

BOOK SEVENTEEN

Odysseus Goes to the Palace as a Beggar

[Telemachus leaves Eumaeus and Odysseus at the farm, telling the swineherd that the beggar (Odysseus) must go to the city; Telemachus is welcomed in the palace by Eurycleia and his mother; Telemachus joins the suitors; Peiraeus leads in Theoclymenus; Theoclymenus and Telemachus dine with Penelope; Telemachus tells Penelope about his journey; Theoclymenus makes a prophecy of Odysseus' return; Eumaeus and Odysseus leave the farm for the city; they meet Melanthius, the goat herder, on the way, who insults them; Eumaeus and Odysseus arrive at the palace, meet Odysseus' old dog, Argus, who recognizes him and dies; Eumaeus enters the palace and joins Telemachus at dinner; Odysseus sits by the entrance way; Telemachus offers food to the disguised Odysseus, who then starts begging from the suitors; Melanthius and Antinous insult Eumaeus and Odysseus; Odysseus tells Antinous his story, they trade insults, and Antinous throws a foot stool at Odysseus and hits him; Penelope summons Eumaeus to her, asks him to call the disguised beggar to her; Odysseus tell Eumaeus that he'll meet Penelope in the evening, not now; Eumaeus tells Penelope, talks to Telemachus, and returns to the farm, leaving the feast still in progress.]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
Telemachus, dear son of god-like Odysseus,
tied some fine sandals on his feet, took a strong spear,
well suited to his grip, and, as he headed off
towards the city, spoke out to the swineherd:
“Old friend, I’m leaving for the city,
so my mother can observe me. I don’t think
her dreadful grieving and her sorry tears
will stop until she sees me for herself.
[10] So I’m telling you to do as follows—
take this wretched stranger to the city.
Once there, he can beg food from anyone
who’ll offer him some bread and cups of water.
I can’t take on the weight of everyone,
not when I have these sorrows in my heart.
As for the stranger, if he’s very angry,
things will be worse for him. Those are the facts,
and I do like to speak the truth.”

Odysseus,
that resourceful man, then answered him and said:
[20] “Friend, I myself am not all that eager
to be held back here. For a beggar man
it’s better to ask people for a meal
in the city instead of in the fields.
Whoever’s willing will give me something.
At my age it’s not appropriate for me
to stay any longer in the farmyard,
obeying everything a master orders.
No. So be on your way. This man here,
who you give orders to, will take me there,
[30] as soon as I’ve warmed up beside the fire
and the sun get hot. These clothes I’m wearing
are miserably bad, and I’m afraid
the morning frost may be too much for me—
you say the city is a long way off.”

Odysseus finished. Telemachus walked away,
across the farmyard, moving with rapid strides.
He was sowing seeds of trouble for the suitors.
As he entered the beautifully furnished house,
he carried in his spear and set it in its place,
[40] against a looming pillar. Then he moved inside,
across the stone threshold. His nurse Eurycleia
saw him well before the others, while spreading fleeces
on the finely crafted chairs. She burst out crying,
rushed straight up to him, while there gathered round them
other female servants of stout-hearted Odysseus.
They kissed his head and shoulders in loving welcome.
Then from her chamber wise Penelope emerged,
looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite.
She embraced the son she loved, while shedding tears,
[50] and kissed his head and both his beautiful eyes.
Through her tears, she spoke to him—her words had wings:
“You’ve come, Telemachus, you sweet light.
I thought I’d never see you any more,

when you secretly went off to Pylos
in your ship, against my wishes, seeking
some report of your dear father. So come,
describe for me how you ran into him.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her and said:
“Mother, don’t encourage me to grieve,
[60] or get the heart inside my chest stirred up.
I’ve just escaped being utterly destroyed.
But have a bath, and pick fresh clothing
for your body. Then, with your attendants
go to the room upstairs, and promise
all the gods you’ll offer perfect sacrifices,
if Zeus will somehow bring to fulfillment
actions which will give us retribution.
I’ll go to the place where we assemble,
so I can call upon a stranger, a man
[70] who came with me on my trip from Pylos.
I sent him ahead with my noble comrades,
telling Peiraeus to take him to his home,
to treat him kindly, and to honour him,
until the time I got there.”

