

## BOOK TWO

### Telemachus Prepares for His Voyage

[Telemachus summons all the Achaeans to an assembly; Aegyptius speaks first; Telemachus complains about the suitors and threatens them; Antinous replies, blaming Penelope, describing how she has deceived the suitors, and issuing an ultimatum to Telemachus; Telemachus says he will never send his mother away; Zeus sends two eagles as an omen; Halitherses prophesies trouble for the suitors; Eurymachus replies with a threat and an ultimatum; Telemachus announces his intention of making a sea voyage; Telemachus prays to Athena, who reappears as Mentor and gives instructions for the trip; the suitors mock Telemachus; Telemachus tells Eurycleia to prepare supplies for the voyage; Athena organizes a ship and a crew for Telemachus and puts the suitors to sleep; Telemachus and the crew collect the supplies, load them onboard, and sail away from Ithaca.]

As soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,  
Odysseus' dear son jumped up out of bed and dressed.  
He slung a sharp sword from his shoulders, then laced  
his lovely sandals over his shining feet.  
Then he left his room, his face resembling a god's.  
At once he asked the loud-voiced heralds to summon  
all the long-haired Achaeans to assembly.  
They issued the call, and the Achaeans came,  
gathering quickly. When the assembly had convened,  
[10] Telemachus moved straight into the meeting,  
gripping a bronze spear. He was not by himself—  
two swift-footed hunting dogs accompanied him.  
Athena cast down over him a god-like poise—  
all the people were astonished at his presence,  
as he entered and sat down in his father's chair,  
while the senior men gave way. Among those present,  
heroic Aegyptius was the first to speak,  
a man stooped with age, but infinitely wise.  
His son, the warrior Antiphus, had sailed to Troy,  
[20] that horse-rich city, along with lord Odysseus,  
in their hollow ships. But in his cave the wild Cyclops  
had slaughtered him and made him his final meal.  
Aegyptius had three other sons. One of them,

Eurynomus, was with the suitors. The other two  
were always working in their father's fields. But still,  
Aegyptius could not forget the son who'd died.  
And now, racked with grief and mourning, he shed tears  
as he addressed them:

“Men of Ithaca,  
listen now to what I have to say.

[30] We have not held a general meeting  
or assembly since the day Odysseus  
sailed off in his hollow ships. What man  
has made us gather now? What's his reason?  
Is he a younger or a senior man?  
Has he heard some news about the army  
and will tell us details of its journey home,  
now that he has heard the news himself?  
Or is it some other public business  
he will introduce and talk about?

[40] He has my blessing! I pray that Zeus  
fulfils whatever he has in his heart  
and makes his wishes work out for the best.”

Aegyptius spoke. Odysseus' dear son rejoiced  
at such auspicious words. But he did not sit long,  
for he was very keen to speak. So he stood up  
in the middle of the meeting. In his hand,  
Peisenor, a herald who provided shrewd advice,  
placed the sceptre. Telemachus began to speak,  
talking to Aegyptius first of all:

“Old man,

[50] the one who called the people to this meeting  
is not far off, as you will quickly learn.  
I did. For I'm a man who suffers more  
than other men. But I have no reports  
of our returning army, no details  
I've just heard myself to pass along to you,

nor is there other public business  
I'll announce or talk about. The issue here  
is my own need, for on my household  
troubles have fallen in a double sense.

[60] First, my noble father's perished, the man  
who was once your king and my kind father.  
And then there's an even greater problem,  
which will quickly and completely shatter  
this entire house, and my whole livelihood  
will be destroyed. These suitors, the dear sons  
of those men here with most nobility,  
are pestering my mother against her will.  
They don't want to journey to her father,  
Icarius, in his home, where he himself

[70] could set a bride price for his daughter  
and give her to the man he feels he likes,  
the one who pleases him the most. Instead,  
they hang around our house, day after day,  
slaughtering oxen, fat goats, and sheep.  
They keep on feasting, drinking sparkling wine  
without restraint, and they consume so much.  
There's no man to guard our home from ruin,  
as Odysseus did before. I cannot act  
the way he used to and avert disaster.

