

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice. The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Homer, *The Odyssey* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

[The original work is an epic poem, but this Simplified Edition tells the story in prose.]

Part 1

Long ago, after the great war at Troy had ended, many heroes sailed home across the wide sea. Some returned quickly to their families and lands. Others wandered for many years. Among all these men there was one whose journey was the longest and most difficult. This man was Odysseus, king of the rocky island of Ithaca.

Odysseus had fought bravely in the Trojan War. He was famous for his clever mind and for the plans he invented during the fighting. Yet after the city of Troy fell, the gods did not allow him to return home easily. Storms, monsters, and strange lands delayed him again and again. Many of his companions died during those long travels. Only Odysseus survived.

Far away from his home, Odysseus was now living on a lonely island in the middle of the sea. The island belonged to the beautiful goddess Calypso. She had found the exhausted hero after a terrible storm had destroyed his ship. Calypso cared for him kindly and gave him food and shelter in her cave beside the shore.

But Odysseus did not wish to remain there. Every day he sat on the rocks beside the sea and looked across the endless water. His thoughts were always the same.

“I want to see my home again,” he would say quietly. “I want to see the smoke rising from my own house in Ithaca. I want to see my wife Penelope and my son Telemachus.”

Calypso often spoke gently to him.

“Why do you wish to leave?” she asked. “Stay here with me. You will never grow old. I will make you immortal.”

But Odysseus always shook his head.

“My home is far away,” he answered. “Even if I suffer many hardships on the

sea, I must return.”

While Odysseus waited sadly on Calypso’s island, the gods on Mount Olympus were thinking about him.

One day the gods gathered together in the bright halls of Zeus, the king of heaven. The immortals sat in their shining seats and spoke with one another. Zeus himself began the conversation.

“Men often blame the gods for their troubles,” he said. “Yet many of their sufferings come from their own foolish actions.”

He spoke of a man named Aegisthus, who had done evil deeds and had been punished for them. While Zeus was speaking, the goddess Athena was listening carefully. She loved Odysseus because he was wise and brave.

At last she rose and addressed Zeus.

“Father,” she said, “it is true that foolish men bring trouble upon themselves. But there is one man who deserves our pity. I speak of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca. He has suffered many hardships for many years. Now he is trapped on an island far from his home.”

She continued earnestly.

“The goddess Calypso keeps him there. She wishes him to stay and become her husband. Yet Odysseus longs only to return to his wife and his country. Every day he sits by the sea and weeps.”

Athena looked directly at Zeus.

“Surely it is time for him to return home.”

Zeus nodded slowly.

“I have not forgotten Odysseus,” he replied. “Among all men he is the most clever and capable. But Poseidon, the god of the sea, still hates him. Odysseus blinded Poseidon’s son, the Cyclops Polyphemus. Because of this, Poseidon has made the hero’s journey very difficult.”

Athena answered quickly.

“Poseidon is far away now, visiting distant lands. While he is gone, we can help Odysseus begin his return.”

Zeus agreed.

“Very well,” he said. “Hermes will go to Calypso and tell her that she must let Odysseus leave the island. The hero must be allowed to sail home.”

Athena smiled.

“Thank you, father. While Hermes carries your message, I will travel to Ithaca. Odysseus has a son there, a young man named Telemachus. I will encourage him and give him courage. The suitors who crowd his father’s house are causing great trouble.”

Zeus lifted his hand in agreement.

“Go, then,” he said. “Do as you think best.”

Athena did not wait. She fastened her shining sandals to her feet. These magical sandals allowed her to fly quickly over land and sea. Then she took up her strong bronze spear and left the halls of Olympus.

In a moment she was flying through the bright air toward the island of Ithaca.

When Athena reached the island, she did not appear in her true form. Instead she disguised herself as a man named Mentos, a traveler and friend of Odysseus. Holding a spear in her hand, she walked toward the great house of the king.

Outside the house she saw many men sitting together. These men were the suitors who wished to marry Penelope, the wife of Odysseus. Since Odysseus had been gone for many years, they believed he would never return.

The suitors behaved badly. They ate the king’s cattle and sheep. They drank his wine and spent their days feasting and playing games. None of them respected the house of Odysseus.

Among them sat Telemachus, the son of the missing king. He was now a young man, but he felt powerless among the noisy suitors. As he sat quietly, he thought about his father.

“If my father were here,” he said to himself, “these men would not dare behave in this way.”

While he was thinking these thoughts, he noticed the stranger standing at the gate. Telemachus rose immediately and walked toward her, for he did not want a guest to be kept waiting outside.

He took the stranger’s hand and spoke politely.

“Welcome to our house,” he said. “Please come inside and share our meal. Afterward you may tell me the reason for your visit.”