Telemachus finished.
Penelope was quiet—no winged words flew from her.
She bathed herself and took fresh clothing for her body.
Then she promised she’d offer perfect sacrifice
to all the gods, if Zeus would somehow bring about
those actions which would give them retribution.
[80] Telemachus walked through the hall, gripping his spear.
Two swift dogs went with him. Athena poured on him
such marvelous grace that, as he moved along,
all people gazed at him. The arrogant suitors
thronged around him, making gentle conversation,
but deep in their hearts they were planning trouble.
He avoided the main crowd of them and took a seat
where Mentor and Antiphus and Halitherses sat,

companions of his father's from many years ago.

They asked him all kinds of questions. Then Peiraeus,
[90] the well-known spearman, approached, leading the stranger
through the city to the place where they assembled.¹

Telemachus did not turn his back for very long
upon the stranger, but went up to him. Peiraeus
was the first to speak:

"Telemachus,
send some women quickly to my home,
so I may have those gifts sent here to you
which Menelaus gave you."

Shrewd Telemachus
then answered him and said:

"Peiraeus,
we don't know how these matters will turn out.
[100] If these overbearing suitors kill me
in my own halls in secret and divide
all my father's goods amongst themselves,
I'd prefer you keep those gifts yourself—
enjoy them—rather than any of those men.
But if I sow a lethal fate for them,
then bring them to the house, and be happy
with me, for I will be rejoicing."

As he said this, he led the long-suffering stranger
towards the house. When they reached the stately palace,
[110] they put their cloaks down on the seats and armchairs,
then went into the polished tubs to have a bath.

After the attending women had washed both men,
rubbed them down with oil, and wrapped around them
woolen cloaks and tunics, they came out from the bath
and sat down on the chairs. A servant brought in water
in a lovely golden pitcher and poured it out
in a silver basin, so they could wash their hands.

Beside them she then set up a polished table.

The worthy housekeeper brought bread and set it out,

[120] then added lots of meat, giving freely from her stores.

Telemachus' mother sat across from him,
by the door post of the hall, leaning from her seat
to spin fine threads of yarn. They stretched out their hands
to take the fine food prepared and set before them.

When they'd had food and drink to their heart's content,
the first to speak to them was wise Penelope:

"Telemachus, once I've gone up to my room,
I'll lie down in bed, which has become for me
a place where I lament, always wet with tears,

[130] ever since Odysseus went to Troy
with Atreus' sons. Yet you don't dare
to tell me clearly of your father's trip,
even before the haughty suitors come
into the house, no word of what you learned."

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her and said:

"All right then, mother, I'll tell you the truth.

We went to Pylos and reached Nestor,
shepherd of his people. He welcomed us
in his lofty home with hospitality

[140] and kindness, as a father for a son
who's just returned from far-off places
after many years—that's how Nestor
and his splendid sons looked after me
with loving care. But of brave Odysseus,
alive or dead, he told me he'd heard nothing
from any man on earth. He sent me off
with horses and a well-built chariot
to that famous spearman Menelaus,
son of Atreus. There I saw Argive Helen,

[150] for whom many Trojans and Achaeans
struggled hard, because that's what gods had willed.
Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, at once
asked me why I'd come to lovely Sparta,
what I was looking for. I told him the truth,
all the details. He answered me and said:

‘That’s disgraceful! They want to lie down
in the bed of a courageous warrior,
when they themselves are cowards—just as if
a doe has put two new-born suckling fawns
[160] in a mighty lion’s thicket, so they can sleep,
and roams mountain slopes and grassy valleys
seeking pasture, and then the lion comes
back to that lair and brings a dismal fate
for both of them—that’s how Odysseus
will bring those men to their disastrous end.
By Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo,
how I wish he could be as he was once
in well-built Lesbos, in a wrestling match,
when he stood and fought Philomeleides,
[170] threw him decisively, and all Achaeans
felt great joy—if he were that sort of man,
Odysseus might well mingle with the suitors,
and they’d all meet death, a bitter courtship.
But as for these things you’re asking me about,
begging me to speak, I’ll not evade them
or lead you astray. No. I won’t conceal
or bury a single word that I was told
by that infallible Old Man of the Sea.
He said that he had seen Odysseus
[180] on an island, suffering great distress
in nymph Calypso’s home—she keeps him there
by force. He can’t get to his native land
because he has no ship available,
no oars, and no companions, men who might
transport him on the broad back of the sea.’

