

BOOK 14

A Loyal Slave

Leaving the bay, he hiked the rugged path
 through woodland and across the cliffs; Athena
 had shown him where to go to find the swineherd.
 Of all those in Odysseus' household,
 this noble slave cared most about preserving
 the master's property. Odysseus
 found him as he was sitting out on his porch.
 His yard was high and visible for miles,
 of fieldstones topped with twigs of thorny pear.
 He built it in the absence of his master,
 with no help from Laertes or the mistress.
 Around the yard, he set a ring of stakes,
 of wood with bark stripped off. Inside the yard,
 he made twelve sties all next to one another,
 for breeding sows, with fifty in each one.
 The boars slept outside; there were fewer of them,
 because the suitors kept on eating them.
 The swineherd let them have the fattest boars;
 just three hundred and sixty still remained.
 Their captain kept four fierce half-wild dogs
 to guard the gate. Now he was cutting oxhide

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to make himself some sandals. Of his men,
 three herded up the pigs, and ran around
 in all directions; he had sent the fourth
 to town to take a pig to those proud suitors.
 He had no choice; he had to satisfy
 their cravings for fresh meat.

Then suddenly
 the guard dogs saw Odysseus, and rushed
 towards him with loud barks. He kept his head,
 and sank down to the ground and dropped his stick.
 They would have hurt him terribly, and shamed him
 on his own property—but acting fast
 the swineherd dropped his leatherwork and rushed
 to chase the dogs away. He yelled at them
 and pelted them with stones to make them scatter.
 And then he told his master,

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"My dogs almost
 ripped you apart, old man! You would have brought me
 shame, when the gods are hurting me already.
 I am in mourning for an absent master,
 raising his pigs for other men to eat.
 My lord is lost and maybe even hungry,
 in lands where the people speak in foreign tongues—
 if he is even still alive, still seeing
 the sunlight. Well now, follow me, old man,
 fill up on food and wine, then tell me where
 you come from, and the troubles you have borne."

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The noble swineherd heaped up cushy brushwood,
 and spread a furry goatskin over it—his own
 bed-blanket, thick and warm. Odysseus
 sat down and was delighted at this welcome.
 He said,

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"May Zeus and all the deathless gods
reward you with your heart's desire, because
you welcomed me so willingly."

And you,
Eumaeus, answered, "One must honor guests
and foreigners and strangers, even those
much poorer than oneself. Zeus watches over
beggars and guests and strangers. What I have
to give is small, but I will give it gladly.
Life is like this for slaves: we live in fear,
when younger men have power over us. 60
My real lord is kept from home by gods.
He would have taken care of me, and given
what kindly owners give to loyal slaves:
a house with land, and wife whom many men
would want—as recompense for years of labor
which gods have blessed and made to prosper. Master
would have been good to me, if he had stayed
here till old age. He must be dead by now.
Damn Helen and her family! So many
have died for her sake. Master went to Troy, 70
to win back Agamemnon's honor, fighting
the Trojans."

Then he belted up his tunic
and hurried to the pen, and chose two piglets.
Inside he butchered them, singed off the bristles,
chopped up the meat and roasted it on skewers.
He set it, piping hot, before his guest,
sprinkling barley on the top. He mixed
wine in an ivy bowl, as sweet as honey,
and then sat down across from him, and urged,

"Now, guest, eat up! This is a poor slave's meal: 80
a suckling pig. The suitors eat the hogs.
Their hearts have no compassion! They ignore
the gods, who watch and hate such crimes and bless
good deeds and justice. Even cutthroat pirates,
who go to plunder other people's lands,
seizing the spoils that Zeus has granted them,
and sail home in a ship filled full of treasure—
even they feel the watchful eyes of gods.
These suitors must have heard some god's voice saying,
'Odysseus has died.' So they refuse 90
to go back to their own homes or to arrange
suitable marriages. Instead they sit,
wasting his wealth on feasts. Each night and day
they butcher sheep, not one but dozens of them,
and pour out yet more wine for reckless drinking.
Those selfish oafs! My lord was very rich;
no others on the mainland or back here
in Ithaca, nor twenty all combined,
possessed as much. I will list all of it.
Twelve herds of cattle on the mainland, twelve 100
of sheep, and twelve of pigs, and twelve of goats.
He had to hire more laborers to help us.
And out here on the far end of the island,
eleven herds of goats are grazing, watched
by good men. Every day, a herdsman takes
whichever goat seems fattest and most healthy
up to the palace. I, who watch these pigs,
must choose the best for them."

Odysseus
gratefully wolfed the meat and drank the wine
in silence. He was hatching plots to ruin 110
the suitors. After he had had enough

to eat, he took the wine-cup he had drunk from,
filled it again and gave it to Eumaeus,
who took it gladly. Then Odysseus
said,

"Friend, who bought you? This rich, noble man
that you describe—who is he? You say he
died in the war for Agamemnon's honor.
Perhaps I know him, since he must be famous.
Zeus and the other gods will be aware
if I have seen him and can bring you news.
He traveled widely."