Telemachus led the stranger into the great hall. He placed her spear carefully among the many weapons that once belonged to his father. Then he seated her on a fine chair away from the rude suitors.

Servants quickly brought water for washing hands and placed food before them. Bread, roasted meat, and wine were set on the table.

The suitors continued their loud feasting nearby, laughing and shouting as a singer played music for them.

Telemachus leaned close to his guest and spoke quietly so the others could not hear.

“Stranger,” he said, “please forgive the noise you see around us. These men are destroying my father’s house. They eat our food and drink our wine every day.”

He sighed deeply.

“If my father were alive and returned to Ithaca, they would quickly run away in fear.”

Then he asked politely,

“Please tell me who you are. From what land have you come? Did you know my father when he lived here?”

Athena, still disguised as Mentos, answered calmly.

“My name is Mentos,” she said. “I am the son of Anchialus and king of the Taphians. Your father and I were friends long ago.”

Telemachus listened eagerly.

“I came here because I heard that Odysseus had returned home,” Athena continued. “But it seems this report was false. Still, I believe he is not dead. He may be held somewhere against his will, but he will find a way to return.”

She looked carefully at the young man.

“You resemble your father,” she said. “Your eyes and face are very similar.”

Telemachus lowered his head.

“My mother says I am his son,” he replied. “But how can anyone be certain? I have never known him.”

Athena studied him kindly.

“You are no longer a child,” she said. “You must act with courage. First, call the people of Ithaca together and speak against the suitors. Then prepare a ship and travel to the lands of the old kings who fought at Troy.”

She spoke firmly.

“Visit Nestor in Pylos. Then go to Sparta and speak with King Menelaus. Perhaps they will know what happened to your father.”

Telemachus listened carefully to every word.

Athena rose from her seat.

“I must return to my ship now,” she said. “Remember my advice.”

Then something wonderful happened.

As Telemachus watched, the stranger suddenly flew upward like a bird and disappeared into the air. At once he understood that the visitor had been a goddess.

He felt a new strength growing inside his heart.

“I will follow her advice,” he said to himself. “I will search for news of my father.”

And with this decision the young man’s great journey began.

Part 2

When the rosy light of morning spread across the sky, Telemachus rose from his bed. He dressed quickly and fastened his sandals upon his feet. Then he took a strong spear in his hand and stepped out of the house.

His mind was full of the words the goddess had spoken to him the night before.

“I must act,” he thought. “I cannot sit quietly any longer while the suitors destroy my father’s house.”

Telemachus called the heralds of the town and gave them an order.

“Go through the streets,” he said, “and tell the people of Ithaca to gather in the assembly place. I wish to speak to them today.”

The heralds hurried away and soon the people began to gather. It had been many years since the men of Ithaca had met together in a public assembly. Since

Odysseus had sailed to Troy, no one had called them together like this.

When the people were seated, Telemachus walked into the center of the meeting place. The citizens looked at him with surprise. Some of the older men remembered his father and wondered if the young man would become like him.

An old man named Aegyptius stood up first. He leaned heavily on his staff, for he was very old.

“Men of Ithaca,” he said, “we have not held an assembly since Odysseus left for Troy. Who has called us here today? Perhaps someone has news of danger, or wishes to speak about an important matter.”

Telemachus stepped forward with his spear in his hand.

“It is I who have called you,” he said.

The young man looked around at the gathered people. His voice was strong, but his heart was heavy.

“My friends,” he continued, “I suffer from two great troubles. The first is the loss of my father. Odysseus was your king, and he cared for every one of you. Now he is gone, and we do not know whether he lives or has died far away.”

Many of the older men lowered their heads when they heard the name of Odysseus.

Telemachus went on.

“My second trouble is even worse. Many men have come to my house to ask for my mother’s hand in marriage. But instead of behaving with respect, they stay there day after day. They eat my cattle, my sheep, and my goats. They drink my wine without paying for it.”

His voice grew stronger.

“They are destroying my home and my wealth. Soon nothing will remain.”

Telemachus raised his hand toward the suitors who were sitting nearby.

“If any of you feel shame,” he said, “help me stop this wrongdoing. If the gods have taken my father away forever, then my mother may marry again. But these men must stop ruining my house.”

When he finished speaking, he threw his staff upon the ground. Tears filled his eyes.

For a moment the people sat silently. They felt pity for the young man, but none of them dared to answer him.

At last one of the suitors rose to his feet. This was Antinous, the proud and arrogant leader of the group.

“Telemachus,” he said angrily, “you accuse us unfairly. Your mother is the one who has caused this trouble, not us.”

The people listened closely as Antinous continued.

“For several years we have asked Penelope to choose a husband. But she refuses to make a decision. Instead she tricks us again and again.”

He described Penelope’s clever plan.

“She began weaving a great burial cloth for your grandfather Laertes. She told us that when the cloth was finished she would choose a husband. But every night she secretly pulled apart the threads she had woven during the day.”

