Do not give in to them.

Eurymachus: We demand what is rightfully ours by the law.

Penelope: If Odysseus is truly dead, then by the law I must remarry.

Telemachus: He is not dead.

Penelope: (*turning*) My son, how do we know? We do not. My nurse, the woman who has cared for me since my childhood, counseled me well last night. Twenty lonely years have passed since last I saw my husband and not a word of him.

Narr 2: The old nurse stares in surprise at her mistress. Telemachus pushes himself to his feet.

Penelope: It is time to put grief away. I will remarry. But is this the proper way for you to court a lady of family? Have you no breeding?

Narr 1: Antinous and Eurymachus look at each other with contempt.

Penelope: What do you offer me in marriage? I will choose but only after deciding which of you is the most generous. (*she leaves*)

Narr 2: Telemachus stares after her a moment, then turns to the suitors.

Telemachus: My mother longs to know the truth about my father's sad fate. Which one of you will do the honorable thing and supply me with a ship and men to take the oars?

Eurymachus: For what good? To chase down whispers and rumors?

Antinous: It is another of their tricks. He wants only to round up some of Odysseus' old warrior friends to make trouble for us.

Telemachus: After the hospitality we have shown you, the least you can do is help me learn whether my father is dead or alive.

Antinous: There will be no ship and no voyage, little master. But I promise you this—there *will* be a marriage.

SCENE 4

Narr 1: Dejected, Telemachus wanders along the beach. He prays to the



goddess Athena for some direction.

Narr 2: The goddess of battle has long admired Odysseus. Hearing the desperate cries of the hero's son, she disguises herself as Mentor, an old and trusted friend of the family. She crosses the sand to where the boy is brooding.

Athena: Your silent fury solves nothing.

Telemachus: What more can I do, Mentor? I cannot fight them. There are too many. (*bitterly*) Son of the hero. Do you have any idea how difficult it is to live up to a father's reputation? A father I've never known!

Athena: Each of us has our own strengths, Telemachus.

Telemachus: Strengths? What strengths have I? None! I shall never measure up to Odysseus.

Athena: Not if you sit idly waiting for the gods to pity you. You are no longer a child. Take action. King Menelaus might know something of your father. Go to him.

Telemachus: Mentor, you are an old man, a fool. Am I to swim across the sea? Or perhaps I should walk on top of the water to get there?

Athena: If I can get you a ship, are you man enough to captain the crew?

Telemachus: Yes, of course, but how can you—

Athena: Shhh. I have my ways. I'm not the old man you think I am.

Telemachus: (*excitedly*) We must wait until night so no one suspects that I have gone. I don't trust them, not one of them.

Athena: You see? Already you are thinking like the son of a hero.

Narr 1: During the night, Telemachus sneaks away with provisions. Still disguised as Mentor, Athena is waiting with a ship and crew. They set sail for Sparta.

Narr 2: Meanwhile, in Penelope's bedchamber . . .

Nurse: You misunderstood my words last evening. I did not mean for you to marry one of those oafs.

Penelope: (*smiling*) Nor, sweet nurse, do I.

SCENE 5

Narr 1: In Sparta, King Menelaus welcomes the strangers into his home, as is the custom.

Telemachus: (*whispering to Athena*) Mentor, I have never seen such a magnificent place. The great hall of Zeus on Mount Olympus could not be any grander than this!

Athena: (*smiling to herself*) Oh, perhaps just a bit more grand.

Narr 2: The king motions for Telemachus and Mentor to sit. A few moments later, Helen enters.

Narr 1: She is the woman for whom the Trojan War was waged. She is the woman for whom Odysseus left home and fought.

Narr 2: Telemachus can't help but stare. Despite 20 years, she is still beautiful, though a sadness fills her eyes.

Helen of Troy: You are the son of Odysseus. You have your father's eyes. I would know you anywhere.

Telemachus: I know nothing of Odysseus except the stories my mother has told me.

Menelaus: Oh, what a man your father was! The Trojans had a name for him—the trickster! He moved through the night as silent as fog.

Helen: The last time I saw Odysseus, he had fooled the Trojan guards into thinking he was an old beggar. Covered with bruises and wearing rags, he slipped inside the city gates and got secret information.

Menelaus: Soon after, he thought up the trick of the Trojan Horse. For those who hid inside, it was certain death should the Trojans discover them. Without your father, we could not have taken Troy. Nor would I have my wife beside me now.

Narr 1: Helen sighs and casts her glance away, and Telemachus wonders if perhaps she wishes the war had turned out differently. Perhaps his father is alive but does not wish to return.

Telemachus: What happened to Odysseus after the war?

Menelaus: I heard he was a prisoner of the nymph Calypso on her island in the Mediterranean Sea. But that was a long time ago.