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But the swineherd said,
"His wife and son will not trust travelers
who claim to bring them news. Tramps always lie
to get a meal—they have no cause to tell
the truth. All those who pass through Ithaca
go to my mistress spinning foolish tales.
She welcomes them and questions them, while tears
stream from her eyes, and rightly so: a wife
should mourn for her dead husband. Sir, you also
would weave tall tales if you got clothes for it.
But in reality, my master's skin
has been ripped off his bones by birds of prey
and dogs; his life is gone. Or he has been
eaten at sea by fish; his bones are lying
upon the beach, heaped high with sand. His death
is ruin for us all, especially me,
since I will never have so kind a master,
however far I go, not even if
I go back to the home of my own parents
who gave me birth and brought me up. I wish
that I could see them, in my native land.

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But I grieve less for my own family
than for Odysseus. I miss him so.
I hesitate to call him by his name,
stranger: I would prefer to call him 'brother,'
even when he is far away, because
he loved and cared for me with so much kindness."

Odysseus was self-restrained. He said,
"My friend, you are so adamant, insisting
that he will not come back. You have no faith.
But this is no tall tale: I swear to you
Odysseus is on his way. And when
he is in his own house, then I will claim
my prize as messenger—some better clothes.
Till then, I will take nothing, though I need them.
I hate like Hades' gates the man who caves
to poverty, and starts to lie. I swear
by Zeus, and by the welcome that you gave me,
and by the hearth of great Odysseus,
where I am going: all this will turn out
as I say now. Odysseus will come,
within this very cycle of the moon:
between the waning and the waxing time,
he will come home, and pay back all those here
who disrespect his wife and noble son."

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You answered him, swineherd Eumaeus, "Sir,
I will not give you this reward, since he
will not come home. Relax and drink. Let us
think about other things. Do not remind me.
My heart is troubled when a person mentions
my faithful master. Never mind your oath.
I hope he comes, as do Penelope
and old Laertes and Telemachus.

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May it come true. But I cannot forget
 my grief for that poor boy, my master's son.
 Thanks to the gods, he grew up like a tree,
 handsome and strong, as if to match his father
 when he becomes a man. But somebody
 or some god ruined his good sense. He went
 to Pylos, seeking news about his father.
 The suitors lie in wait for when he comes
 back home, and soon Arcesius' line
 will be wiped out on Ithaca. No more.
 They may catch him, or he may get away,
 kept safe by Zeus. Now tell me, sir, the truth
 about your own adventures. Where are you from?
 Where do your parents live? Where is your town?
 On what boat did you sail here? How did sailors
 bring you to Ithaca? And who were they?
 I know you did not reach this land by foot."

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Odysseus said cunningly, "I will
 tell you the truth, the whole truth. How I wish
 we two could sit at ease here in this cottage,
 and we had food and sweet strong wine to last
 as long as we desired, while all the work
 was done by others! Even if I talked
 a whole year, I would not complete the story
 of everything the gods have made me suffer.
 Proudly I say, I come from spacious Crete,
 the son of wealthy Castor Hylacides,
 whose sons by his main wife were numerous,
 raised in his house. My mother was a slave,
 bought as a concubine, and yet my father
 respected me like all his other sons.
 The Cretan people held him in high honor
 as if he were a god, since he was rich

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and had such noble sons. But fate arrived
 to take him down to Hades. Then my brothers
 selfishly seized his property, and gave
 only a tiny part to me, with barely
 a place to live. But I was not a weakling,
 or cowardly in fighting. My great skill
 and talent helped me win a wife who had
 a decent dowry—all lost now. But you
 can see in stubble how the grain once grew,
 though I am crushed by grief. I have the gift
 of courage from Athena and from Ares.
 Whenever I chose warriors to ambush
 our enemies, I never thought of death.
 I leapt out far in front, and ran to catch them
 and spear them. That was how I was in war.
 I did not like farmwork or housekeeping,
 or raising children. I liked sailing better,
 and war with spears and arrows, deadly weapons.
 Others may shudder at such things, but gods
 made my heart love them. People's preferences
 are different. Before the Greeks went off
 to march on Troy, I led my troops and fleet
 on nine forays, with great success. I had
 my pick of all the spoils, and got much more
 when we shared out the winnings. Soon my house
 grew rich; I was a fine, important man
 among the Cretans. But far-seeing Zeus
 arranged that expedition of disaster,
 which made so many men collapse and fall.
 The people wanted me to sail to Troy
 with Idomeneus. We had no choice;
 their will was strong, constraining us. We Greeks
 fought for nine years, and in the tenth we sacked
 the town of Priam, and sailed home. Some god

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scattered the Greeks, and I was cursed by Zeus.
 I stayed for just one month at home, enjoying
 my children and my wife and my possessions.
 Some impulse made me want to sail to Egypt,
 with nine ships and a godlike crew. I rushed
 to get the fleet prepared and gather up
 the men. I paid for many animals,
 to kill as sacrifices for the gods
 and for the men to cook and eat. We feasted
 six days, then on the seventh we embarked 250
 and sailed from Crete. A fair north wind was blowing
 so we could drift on easily, like floating
 downstream. No one got sick, and all our ships
 came through undamaged. We sat tight, and let
 the wind and pilot guide us over seas.
 In five days we had reached the river valley
 of Egypt; my fleet docked inside the Nile.
 I told the loyal men to wait and guard
 the ships while I sent scouts to check around
 from points of higher ground. But they indulged 260
 their own aggressive impulses, and started
 willfully doing damage to the fields
 of Egypt and enslaved the little children
 and women, and they killed the men. The news
 soon reached the city; people heard the screaming,
 and right away at dawn, they all arrived.
 The plain was filled with warriors on foot,
 and chariots and gleaming bronze, and Zeus,
 the Lord of Lightning, caused my men to panic.
 They dared not keep on fighting; danger lurked 270
 on every side. Then many of my men
 were killed with sharp bronze spears; the rest were taken
 as slaves to work for them. I wish I too
 had died in Egypt! But more pain remained.

