

CHAPTER ONE

BOOK TWO

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.