“That’s what famous spearman Menelaus said,
the son of Atreus. When I was finished,
I came home, and the immortals gave me
favourable winds which quickly carried me
back to my native land.”

[190] Telemachus' words

stirred the heart within her chest. Then among the group
Theoclymenus, a godlike man, spoke out:
“Noble wife of Laertes' son, Odysseus,
Menelaus has no certain knowledge.
You should attend to what I have to say,
for I will make a truthful prophecy
and not conceal a thing. Now, let Zeus,
first among the gods, act as my witness,
and this table welcoming your guests,

[200] and the hearth of excellent Odysseus,
which I've reached, that Odysseus is, in fact,
already in his native land, sitting still
or moving, learning of these wicked acts.
He's sowing trouble for every suitor.
That's how I interpret that bird omen
I saw, while sitting on the well-decked ship—
that's what I said then to Telemachus.”

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“Ah stranger, I wish what you've just said
[210] might come about. Then you'd quickly learn
how kind we are, how many gifts I'd give—
anyone you met would call you blessed.”

Thus they talked to one another of these things.
Meanwhile, outside in front of Odysseus' palace,
the suitors were enjoying themselves, throwing discus
and tossing javelins on a level piece of ground,
as was their custom, displaying their arrogance.
But when it was time for dinner and the sheep arrived,
coming from the fields in all directions, with those

[220] who used to lead them there, Medon spoke to them.
He was the herald they liked more than all the rest,
and he was present with them when they feasted:
“Young men, now you've entertained your hearts

with tests of skill, so come inside the house,
and we'll prepare a meal. There's nothing wrong
with eating when it's time to have some food."

Medon spoke. Agreeing with what he'd said, they stood up
and moved away. When they reached the stately home,
they set their cloaks down on the seats and armchairs.

[230] Men sacrificed huge sheep and goats with lots of fat.
They killed a heifer from the herd, plump hogs as well,
as they prepared the meal.

Meanwhile Odysseus
and the loyal swineherd were hastening to leave,
moving from the fields into the city. Eumaeus,
that outstanding man, was the first to speak. He said:
"Stranger, since you're keen to reach the city,
as my master ordered, and get there today—
myself, I'd rather leave you at the farm
to guard the place, but I respect and fear him,

[240] for he may reprimand me afterwards,
and a master's punishment can be severe—
so come now, let's be off. Most of the day
has already passed, and as evening comes
you'll quickly sense it's getting colder."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:

"I see that. I know. You're talking to a man
who understands. So let's be setting out.
You yourself can lead me the whole way.
But if you've got a pole somewhere that's cut

[250] for you to lean on, then give it to me.
For you did say the road is slippery."

Odysseus finished, then threw around his shoulders
his ragged bag full of holes, with a twisted strap.
Eumaeus gave him a staff he liked, and then
the two of them set off. The dogs and herdsmen
stayed behind to guard the farmyard. The swineherd