Zeus put another plan into my mind.
 I took my helmet off my head and dropped
 my shield and sword, and unarmed I approached
 the king. Beside his chariot I grasped
 his knees and kissed them. He was merciful;
 he kept me safe, and took me home with him, 280
 riding his chariot. My eyes were wet.
 Many Egyptians were enraged with me,
 and tried to kill me with their spears; the king
 protected me—he feared the wrath of Zeus,
 the god of strangers, who hates wickedness.
 I stayed there seven years and gained great wealth;
 all the Egyptian people gave me gifts.
 But in the eighth, an avaricious man
 came from Phoenicia. He was good at lying,
 skilled and well practiced at exploiting people. 290
 He tricked me into going off with him
 back to Phoenicia, where he lived. I stayed
 a year, but when the hours and days and months
 had rolled around again, he made me sail
 over the seas to Libya, pretending
 that I would go with him to do some trading.
 His true plan was to sell me for a profit.
 I had suspicions, but I climbed on board.
 The ship sailed out with fair north wind behind her
 from Crete out into open sea. But Zeus 300
 planned to destroy the crew. On leaving Crete,
 no other land was visible, but only
 the sea and sky. Zeus set a dark-blue cloud
 across our ship that cast a shadow over
 the sea. He thundered and then hurled a bolt
 of lightning at the ship. The impact whirled
 the ship right round and filled her up with sulfur.
 The men fell overboard and all were swept

away by waves, like cormorants beside
the dark ship, and gods took away their chance
of getting home. But in my desperation
Zeus rescued me. He put the sturdy mast
into my hands. I clung to it and drifted,
propelled by storm winds for nine days. And on
the tenth black night, the rolling waters swept me
towards Thesprotia. There the king, named Pheidon,
helped me without expecting recompense
because his son had found me all worn out,
chilled by the morning air. He took my hand,
raised me and led me to his father's house,
and dressed me. That was where I heard about
Odysseus—the king said he had been
a guest there on his journey home. The king
showed me the treasure that Odysseus
had gathered: gold and bronze and hard-worked iron.
The royal stores contained enough to feed
his family for ten more generations.
Odysseus, the king said, had gone off
to Dodona, to ask the holy oak
what Zeus intended. He had been too long
away from fertile Ithaca. He wondered
how best to get back home—in some disguise
or openly. The king then swore to me,
pouring libations, that he had a boat
prepared and crew picked out, to take him back
to his dear homeland. But he sent me first;
it happened some Thesprotians were already
sailing towards grain-rich Dulichium.
The king told them to treat me well and take me
to King Acastus. But their hearts preferred
to bring me once again to misery.
After the ship was out upon the sea,

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they plotted to enslave me. They stripped off
my cloak and tunic, and tossed me these rags
in which you see me now. And when night fell
they came to Ithaca's bright fields, and tied me
tightly with rope and left me on the ship,
and quickly went ashore to get some dinner.
The gods themselves unloosed my bonds; they slipped
easily off. I pulled my ragged clothes
over my head, slid down the smooth ship's plank
and plunged chest-forward in the sea. I swam
fast with both arms, and quickly got away.
I came ashore beside a flowering thicket
and huddled there in fear. They stomped around,
shouting, but in a while they gave up looking,
and got back on the ship. The gods themselves
hid me with ease, and brought me to this cottage—
a wise man's home—because it is my fate
to stay alive."

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Eumaeus, you replied,
"Poor guest! Your tale of woe is very moving,
but pointless; I will not believe a word
about Odysseus. Why did you stoop
to tell those silly lies? I know about
my master's homecoming. The gods detest him;
they loathe him, since they did not let him die
at Troy or in his friends' arms, when the war
was winding up, so that the Greeks could build
a mound to glorify him and his son
in times to come. The robber-winds have snatched him.
He has no glory now. I am a loner;
I live here with the pigs, and do not go
to town, except when wise Penelope
calls me to share some news. The people cluster

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around her, asking questions—some in sorrow
 about their absent master; others glad
 to eat at his expense. I ask no questions,
 since an Aetolian fooled me with his lies.
 He came to my house, saying he had killed
 a man in distant parts and run away. 380
 I welcomed him. He said that he had seen
 Odysseus with Idomeneus
 in Crete, repairing ships that storms had wrecked.
 He promised that my lord would come in summer
 or harvesttime, made rich by heaps of treasure,
 his crew complete. A god has brought you here;
 but do not try to trick me or make nice
 with lies. I will be kind to you, old man,
 not for your stories, but in fear of Zeus,
 the god of strangers, and because I feel 390
 pity for you.”

But sly Odysseus
 answered, “You are too skeptical! Despite
 my oath, I see you will not trust me. May
 the gods of Mount Olympus be our witness
 that if your master ever comes back home
 to this house, you will give me clothes to wear,
 and help me to Dulichium—I want
 to go there. But if he does not arrive,
 and I am wrong, your slaves can drive me over
 the cliff tops, so no other beggar tries 400
 to trick you.”

