

BOOK THIRTEEN

Odysseus Leaves Phaeacia and Reaches Ithaca

[Odysseus ends his story; the Phaeacians collect gifts and store them on a ship; Odysseus takes his leave and goes on board, where he sleeps during the voyage to Ithaca; the Phaeacians land in Ithaca, unload the goods, place Odysseus sleeping on the shore, and leave; Poseidon complains to Zeus about the Phaeacians' transporting Odysseus safely home; Poseidon decides to turn the Phaeacian ship to stone and put up a mountain range around their city; the Phaeacians are amazed at the transformation of their ship; Alcinous recalls his father's prophecies; the Phaeacians sacrifice to Poseidon; Odysseus wakes up on Ithaca but does not recognize the place; Athena visits him in the form of a young man; she tells him he is in Ithaca; Odysseus fabricates a story about his identity; Athena transforms herself into a woman, reveals her identity, and points out the features of the island; the two of them plan how Odysseus will take his revenge on the suitors; Athena transforms his appearance so that he looks like an impoverished old beggar; she tells him to seek out the man who tends his swine; Athena leaves for Sparta to fetch Telemachus]

Odysseus paused. All Phaeacians sat in silence,
without saying a word, spellbound in the shadowy hall.
Then Alcinous again spoke up and said to him:

“Odysseus, since you’re visiting my home,
with its brass floors and high-pitched roof, I think
you won’t leave here and go back disappointed,
although you’ve truly suffered much bad luck.
And now I’ll speak to all men present here,
those who in this hall are always drinking
[10] the council’s gleaming wine and enjoying
the songs the minstrel sings. I tell you this.
Clothing for our guest is packed already,
stored in a polished chest inlaid with gold,
as well as all the other gifts brought here
by Phaeacia’s counsellors. But come now,
let’s give him a large tripod and a cauldron,
each one of us. We can repay ourselves—
we’ll get the people to provide the cost.
It’s too expensive for one man to give
[20] without receiving any money back.”

Alcinous spoke. And they agreed with what he'd said.
Then they all left to go back home and get some rest.

But as soon as rose-fingered early Dawn appeared,
they hurried to the ship and loaded on the bronze,
which strengthens men. Strong and mighty Alcinous
went in person through the ship and had the gifts
stowed below the benches, where they wouldn't hinder
any of the crewmen, as they plied their oars.
Then they went back to Alcinous' home to feast.

- [30] On their behalf, strong and mighty Alcinous
sacrificed a bull to Zeus, god of the dark cloud
and son of Cronos, who rules over everything.
Once they'd burned pieces of the thigh, they then enjoyed
a splendid banquet. Among them Demodocus,
the godlike minstrel honoured by his people,
sang a song of celebration. But Odysseus
kept on turning round toward the blazing sunlight,
keen to see it set—he so wanted to return.
Just as a man longs for supper, when all day long
[40] a pair of wine-dark oxen pull a well-made plough
through fallow land for him, and as the sun goes down,
the sight delights him—now he can prepare a meal,
for his knees are tired when he moves—that's how
Odysseus rejoiced to see the sunlight disappear.
He spoke up at once, addressing the Phaeacians,
men who love the oar, and especially Alcinous,
saying these words:

“Lord Alcinous, of all men
most renowned, pour out your libations now,
and send me safely off. Farewell to you!

- [50] Now everything my dear heart once desired
has come about—an escort and these gifts,
marks of friendship. And may the heavenly gods

make me content with them. When I get back,
may I find my excellent wife at home,
with all my family safe. And as for you,
may you stay here and make a happy life
for the wives you married and your children.
May gods grant you success of every kind,
and may no evil things afflict your people.”

[60] Odysseus spoke. They all approved of what he’d said,
and ordered that their guest should be escorted off,
because he’d spoken well. Then mighty Alcinous
addressed the herald, saying:

“Pontonous,
stir the mixing bowl, and serve out the wine
to all those in the hall, so once we’ve prayed
to Father Zeus, we may send off our guest,
back to his native land.”