Some of the men in the crowd murmured with surprise.

“For three years she deceived us in this way,” Antinous said. “At last one of the servants told us the truth. Now the cloth is finished, and she must choose a husband. Until she does, we will remain in your house.”

Telemachus answered him firmly.

“Antinous,” he said, “how can I send my mother away from my father’s home? My father may still be alive. If I force her to leave, I will dishonor my family and bring anger from the gods.”

He looked around at the other suitors.

“If you wish to feast, then go to your own houses and eat your own food. But you must not continue wasting my father’s wealth.”

Suddenly something strange happened in the sky above them.

Two great eagles appeared and flew across the assembly. They circled above the crowd, fighting fiercely with their claws and wings. Then they flew away toward the mountains.

The people were amazed by this sight. Many believed it was a sign from the gods.

An old prophet named Halitherses rose slowly to speak.

“Men of Ithaca,” he said, “these birds bring a warning. Odysseus is not dead. He will soon return to this land. When he comes back, the suitors will suffer greatly for their actions.”

The suitors laughed angrily at these words.

Eurymachus, another leading suitor, stood up and spoke loudly.

“Old man,” he said, “your prophecies mean nothing. Birds fly everywhere in the sky. They do not bring messages about Odysseus.”

Then he turned toward Telemachus.

“Your father will never return,” Eurymachus said coldly. “Send your mother back to her father and let her choose a husband. Until she does, we will remain exactly where we are.”

Telemachus realized that the assembly would not help him. The people of Ithaca were afraid to oppose the powerful suitors.

Still, he spoke once more.

“If you will not help me,” he said, “then I will travel myself to learn the truth about my father. I will visit the kings who fought beside him at Troy. Perhaps they can tell me whether he lives or has died.”

After this the assembly ended, and the people returned to their homes.

The suitors also went back to the house of Odysseus. They laughed and joked about Telemachus, believing he was too young and weak to oppose them.

But Telemachus walked alone to the shore of the sea. There he washed his hands in the waves and prayed to the goddess Athena.

“You who visited me yesterday,” he said, “help me now. I wish to follow your advice and search for my father. But the suitors stand in my way.”

As he finished speaking, Athena appeared beside him. This time she was disguised as Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus.

“Telemachus,” she said kindly, “if you are truly the son of Odysseus, you will not fail. Courage and wisdom run in your blood.”

The young man listened carefully.

“Return to your house,” Athena continued. “Prepare food and wine for your journey. I will find a ship and gather sailors for you. Tonight we will sail across

the sea.”

Encouraged by the goddess, Telemachus hurried home.

Inside the great house the suitors were feasting loudly again. They laughed at him and spoke mockingly.

“Perhaps Telemachus will bring warriors from other lands to fight us,” one of them joked.

“Or perhaps he will disappear like his father,” another said.

Telemachus ignored their words and went to a large storeroom in the house. There he called the faithful old servant Eurycleia, who had cared for him since he was a baby.

“Nurse,” he said quietly, “fill twelve jars with the best wine in the house. Also prepare bags of barley meal for a journey.”

The old woman looked at him with worry.

“My child,” she said, “where are you going? The sea is dangerous, and these wicked men may harm you while you are gone.”

Telemachus answered gently.

“Do not be afraid. The gods themselves are guiding this journey. But you must promise not to tell my mother until I have already left.”

Eurycleia sadly agreed.

That evening, while darkness covered the island, Athena made the suitors sleepy with a spell. One by one they stumbled away from the hall and went to their homes.

Outside the harbor a ship was waiting. Athena had already gathered a crew of strong young sailors.

When Telemachus arrived, the men loaded the wine and food onto the ship. Then he stepped aboard and took his place beside the goddess, still disguised as Mentor.

The sailors raised the white sail. Athena sent a strong wind to fill it.

The ship moved swiftly across the dark sea.

And so, under the stars of the night sky, Telemachus began his voyage in search of news about his father.

Part 3

As the ship sailed through the dark night, the wind blew steadily behind the sail. The waves whispered along the sides of the vessel, and the crew worked quietly at their oars and ropes. Telemachus sat beside Athena, who still looked like the old man Mentor.

The young prince watched the sea and thought about the long journey before him.

“If I learn the truth about my father,” he thought, “then I will know what must be done.”

All night the ship moved across the water. At last the first light of dawn appeared above the sea. The sky slowly grew bright, and the sailors saw land ahead of them.

Soon they reached the sandy shore of Pylos, the kingdom of the wise old king Nestor.

When they stepped onto the beach, Telemachus saw a great gathering of people near the water. Hundreds of men stood together beside the shore. They were offering sacrifices to Poseidon, the god of the sea.