[80] If I tried, I would be hopeless, a man  
who had not learned what courage is. And yet,  
if I had power, I would defend myself,  
because we can't endure what's happening.  
My home is being demolished in a way  
that is not right. You men should be ashamed.  
You should honour other men, your neighbours,  
who live close by. And you should be afraid  
of anger from the gods, in case their rage  
at your bad acts turns them against you.

[90] I beg you by Olympian Zeus and Themis,  
who summons and disperses men's assemblies,  
restrain yourselves, my friends—leave me alone

to suffer my own bitter grief, unless  
Odysseus, my noble father, for spite  
has hurt well-armed Achaeans, and now,  
in recompense for this, you angry gods  
are harming me by urging these men on.  
For me it would be better if you gods  
ate up my landed property and flocks.

[100] If you gorged yourselves, then someday soon  
there might be recompense. All the time  
you were doing that, we'd walk up and down,  
throughout the city, asking for our goods  
to be returned, until the day every piece  
was given back. But now you load my heart  
with pain beyond all hope."

Telemachus spoke,  
then in his anger threw the sceptre on the ground  
and burst out crying. Everyone there pitied him,  
so all the other men kept silent, unwilling  
[110] to give an angry answer to Telemachus.  
Antinous was the only one to speak. He said:

"Telemachus you boaster, your spirit  
is too unrestrained. How you carry on,  
trying to shame us, since you so desire  
the blame should rest on us. But in your case,  
Achaean suitors aren't the guilty ones.  
Your own dear mother is, who understands  
how to use deceit. It's been three years now—  
and soon it will be four—since she began  
[120] to frustrate hearts in our Achaean chests.  
She gives hope to each of us, makes promises  
to everyone, and sends out messages.  
But her intent is different. In her mind  
she has thought up another stratagem:  
in her room she had a large loom set up,  
and started weaving something very big,

with thread that was quite thin. She said to us:

‘Young men, those of you who are my suitors,  
since lord Odysseus is dead, you must wait,  
[130] although you’re keen for me to marry,  
till I complete this cloak—otherwise  
my weaving would be wasted and in vain.  
It is a shroud for warrior Laertes,  
for the day a lethal fate will strike him.  
Then none of the Achaean women here  
will be annoyed with me because a man  
who acquired so many rich possessions  
should lie without a shroud.’

“That’s what she said.  
And our proud hearts agreed. And so each day  
[140] she wove at her great loom, but every night  
she set up torches and pulled the work apart.  
Three years she fooled Achaeans with this trick.  
They trusted her. But as the seasons passed,  
the fourth year came. Then one of her women  
who knew all the details spoke about them,  
and we caught her undoing her lovely work.  
Thus, we forced her to complete the cloak  
against her will. The suitors now say this,  
so you, deep in your heart, will understand  
[150] and all Achaeans know—send your mother back.  
Tell her she must marry whichever man  
her father tells her and who pleases her.  
But if she keeps on doing this for long,  
teasing Achaea’s sons because in her heart  
she knows that she’s been given by Athena,  
more than any other woman, a skill  
in making lovely things, a noble heart,  
and cunning of a sort we never hear about  
in any fair-haired woman of Achaea,  
[160] even those who lived so long ago—

Tyro, Alcmene, and Mycene,  
the one who wore the lovely headband—  
none of them had shrewdness which could match  
Penelope's. Yet in one thing at least  
her scheme did not go well. Your livelihood  
and your possessions will keep being consumed  
as long as in her mind she follows plans  
the gods have now put in her heart. And so,  
while she is gaining a great reputation,  
[170] you're sad about so much lost sustenance.  
But we are not going back to our own lands,  
or some place else, not until she marries  
an Achaean man of her own choosing."