Alcinous finished speaking.
Pontonous mixed wine sweet as honey, then served it round
to all of them, coming up to everyone in turn,
[70] and, from where they sat, they poured libations
to all the blessed gods who hold wide heaven.
Lord Odysseus stood up, placed a two-handled cup
in Arete’s hands, and spoke winged words to her:

“Fare you well, O queen, through all your years,
until old age and death arrive, the fate
of every human being. I’m leaving now.
But in this house may you have much delight
from your own children and your people,
and from Alcinous, the king.”

Lord Odysseus spoke,
[80] then moved across the threshold. Mighty Alcinous
dispatched a herald to conduct him to the sea

and his fast ship. Arete sent slave girls with him.
One held a freshly laundered cloak and tunic.
She told a second one to follow on behind
escorting the large trunk. Another female slave
brought red wine and bread. Once they'd come down to the ship,
beside the sea, the noble youths accompanying him
immediately took all the food and drink on board
and stowed them in the hollow ship. They spread a rug
[90] and linen sheet on the deck inside the hollow ship,
at the stern, so Odysseus could sleep in peace.
He went aboard, as well, and lay down in silence.
Each man sat in proper order at his oarlock.
They loosed the cable from the perforated stone.
Once they leaned back and stirred the water with their oars,
a calming sleep fell on his eyelids, undisturbed
and very sweet, something very similar to death.
Just as four stallions yoked together charge ahead
across the plain, all running underneath the lash,
[100] and jump high as they gallop quickly on their way,
that's how the stern of that ship leapt up on high,
while in her wake the dark waves of the roaring sea
were churned to a great foam, as she sped on her path,
safe and secure. Not even a wheeling hawk,
the swiftest of all flying things, could match her speed,
as she raced ahead, slicing through the ocean waves,
carrying a man whose mind was like a god's.
His heart in earlier days had endured much pain,
as he moved through men's wars and suffered on the waves.
[110] Now he slept in peace, forgetting all his troubles.

When the brightest of the stars rose up, the one
which always comes to herald light from early Dawn,
the sea-faring ship sailed in close to Ithaca.
Now, in that land, Phorcys, the Old Man of the Sea,
has his harbour.¹ Two jutting headlands at its mouth
drop off on the seaward side, but on the other,
slope down to the cove and keep the place protected

from huge waves whipped up by stormy winds at sea.
In there well-timbered ships can ride without being moored,
[120] once they reach that anchorage. An olive tree
with long pointed leaves stands at the harbour head,
and close beside it there's a pleasant shadowy cave,
sacred to the nymphs whom people call the Naiads.²
Mixing bowls and jars of stone are stored inside,
and bees make honey there. The cave has long stone looms
where nymphs weave cloth with a deep sea-purple dye,
an amazing thing to see. In there, too, are springs
which always flow. The cave has two entrances—
one, which faces North Wind, is the one men use
[130] to go inside; the other one, which faces South Wind,
is divine—human beings may not go in there,
for the pathway is confined to the immortals.

They rowed in here, a place they knew about before.
Those rowers' arms had so much strength, half the boat,
which was moving fast, was driven up on shore.
Once they climbed out of that well-built rowing ship
onto dry land, first they took Odysseus out,
lifting him from the hollow ship still wrapped up
in the linen sheet and splendid blanket, placed him,
[140] fast asleep, down on the sand, then carried out
the gifts Phaeacia's noblemen had given him,
thanks to the goodwill of great-hearted Athena,
when he was setting out for home. They put these gifts
against the trunk of the olive tree, in a pile,
some distance from the path, in case someone came by,
before Odysseus could wake up, stumbled on them,
and robbed him. Then they set off, back to Phaeacia.

