

## Book Two

Inspired by Athena, Telemachus calls a council of all the men of Ithaca. He asks them how they can stand idly by and allow his mother's hospitality to be abused. Antinous, one of the ringleaders of the suitors, brazenly puts the blame on Penelope, for not choosing one of them as husband.

"She has even resorted to trickery," claims Antinous. "At first she said she'd choose among us just as soon as she finished her weaving. But she secretly unraveled it every night."

Hot words are exchanged, and Zeus sends an omen. Two eagles swoop down on the congregation, tearing cheeks and necks with their talons. A wise man interprets this as impending doom for the suitors.

In closing, Telemachus asks his countrymen to fit him out with a ship so that he might seek news of his father.

Back in his own hall, Telemachus is greeted by Antinous, who suggests that they share a feast together just as they did when Telemachus was still a boy. Telemachus replies that he'll see him dead first. The other suitors mock the young man for his fighting words.

Seeking out his aged nursemaid, Eurycleia, Telemachus instructs her to prepare barley meal and wine for the crew of his ship. He makes her swear an oath that she will not tell his mother of his departure until he is ten days gone.

That night a sleek black vessel crewed by twenty oarsmen goes out to sea, with Telemachus and Athena, his godly patron in disguise, seated in the stern.

## Book Eight

The next morning King Alcinous addressed an assembly of his people: "My guest's name is still unknown to me, but I have promised him passage home. Therefore prepare our fastest ship. When all is done, let the crew join me and my nobles for a banquet at the palace."

To entertain the banqueters, Alcinous summoned his minstrel, Demodocus. This bard could sing of all life had to offer, having himself been favored with the gift of song but cursed with blindness. And Demodocus' chosen theme that day was the Trojan War.

He began by singing of Achilles and Odysseus, and this brought tears to that hero's eyes. He managed to hide them by burying his face in his cloak, though the king heard his sobs.

He spoke up at once: "Demodocus, put aside your harp for now. It is time for athletics."

And so the Phaeacians did their best to impress their guest with the discus, foot races and wrestling. And indeed their feats were prodigious. At length they noticed that Odysseus himself was well-muscled and fit. Perhaps he would care to join their contest?

Odysseus replied that he had other things than sport on his mind. But one of the competitors, a sailor like all the Phaeacians, took this as an excuse. "No doubt he's been to sea," he sneered, "but only as a purser."

The hero's eyes went cold. He picked up a discus and threw it with such a rush of wind that the Phaeacians hit the deck. It landed far beyond their own best shots.

## Book Three

Dawn finds the travelers at Pylos, in the kingdom of Nestor, who at the age of ninety led a contingent in the Trojan War. Telemachus asks the wise old king to tell him how and where his father died, for he cannot help but assume the worst. In reply, Nestor tells what he knows of the Greeks' return from Troy.

"It started out badly because of Athena's anger. She caused dissension between our leader Agamemnon and his brother Menelaus. Menelaus was for setting sail immediately, while Agamemnon insisted that a sacrifice be held first to pacify the goddess. In the end, half the army left while the others remained with Agamemnon.

"Those of us who sailed with Menelaus made good speed at first, but then we were at each other's throats again. One group, under Odysseus, broke off and rejoined Agamemnon. I'm sure that even in Ithaca you've heard what eventually happened to him."

"To Agamemnon? Yes," responds Telemachus. He knows that the great king's wife fell in love with another. Together they murdered Agamemnon upon his homecoming. Then, seven years later, he was avenged by his son, Orestes.

"But tell me, Nestor, if you will, why did Menelaus not slay his brother's killer with his own hand and throw his body to the dogs?"

Nestor explains how the fair winds that brought that first party of Greeks safely home from Troy failed Menelaus. A storm blew him all the way to Egypt. There he lingered, unable to return home until it was too late.

"Journey to Sparta," suggests Nestor. "Seek further news from Menelaus. I will loan you a chariot and one of my sons to accompany you."

And so in the morning, after participating in a sacrifice to Athena, Telemachus sets out for the kingdom of Menelaus.

## Book Seven

Odysseus waited in the grove as instructed and then entered the city of the Phaeacians. When he asked directions to the palace, it was Athena in the form of a little girl who showed him the way.

The king and his courtiers were banqueting in this splendor, but Athena wrapped Odysseus in a mist so that he passed by unseen. Straight up to the queen he went and wrapped his huge arms around her knees.