Prudent Telemachus then said in reply:

"Antinous, there's no way I will dismiss  
out of this house against her will the one  
who bore and nursed me. As for my father,  
he's in a distant land, alive or dead.  
It would be hard for me to compensate  
[180] Icarius with a suitable amount,  
as I would have to do, if I sent her back.  
If I didn't do that, then her father  
would treat me badly, and some deity  
would send other troubles, since my mother,  
as she left this house, would call upon  
the dreaded Furies. Men would blame me, too.  
That's why I'll never issue such an order.  
And if your heart is angry about this,  
then leave my home, go have your feasts elsewhere.  
[190] Eat up your own possessions, changing homes,  
one by one. But if you think it's better,  
more in your interests, that one man's goods  
should be destroyed without repayment,  
then use them up. But I will call upon  
the immortal gods to ask if somehow Zeus

will give me retribution. Then you'll die  
here in my home and never be avenged."

Telemachus spoke. Then from a mountain peak  
far-seeing Zeus replied by sending out two eagles,  
[200] flying high up in the sky. For some time they soared,  
like gusts of wind, with their wings spread out, side by side.  
But when they reached the middle of the crowded meeting,  
with quick beats of their wings they wheeled around,  
swooping down on everyone, destruction in their eyes.  
Then with their talons they attacked each other  
clawing head and neck, and flew off on the right,  
past people's homes, across the city. They were amazed  
to see these birds with their own eyes. In their hearts  
they were stirred to think how everything would end.

[210] Then old warrior Halitherses, Mastor's son,  
addressed them. He surpassed all men of his own time  
in knowledge about birds and making prophecies  
of what Fate had in store. Thinking of their common good,  
he spoke up and said:

"Listen to me, men of Ithaca.  
Hear what I say. In what I'm going to speak,  
I'm talking to the suitors most of all.  
A mighty ruin is rolling over them.  
For Odysseus will not be away for long  
from his own friends. I think even now  
[220] he's near by, planning a disastrous fate  
for all the suitors. And he'll be a scourge  
to many others here in sunny Ithaca.  
Long before that we should be considering  
how to stop this. Or rather, these suitors  
should end it by themselves. That would achieve  
what's best for them and do so right away.  
For I am not unskilled in prophecy—  
I understand things well. To Odysseus

I say that everything is turning out  
[230] just as I told him. Back when Achaeans,  
with resourceful Odysseus in their ranks,  
were sailing off to Troy, I prophesied  
he'd suffer many troubles and would lose  
all his companions before returning home  
in twenty years unknown to anyone.  
Now everything I said is coming true."

Eurymachus, Polybus' son, then spoke out in reply:

"Old man, you should go home and prophesy  
to your own children, so that something bad  
[240] does not happen to them later. In these things  
I can foretell events much better than you can.  
There are lots of birds flying here and there  
beneath the sunshine, and not all of them  
are omens of disaster. Odysseus  
has perished far away, and how I wish  
you had died there with him. If you had,  
you would not utter prophecies like these  
or be encouraging Telemachus  
when he's enraged, in hopes you'll get a gift,  
[250] some present he might give you for your house.  
But I tell you this—and it will happen.  
You know many things an old man knows,  
so if your words deceive a younger man  
and incite him to get angry, first of all,  
he'll be worse off, and, with these men here,  
won't have the slightest power to act.  
And on you, old man, we'll lay a penalty  
that will pain your heart to pay—your sorrow  
will be difficult to bear. But now here,  
[260] among you all, I will myself provide  
Telemachus advice. He must command  
his mother to return home to her father.  
They will prepare a wedding and provide



as many lovely presents as befit  
a well-loved daughter. Before that happens,  
I don't think Achaea's sons will end  
their unwelcome wooing, for there's no one  
we're afraid of yet—not Telemachus,  
for all his wordiness—nor do we care  
[270] about a prophecy which you, old man,  
may spout. It won't come to fruition,  
and people will despise you all the more.  
And his possessions will be eaten up  
in this shameful way. There will never be  
compensation given, so long as she  
keeps putting off Achaeans in this marriage.  
Because she's so desirable, we wait here,  
day after day, as rivals, and don't seek  
different women, any one of whom  
[280] might be suitable for us to marry.”