But the Shaker of the Earth had not forgotten
those threats he'd once made against godlike Odysseus.
So he asked Zeus what plan he had in mind:

[150] "Father Zeus,

the immortal gods will honour me no more,
for these men pay me no respect at all,
these Phaeacians, who, as you well know,
are my descendants.³ For I clearly said
Odysseus should suffer much misfortune
before he made it home. I'd not rob him
of his return completely, once you'd made
that promise and confirmed it with a nod.
But these men carried him, while still asleep,
[160] over the sea in their swift ship, set him
in Ithaca, and gave him countless gifts—
bronze and gold and piles of woven clothing,
more than Odysseus ever would have got
at Troy, if he'd come safely back, bringing
his fair share of the trophies with him.”

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then gave Poseidon this reply:

“Mighty Earthshaker, what strange things you say!
The gods aren't treating you with disrespect.
To heap dishonour on the oldest and the best
[170] would be hard to bear. But if any man,
seduced by his own force and power,
fails to honour you somehow, it's up to you
to take vengeance later. Do what you want,
what gives your heart delight.”

Earthshaker Poseidon
then answered Zeus:

“Lord of the Dark Cloud,
I would have quickly done as you've just said,
but I was afraid you might be angry,
and that I wanted to avoid. But now,
I wish to strike at those Phaeacians,
[180] at their splendid ship, as it sails back home,
after its trip across the misty seas,

so they will stop and never more provide
an escort carrying human beings.
Then all around their city I'll throw up
a massive mountain range."

Cloud-gatherer Zeus
then answered him and said:

"Brother, listen now
to what my heart thinks best—when all of them
are in the city looking out, as that boat
speeds on her way, then turn her into stone
[190] close to the shore, a rock that looks just like
some fast ship, so all men will be amazed.
Then raise a massive mountain round their town."

When Earthshaker Poseidon heard these words, he left
and went to Scheria, home of the Phaeacians.
There he waited. As their sea-faring ship approached,
moving quickly on her course, Earthshaker came up
and turned it into stone. With the palm of his hand
he hit it once and from below froze it in place.
Then Poseidon left. The long-oared Phaeacians,
[200] men famous for their ships, spoke to one another—
their words had wings. Looking at the man beside him,
one of them would say:

"Who has fixed our swift ship
out at sea as she was racing homeward,
and in plain sight of all?"

That's what they said.
But they didn't understand why this had happened.
Then Alcinous addressed them all and said:

"Alas!
The prophecies my father used to make

so long ago have come to pass. He'd say
Poseidon would get angry with us,
[210] because we conduct all men in safety.
He claimed that one day, as a splendid ship
of the Phaeacians was returning home,
after a convoy on the misty seas,
Poseidon would strike her and then throw up
a huge mountain range around our city.
That's what the old man said. And now all this
is taking place. But come, let all of you
attend to what I say. You must now stop
escorting mortal men when any man
[220] comes to our city. And let's sacrifice
twelve choice bulls as offerings to Poseidon,
so he'll take pity and not ring our city
with a lofty mountain range."

Alcinous spoke.

They were all afraid, so they prepared the bulls.
Then the Phaeacian counsellors and leaders,
standing by the altar, prayed to lord Poseidon.

Meanwhile, Odysseus, asleep in his own land,
woke up. He didn't recognize just where he was.
He'd been away so long, and Pallas Athena,
[230] Zeus' daughter, had shed a mist around him,
to make him hard for people to identify,
so she could tell him everything, while his wife,
his townsfolk, and his friends would not know who he was,
until the suitors' crimes had all been paid in full.
And so all things seemed unfamiliar to their king,
the long straight paths, the harbour with safe anchorage,
the sheer-faced cliffs, the trees in rich full bloom.
So he jumped up and looked out at his native land.
He groaned aloud and struck his thighs with both his palms,
then expressed his grief, saying:

[240] “Where am I now?