- led his master to the city, like a beggar,
leaning on a stick, an old and miserable man,
with his body wrapped in wretched clothing.
- [260] But as they walked along the rugged pathway,
getting near the city, they reached a well-made spring,
with a steady flow, where townsfolk drew their water,
built by Ithacus, Neritus, and Polyctor.²
Around it was a poplar grove, fed by its waters.
They grew on all sides of the spring. Cold water flowed
down from a rock above, and on the top of that
an altar had been dedicated to the nymphs,
where all the people passing by made offerings.
Here Melanthius, son of Dolius, met them—
- [270] he was driving on some goats, the finest ones
in all the herds, to serve as dinner for the suitors.
Two herdsmen followed with him. When he saw them,
Melanthius started yelling insults. What he said
was shameful and abusive—it stirred Odysseus' heart.
“Now here we have a truly filthy man
leading on another filthy scoundrel.
As always, god matches like with like.
You miserable swineherd, where are you going
with this disgusting pig, this beggar man,
- [280] a tedious bore who'll interrupt our feasts?
He'll scratch his shoulders on many doorposts,
begging scraps—no need for sword or cauldron.³
If you'd let me have him guard my farmyard,
clean out the pens, and carry tender shoots
to my young goats, then he could drink down whey
and put some muscle on those thighs of his.
But since he's picked up his thieving habits,
he won't want to get too close to real work.
No. He'd rather creep around the country
- [290] and beg food to fill his bottomless gut.
I'll tell you something—and this will happen—
if he reaches godlike Odysseus' home,
many a footstool hurled by real men

will hit his ribs and all parts of his head,
as he's tossed around throughout the house."

Melanthius finished, and as he moved on past them,
in his stupidity he kicked Odysseus on the hip.
But that didn't push Odysseus off the pathway.
He stood there without budging. He was wondering
[300] whether he should charge and kill him with his staff,
or grab him by the waist, lift him up, and smash his head
down on the ground. But he hung on, controlling
what was in his heart. Eumaeus looked at the man,
scolded him, then, lifting up his hands in prayer,
he cried aloud:
"Fountain nymphs, daughters of Zeus,
if for your sake Odysseus ever burned
pieces of thigh from lambs or from young goats,
richly wrapped in fat, grant this prayer for me—
let my master come, guided by some god.
[310] Then he would scatter this presumption,
which you now, in your arrogance, display,
always roaming down into the city,
while wicked herdsmen are destroying the flock."

Then Melanthius the goatherd answered him:
"Dear me, the things this crafty mongrel says!
I'll take him someday on a trim black ship
far from Ithaca—he can make me very rich.
How I wish Apollo with his silver bow
would strike Telemachus in his own house
[320] this very day, or that he'd be overwhelmed
by those suitors, since the day Odysseus
will be returning home has been wiped out
in some land far away."

Melanthius said this
and left them there, as they walked slowly onward.
He strode ahead and quickly reached the royal palace.

He went in at once and sat among the suitors,
opposite Eurymachus, who was fond of him
more than the others were. Those serving at the meal
laid down a portion of the meat in front of him.

[330] The respected housekeeper brought in the bread
and placed it there for him to eat.

Meanwhile Odysseus
and the loyal swineherd paused as they came closer.
Around them rang the music of the hollow lyre,
for Phemius was striking up a song to sing
before the suitors. Odysseus grabbed the swineherd
by the hand and said to him:

“Eumaeus,
this place surely is the splendid palace
belonging to Odysseus. It’s easy
to recognize, even when one sees it

[340] among many others, for here there is
building after building, and this courtyard—
it’s finished off with walls and coping stones,
and there’s a double gateway well fenced in.
No man could criticize a house like this.
I notice many men are feasting here—
smoke from cooked meat is rising from the house,
and a lyre is playing. A god made that
as our companion at a banquet.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:

[350] “You recognized it easily enough—
for in other things you’re quite perceptive.
But come, let’s consider how this business
will be carried out. Either you go first
and move inside the finely furnished house
to join the suitors, while I stay outside,
or, if you wish, stay here. I’ll go ahead.
But don’t hang around for long, just in case
someone sees you here outside and hits you
or throws something. You should consider that,

I tell you.”

[360] Long-suffering lord Odysseus
then said to Eumaeus:
“I know. I see that.
You’re talking to a man who understands.
But you go on ahead. I’ll stay out here.
Having objects thrown at me or being hit
is nothing new. My heart can bear all that,
since I’ve put up with many hardships
in war and on the waves. So let all this
be added in with those. There is no way
someone can hide a ravenous stomach—

[370] that torment which brings men so many troubles.
Because of it, they launch their well-built ships
and transport evil to their enemies
across the restless sea.”