"Blessings upon you and this company," he said, "if you but grant my plea -- safe passage to my homeland." With this he rose and sat down again in the ashes of the fire.

"Tomorrow shall be a holiday," declared the king. "And when we have made sacrifice to the gods and entertained our visitor, we will give thought to speeding his journey home."

## Book Four

Telemachus and Nestor's son are welcomed by King Menelaus with great hospitality. Queen Helen immediately recognizes Telemachus as the spitting image of Odysseus.

"You must be the boy he left behind when he took ship for Troy -- all because of me and my mad passion for Trojan Paris. Aphrodite's curse was already wearing off when last I saw your father. What a man! I'll never forget his daring and his guile.

These reminiscences are mixed with tears for fallen comrades, and at length Telemachus seeks respite in sleep. In the morning, Menelaus relates what he can of Odysseus.

"As you know, I was held down for seven long years in Egypt. And when at last the gods relented and sent a homeward breeze, I only made it as far as an island off the mouth of the Nile before I was becalmed. A goddess took pity on me as I paced the beach in desperation.

"My father is the Old Man of the Sea,' she said. 'You and three picked men of your crew must catch him and pin him down.' She helped us with disguises, the hides of seals which stank to high heaven. She even rubbed ambrosia under our noses against the stench.

"And when the Ancient came for his midday nap amongst the seals, as was his custom, we jumped him and held on for dear life. He had an awesome power, you see, to change his form -- to lion, to snake, to boar, to gushing fountain and towering tree. But when he saw that we weren't about to let go, he reverted to his original shape and began to speak.

"He said that Zeus himself was furious because we had failed to sacrifice before setting sail. We'd have to slog back up the Nile and start all over. And as he was an all-knowing god, I asked which of our comrades had perished on the journey home from Troy.

"Only two high officers,' he replied. 'And one of them might have lived but for his insolence. Even though he had been the cause of Athena's wrath in the first place, Ajax made it safely ashore on a promontory. At which point he had the audacity to brag that he had beaten the gods. His boast was heard by Poseidon, and the Lord of Earthquakes swung his mighty trident and knocked the earth right out from under Ajax, who fell into the sea and perished.'

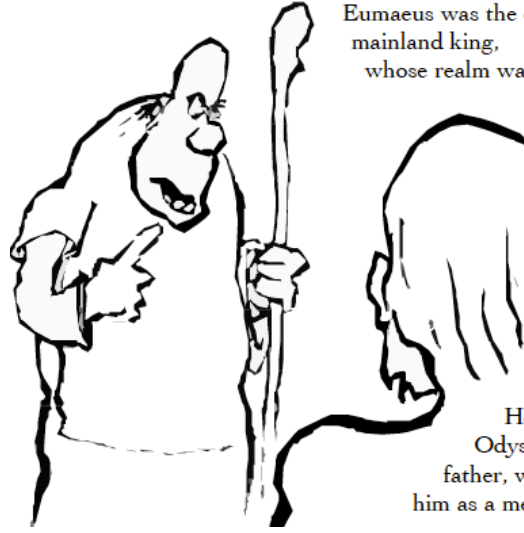
"And the other?" we asked, for he had spoken of two high officers.

"Odysseus lives still, though marooned, without a crew of oarsmen to stroke him home.'

And so Telemachus received the news that he had sought. But meanwhile his situation had become still more perilous. For back at home on Ithaca, the suitors had gotten wind of his departure. Spurred on by Antinous, they plotted to ambush him at sea upon his return.

## Book Fifteen

Athena summons Telemachus home and tells him how to avoid an ambush by the suitors. Meanwhile back on Ithaca, Odysseus listens while the swineherd Eumaeus recounts the story of his life.



Eumaeus was the child of a prosperous mainland king, whose realm was visited by Phoenician traders. His nursemaid, a Phoenician herself, had been carried off by pirates as a girl and sold into slavery. In return for homeward passage with her countrymen, she kidnapped Eumaeus. He was bought by Odysseus' father, whose queen raised him as a member of the family.

## Book Eighteen

Now a real beggar shows up at the palace and warns Odysseus off his turf. This man, **Irus**, is always running errands for the suitors. Odysseus says that there are pickings enough for the two of them, but Irus threatens fisticuffs and the suitors egg him on.

Odysseus rises to the challenge and rolls up his tunic into a boxer's belt. The suitors goggle at the muscles revealed. Not wishing to kill Irus with a single blow, Odysseus breaks his jaw instead.