But the upright swineherd answered,
 “Yes, guest, I would be praised enormously
 among all men, now and in times to come,
 if I took you inside and welcomed you,

then murdered you! And doing this,
 with what clean conscience could I pray to Zeus?
 In any case, now it is dinnertime.
 My men should come inside, so we can cook
 delicious food.”

That was their conversation.
 In came the herdsmen, and they drove the pigs 410
 into their usual pens to rest; there rose
 a mighty din of grunting pigs. The noble
 swineherd addressed his men.

“Bring out the best
 pig for our guest, who comes from distant lands.
 And let us all enjoy ourselves. We suffer
 in bitter toil for these white-tusked pigs,
 while others eat the food we labor for,
 and give us nothing.”

With a keen bronze axe
 he chopped the wood. They brought a fattened pig
 of five years old and put it on the altar. 420
 The swineherd’s heart was good: he kept in mind
 the gods. He shaved the bristles off its head,
 and threw them in the fire, and prayed to all
 the gods, that through his ingenuity,
 his master would come home. He stretched up
 tall, and used a piece of oaken firewood
 to strike. The life departed, and they slit
 the throat and singed the hide, and chopped it up.
 The swineherd made an offering of meat,
 laid flesh across the fine rich fat, and put it 430
 upon the fire with barley-grain on top,
 and sliced the rest and put it all on skewers,

and roasted it with care, then drew the meat off
 and heaped it high on platters. Next he stood
 and served it out in seven equal parts,
 the first with prayers, for Hermes and the Nymphs,
 and then he served the others to the men.
 He gave Odysseus the piece of honor,
 cut from the spine. His master was delighted,
 and said,

“Eumaeus, may Zeus bless and love you
 as I do, since you give me such good things.”

You answered him, swineherd Eumaeus, “Eat,
 dear guest; enjoy it, simple though it is.
 Gods give, gods take away, as is their will;
 to gods all things are possible.”

With that,
 he made the sacrifices to the gods,
 poured a libation from the bright red wine,
 then gave Odysseus, the city-sacker,
 the cup. At last the swineherd sat to eat.
 Mesaulius served the food—that was the slave
 bought by Eumaeus in his master’s absence,
 with no help from his mistress or Laertes.
 He traded him from Taphians. They all
 reached out to take the good things set before them.
 When they had had enough of food and drink,
 Mesaulius cleared things away; the men
 were full of bread and meat, and wanting sleep.
 Night fell, a moonless, bitter night. Zeus rained
 continually; wet Zephyr blew his hardest.
 Odysseus—to test out if Eumaeus

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was kind enough to take his own cloak off,
 or tell another man to do it—said,

“Eumaeus and you others, all of you.
 I want to brag a little. I am dizzy,
 under the influence of wine, which makes
 even the wisest people sing and giggle,
 and dance, and say things best not spoken. Since
 I have begun this blabbering, here goes,
 I will be honest. I wish I was young
 and strong again! As when we planned an ambush
 under the walls of Troy—the leading men
 were Menelaus and Odysseus,
 and I was chosen as the third commander.
 When we had reached the city wall, we lay
 in bushes, reeds, and marshes, hiding under
 our shields. Night fell, harsh and icy cold,
 with North Wind and a sleetlike snow, so cold
 the ice grew on our weapons. All the others
 had cloaks; they slept in comfort, tucked beneath
 their shields. But I had foolishly forgotten
 my cloak and left it, not expecting cold.
 I carried just my shield and shining belt.
 In the last part of night, as stars were setting,
 I went near to Odysseus and nudged him.
 He listened to me carefully. I said,
 ‘Your Majesty, Odysseus, great general,
 I am about to die from this cold weather!
 I have no cloak. Some spirit tricked me into
 wearing my tunic only; now there is
 no way to fix it.’ Instantly he thought
 of this solution. What a strategist
 and fighter! Very quietly he whispered,

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'Hush now, do not let any of the others hear you.' He propped his head up on his elbow, and told them, 'Listen, friends. I had a dream sent by the gods. We moved too far away from where the ships are. Someone needs to speak to Agamemnon, shepherd of the people, and tell him to send more troops here.' At that, Thoas the son of Andraimon leapt up, took off his purple cloak and sprinted down towards the ships. I snuggled down in comfort under his cloak till golden Dawn shone bright. If only I was young and strong again! Then one of these pig-keepers on this farm would give a cloak to me, both from respect and friendship. As it is, they all despise me for wearing dirty rags."

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Eumaeus, you replied, "That was a splendid tale, old man! It worked. You will get all the clothes and things a poor old beggar needs—at least for now. But in the morning, you will have to put your old rags on again. We only have one outfit each, no spares. My master's son will give you clothes when he arrives, and help you to travel on wherever you desire."

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With that, he stood and set a bed for him beside the fire, and threw on it some skins of sheep and goats. Odysseus lay down. Eumaeus tucked him in a big thick cloak, his extra one, for really bitter weather. Odysseus went to sleep; the young men slept beside him. But the swineherd did not like

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to sleep so distant from the pigs; he started to leave. Odysseus was glad the slave took good care of his absent master's things. Eumaeus slung his sharp sword belt across his well-toned back, and wrapped around himself his windproof cloak and fine big furry goatskin. He took a sharpened knife to ward away humans or dogs, and he went off to sleep out where the pigs with silver tusks were sleeping; a hanging rock protected them from wind.