Nine groups of men had gathered there. Each group had brought a black bull as an offering. Fires burned on the sand, and the smell of roasting meat filled the air.

Telemachus felt nervous when he saw the crowd.

“Mentor,” he whispered to Athena, “how can I speak to such a great king as Nestor? I have never talked with men who are so much older and wiser than I am.”

Athena answered calmly.

“Telemachus, do not be afraid. Some of the words you need will come from your own heart. The rest the gods will help you say. Go forward with courage.”

Encouraged by her words, Telemachus followed her toward the gathering.

King Nestor sat among his sons and companions near the place where the sacrifice was taking place. His long hair was white with age, but his eyes were still bright with wisdom.

When Nestor's son Pisistratus saw the strangers approaching, he welcomed them warmly.

"Friends," he said, taking them by the hand, "come and sit with us. Join our feast before we ask who you are."

He placed soft skins upon the sand and invited them to sit beside him. Then he gave them pieces of roasted meat and poured wine into a golden cup.

Pisistratus handed the cup first to Athena.

"Please pray to Poseidon," he said politely. "This feast is held in his honor."

Athena lifted the cup and prayed.

"Mighty Poseidon," she said, "hear the prayers of your servants. Bless Nestor and his sons, and grant success to the voyage of Telemachus, who has come seeking news of his father."

After she finished, she passed the cup to Telemachus. The young man also prayed quietly before drinking.

Soon the meal was finished. The people of Pylos were satisfied with food and wine. Then Nestor turned to the strangers and spoke kindly.

"Now that you have eaten," he said, "tell me who you are. From what land have you come? Are you traders, or travelers exploring the sea?"

Telemachus gathered his courage and answered.

"Nestor, great son of Neleus," he said respectfully, "we have come from the island of Ithaca. I am Telemachus, the son of Odysseus."

At the name of Odysseus, Nestor's expression changed.

"Ah," he said slowly, "Odysseus was a great man. I remember him well from the days of the Trojan War."

Telemachus continued.

"I have come here to ask if you know what happened to my father after the war. Did you see him when the Greek kings sailed home from Troy?"

Nestor sighed deeply.

"My child," he said, "many things happened after Troy fell. The Greek leaders did not all leave the city together. Some wished to sail home at once, while others stayed longer."

He began to describe those troubled days.

“There was much disagreement among the leaders,” Nestor explained. “Your father Odysseus and the great king Agamemnon did not agree about what should be done. Because of this, the army divided into different groups.”

The old king paused for a moment before continuing.

“I myself sailed home with Diomedes and other companions. We had a safe journey and reached Pylos without trouble. But I do not know what happened to Odysseus after we separated.”

Telemachus listened carefully, though the answer disappointed him.

Nestor went on speaking.

“Some of the Greek kings had terrible fates when they returned home. Agamemnon himself was murdered by a wicked man named Aegisthus.”

The people around the fire nodded sadly.

“But Agamemnon’s son Orestes grew up and took revenge,” Nestor said. “He killed the man who had murdered his father. Because of this brave act, people now praise Orestes everywhere.”

Nestor looked directly at Telemachus.

“You should remember this story,” he said. “A son must defend the honor of his father.”

Telemachus understood the meaning behind the old king’s words.

Athena then spoke, still disguised as Mentor.

“Nestor,” she said, “do you believe Odysseus is still alive somewhere in the world?”

The old king shook his head slowly.

“I do not know,” he answered. “But if he still lives, he will surely find a way to return home. Odysseus was the most clever man among all the Greek heroes.”

Then Nestor offered advice.

“If you wish to learn more,” he said to Telemachus, “you should visit Menelaus, the king of Sparta. He was the last of the Greek leaders to return home from Troy. Perhaps he heard news of your father during his travels.”

As the sun began to sink toward the horizon, Nestor invited the travelers to stay

the night.

“You must not sleep in your ship,” he said kindly. “Come to my house and rest as honored guests.”

The people of Pylos agreed warmly. Soon Telemachus and Athena were led to the palace of Nestor.

That evening they shared another meal with the king and his family. Afterward they prepared for sleep.

Nestor’s daughter Polycaste brought water so Telemachus could wash. She also gave him a warm cloak and a soft bed to rest upon.

Meanwhile Nestor offered a comfortable place for Mentor—who was really Athena.

But when the night was quiet and everyone slept, Athena revealed her divine power for a moment. She changed her form into that of a great bird and flew upward into the dark sky.

Nestor watched this in amazement.

“Surely that was a god,” he said to his sons. “This young man is under divine protection.”

The next morning Nestor prepared a chariot and horses for Telemachus. His own son Pisistratus would guide the chariot and travel with him to Sparta.

There, perhaps, the young prince would finally hear the truth about Odysseus.

Part 4

When the bright light of morning filled the sky, King Nestor rose from his bed and went out into the courtyard of his house. Soon his sons gathered around him. Telemachus also came out to join them.