Another suitor, Eurymachus, marks himself for revenge by trying to hit Odysseus with a footstool as Antinous had done.

## Book Nineteen

Odysseus has a long talk with his queen Penelope but does not reveal his identity. Penelope takes kindly to the stranger and orders her maid **Euryycleia** to bathe his feet and anoint them with oil.

Euryycleia, who was Odysseus' nurse when he was a child, notices a scar above the hero's knee. Odysseus had been gored by a wild boar while hunting on Mount Parnassus as a young man. The maid recognizes her master at once, and her hand goes out to his chin. But Odysseus silences her lest she give away his plot prematurely.

## Book Six

Odysseus had washed up in the land of the **Phaeacians**. Athena now intervened to make these people foster his journey home. She went by night to the palace of their king and appeared in a dream to the princess, **Nausicaa**.

The goddess prompted her to give thought to her wedding day. Shouldn't she journey to the pools down by the river and wash her bridal gown?

In the morning Nausicaa awoke with this idea in mind. But being modest, she asked her father instead if she might launder the family linen. Could she have the mule cart for the day? This was ordered and Nausicaa departed with her serving maids.

At the river, they soaked and thrashed the linen and laid it out to dry. Then they bathed in the river and anointed themselves with oil. After lunch they began to toss around a ball.

It was while they were playing that Odysseus woke to the sound of their laughter. Tearing off an olive branch to cloak his nakedness, he approached the group.

The maids ran away at the sight of the brine-encrusted stranger, but Nausicaa stood her ground. Odysseus had to choose between touching her knees in the gesture of a suppliant or staying back and trusting to words. He decided that words were the safer course.

"Are you a goddess or a mortal?" he inquired. "If the latter, your parents must be proud. I've never seen your like in beauty. I don't dare embrace your knees. Could you just tell me the way to town?"

In her candid way, Nausicaa sized him up and saw that he meant no harm.

"As strangers and beggars are in the hands of Zeus, I'll not refuse comfort to a



castaway." She called back her maids and told them to feed and clothe Odysseus. They gave him oil to rub on after he had bathed in the river.

And now Athena added further luster to the hero's freshly anointed skin and made him seem almost a god. So the princess wished that her own husband might in some way resemble Odysseus.

"Now here is what you must do," she told him. "On the way to my father's palace we will pass between the boatyards. The last thing I want is for some shipwright to see you following along behind my cart and think that there is something going on between us.

"But just before town is a roadside grove, sacred to Athena. Wait there until you're sure I'm gone, then enter the city gate. Ask directions to the palace, and when you've found it do not hesitate. Come straight into the hall and seek out my mother.

"She'll be seated by the fire. Clasp her knees. If she accepts your supplication, you're as good as home."

## Book Twenty-Four

The next morning Odysseus goes upcountry to the vineyard where his father, old King **Laertes**, labors like a peasant. Ever since his wife died of heartbreak for Odysseus, the miserable man has lived with his fieldhands. Odysseus cannot resist testing his father with a tall tale before their fond reunion.

Meanwhile, the kin of the suitors have borne off their dead and gathered at the assembly ground. The father of the suitor Antinous fires them up for revenge. Odysseus, Telemachus, the loyal herdsmen, Laertes and the fieldhands arm themselves to meet the challenge.

Inspired by Athena, Laertes casts a lance through the helmet of Antinous' father, who falls to the ground in a clatter of armor.

## Book Fourteen

**Eumaeus** the swineherd welcomes the bedraggled stranger. He throws his own bedcover over a pile of boughs as a seat for Odysseus, who does not reveal his identity.

Observing Zeus's commandment to be kind to guests, Eumaeus slaughters a prime boar and serves it with bread and wine. Odysseus, true to his fame as a smooth-talking schemer, makes up an elaborate story of his origins.

That night the hero sleeps by the fire under the swineherd's spare cloak, while Eumaeus himself sleeps outside in the rain with his herd.

## Book Twenty

The next morning Odysseus asks for a sign, and Zeus sends a clap of thunder out of the clear blue sky. A servant recognizes it as a portent and prays that this day be the last of the suitors' abuse.

Odysseus encounters another herdsman. Like the swineherd Eumaeus, this man, who tends the realm's cattle, swears his loyalty to the absent king.

A prophet, an exiled murderer whom Telemachus has befriended, shares a vision with the suitors: "I see the walls of this mansion dripping with your blood." The suitors respond with gales of laughter.