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BOOK 15



The Prince Returns

Athena went to Sparta, to ensure
the safe return of Prince Telemachus.
She found him with Pisistratus, both lying
on Menelaus' porch, and Nestor's son
was fast asleep, but no sweet slumber held
Telemachus. His worries for his father
kept him awake all through god-given night.
Owl-eyed Athena stood by him and said,

"Telemachus, you should no longer travel
so far from home, abandoning your wealth,
with greedy men at home. You must watch out;
They may divide and eat up all your wealth,
and make your journey useless. Quickly ask
for help from Menelaus to get home,
so you may find your mother safe and blameless.
Her father and her brothers are already
telling her she should wed Eurymachus.
He is the one most generous with gifts
to her and to her father. Do not let her

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take any items from the house, without
your full consent. You know how women are—
they want to help the house of any man
they marry. When one darling husband dies,
his wife forgets him, and her children by him.
She does not even ask how they are doing.
Let your best slave girl watch your property,
until the gods give you your own wife. Also,
I have more news: take note. There is a gang
of suitors lurking in the stream between
your Ithaca and rocky Same, who
have plans to kill you on your journey home.
But I suspect that some of those who waste
your wealth will soon be lying under earth.
Now steer your ship far distant from the islands,
and sail both day and night. Some god who guards
and watches over you will send fair wind
behind your sails. When you first reach the shore
of Ithaca, your men must drag the ship
up to the town, while you first go and visit
the swineherd, who is better than most slaves.
Spend the night there. Tell him to go to town
to tell Penelope that you have come
safely back home from Pylos."

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With these words
the goddess went back up to Mount Olympus.
He woke the son of Nestor with a kick,
and said to him,

"Pisistratus! Go fetch
the horses, get them harnessed to the carriage,
and let us hurry on our way."

He answered,
 "Telemachus, this is impossible,
 for us to drive when it is pitch-black night,
 however eager we may be to travel.
 Dawn will come soon. Wait till great Menelaus
 comes out to bring us presents in his carriage,
 and sends us on our way with friendly words.
 A generous host is sure to be remembered
 as long as his guests live."

Then all at once
 Dawn on her golden throne lit up the sky.
 King Menelaus got up from the bed
 he shared with fair-haired Helen and approached them.
 Seeing him on his way, Telemachus
 put on his bright white tunic, and then slung
 his mighty sword across his sturdy shoulders.
 So in a warlike guise, the well-loved son
 of godlike King Odysseus stood near
 and spoke to Menelaus.

"Royal son
 of Atreus, now, please, send me home now,
 to my beloved country. My heart yearns
 to go back home."

And Menelaus answered,
 "Telemachus, I will not keep you here
 if you are truly desperate for home.
 I disapprove of too much friendliness
 and of too much standoffishness. A balance
 is best. To force a visitor to stay
 is just as bad as pushing him to go.
 Be kind to guests while they are visiting,

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then help them on their way. So friend, remain
 just till I fetch some splendid gifts to pile
 onto your carriage. Wait till you see them!
 I will instruct the women to prepare
 a banquet in the hall from our rich stores.
 Feasting before a long trip brings you honor;
 it also makes good sense. And if you want
 to have me travel with you all through Greece,
 I shall yoke up my horses and escort you
 through every town, and everywhere we go
 we will be given gifts—a fine bronze tripod,
 a cauldron, or two mules, or golden cups."

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Telemachus replied, "King Menelaus,
 I want to go home right away. I have
 no one back there to watch my property.
 I would not want to die while I am searching
 for Father, or to lose my wealth at home."

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So General Menelaus shouted out
 to tell his wife and female slaves to make
 a feast from his rich stores. Eteoneus
 got out of bed and came—he lived nearby.
 The general boomed out orders: "Light the fire
 and roast the meat!" The slave obeyed. Meanwhile,
 his master went inside the fragrant room
 containing treasures. Helen went with him,
 and Megapenthes. There he took a goblet,
 two-handled, and he told his son to bring
 a silver bowl. And Helen stood beside
 the chests in which she kept the special clothes
 that she had worked with her own hands. She lifted
 the most elaborate and largest robe
 that shone like starlight under all the rest.

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Then they went through the palace till they reached
Telemachus. And fair-haired Menelaus
said to him,

“May great Zeus, the Lord of Thunder,
husband of Hera, make your wish come true—
may you go back home safely. I will give you
the best of all my treasure, as a mark
of deep respect: a bowl of solid silver,
circled with gold; Hephaestus fashioned it.
The King of Sidon, Phaedimus, bestowed it
on me when I was at his house, en route
for home. Now take it; it is yours.”

He gave
the goblet first, and Megapenthes brought
the shining silver bowl and put it down
in front of him. Then Helen's lovely cheeks
flushed as she moved in close. She held the robe
and said,

“Sweet boy, I also have a gift,
crafted by my own hands. Remember Helen
when your own wedding day at last arrives,
and let your bride wear this. Until that time,
your mother should take care of it. I wish you
great joy. I hope you reach your well-built home,
and fatherland.”