Nestor spoke kindly to the young traveler.

“My child,” he said, “you must not leave Pylos without first giving thanks to the gods. Before your journey continues, we will offer a sacrifice to Athena, who has clearly protected you.”

A great bull was brought into the courtyard. The men prepared the offering

carefully. Nestor's youngest daughter brought water for washing hands, while another servant carried a basket of barley grains.

Nestor lifted his hands toward the sky and prayed.

"Athena, wise daughter of Zeus," he said, "you helped us yesterday and guided these travelers safely to our land. Accept this sacrifice and bless the journey of Telemachus."

After the prayer, the men killed the bull and placed its finest parts upon the fire for the goddess. The rest of the meat was prepared for a meal.

When the sacrifice was finished, Nestor turned again to Telemachus.

"Now you must travel to Sparta," he said. "My son Pisistratus will guide you there in a chariot. King Menelaus will welcome you warmly."

Soon the horses were brought out and the chariot was made ready. Pisistratus climbed up and took the reins. Telemachus stood beside him.

Nestor raised his hand in farewell.

"Go safely," he said. "And remember what I told you about courage and honor."

The horses moved forward, and the chariot rolled quickly along the road. All day the two young men traveled across the wide land of Greece.

As evening came, they stopped at the house of a noble man named Diocles. He welcomed them kindly and gave them food and beds for the night.

The next morning they continued their journey.

By the second evening they reached the great city of Sparta, where King Menelaus ruled. The palace of Menelaus was magnificent. Its halls shone with bronze and gold, and beautiful decorations covered the walls.

When Telemachus and Pisistratus arrived at the palace gates, servants hurried to greet them. Inside the palace a wedding feast was taking place.

Menelaus was celebrating two marriages within his family. One of his daughters was being married, and his son was also taking a bride.

A servant hurried to inform the king that strangers had arrived.

"My lord," the servant said, "two travelers stand at the gate with a chariot and horses. Shall we welcome them inside?"

Menelaus answered at once.

“Of course,” he said. “We ourselves have wandered far from home before. No traveler should ever be turned away from our door.”

The servants led the guests into the palace. They helped them wash away the dust of travel and gave them fresh cloaks to wear. Then they guided them to seats at the feast.

Soon food and wine were placed before them.

As they ate, Menelaus studied the young stranger carefully.

“My friends,” he said, “you resemble someone I once knew long ago.”

He turned to his wife Helen, who sat beside him.

“Helen,” he said quietly, “look at this young man. Does he not remind you of Odysseus?”

Helen looked closely at Telemachus.

“Yes,” she said softly, “he does. The shape of his face and eyes is very similar.”

Telemachus lowered his head.

“King Menelaus,” he said, “you speak truly. I am Telemachus, the son of Odysseus.”

Menelaus stood up at once.

“Son of my dear friend!” he cried. “You are most welcome in my house.”

The king remembered the long years of war beside Odysseus. Tears filled his eyes.

“Your father was the wisest of all the Greek leaders,” Menelaus said. “Many times his clever plans saved us.”

Helen also spoke with emotion.

“I remember him well,” she said. “Once he entered the city of Troy disguised as a beggar. No one recognized him except me. Yet even then he remained calm and brave.”

The guests listened as the king and queen told stories of Odysseus during the war.

At last Menelaus spoke of his own difficult journey home after Troy.

“The gods did not allow me to return easily,” he said. “Storms drove my ships far across the sea. For many years I wandered through distant lands.”

Telemachus listened carefully.

“During those travels,” Menelaus continued, “I met an ancient sea god named Proteus. He knew many secrets about the world.”

The king leaned forward.

“From him I learned news of your father.”

Telemachus felt his heart beat faster.

“Tell me,” he said eagerly. “What did he say?”

Menelaus spoke slowly.

“Proteus told me that Odysseus was alive. But he was being held on an island by the nymph Calypso. She wished him to stay with her forever.”

Telemachus felt both relief and sadness.

“So my father lives,” he whispered.

“Yes,” Menelaus said gently. “At least he lived when the sea god told me this. Whether he has escaped since then, I cannot say.”

Telemachus thanked the king for the news.

That night he rested in the palace of Menelaus.

But far away in Ithaca, the suitors had learned about his journey. They were angry that Telemachus had dared to leave the island.

Antinous spoke with dark anger.

“The boy has become dangerous,” he said. “If he returns, he may gather support against us.”

Eurymachus nodded.

“Then we must act before he comes home,” he said.

The suitors made a cruel plan.

“We will wait with a ship in the narrow strait near Ithaca,” Antinous said. “When Telemachus returns, we will kill him before he reaches land.”

The men agreed eagerly.

Meanwhile, far away in Sparta, Telemachus slept peacefully, unaware of the danger waiting for him on his journey home.