And so these two men
talked to each other about these things. Then a dog
lying there raised its head and pricked up its ears.
It was Argus, brave Odysseus’ hunting dog,
whom he himself had brought up many years ago.
But before he could enjoy being with his dog,
he left for sacred Troy. In earlier days, young men
[380] would take the dog to hunt wild goats, deer, and rabbits,
but now, with his master gone, he lay neglected
in the piles of dung left there by mules and cattle,
heaped up before the doors until Odysseus’ servants
took it as manure for some large field. Argus lay there,
covered in fleas. Then, when he saw Odysseus,
who was coming closer, Argus wagged his tail
and dropped his ears. But he no longer had the strength
to approach his master. Odysseus looked away
and brushed aside a tear—he did so casually

[390] to hide it from Eumaeus. Then he questioned him:
“Eumaeus, it’s strange this dog is lying here,

in the dung. He has a handsome body.
I'm not sure if his speed once matched his looks
or if he's like those table dogs men have,
ones their masters raise and keep for show."

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:
"Yes, this dog belongs to a man who died
somewhere far away. If he had the form
and acted as he did when Odysseus
[400] left him and went to Troy, you'd quickly see
his speed and strength, and then you'd be amazed.
No wild animal he chased escaped him
in deep thick woods, for he could track a scent.
He's in a bad way now. His master's dead
in some foreign land, and careless women
don't look after him. For when their masters
no longer exercise their power, slaves
have no desire to do their proper work.
Far-seeing Zeus steals half the value of a man
[410] the day he's taken and becomes a slave."

This said, Eumaeus went inside the stately palace,
straight into the hall to join the noble suitors.
But once he'd seen Odysseus after nineteen years,
the dark finality of death at once seized Argus.
As the swineherd Eumaeus came inside the house,
godlike Telemachus was the first to see him,
well before the others. He quickly summoned him
by nodding. Eumaeus looked around, then picked up
a stool lying where a servant usually sat
[420] to carve large amounts of meat to serve the suitors,
when they feasted in the house. He took this stool,
placed it by Telemachus' table, facing him,
and then sat down. Meanwhile, a herald brought him
a portion of the meat, set it in front of him,
and lifted some bread for him out of the basket.
Odysseus came into the house behind Eumaeus,

looking like an old and miserable beggar,
leaning on his staff, his body dressed in rags.
He sat on the ash wood threshold in the doorway,
[430] propping his back against a post of cypress wood,
which a craftsman had once planed with skill
and set in true alignment. Then Telemachus
called the swineherd to him and, taking a whole loaf
from the fine basket and as much meat as he could hold
in both his hands, he spoke to him, saying:
“Take this food, and give it to the stranger.
Tell him he can move among the suitors
and beg from each of them in person.
When a man’s in need, they say that shame
is not a good companion.”

[440] Telemachus spoke.
Once he’d heard these words, Eumaeus went and stood
beside Odysseus, then spoke—his words had wings:
“Stranger, Telemachus gives you this food
and invites you to move around and beg
among the suitors, each in turn. He says,
when one’s in need, it’s no good being ashamed.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered him and said:
“May lord Zeus, I pray, grant Telemachus
be blessed among all men, get everything
he may desire in his heart.”

[450] Once he’d said this,
he took the food in his two hands and set it down
right there at his feet, on his tattered bag, and ate,
while the minstrel sang his song throughout the hall.
When he’d eaten and the godlike singer finished,
the suitors were making an uproar in the room.
But Athena approached Odysseus, Laertes’ son,
and urged him to collect bread from the suitors,
so he might find out those who did respect the law

and those who flouted their traditions. Even so,
[460] she wouldn't let any man escape destruction.
Odysseus then moved off to beg for scraps of bread,
holding out his hand to each of them on every side,
starting on the right, as if he'd been a beggar
for years and years. They pitied him, gave him bread,
and wondered about him, asking one another
who he was and where he came from. Then the goatherd,
Melanthius, spoke out to them:

"Listen to me,
those of you courting the glorious queen,
about this stranger. I've seen him before.
[470] The swineherd was the one who brought him here.
I don't know his identity for sure
or the family he claims to come from."