She handed it to him;
he took it gladly. Prince Pisistratus
took all the gifts and packed them in the luggage,
and marveled at them in his heart.

The king
led them inside; they sat on chairs. A slave girl
brought out a beautiful gold water pitcher
and silver bowl so she could wash their hands.
She set a polished table at their side.
Another lowly girl brought bread and food
of every kind. Boethoedes began
to carve and serve the meat. The king's son poured
the wine for everyone. They helped themselves
to all the delicacies spread before them.
When they were satisfied, Telemachus
and Nestor's son strapped on the horses' harness,
and yoked them to the chariot and drove
off from the echoing portico and gate.
But Menelaus ran up just behind them,
holding a golden cup of honeyed wine
in his right hand, so they could pour libations
before they left. He stopped in front of them
and spreading wide his arms said,

“Boys, good luck!
Give Nestor my best wishes—he was always
as kind as any father while we Greeks
were making war in Troy.”

Telemachus
said carefully, “Yes, king, when we go there
we will pass on what you have said. I hope
I may go back to Ithaca and meet
Odysseus—good luck to match my fortune
in all your generosity and kindness.”

Then on the right an eagle flew; it held
a big white goose clutched in its claws—a tame one,

caught from the yard. The people, men and women,
were running round and yelling after it.
It darted on the right beside the boys,
and flew before their horses. They were all
delighted. Nestor's son was first to speak.

"My lord, King Menelaus, what do you think?
Was this a sign sent by some god for us?
Or sent for you?"

And Menelaus, favorite
of Ares, wondered how he ought to answer.

But Helen cut in first and said, "Now listen, 170
and I will make a prophecy. The gods
have put it in my heart and I believe
it will come true. Just as the eagle flew
down from the mountains where he has his home
with chicks and parents, seizing this tame goose—
so will Odysseus, who has been gone
so long and has endured so much, come back
and take revenge. Indeed, he is already
at home and planting ruin for the suitors."

Telemachus replied, "May thundering Zeus 180
fulfill your prophecy at once! If so,
I would bow down to you as to a goddess."

He whipped the horses and they galloped off
through the town center to the open plain.
All day the harness rattled as they ran.
But when the sun went down and it grew dark,
they came to Pherae, home of Diocles,
son of Ortilochus, who was the son
of Alpheus. He welcomed them and there

they spent the night. When rosy-fingered Dawn 190
the early-born appeared, they yoked the horses,
climbed in the chariot, and drove away
from the resounding portico and gate.
The horses flew with gusto at the whip.
Soon they were near the rocky town of Pylos.
Telemachus then asked Pisistratus,

"Would you do me a favor? We are friends
because our fathers have been friends forever,
and we are age-mates, and this trip has made us
even more intimate. Please do not bring me 200
beyond my ship, but leave me here, in case
the old man forces me to visit him
and be his guest. I long to get back home.
I have to go, and fast."

The son of Nestor
wondered how he should best respond. He thought
upon reflection he should turn the horses
back to the ship and shore beside the sea.
There he took out the splendid gifts and clothes
and gold from Menelaus, and he packed them
inside the stern, and told Telemachus, 210

"Hurry! Embark now! Get your crew in too,
before I get back home and tell my father
that you are here. I know him; he is stubborn.
He will not let you go; he will come here
to fetch you, and he surely will not leave
without you. He will be in such a rage!"

With that, he spurred the horses. Long manes flowing,
they galloped to the citadel of Pylos.
Telemachus gave orders: "Make it all

shipshape, my friends, and get on board, so we
can start our journey."

220

Quickly they obeyed
and sat along the benches. As he worked,
with prayers and sacrifices to Athena,
a foreigner approached him, who had killed
a man in Argos and had run away.
He was a prophet and descended from
Melampus, who once lived in Pylos, land
of sheep. Melampus had been rich, and owned
a palace, but he left his home, escaping
from Neleus, a proud, important man,
who seized all his great wealth while he was trapped
and tortured in the house of Phylacus,
because a Fury put inside his mind
a dangerous obsession with the daughter
of Neleus. He managed to escape,
and drove the cattle, lowing loudly, off
from Phylace to Pylos. He avenged
the wrong that Neleus had done to him,
and brought the woman to his brother's house
as wife, then went to Argos, home of horses,
since there it was his destiny to rule
the multitude of Argives, and he had
two strong sons: Mantius, and Antiphates,
who fathered the heroic Oïcles,
whose son was Amphiaraus, the warlord,
whom Zeus who holds the aegis and Apollo
adored wholeheartedly. But he did not
live to old age, since he was killed at Thebes,
because his wife took bribes. He had two sons,
Amphilochus and Alcmaeon. The sons
of Mantius were Clitus, snatched by Dawn
to join the gods, because he was so handsome,

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and Polyphides, whom Apollo gave
the best prophetic skill of any mortal
after Amphiaraus had died. This prophet
grew angry with his father, and migrated
to Hyperisia, and there he told
fortunes for everyone. It was his son,
named Theoclymenus, who had approached
Telemachus while he was pouring wine
and praying to the gods. The stranger said,

260

"My friend, I find you making sacrifices.
I beg you, by religion, by the gods,
and by your life and your men's lives: who are you?
Who are your parents? What is your home town?"