Part 5

While Telemachus was staying in Sparta and learning news about his father, the gods on Mount Olympus were once again thinking about Odysseus.

The hero was still on the lonely island of Calypso. Day after day he sat beside the sea, looking across the wide water toward the distant land of Ithaca.

His heart was heavy with longing.

One morning the gods gathered again in the shining halls of Zeus. Athena spoke once more.

“Father,” she said, “Odysseus has suffered long enough. It is time for him to return home.”

Zeus nodded.

“You are right,” he replied. “We will send Hermes to the island of Calypso. He will tell her that she must release Odysseus and allow him to sail away.”

At once Hermes, the swift messenger of the gods, prepared for his journey. He fastened his winged sandals to his feet and took his golden wand in his hand. Then he flew down from Olympus and across the wide sea.

Soon he reached the remote island where Calypso lived.

The island was beautiful. Tall trees grew everywhere, and clear streams flowed through green meadows. Birds sang among the branches, and flowers covered the ground.

In the middle of the island stood Calypso’s cave. Inside, the goddess sat at her loom, weaving a bright cloth of many colors.

When Hermes entered, Calypso rose to greet him.

“Welcome, Hermes,” she said. “What brings you to my island?”

Hermes answered directly.

“I bring a message from Zeus. You must allow Odysseus to leave this island. The gods have decided that he must return to his home in Ithaca.”

Calypso was unhappy when she heard this.

“You gods are always jealous when a goddess loves a mortal man,” she said. “Still, I cannot disobey Zeus. Odysseus may go if he wishes.”

Hermes nodded and quickly flew away again toward Olympus.

Calypso walked down to the shore where Odysseus sat on the rocks, staring across the sea.

“Odysseus,” she said gently, “you are free to leave my island.”

The hero looked up in surprise.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“The gods have ordered that you return home,” Calypso explained. “I will help you build a raft so you can sail away.”

Odysseus felt joy rising in his heart, but he was also cautious.

“You truly mean this?” he asked. “You are not planning to trick me?”

Calypso smiled sadly.

“No,” she said. “I swear that I will help you.”

For several days Odysseus worked beside the sea. With Calypso’s tools he cut down tall trees and shaped them into beams. He tied the beams together to build a strong raft.

Calypso provided ropes, cloth for a sail, and food for the journey. She also filled skins with fresh water and wine.

At last everything was ready.

Before Odysseus left, Calypso spoke to him once more.

“If you knew how many hardships still lie before you,” she said softly, “you might choose to remain here with me.”

But Odysseus shook his head.

“Nothing can keep me from my home,” he answered. “Even if I suffer many more storms, I must see Ithaca again.”

So he climbed onto the raft and raised the sail. A gentle wind carried him across the sea.

For seventeen days Odysseus sailed without trouble. The stars guided his path across the wide water.

But on the eighteenth day a powerful god noticed him.

Poseidon, the lord of the sea, was returning from a distant land. When he saw Odysseus sailing across the water, anger filled his heart.

“So the other gods are helping him return home,” Poseidon growled. “But he

will suffer before he reaches Ithaca.”

The sea god struck the water with his great trident. At once dark clouds filled the sky, and a terrible storm began.

The winds howled across the sea. Waves as high as mountains crashed against the raft.

Odysseus struggled desperately to hold the raft together.

“Why must I suffer so much?” he cried.

A huge wave smashed against the raft and broke it apart. Odysseus was thrown into the sea.

For a moment he feared he would drown.

But the goddess Ino, who lived in the sea, saw his struggle and came to help him. She rose from the waves and spoke kindly.

“Odysseus,” she said, “you cannot save your raft. Leave it and swim toward the distant land you see ahead.”

She gave him a magical veil.

“Wrap this around your chest,” she said. “It will keep you safe in the water.”

Odysseus followed her advice. He tied the veil around himself and began swimming through the storm.

For two long days and nights he fought against the waves. At last he saw land ahead of him.

But reaching the shore was not easy. Sharp rocks covered the coast, and great waves crashed against them.

Athena watched from Olympus and decided to help him. She calmed the winds so the sea became quieter.

Odysseus swam with the last of his strength toward the mouth of a river. The current carried him safely onto the shore.

Exhausted, he crawled onto the land and lay upon the grass.

“I have survived,” he whispered.

Soon sleep overcame him.

Athena gently covered him with leaves to keep him warm through the night.

Thus the long-suffering hero finally reached the land of the Phaeacians, though

he did not yet know whose country it was.

Part 6

While Odysseus slept beneath the thick leaves near the river, the sun rose slowly over the land of the Phaeacians. This island kingdom was peaceful and beautiful. Its people were skilled sailors, and their ships were famous throughout the world.