Once he'd said this, Antinous turned on Eumaeus,
to reprimand him:
"You really are a man
who cares for pigs—why bring this fellow here
into the city? As far as vagrants go,
don't we have enough apart from him,
greedy beggars who disrupt our banquets?
Do you think too few of them come here
[480] and waste away your master's livelihood,
so you invite this man to come as well?"

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered him and said:
"Antinous, you may be a noble man,
but what you've said is not a worthy speech.
Who looks for strangers from another land
and then in person asks them to come in,
unless they're workers in a public space—
prophets, healers of disease, house builders,
or inspired minstrels, who sing for our delight?
[490] Such men are summoned to where people live
all around the boundless earth. But no one

invites a beggar to consume his goods.
You are abusive to Odysseus' slaves,
more so than any of the other suitors,
especially to me. But I don't care,
not while faithful Penelope lives here,
in these halls, and godlike Telemachus."

Then prudent Telemachus replied and said:
"Be quiet. For my sake don't reply to him
[500] with a long speech. It's Antinous' habit
always to offer nasty provocation,
to start a quarrel with abusive words.
He urges other men to do the same."

That said, he spoke to Antinous—his words had wings:
"Antinous, you really do care for me,
like a father for his son, when you tell me
with your forceful words to drive this stranger
from the house. May god forbid such action.
Take some food and give it him yourself—
[510] I don't mind. In fact, I'm asking you to do it.
You need not worry about my mother
or any of the servants in this house
belonging to godlike Odysseus. But still,
no thought like this could be inside your chest—
you'd much prefer to stuff yourself with food
than give it to another man."

Antinous
then answered him and said:
"Telemachus,
you're a braggart and won't control your rage.
What are you saying? If every suitor
[520] offered him as much as I will, this house
would make him keep his distance for three months."

As he said this, he picked up a stool standing there,

where he used to rest his shining feet while feasting,
raised it from below the table, and brandished it.
But all the other suitors offered something,
and so the beggar's bag was filled with meat and bread.
Odysseus was soon going to retrace his steps
back to the doorway and sound out the Achaeans
with impunity, but he stopped by Antinous,
and spoke to him, saying:

[530] "My friend, give something.

You don't seem to me the worst Achaean,
but the very best. You look like a king.
So you should give a bigger piece of bread
than these others. I'd publicize your fame
across the boundless earth. For once I, too,
lived among men in my home, a rich man
with a happy life. There were many times
I'd give presents to some sort of vagabond,
no matter who he was or what he needed

[540] when he came. I had countless servants, too,
and many other things that people have
when they live well and are considered wealthy.
But Zeus, son of Cronos, destroyed all that.
That's what he wanted, I suppose. He sent me
with some wandering pirates off to Egypt,
a lengthy voyage, to do away with me.
I moored my curving ships in Egypt's river,
and told my loyal comrades to stay there
with the ships and guard them. I sent out scouts

[550] to go up to the lookouts. But the crew,
giving way to impulse and counting on
their strength, quickly began to destroy
the attractive farms of the Egyptians,
carrying off the women and young children,
while slaughtering the men. The cry went up,
and soon it reached the city. Hearing noise,
the people came as soon as dawn appeared—
the entire plain was filled with men on foot

and in their chariots and with gleaming bronze.
[560] Then Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt, threw down
a dreadful panic on my comrades. None of them
dared stand and face up to the enemy.
Disaster loomed for us from every side.
With their sharp bronze they killed a lot of us,
but others they led off while still alive
so they could be compelled to work for them.
They gave me to a stranger they had met,
bound for Cyprus, Dmetor, son of Iasus,
a powerful man who was king of Cyprus.
[570] From there I reached this place in great distress.”

Then Antinous answered him and said:
“What god
sent this nuisance to interrupt our feast?
Get away from my table—over there,
in the middle, or you’ll soon find yourself
in a harsher place than Cyprus or in Egypt.
You’re an insolent and shameless beggar—
you come up to every man, one by one,
and they give you things without holding back,
for there’s no check or scruple when one gives
[580] from someone else’s goods, and each of them
has plenty of supplies in front of him.”