Telemachus said, "Stranger, I will tell you.
I come from Ithaca; my father is
Odysseus—he was. He must have died
some dreadful death by now. It was for him
I got this ship and crew. I sailed to seek
news of my absent father."

270

And the stranger
replied, "I too am far from home. I killed
a man of my own tribe, and I have many
brothers and kinsmen, powerful in Argos,
so I am on the run. They want to kill me.
I have been doomed to homelessness. But please,
let me on board your ship. I come to you
in desperation—otherwise I will
surely be killed. Those men are after me."

Telemachus said, "Yes, you can join us
on board our ship. And what we have is yours;
you are our guest."

280

He took the stranger's spear,
laid it on deck, then climbed on board himself,
sat at the stern, and had his guest sit down
beside him at the stern. They loosed the ropes.
Telemachus gave orders to the men
to seize the tackle; promptly they obeyed,
and raised the wooden mast and fastened it
into the socket, binding it with forestays,
and hauled the white sail up with leather cables.
Sharp-eyed Athena sent fair wind that gusted
a wild explosive breath through bright clear sky;
the ship began to race across the sea,
past Crouni and the lovely streams of Chalcis.
The sun went down and all the world was dark.
Impelled by wind from Zeus, the ship sped on
past Phaea and they came to famous Elis
ruled by the Epeians; from there they steered
towards the Needle Islands, still unsure
if they would die.

290

Meanwhile, Odysseus
was having dinner with the noble swineherd
inside the cottage, and the other men
were eating with them. After they were done,
Odysseus began to test the swineherd,
to see if he would be hospitable,
and ask him to stay there, out on the farm,
or send him into town. He said,

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"Eumaeus,
listen, and listen all of you. At dawn
I plan to go to town to beg—I have
no wish to be a burden to you all.

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I only need directions and a guide
who can go with me. I will roam around
the city on my own, in search of drink
and crusts of bread—so it must be. And if
I reach the house of King Odysseus,
I plan to tell Penelope my news,
and mingle with the high and mighty suitors;
they may give me some food from their rich stores.
I could do anything they want at once.
I have the capability, you see.
Hermes the messenger, the god who gives
favor and glorifies all human labor,
has blessed me with unrivaled skill in all
domestic tasks: fire-laying, splitting logs,
carving and roasting meat, and pouring wine—
I can do all the chores poor people do
to serve the rich."

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But angrily you said,
Eumaeus, "No! Why would you think of this?
You would be killed if you set foot among
that horde of suitors; their aggression reaches
the iron sky. And those who wait on them
are not like you. They are young men, well dressed,
with bright clean hair and handsome faces, serving
the bread and wine and meat, piled high upon
their polished tables. Stay here. No one minds
your presence—not myself, nor my companions.
And when Odysseus' son arrives,
he will provide a proper cloak and tunic,
and help you travel where your heart desires."

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Odysseus, experienced in pain,
answered, "I hope Zeus loves you as I do,

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since you have saved me from the agonies
 of wandering. The worst thing humans suffer
 is homelessness; we must endure this life
 because of desperate hunger; we endure,
 as migrants with no home. But since you now
 want me to stay and wait for your young master,
 tell me about Odysseus' parents.
 His father, when he left, was on the threshold
 of age. Are they alive still? Have they died?"

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He answered, "Stranger, I will tell you truly.
 Laertes is alive, but he is always
 praying to Zeus to let him pass away
 in his own home. He feels such desperate grief
 about his son and his beloved wife,
 whose death made him so heartbroken, he aged
 before his time. She died a dreadful death,
 a death I would not wish for any friend—
 grieving her absent son, the famous hero.
 While she was still alive, despite her sadness,
 she used to like to talk and chat with me—
 she brought me up herself with her own daughter,
 strong, pretty Ctimene, her youngest child.
 She raised us both together, treating me
 almost as equal, just a little less.
 And when we came of age, they sent the girl
 to Same, for a hefty bridal-price.
 The mother dressed me in fine clothes, a cloak
 and tunic, tying sandals on my feet,
 and sent me to the country. But she still
 loved me with all her heart. I miss them both.
 The blessed gods have made my work here prosper,
 so I have had enough to eat and drink
 and give to guests. But I hear no good news
 about my mistress. Ruin has befallen

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the house from those invaders. All her slaves
 miss talking to their owner, getting gossip,
 sharing some food and drink with her, and taking
 scraps to the fields with them—the kind of thing
 that makes slaves happy."

And Odysseus
 exclaimed, "Eumaeus! What a little child
 you were when you were taken far from home
 and from your parents! Tell me more. Did they
 live in a city that was sacked? Or was it
 bandits that found you, herding sheep or cows
 alone? Did they seize hold of you and put you
 onto their ship, and sell you for a profit
 in this man's house?"