Not far from the river stood the great city where King Alcinous ruled. In the royal palace lived the king's daughter, the young princess Nausicaa.

That morning Athena visited Nausicaa in a dream.

The goddess appeared in the form of one of the princess's close friends. Standing beside the sleeping girl, she spoke softly.

"Nausicaa," she said, "why do you sleep so long? Soon the time will come for your marriage. Your clothes and your family's clothes must be washed before that day arrives."

Nausicaa stirred in her sleep.

Athena continued.

"Take the wagon and the mules to the river. There you can wash the garments with your friends. It will be a pleasant day in the sunshine."

With these words the goddess disappeared.

When Nausicaa awoke, she remembered the dream clearly. She rose quickly and went to her father.

"Father," she said, "may I borrow the wagon and the mules today? I wish to take our clothes to the river and wash them."

King Alcinous smiled kindly.

"Of course, my child," he replied. "Take whatever you need."

Soon the wagon was ready. Nausicaa placed many baskets of clothing upon it, and her servant girls climbed aboard beside her.

The mules pulled the wagon along the road toward the river.

When they arrived, the young women began their work. They carried the

clothes down to the water and washed them carefully. Then they spread them upon the warm stones to dry in the sun.

After the work was finished, the girls decided to play.

They began tossing a bright ball to one another, laughing and shouting happily. Their voices echoed across the quiet riverbank.

Suddenly Nausicaa threw the ball too far. It fell into the water with a splash.

The girls cried out loudly.

Their voices woke Odysseus, who had been sleeping nearby beneath the leaves.

The hero slowly opened his eyes. For a moment he did not know where he was.

“Where have I come?” he wondered. “Are these people friendly, or will they treat me cruelly?”

He looked down at himself and saw that he was still covered in salt from the sea. His clothes were gone, and he was weak from hunger and exhaustion.

Carefully he broke a leafy branch from a tree and used it to cover himself.

Then he stepped out from the bushes and walked slowly toward the young women.

When the girls saw him suddenly appear, they screamed and ran away in fear.

But Nausicaa stood still.

Athena had filled her heart with courage, so she did not flee like the others.

Odysseus stopped at a respectful distance. He knew he must speak carefully so he would not frighten the princess.

He bowed his head slightly and spoke in a gentle voice.

“Princess,” he said, “I beg you to help me. I have suffered many hardships on the sea and have lost my ship and companions. I have reached this land with nothing.”

Nausicaa studied the stranger. Though he looked wild and tired, there was something noble in his voice and manner.

Odysseus continued speaking.

“Please show me where I may find clothing and food,” he said. “And if you can guide me to your city, I will always remember your kindness.”

Nausicaa nodded kindly.

“Stranger,” she said, “you have come to the land of the Phaeacians. My father is King Alcinous, who rules this country.”

She called to her servant girls.

“Do not be afraid,” she told them. “This man is not dangerous. The gods sometimes send travelers to us, and we must help them.”

The girls slowly returned.

Nausicaa gave them instructions.

“Bring clothing for our guest,” she said. “And prepare food for him.”

The servants gave Odysseus clean garments and oil so he could wash himself in the river.

When Odysseus had bathed and dressed, Athena made him appear taller and more handsome than before. His hair shone like dark gold, and his strong shoulders looked powerful and noble.

Nausicaa noticed the change at once.

“This man looks like a god,” she thought.

After Odysseus had eaten and regained some strength, the princess gave him directions.

“Follow us to the city,” she said. “But do not walk beside me. People might gossip if they see a stranger walking with me.”

She pointed toward the road.

“Wait until we reach the city gates, then come behind us. When you arrive at the palace, go directly to my mother, Queen Arete. She is wise and kind. If she welcomes you, then you will soon find a way to return home.”

Odysseus bowed gratefully.

“Princess,” he said, “your kindness may save my life. May the gods bless you and grant you happiness.”

Nausicaa climbed into the wagon, and the mules began pulling it toward the city.

Odysseus remained behind for a while as she had advised. Then he slowly followed the road toward the palace of the Phaeacian king.

Ahead of him lay the city where his long journey would take its next important

turn.

Part 7

After Nausicaa and her companions had driven their wagon toward the city, Odysseus remained behind for a short time beside the river. He wanted to give the princess enough time to reach the palace before he followed.

As he waited, he looked around the peaceful land of the Phaeacians.

“The gods have brought me safely here,” he thought. “Now I must find a way to reach the palace and ask for help.”

When he believed that enough time had passed, Odysseus began walking toward the city.

Soon he saw its tall walls shining in the sunlight. The harbor was filled with strong ships, for the Phaeacians were famous sailors. Their vessels could cross the sea faster than any others in the world.

Odysseus stopped for a moment and prayed quietly.

“Athena,” he said, “if you have guided me this far, please continue to help me. Let the people of this land treat me kindly.”