Resourceful Odysseus then moved back and replied:
“Well now, it seems as if that mind of yours
doesn’t match your looks—you’d refuse to give
even a grain of salt from your own house
to a follower of yours, and now you sit
in someone else’s house and do not dare
to take some bread and offer it to me.
And yet there’s plenty right in front of you.”

[590] Odysseus finished. Antinous in his heart
was even angrier than before. He glared at him,

then, with a scowl, replied—his words had wings:
“I no longer think you’ll leave this hall unharmed,
now that you’ve begun to babble insults.”

As he said this, he grabbed the stool and threw it.
It hit the bottom of Odysseus’ right shoulder,
where it joins the back. But he stood firm, like a rock—
what Antinous had thrown didn’t make him stagger.
He shook his head in silence, making cruel plans
[600] deep in his heart. He went back to the door, sat there,
set down his well-filled bag, and addressed the suitors:
“Listen to me, you suitors of the splendid queen,
so I can say what the heart in my chest prompts.
There’s no pain in a man’s heart, no grieving,
when he’s hit fighting for his own possessions,
for cattle or white sheep. But Antinous
struck me because of my wretched belly,
that curse which gives men all kinds of trouble.
So if beggars have their gods and Furies,
[610] may Antinous come to a fatal end,
before his wedding day.”

Then Antinous, Eupheithes’ son,
gave him this reply:
“Sit still and eat, stranger,
or go somewhere else, just in case young men
drag you by your hands and feet all through the house
for what you say, scraping your whole body.”

He finished. But all those proud men were furious,
and one of the arrogant young men spoke out:
“Antinous, it was wrong of you to hit
a wretched vagrant. And you may be doomed,
[620] if somehow he’s a god come down from heaven.
For, in fact, gods make themselves appear
like foreign strangers, assuming many shapes
and haunting cities, to investigate

men's pride and their obedience to the laws."

That's what the suitors said. However, Antinous
paid no attention to their words. Telemachus,
having seen the blow, felt pain growing in his heart.
But his eyelids shed no tears upon the ground.
No. He shook his head in silence and kept planning
[630] dark schemes in his heart. But when wise Penelope
heard about the stranger being hit inside the hall,
she spoke to her attendant women, saying:
"How I wish that he, too, might be struck
by Apollo, that celebrated archer."

Then housekeeper Eurynome said to her:
"O if only our prayers could be fulfilled,
not one of them would see Dawn's lovely throne."

Wise Penelope then answered her:
"Good nurse,
they're all enemies hatching evil plans,
[640] but Antinous, more than any of them,
is like black fate. Some unhappy stranger
roams through the house, begging from the men.
His own need drives him to it. The others,
all of them, gave him gifts and filled his bag,
but Antinous threw a footstool at him
and struck him under his right shoulder."

So Penelope talked with her serving women,
sitting in her room, while lord Odysseus ate.
Then she called out to the loyal swineherd, saying:
[650] "Good Eumaeus, go and ask the stranger
to come here, so I can greet him warmly
and ask if he perhaps has heard about
my brave Odysseus, or caught sight of him
with his own eyes. He looks like a man
who's spent a long time wandering around."

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered her and said:
“I wish the Achaeans would keep quiet,
my queen, for he tells the kind of stories
which enchant one’s heart. I had him with me
[660] for three nights, and for three days I kept him
in my hut. He came to me first of all,
while he was fleeing in secret from a ship.
But he never finished what he had to say
of his misfortunes. Just as any man
looks at a minstrel who sings enticing songs
to mortal men, ones the gods have taught him,
and there’s no end to their desire to hear,
whenever he may sing, that’s how this man
enchanted me, as he sat in my home.
[670] He claims he’s a friend of Odysseus’ father,
from Crete, where the race of Minos lives,
He’s come here from there, enduring troubles,
as he keeps wandering from place to place.
He insists he’s heard about Odysseus—
he’s close by, still alive in the rich land
of Thesprotians—with many treasures
which he’s going to bring back home.”