380

The swineherd answered him,
 "Since you have asked this question, stranger, listen;
 enjoy my story, sitting quietly,
 drinking your wine. These nights are magical,
 with time enough to sleep and to enjoy
 hearing a tale. You need not sleep too early;
 it is unhealthy. Any other man
 who feels the need of sleep should go lie down,
 get up at dawn, have breakfast, and go herd
 the master's pigs. But let us, you and I,
 sit in my cottage over food and wine,
 and take some joy in hearing how much pain
 we each have suffered. After many years
 of agony and absence from one's home,
 a person can begin enjoying grief.
 I will tell you my story as you ask.
 There is an island—you may know it—called
 Syria, where the sun turns round, above
 Ortygia. It has few inhabitants,

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but it is good land, rich in sheep and wine
 and grain; no famine ever hurts those there,
 nor any deadly sickness. They grow old,
 and with their gentle arrows, Artemis
 and silver-bowed Apollo cause their death.
 The land is split into two provinces;
 my father Ctesius was king of both.
 Then avaricious merchants came—Phoenicians,
 skilled sailors, with great piles of treasure stored
 in their black ship. And in my father's house
 there was a woman from Phoenicia—tall
 and beautiful and skilled in many arts.
 Those clever rascals tricked her. One of them
 first found her washing clothes beside the ship
 and lay with her. Sex sways all women's minds,
 even the best of them. And then he asked her
 where she was from and who she was; she showed him
 my father's palace, and she said, 'I am
 from Sidon, rich in bronze. I am the daughter
 of wealthy Arybas; as I was walking
 back from the fields one day, some Taphian pirates
 kidnapped me, brought me here to this man's house,
 and sold me to him, for a tidy sum.'
 Her secret lover said, 'Then would you like
 to go back home with us, and see your parents
 and your fine home again? They are alive
 and quite rich now.' The woman said, 'Oh, yes,
 I would! If all you sailors swear an oath
 to bring me safely home.' At that, they swore
 as she had asked, and made their solemn vows.
 And then the woman said, 'You must keep mum,
 and none of you can even speak to me
 if you bump into me beside the road
 or at the water fountain—otherwise
 someone might tell the old man at the house.

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Then he would get suspicious, chain me up,
 and plan to have you killed. Remember this,
 bear it in mind and do your trading quickly,
 and when your ship is full of stores to take
 back home with you, send news to me, and fast.
 I will bring gold with me as well, whatever
 wealth I can find to hand. I also want
 to give another gift to pay my fare.
 I take care of my master's clever son—
 who always runs around outside with me.
 I will bring him on board and he will fetch
 a pretty price from foreigners.' With that,
 she went back to the palace. For a year
 they stayed with us accumulating wealth
 by trading, and they filled their ship's hold up.
 When it was time to go, they sent a man
 to tell the woman at my father's house.
 He was a very cunning man. He wore
 a golden necklace strung with amber beads;
 the slave girls in the palace and my mother
 stared and began to finger it and ask
 how much it cost; he nodded to the woman
 in silence, and then went back to the ship.
 She took me by the hand and led me out
 into the forecourt, where she found some cups
 left on the tables by my father's men
 who had been banqueting, and now had gone
 to council—they were having a debate.
 She took three cups and hid them in her dress
 and carried them away with her. I followed,
 knowing no better. As the sun went down,
 we hurried through the dark streets to the harbor.
 There was the swift Phoenician ship. They all
 embarked, put us on board as well, and sailed
 over the watery waves; Zeus sent fair wind.

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For seven days we sailed and on the eighth,
 Artemis struck the woman with her arrows.
 She crashed into the ship's hold like a seagull.
 They threw her overboard to feed the fish
 480 and seals, and I was left there, brokenhearted.
 The current carried them to Ithaca,
 and then Laertes bought me with his wealth.
 That was the way my eyes first saw this land."

Odysseus replied, "My heart is touched
 to hear the story of your sufferings,
 Eumaeus. In the end, though, Zeus has blessed you,
 since after going through all that, you came
 to live with someone kind, a man who gives you
 plenty to eat and drink. Your life is good.
 490 But as for me, I am still lost; I trekked
 through many towns before I wandered here."

So went their conversation; then they slept
 for just a little while; Dawn soon arrived
 upon her throne.

Meanwhile, Telemachus
 drew near the mainland. Lowering the sail
 nimbly, his men took down the mast and rowed
 to anchorage. They cast the mooring stones,
 and tied the cables from the stern, then climbed
 out in the surf, and waded into shore.
 500 There they made dinner, mixing bright red wine.
 When they had had enough to eat and drink,
 the boy said sensibly,

"You all should drag
 the ship towards the town, while I go visit

the herdsmen in the fields of my estate.
 Then I will come to town, at evening time.
 At dawn, I will provide a feast for you
 of meat and wine."

Then Theoclymenus
 asked him, "But where shall I go, my dear boy?
 To whose house? One of those who rule this land?
 510 Or should I go at once to your own mother
 in your house?"

And Telemachus replied,
 "Well, ordinarily I would invite you.
 We are good hosts. But as it is—best not,
 for your own sake. I will not be at home,
 and Mother will not see you; she is weaving
 upstairs upon her loom—she does not want
 the suitors seeing her. So I suggest
 you go to someone else's house: the son
 of skillful Polybus, Eurymachus.
 520 The Ithacans look at him as a god.
 He is the dominant suitor and the keenest
 on marrying my mother and acquiring
 the riches of Odysseus. Zeus knows
 the future, he alone. Eurymachus
 may die a dreadful death before that marriage."

As he said this, a bird flew on his right:
 a hawk, Apollo's messenger. It clutched
 a pigeon in its talons; feathers scattered
 between the ship and young Telemachus.
 530 Then Theoclymenus called him aside
 and grasped him by the hand, and said to him,