Telemachus: I must know the truth.

Helen: The truth, Telemachus, is that we have no free will. Our fate is in the hands of the gods.

Narr 2: Athena, sitting in disguise beside Telemachus, raises her chin and regards Helen.

Athena: (to herself) You are still a proud woman, Helen. It is your flaw.

SCENE 6

Narr 1: That evening, Athena returns to Mount Olympus and sits before her father, Zeus.

Athena: I have come to ask that you release Odysseus. His life has been made wretched. He sits for hours gazing at the empty sea, longing for a woman he cannot forget and a son he has yet to know.

Zeus: Sentimental mortals. All of them. Calypso is beautiful. She has offered him immortality, yet he cares not. He is arrogant. He killed Poseidon's son, and for that he must pay.

Athena: Then reward Penelope for her faithfulness. Reward the son who struggles to become a man. Give her back her husband. Give the son his father.

Zeus: Why do you intercede on their behalf?

Athena: Because not only mortals are sentimental. You cared for Odysseus once. You still do.

Zeus: It is you I care about. For you, I shall release him.

Narr 2: Athena returns to Telemachus, appearing to him in a dream as her true self, the goddess of battle and of wisdom.

Athena: The gods favor you, Telemachus. Calypso no longer controls your father. Even now, he sails for Ithaca. Go quickly. He needs your help.

Telemachus: (waking) Mentor?

Narr 1: Roughly, Telemachus shakes the old man's shoulder.

Telemachus: Wake up, Mentor. We must return to Ithaca.

Athena: (as Mentor) Now? But it's just midnight.

Telemachus: Yes, now. My father is alive!

SCENE 7

Narr 2: On the island of Ithaca, Penelope's suitors have presented their gifts of marriage. Antinous proves the most generous. That angers the servant girl, Clarisse, for she herself is in love with Antinous.

Antinous: Let's drink to the wedding.

Eurymachus: Yours? Or mine?

Clarisse: Look at you, getting fat on olives and goat cheese while Telemachus slips from your hands.

Eurymachus: (alarmed) What?

Antinous: Do you see now why I am the better man to be Penelope's mate? I knew the sad-eyed boy had sailed off, and I am glad. One less obstacle in the way.

Eurymachus: No, this is trouble.

Antinous: Not if we see to it he never comes back.

Clarisse: What are you going to do?

Antinous: Why should you care?

Narr 1: Hurt, Clarisse turns away, but she continues to listen.

Eurymachus: What are you planning?

Antinous: When his ship returns, he'll find a little surprise waiting for him in the harbor.

Eurymachus: It is a shivery thing to kill a prince of royal blood.

Antinous: And it is a powerful man who will inherit Odysseus' wealth. Did you think it was Penelope's beauty that brought me here? Don't be a fool. She is an old woman.

Eurymachus: (suspiciously) Why tell me this?

Antinous: Because together we will kill the prince and divide Odysseus' wealth.

Narr 2: The two men raise their goblets in silent agreement.

SCENE 8

Narr 1: A man lies facedown on the beach. The surf washes over his legs. A woman approaches the body and gently rolls the man onto his back.

Narr 2: His face is grizzled and burned from the sun and salt water, but he is alive. He squints at the face leaning over him.

Athena: You are home, Odysseus. Your years of wandering have ended.

Odysseus: (hoarsely) No, it is a trick. Another trick. Where is he? Poseidon has cast me upon this shore. (struggles to sit up)

Athena: Shhhh. Listen to me. This is your homeland, Ithaca.

Narr 1: The man's eyes focus on Athena's face.

Odysseus: Who are you?

Athena: A friend, though there are others on this island you cannot trust.

Odysseus: Penelope? Where is my wife?

Athena: No man has taken your honored place, but even now the suitors are plotting against your wife and your son.

Odysseus: Dogs! I'll kill them all.

Athena: Think, Odysseus. Cleverness has saved your life before. You once put on beggar's rags and fooled the Trojan army. Surely you can fool these greedy rogues.

Odysseus: (smiling) Yes. Perhaps it is time I became "nobody" again.

SCENE 9

Narr 2: Disguised as a beggar, Odysseus goes to a swineherd's cottage.

Eumaeus: Who's there?

Odysseus: Just a hungry, tired old tramp.

Eumaeus: Hospitality is the mark of

a civilized man. Enter.

Narr 1: Odysseus sits on a goatskin and eats from a bowl.

Odysseus: What place is this?

Eumaeus: Ithaca, home of the great Odysseus.

Odysseus: I have heard of him. He's the one the Trojans called the trickster.

Eumaeus: He was a great hero, but his journey home was more dangerous than the Trojan swords.