Shrewd Telemachus then said in reply:

“Eurymachus,  
all you other noble suitors, no longer  
will I make requests of you or speak of it,  
for gods and all Achaeans understand.  
Just give me a swift ship and twenty rowers—  
so I can make a journey and return  
to various places, to sandy Pylos  
and then to Sparta, to see if I can find  
some news about my father's voyage home—  
[290] he's been gone so long—if any mortal man  
can tell me. Or I'll hear Zeus' voice perhaps,  
which commonly provides men information.  
If I hear my father is still living  
and returning home, I could hold out here  
for one more year, although it's hard for me.  
If I learn he's dead and gone, I'll come back  
to my dear native land, build him a tomb,

and there perform as many funeral rites  
as are appropriate. And after that,  
[300] I'll give my mother to a husband."

Telemachus said this, then sat down. Next Mentor,  
who had been noble Odysseus' companion,  
stood up among them. When he'd sailed off in his ships,  
Odysseus had made Mentor steward of his household,  
charging them to follow what the old man ordered  
and telling Mentor to keep all property secure.  
Keeping in mind their common good, he spoke them:

"Men of Ithaca, listen now to me.  
Hear what I have to say. From now on  
[310] let no sceptred king ever be considerate  
or kind or gentle. Let him in his heart  
ignore what's right, act with cruelty,  
and strive for evil, for no one here,  
none of those whom divine Odysseus ruled,  
remembers him, yet in his role as father,  
he was compassionate. Not that I object  
to these proud suitors and the violent acts  
which they, with their malicious minds, commit,  
for they are putting their own heads at risk,  
[320] when they use force to drain Odysseus' home  
of its resources and claim he won't come back.  
But at this point it's the other people  
I am angry with, you who sit in silence  
and don't say anything to criticize  
or make the suitors stop, even though  
there are many of you and few of them."

Then Leocritus, son of Euenor, spoke in reply:

"Mentor, you mischief maker, your wits  
have wandered off. What are you saying,  
[330] urging men to make us stop? It would be hard

to fight against those who outnumber you—  
and about a feast. Even if Odysseus,  
king of Ithaca, were to come in person,  
eager in his heart to drive out of his halls  
these noble suitors eating up his home,  
his wife would not rejoice at his arrival,  
although she yearned for him. For if he fought  
against so many men, then he would meet  
a shameful death right here. What you've just said  
[340] is quite irrelevant. So come on now,  
you people should disperse, each one  
go off to his own land. As for Telemachus,  
well, Mentor and Halitherses, comrades  
of his ancestral house from years ago,  
will speed him on his way. But still, I think  
he will be sitting here a long time yet,  
collecting his reports in Ithaca.  
He's never going to undertake that trip."

Leocritus spoke and soon dissolved the meeting.  
[350] The men dispersed, each man to his own house.  
The suitors went inside godlike Odysseus' home.

Telemachus walked away to the ocean shore.  
There, once he'd washed his hands in grey salt water,  
to Athena he made this prayer:

"O hear me,  
you who yesterday came to my home  
as a god and ordered me to set out  
on board ship across the murky seas,  
to learn about my father's voyage back  
after being away so long. All this  
[360] Achaeans are preventing, most of all,  
the suitors with their wicked arrogance."

As he said this prayer, Athena came up close to him,

looking and sounding just like Mentor. She spoke—  
her words had wings:

“Telemachus,  
in future days you will not be worthless  
or a stupid man, if you have in you now  
something of your father’s noble spirit.  
He’s the sort of man who, in word and deed,  
saw things to their conclusion. So for you  
[370] this trip will not be useless or without result.  
If you’re not sprung from Penelope and him,  
then I have no hope that you’ll accomplish  
what you desire to do. It’s true few men  
are like their fathers. Most of them are worse.  
Only very few of them are better.  
But in future you’ll not be unworthy  
or a fool, and you do not completely lack  
Odysseus’ wisdom, so there is some hope  
you will fulfil your mission. So set aside  
[380] what those foolish suitors have advised.  
They lack all discretion, all sense of justice,  
for they have no idea of death, the dark fate  
closing in on them, when in a single day  
they will all perish. You must not delay  
that trip you wish to make. I am a friend  
of your ancestral home, so much so that I  
will furnish a fast ship for you and come  
in person with you. But now you must go home.  
Mingle with the suitors. Collect provisions,  
[390] and put everything in some containers—  
wine in jars and barley meal, which strengthens men,  
in thick leather sacks. I’ll go through the town  
and quickly round up a group of comrades,  
all volunteers. In sea-girt Ithaca,  
I’ll choose from the many ships, new and old,  
the best one for you, and then, when that ship  
has been made ready and is fit to sail,

we'll launch it out into the wine-dark sea.”