Whose country have I come to this time?
Are they violent, unjust, and cruel,
or do they welcome strangers? Do their minds
respect the gods? And all this treasure here,
where do I take that? Where do I go next?
I wish I’d stayed with the Phaeacians there.
I’d have visited another mighty king
who would’ve welcomed me, then sent me off
on my way home. I’ve no idea now

[250] where to put this wealth. I won’t leave it here,

in case someone robs me and removes it
as his spoils. Alas! All those Phaeacians,
those counsellors and leaders, weren’t so wise
or just—they led me to a foreign land.
They said they’d bring me to bright Ithaca,
but that’s not what they’ve done. I pray that Zeus,
god of suppliants, who watches everyone
and punishes the man who goes astray,
will pay them back. But come, I’ll count these gifts

[260] and check them out, just in case these men

in their hollow ship have carried away
some property of mine.”

After saying this,

Odysseus began to count the lovely tripods,
cauldrons, gold, and splendid clothing. It was all there.

Then, overwhelmed with longing for his native land,
he wandered on the shore beside the crashing sea,
with many cries of sorrow. Then Athena came,
moving close to him in the form of a young man,
someone who herded sheep, but with a refined air

[270] that marks the sons of kings. She wore a well-made cloak,

a double fold across her shoulders, and sandals
on her shining feet. In her hand she gripped a spear.
Odysseus, happy to catch sight of her, came up
and spoke to her—his words had wings:

“My friend,
since you’re the first one I’ve encountered here,
my greetings to you, and may you meet me
with no evil in your mind. Save these goods,
and rescue me. For I’m entreating you,
the way I would a god, and I’ve come here
[280] begging as a dear friend at your knee.
Tell me the truth, so I can understand—
What country is this? Who are these people?
Is it some sunny island or a headland
of the fertile mainland reaching out to sea?”

Athena, goddess with the gleaming eyes, replied:

“Stranger, you’re a fool, or else you’ve come
from somewhere far away, if you must ask
about this land. It’s name is not unknown—
not at all—many men have heard of it,
[290] all those who live in regions of the dawn
and rising sun, as well as all who dwell
towards the gloomy darkness in the west—
a rugged place, not fit for herding horses,
yet not too poor, although not very wide.
There are countless crops and wine-bearing grapes.
There’s no lack of rain or heavy dew,
a fine land for raising goats and cattle.
There are all sorts of trees and watering holes
that last throughout the year. And so, stranger,
[300] the name of Ithaca is even known in Troy,
a long way from Achaean land, they say.”

Athena spoke, and much-enduring lord Odysseus
felt great joy, happy to learn of his ancestral lands
from what Pallas Athena said, daughter of Zeus,
who bears the aegis. So he spoke winged words to her.
He didn’t tell the truth, but left some things unsaid,

always thinking up sly thoughts inside his chest:

“I’ve heard of Ithaca, even in wide Crete,
far across the sea. Now I’m here in person,
[310] with these goods of mine. When I ran away,
I left even more there with my children.
I killed a dear son of Idomeneus,
swift-footed Orsilochus—in spacious Crete
he was the fastest runner of all those
who work to earn their bread.⁴ He wished
to steal away the spoils I’d won at Troy,
for which my heart had gone through so much pain,
suffering men’s wars and dangers on the sea,
because I wouldn’t gratify his father
[320] and serve as his attendant there in Troy,
but led another group of my own men.
As he was coming home, back from the fields,
I lay in wait for him with my companions,
close to the road. There with my bronze-tipped spear
I struck him. Black night concealed the heavens,
and no one noticed us or was aware
I took his life. Once my sharp bronze killed him,
I ran off to a ship without delay,
offered prizes to some fine Phoenicians,
[330] as much as they could wish, entreating them,
begging them to take me off to Pylos,
land me there, or else to lovely Elis,
where Epeians rule. Much against their will,
the power of the winds drove them off course.
They didn’t wish to cheat me, but were blown
away from there and sailed in here at night.
We quickly rowed into this anchorage.
Although we needed food, we never thought
of dinner—we all lay down where we were.
[340] I was so tired, sweet sleep fell over me.
They took my goods out of the hollow ship
and piled them where I lay down in the sand.

Then they went on board and sailed away
for bustling Sidon, leaving me behind
with all these troubles in my heart.”