Odysseus: He was lost at sea?

Eumaeus: No one knows. His home is in ruins. Greedy men have taken advantage of his wife.

Odysseus: Will no one come to her aid?

Eumaeus: No one believes Odysseus is alive.

Odysseus: If he were, would you fight by his side?

Eumaeus: Oh, yes! We were good friends once.

Odysseus: You? A swineherd and a hero were good friends?

Eumaeus: Do you insult me in my house?

Narr 2: Odysseus throws off his beggar's robe to reveal a scar on his leg.

Odysseus: What do you make of this?

Eumaeus: What the—why, only one person has that mark. I remember the day the wild boar gored the boy.

Odysseus: It was painful.

Eumaeus: My lord, is it really you?

Narr 1: The old man kneels before Odysseus.

Odysseus: Stand up, old friend.

Eumaeus: I'd give my life for you.

Odysseus: You may have to.

SCENE 10

Narr 2: Before dawn, Telemachus' ship nears Ithaca. The fog is as thick as lamb's wool.

Narr 1: Suspecting that some danger may await him, Telemachus rows to shore alone. He quietly steals toward the swineherd's cottage.

Telemachus: (*nodding to the beggar asleep in the corner*) Who is he?

Eumaeus: (*grinning*) An old friend.

Telemachus: Someone I can trust?

Eumaeus: I'm not sure. (*kicks the beggar*) Wake up, old man. Someone here wants to question you. (*to Telemachus*) I will leave you alone with him while I tell your mother that you have arrived safely.

Narr 2: Odysseus sits up and wraps his beggar's robe around himself.

Telemachus: Where do you come from?

Odysseus: Across the sea. The swineherd told me who you are and of the troubles in your house. If I were the son of a hero, I would rather die fighting than be so disgraced by worthless men.

Telemachus: I'm no coward. But I'm no fool, either. I have my mother's well-being to think of.

Odysseus: Then you are wise. (*hesitates*) I know your mother. And I know you, though it has been many years since I last saw you.

Telemachus: (*eagerly*) And did you know Odysseus as well? Did you fight with my father at Troy?

Odysseus: Yes, I fought at Troy.

Telemachus: Will you fight for him again? Here?

Odysseus: I will fight for you, my son.

Narr 1: Odysseus casts off his robe. The man standing before Telemachus is broad-shouldered with muscled arms and calves.

Odysseus: I am your father, Telemachus. I've come home.

Telemachus: (*drawing his sword*) This is a trick!

Odysseus: (*laughing*) Come here, Telemachus. I am Odysseus.

Narr 2: Odysseus embraces him.

Telemachus: Is it really true? How long I have dreamed of this day! Now we'll make the freeloaders pay for their crimes against us. In blood!

Odysseus: It is grisly work. Are you up for it?

Telemachus: It'll be two against a hundred, but I will not fail you.

SCENE 11

Narr 1: In the banquet hall, the suitors are dozing contentedly after their midday meal.

Narr 2: When a beggar appears at the door, the old dog lying nearby lifts its head and wags its tail.

Narr 1: Odysseus recognizes the dog as the faithful pet he bred 20 years earlier, before leaving for Troy. The dog is too feeble now to drag itself to him.

Eurymachus: Look there. The old cur seems to know the beggar.

Narr 2: To avoid arousing suspicions, Odysseus walks past. At once, the dog lays down its head and dies.

Antinous: Throw the beggar out. We have no room in this place for his old rags.

Odysseus: Have you forgotten that hospitality to a stranger is a practice demanded by Zeus himself?

Clarisse: Are you out of your mind, talking to your betters like that? Go sleep with the pigs.

Odysseus: If Telemachus heard you, lady, he'd tear you limb from limb.

Clarisse: Telemachus has fled and abandoned all claims to this place.

Odysseus: I see. I ask only for a bite to eat, and then I shall move on.

Antinous: Something to eat, is it?



Why didn't you say so?

Narr 1: He pushes Odysseus' face into the goat cheese. Everyone laughs.

Eurymachus: How about a little wine with your meal?

Narr 2: He lifts a skin of wine and pours it over the beggar's head.

Narr 1: At that moment, Telemachus enters.

Telemachus: I see the freeloaders are generous with the food they steal from me. (*firmly*) Let the tramp go.

Antinous: You!

Narr 2: Just then Penelope enters the hall, wearing a veil of mourning over her face. Her beauty and poise quiet the men.

Penelope: Nurse, give the beggar a tub of rose water so he can wash. (*to beggar*) You are welcome here. This is my house still.

Odysseus: Kind lady, I knew your husband.

Penelope: (*sadly*) Tell me no more un-

less you know where he is now.