Athena, Zeus' daughter, finished speaking,  
[400] Telemachus did not stay there for long,  
once he had heard the goddess speak. He set off  
toward his home, with a heavy heart, and there  
he found the arrogant suitors in the palace,  
by the courtyard, skinning goats and singeing pigs.  
Antinous came up laughing at Telemachus.  
He grabbed his hand and spoke to him:

“Telemachus,  
you're such a braggart—an untamed spirit.  
You should never let that heart of yours  
entertain any further nasty words  
[410] or actions. I think you should eat and drink,  
just as you did before. Achaeans here  
will certainly see to it you acquire  
all the things you need—some hand-picked oarsmen  
and a ship, so you can quickly travel  
to sacred Pylos in search of some report  
about your noble father.”

Prudent Telemachus  
then answered him and said:

“Antinous,  
it's quite impossible for me to eat  
and stay quiet with your overbearing group  
[420] or to enjoy myself with my mind relaxed.  
Is it not sufficient that in days past,  
while I was still a child, you suitors  
consumed so much of my fine property?  
But now that I've grown up and teach myself  
by listening to others and my spirit  
gets stronger here inside me, I will try  
to counteract the wicked fate you bring,

either by going to Pylos, or else here,  
in this community. For I will set out,  
[430] and the voyage which I have talked about  
will not be useless, even though I travel  
as a passenger and not the master  
of the ship or oarsmen. It seems to me  
you think that will make things better for you.”

Telemachus spoke. Then he casually pulled his hand  
out of Antinous’ grasp. Meanwhile, the suitors,  
preoccupied with feasting in the house, mocked him  
and kept up their abusive insults. One of them,  
an over-proud young man, would speak like this:

[440] “It seems Telemachus really does intend  
to murder us. He’ll bring men to help him  
back from sandy Pylos or from Sparta.  
That’s how terrible his resolution is.  
Or else he wants to head off to Ephyre,  
that rich land, so he can fetch from there  
some lethal medicines and then throw them  
in the wine bowl, to destroy us all.”

And after that another proud young man would say:

“Who knows whether he might die himself,  
[450] once he sets off in his hollow ship, roaming  
far away from friends, just like Odysseus?  
If so, he’ll provide still more work for us.  
We’ll have to split up everything he owns  
and hand this house over to his mother  
and the man she marries.”

That’s how the suitors talked.  
But Telemachus just walked away, going down  
to the high-roofed chamber which stored his father’s wealth,  
an extensive place. Bronze and gold lay there in stacks,

with clothing packed in chests and stores of fragrant oil.

[460] Huge jars of old sweet wine stood there—each one contained  
drink fit for gods and not yet mixed with water—  
arranged in rows along the wall, in case Odysseus,  
after so many hardships, ever reached his home.  
The close-fitting double doors were firmly closed,  
and a female steward stayed there day and night,  
protecting everything, the shrewd Eurycleia,  
daughter of Ops, Peisenor's son. Telemachus  
called her into the storage room, then said:

“Old Nurse,  
pour some sweet wine into jars for me,  
[470] the best wine you've got after the stock  
you've planned to store here for Odysseus,  
that ill-fated man, born from Zeus, in case,  
after evading death and fate, he shows up  
from somewhere. Fill twelve jars and fit them all  
with covers. Pour me out some barley grain  
in well-stitched leather sacks. Make sure there are  
twenty measures of ground-up barley meal.  
But keep this knowledge to yourself. Just get  
all these things assembled. In the evening,  
[480] once my mother goes upstairs into her room  
to get some sleep, I'll come to collect them.  
I'm off to sandy Pylos and to Sparta,  
to see if I can get some information  
about my dear father's journey home,  
if there is any news I can find out.”