Odysseus finished.

Bright-eyed Athena smiled and stroked him with her hand.
Then she changed herself into a lovely woman,
tall and very skilled in making splendid things.
She spoke to him—her words had wings:

“Any man
[350] or even a god who ran into you
would have to be a cunning charlatan
to surpass your various kinds of trickery.
You’re bold, with subtle plans, and love
deceit. Although you’re now in your own land,
it doesn’t look as if you’re going to stop
your lies or making up those artful stories,
which you love from the bottom of your heart.
But come, let’s no longer speak of this,
for we both understand what shrewdness means.
[360] Of all men you’re the best in making plans
and giving speeches, and among all gods
I’m well known for subtlety and wisdom.
Still, you failed to recognize Pallas Athena,
daughter of Zeus, who’s always at your side,
looking out for you in every crisis.
Yes, I made all those Phaeacians love you.
Now I’ve come to weave a scheme with you
and hide these goods Phaeacian noblemen
gave you as you were setting out for home,
[370] thanks to my plans and what I had in mind.
I’ll tell you what Fate has in store for you—
you’ll find harsh troubles in your well-built home.
Be patient, for you must endure them all.
Don’t tell anyone, no man or woman,
you’ve returned from wandering around.

Instead, keep silent. Bear the many pains,
and, when men act savagely, do nothing.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

“Goddess, it’s difficult for any man
[380] to recognize you when he meets you,
even if he’s really wise, for you appear
in any shape you wish. But I know well
that in years past you’ve been kind to me,
when we sons of Achaea fought in Troy.
But when we’d ransacked Priam’s lofty city
and sailed off in our ships and then some god
scattered the Achaeans, I never saw you,
daughter of Zeus. I didn’t notice you
coming aboard our ship to keep me safe
[390] from danger. So I kept on wandering,
my heart always divided in my chest,
until the gods delivered me from trouble.
Then, in the rich land of the Phaeacians,
your words encouraged me, and you yourself
led me into their city. Now I beg you,
in your father’s name, for I don’t believe
I’ve come back to sunny Ithaca. No.
I’m footloose in some other country,
and you’re attempting to confuse my mind.
[400] So tell me truly if I have arrived
in my dear native land.”

Then Athena,
the bright-eyed goddess, answered him:

“That heart in your chest
always thinks this way. And that’s the reason
I can’t leave you in distress. You’re so polite,
intelligent, and cautious. Another man
who’d just come back from wandering around

would've been eager to rush home to see
his wife and children. But you're not keen
to learn about or hear of anything,
[410] before you can observe your wife yourself.
She's still living in her home, as before—
her nights and days always end in sorrow,
and she weeps. As for me, I had no doubts,
for my heart always knew you'd get back home,
although your comrades would all be destroyed.
But you should know I had no wish to fight
against Poseidon, my father's brother,
who bears anger in his heart against you,
enraged that you destroyed his dear son's eye.
[420] But come, I'll demonstrate to you this land
is Ithaca, so you'll be reassured.
This anchorage here belongs to Phorcys,
the Old Man of the Sea. At the harbour head
stands the long-leafed olive tree. Beside it
is the pleasant, shadowy cave, sacred
to those nymphs they call the Naiads.
This, you must know, is the arching cavern
where you made many sacrificial gifts
to those same nymphs to grant your wishes.
[430] And there is forested Mount Neriton."

As the goddess said these words, she dispersed the mist.
Once the land was visible, lord Odysseus,
who had endured so much, overjoyed to see it,
kissed the fertile ground. Then, stretching out his arms
towards the nymphs, he made this prayer:

"You Naiad nymphs,
Zeus' daughters, I thought I'd never catch
a glimpse of you again. Now I greet you
with a loving prayer. I'll give gifts, as well,
as I have done for you in earlier days,
[440] if Zeus' daughter who awards the spoils

will in her goodness let me stay alive
and help my dear son grow into a man.”