Wise Penelope
then answered him:
“Go and call him here—
he can tell me for himself. And let the men
[680] keep sitting in the hall or at the door
enjoying themselves—their hearts are cheerful.
Their own possessions lie untouched at home,
sweet wine and bread, which their servants eat.
But they fill up our house day after day,
butchering our cattle, fat sheep, and goats,
carousing and drinking our gleaming wine,
without restraint. So much is wasted.
There’s no one like Odysseus here who’ll guard

our house from ruin. If Odysseus came,
[690] got back to his native land, he and his son
would quickly take their vengeance on these men
for their violent ways.”

As Penelope said this,
Telemachus gave a mighty sneeze—it echoed
through the house. Penelope laughed and quickly spoke
these winged words to Eumaeus:
“Go call the stranger.
Bring him here in front of me. Did you not see
my son sneezing at everything I said?
So the complete destruction of the suitors
will not go unfulfilled—for all of them—
[700] not one will escape his fatal destiny.⁴
I’ll tell you something else. Lay it to heart.
If I see he tells me the entire truth,
I’ll dress him in fine clothes, cloak and tunic.”

Penelope finished. Once Eumaeus heard her,
he went off and, standing beside Odysseus,
spoke to him—his words had wings:
“Honoured stranger,
wise Penelope is summoning you,
Telemachus’ mother. For her heart,
in spite of bearing much anxiety,
[710] is telling her to ask about her husband.
If she knows that everything you say
is true, she’ll give you a cloak and tunic,
things you really need. And as for food,
you can beg for it throughout the country
and fill your stomach. Whoever wants to
will give it to you.”

Long-suffering lord Odysseus
then answered him:
“Eumaeus, I’ll tell the truth,

all the details, to wise Penelope,
daughter of Icarius, and quickly, too.

[720] For I know Odysseus well—both of us
have had the same misfortunes. But I fear
this abusive crowd of suitors, whose pride
and violence reach up to iron heaven.
Just now, as I was moving through the house,
doing nothing wrong, this man struck me
and caused me pain. Meanwhile Telemachus
couldn't do a thing to stop him, nor could
any other man. So tell Penelope,
for all her eagerness, to wait right now,

[730] there in the hall, until the sun goes down.
Let her ask me then about her husband
and the day of his return. And let me sit
close to the fire, for the clothes I have
are pitiful, as you know for yourself,
since I came to you first of all for help.”

Odysseus finished. Once he'd listened to him,
the swineherd went away. As he crossed the threshold,
Penelope addressed him:

“You haven't brought him,
Eumaeus. What does the vagrant mean by this?

[740] Is he somehow too afraid of something,
or is there some other reason he's ashamed?
He's a bad beggar if he feels disgraced.”

Then, swineherd Eumaeus, you answered her and said:

“What he said made sense—what any other man
would think if he was planning to avoid
the insolence of those presumptuous men.
He says you should wait around till sunset.
And, my queen, it would be far more fitting
for you to talk in person to the stranger,

[750] to hear for yourself what he has to say.”

Wise Penelope then answered him and said:

“The stranger is not stupid. For he thinks
about those things that well may happen.
I don’t believe there are any mortal men
who are as high handed as these suitors are,
the way they plan their wicked foolishness.”

Penelope spoke. Once he’d told her everything,
the loyal swineherd joined the crowd of suitors.

He quickly spoke winged words to Telemachus,
[760] holding his head close to him, so others couldn’t hear:

“Friend, I’m going to leave and guard the swine
and other things, your livelihood and mine.
You take charge of all the problems here.
First and foremost, protect yourself. Your heart
must stay alert, so you don’t suffer harm.
Many Achaeans are hatching evil plans—
may Zeus destroy them before they harm us.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered him and said:

“It will happen, old friend. Now, you should eat
[770] before you leave. Come here in the morning,
and bring fine animals for sacrifice.
Everything going on here is my concern,
mine and the immortals.”

Telemachus spoke.

The swineherd sat down on the polished chair again.
Once he’d filled his heart with food and drink, he left,
returning to his pigs, through the courtyard and the hall
full of banqueters, who were enjoying themselves
with dance and song, for evening had already come.