Antinous: (*mocking the beggar*) Kind lady. Ha! (*angrily*) You encourage us one day and put us off the next. It is time for you to decide.

Penelope: I am like the nightingale that wails for its lost child. I do wish to remarry, but I must submit to the law of the land. Telemachus, bring me your father's bow.

Eurymachus: Why, no man can string that bow but Odysseus himself.

Penelope: Telemachus has returned without my husband, so I must now accept that he is dead.

Odysseus: Kind lady, he is nearer than you think.

Penelope: If only I could believe you. (*to suitors*) Hear me, my lords. He who strings the bow and shoots an arrow through 12 rings in a line will become my husband tomorrow.

Narr 1: As Penelope leaves, the nurse kneels at the beggar's feet with her pan of scented water.

Odysseus: The lady is shrewd as well as kind.

Narr 2: The nurse spies the scar on the beggar's leg and cries out, spilling the water.

Odysseus: Nurse, you know my secret. Shhh. Not another word.

Narr 1: The nurse lowers her face, hiding her joy from the others.

SCENE 12

Narr 2: That evening, the men celebrate in anticipation of the contest. Telemachus joins them, encouraging them to drink and eat more. When they have finally passed out on the goatskins, he moves silently through the hall, gathering their weapons.

Narr 1: In the morning, Telemachus

sets the 12 rings in order, placing them exactly in line. He holds up the bow and a quiver of arrows.

Telemachus: Who will be the first to compete for the wealth of Odysseus? You, Eurymachus?

Narr 2: Eurymachus glances about, uncomfortable at going first. Then finally, he steps forward.

Eurymachus: Give me the bow.

Narr 1: He strains but cannot string the bow. It is too stiff.

Telemachus: And now you, Antinous. Are you truly worthy to be my father?

Antinous: A wise man uses his brain as well as his brawn. First, I'll soften the wood.

Narr 2: The crowd presses close to watch as Antinous rubs hot wax into the bow.

Antinous: Now, stand back.

Narr 1: He winces, groans, pushes, and pulls. The bow does not bend.

Antinous: (*turning on Telemachus*) This is some trick! What have you done to the bow?

Odysseus: (*stepping forward*) Can an old beggar try?

Telemachus: Give him the bow.

Antinous: This is an outrage!

Telemachus: Give him the bow!

Narr 2: Odysseus bends the bow and strings it as easily as a musician plucking a lyre. He grins at the amazed crowd.

Odysseus: Now, let me see if an old beggar who sleeps with the pigs can hit the mark.

Narr 1: He lets the arrow fly. It sings cleanly through the 12 rings.

Narr 2: At once, Antinous draws his sword. The other suitors frantically reach for their weapons and are horrified to discover that they have disappeared.



Antinous: More of their tricks! Kill the beggar, I say! The boy is mine!

Narr 1: Telemachus draws his sword as well. He has no tears in his eyes now.

Telemachus: Odysseus is alive. Show him, Father.

Narr 2: In one quick movement, Odysseus throws aside his robe, draws a second arrow, and aims it at Antinous.

Odysseus: It is time to pay for your crimes.

Narr 1: The crowd is silent. Antinous stares at the arrow. At last, he drops his sword.

Antinous: Show mercy, Odysseus. (*kneels*) I beg you. I thought you were dead.

Odysseus: You rob me. You harass my wife. You plot to kill my son. I have no mercy for the likes of you.

Narr 2: He lets go the arrow. It pierces Antinous's throat. Clarisse cries and runs to him.

Odysseus: Who is next? You, Eurymachus?

Narr 1: Eurymachus cowers on the floor. Odysseus turns to Clarisse.

Odysseus: You?

Narr 2: She raises her head.

Clarisse: I am guilty, my lord. I have betrayed my mistress.

Narr 1: She waits, but Odysseus lowers his bow.

Odysseus: (*to Eumaeus*) Get her out of here. She'll hang for her betrayal. (*to suitors*) The contest is over. All of you, leave here at once.

SCENE 13

Narr 2: In Penelope's chambers . . .

Penelope: Do not tease me.

Nurse: But I tell you, I saw the boar's scar. It is he!

Telemachus: (*appearing in the door*) It is true, Mother. We have defeated the suitors!

Narr 1: Telemachus steps aside, and Odysseus comes into the room.

Penelope: Odysseus? Perhaps it is you, and yet after 20 years, you are a stranger to me.

Odysseus: We share a secret, my lady. Your bed has one solid leg made from the trunk of a tree. I made it myself for you. It is impossible to move, it is so heavy.

Penelope: (*smiling*) Leave us alone now, Telemachus. In time I will know if this is your father.

Narr 2: Telemachus smiles as he leads the nurse away. ❧