Telemachus spoke. The dear nurse Eurycleia  
let out a cry and began to weep. Then she spoke—  
her words had wings:

“O my dear child,  
how did this thought gain entry to your heart?  
[490] Where on this wide earth do you intend to roam,

with you an only son and so well loved?  
In some distant land among strange people  
Odysseus, a man born from Zeus, has died.  
As soon as you have gone from here, the suitors  
will start their wicked schemes to hurt you later—  
how they can have you killed by trickery  
and then parcel out among themselves  
all your possessions. You must stay here  
to guard what's yours. You don't need to suffer  
[500] what comes from wandering on the restless sea.”

Shrewd Telemachus then answered her and said:

“Be brave, dear nurse, for I have not planned this  
without help from a god. But you must swear  
you won't mention this to my dear mother,  
until eleven or twelve days from now,  
or until she misses me or learns I've gone,  
so she does not mar her lovely face with tears.”

Once Telemachus said this, the old woman swore  
a mighty oath by all the gods she'd tell no one.  
[510] When she had sworn and the oath had been completed,  
she went immediately to pour wine into jars  
and fill the well-stitched leather sacks with barley meal.  
Telemachus went up into the dining hall  
and there rejoined the company of suitors.

Then goddess Athena with the gleaming eyes  
thought of something else. Looking like Telemachus,  
she went all through the city. To every man  
she came across to she gave the same instructions,  
telling them to meet by the fast ship that evening.  
[520] Next, she asked Noemon, fine son of Phronius,  
for a swift ship, and he was happy to oblige.  
Then the sun went down, and all the roads grew dark.  
Athena dragged the fast ship down into the sea



and stocked it with supplies, all the materials  
well-decked boats have stowed on board, then moved the ship  
to the harbour's outer edge. There they assembled,  
that group of brave companions, and the goddess  
instilled fresh spirit in them all. Then Athena,  
goddess with the glittering eyes, thought of one more thing.

[530] She set off, going to noble Odysseus' home.

There she poured sweet drowsiness on all the suitors.  
She made them wander round as they were drinking  
and knocked the cups out of their hands. When sleep  
fell down across their eyelids, the suitors felt an urge  
not to stay sitting there for any length of time,  
but to get themselves some rest down in the city.  
Then bright-eyed Athena told Telemachus  
to come outside, by the entrance to the spacious hall.  
In her voice and form she resembled Mentor:

[540] "Telemachus, your well-armed companions  
are already sitting beside their oars,  
waiting for you to launch the expedition.  
Let's be off, so we don't delay the trip  
a moment longer."

With these words, Pallas Athena  
quickly led the way, and Telemachus followed  
in her footsteps. Once they'd come down to the sea  
and reached the ship, on shore they came across  
their long-haired companions. Telemachus spoke to them  
with strength and power:

"Come, my friends, let's gather  
[550] our supplies. They've already been assembled,  
all together in the hall. My mother  
knows nothing of all this, and neither do  
any other women of the household.  
I've mentioned this to only one of them."

After saying this, Telemachus led them away,  
and the group then followed. They carried everything  
to the well-decked ship and stowed it all in place,  
as Odysseus' dear son instructed them to do.  
Then, with Athena going on board ahead of him,  
[560] Telemachus embarked. She sat in the stern.  
Telemachus sat right beside her, as the men  
untied the stern ropes, then climbed aboard the ship  
and went to seat themselves beside their oarlocks.  
Bright-eyed Athena arranged a fair breeze for them,  
a strong West Wind blowing across the wine-dark sea.  
Telemachus then called out to his companions  
to set their hands to the ship's rigging. Once they heard,  
they went to work, raising the mast cut out of fir,  
setting it in its hollow socket, securing it  
[570] with forestays, and hoisting the white sail aloft  
with twisted ox-hide thongs. The belly of the sail  
filled up with wind, and the ship sailed on its way.  
As it sliced straight through the swell on its way forward,  
around the bow began the great song of the waves.  
When they had lashed the rigging on that fast black ship,  
they set out bowls brimful of wine and poured libations  
to the eternal ageless gods, and of them all  
especially to Athena, Zeus' bright-eyed daughter.  
Then all night long and well beyond the sunrise,  
[580] their ship continued sailing on its journey.