Athena, the bright-eyed goddess, then said to him:

“Be brave, and don’t weigh down your heart with this.
Now, let’s not delay, but put away these goods
in some hidden corner of this sacred cave,
where they’ll stay safely stored inside for you.
And then let’s think about how all these things
may turn out for the best.”

After saying this,
[450] the goddess went into the shadowy cave
and looked around for hiding places. Odysseus
brought in all the treasures—enduring bronze and gold
and finely woven clothes, gifts from the Phaeacians.
He stored these carefully, and Pallas Athena,
daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus, set a rock in place
to block the entranceway.

Then the two of them
sat down by the trunk of the sacred olive tree
to think of ways to kill those arrogant suitors.
Bright-eyed goddess Athena was the first to speak:

[460] “Resourceful Odysseus, Laertes’ son
and child of Zeus, think how your hands may catch
these shameless suitors, who for three years now
have been lording it inside your palace,
wooing your godlike wife and offering her
their marriage gifts. She longs for your return.
Although her heart is sad, she feeds their hopes,
by giving each man words of reassurance.
But her mind is full of other things.”

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

[470] “Goddess, if you had not told me all this,
I would have shared the fate of Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, and died in my own home.
Come, weave a plan so I can pay them back.
Stand in person by my side, and fill me
with indomitable courage, as you did
when we loosed the bright diadem of Troy.
O goddess with the gleaming eyes,
if you are with me now as eagerly
as you were then, with your aid I’d fight
[480] three hundred men, if you, mighty goddess,
are willing in your heart to help me.”

Bright-eyed goddess Athena then answered him:

“You can be sure I’ll stand beside you.
I won’t forget you when the trouble starts.
I think the brains and blood of many suitors
who consume your livelihood will spatter
the wide earth. But come, I’ll transform you,
so you’ll be unrecognizable to all.
I’ll wrinkle fine skin on your supple limbs,
[490] remove the dark hair on your head, and then
dress you in rags which would make you shudder
to see clothing anyone. And your eyes,
so striking up to now, I’ll make them dim.
To all those suitors you’ll appear disgusting,
and to the wife and son you left at home.
You must go first of all to see the swineherd,
who tends your pigs. He’s well disposed to you
and loves your son and wise Penelope.
You’ll find him keeping his swine company
[500] where they feed by Corax Rock, near the spring
of Arethusa, drinking its dark water
and eating lots of acorns, which make pigs
grow rich in fat. Stay there and sit with him.

And ask him questions about everything.
I'll go to Sparta, land of lovely women,
and there, Odysseus, I'll summon back
your dear son, Telemachus, who has gone
to spacious Lacedaemon, to the home
of Menelaus, to find out news of you,
[510] to learn if you are still alive somewhere."

Resourceful Odysseus then answered her and said:

"Why did you not tell him, since in your mind
you know all things? What did you intend—
that he'd experience hardships on his trip
across the restless seas, while other men
were eating up his livelihood?"

Athena,
goddess with the gleaming eyes, then said to him:

"Don't let your heart get too concerned with him.
I sent him off myself, so he might earn
[520] a well-known reputation going there.
He's not in trouble, but sits there in peace,
in the home of the son of Atreus,
with countless fine things set before him.
It's true some young men out in a black ship
are lying in ambush, keen to murder him
before he gets back to his native land,
but I don't think that's what will come about.
Before that happens, earth will cover up
the many suitors who consume your goods."

[530] As she said this, Athena touched him with her staff.
She wrinkled the fair skin on his supple limbs
and took the dark hair from his head. His arms and legs
she covered with an old man's ancient flesh and dimmed
his eyes, which had been so beautiful before.

She dressed him in different clothes—a ragged cloak,
a dirty tunic, ripped and disheveled, stained
with stinking smoke. Then she threw around him
a large hairless hide from a swift deer and gave him
a staff and a tattered leather pouch, full of holes
and with a twisted strap.

[540] When the two of them
had made their plans, they parted, and Athena went
to Lacedaemon to bring back Odysseus' son.