Athena heard his prayer and decided to assist him once again. She appeared before him in the form of a young girl carrying a water jar.

Odysseus approached her politely.

“Child,” he said, “can you show me the way to the palace of King Alcinous?”

The girl smiled. It was Athena herself.

“I will guide you,” she said. “The palace is not far from here.”

As they walked, Athena spoke quietly.

“The Phaeacians are proud people,” she explained. “You must behave wisely when you meet them. When you enter the palace, go straight to Queen Arete and kneel before her. Ask for her protection first.”

Odysseus listened carefully.

“Why the queen?” he asked.

“Because the people respect her greatly,” Athena replied. “If she accepts you,

the king and the whole court will also welcome you.”

Soon they reached the palace gates. The building was magnificent.

Tall bronze walls surrounded the courtyard, and golden doors shone brightly in the sunlight. Inside, beautiful gardens grew with fruit trees that produced food all year round.

When Odysseus entered the palace hall, he was amazed.

Golden statues of young men stood beside the walls, holding bright torches that filled the hall with light. Servants moved quietly among the guests, carrying food and wine.

At the far end of the hall sat King Alcinous and Queen Arete upon their thrones.

Athena quietly disappeared, leaving Odysseus to face the royal court alone.

The hero walked forward bravely.

When he reached the queen, he knelt down and wrapped his arms around her knees—a sign that he was asking for protection.

“Queen Arete,” he said respectfully, “I am a stranger who has suffered many hardships on the sea. Please show me kindness and help me return to my home.”

The people in the hall fell silent. They watched the stranger with curiosity.

King Alcinous was the first to speak.

“Rise, stranger,” he said kindly. “Sit beside us and share our food. No traveler will be turned away from this house.”

Servants quickly brought a chair for Odysseus and placed food before him. The hero ate eagerly, for he had been hungry for many days.

After the meal, the king asked the stranger a question.

“Tell us your name,” Alcinous said. “From what land have you come, and what misfortune has brought you here?”

Odysseus hesitated.

He was not yet ready to reveal his true identity. Instead he answered carefully.

“Great king,” he said, “I have wandered for many years across the sea. Storms destroyed my ship, and I barely survived. The princess Nausicaa found me beside the river and showed me kindness.”

Queen Arete studied him closely.

“Stranger,” she said slowly, “the clothes you wear were made in this palace. How did you receive them?”

Odysseus realized that the queen was testing him.

So he told the truth about Nausicaa.

“Your daughter found me near the river,” he explained. “She and her companions gave me these garments and guided me toward your city.”

Queen Arete nodded with satisfaction. She was pleased to hear that her daughter had acted with kindness.

King Alcinous smiled warmly.

“Then you are welcome in our house,” he said. “Tomorrow we will gather our people and prepare a ship to take you wherever you wish to go.”

Odysseus felt hope rising again in his heart.

“At last,” he thought, “my journey home may truly begin.”

That evening the king ordered a great feast in honor of their guest. Musicians played beautiful songs, and the people of the palace celebrated together.

But while the others enjoyed the music, Odysseus sometimes turned his face away.

The songs about the Trojan War reminded him of the long years of struggle and loss he had endured.

Quietly he wiped tears from his eyes, hoping that no one would notice.

Yet King Alcinous watched him carefully.

The wise king began to wonder who this mysterious stranger truly was.

Part 8

The next morning the people of the Phaeacians gathered again in the palace of King Alcinous. The king wished to honor his mysterious guest and to decide how he might help him return home.

Odysseus sat quietly among the nobles of the court. He still had not told them his name, but the king had already decided that this stranger must be treated with respect.

King Alcinous stood before the assembly and spoke.

“My friends,” he said, “a traveler has come to our land after suffering great hardships on the sea. It is our duty to help him return safely to his home. Let us prepare one of our finest ships and a crew of strong sailors.”

The people agreed at once.

The Phaeacians were famous for their ships. Their vessels moved quickly across the water, guided almost by thought alone. No sailors in the world were more skilled.

After the meeting ended, the king announced that games would be held in honor of the guest.

“Let us show our visitor the strength and skill of the Phaeacians,” he said.

Soon the young men of the island gathered in an open field near the sea. Many spectators came to watch.

First they held a running race. The runners sped across the ground while the crowd cheered loudly.

Then came wrestling, jumping, and boxing. Strong young athletes competed fiercely to show their skill.

Odysseus sat quietly beside King Alcinous, watching the contests.

At last a young man named Laodamas, the king’s son, approached him politely.

“Stranger,” he said, “will you not take part in the games? You look strong and capable.”

Odysseus shook his head.

“My friend,” he replied, “I have suffered many troubles on the sea. My heart is too heavy to enjoy contests today.”

Another young man named Euryalus laughed loudly.

“Perhaps this traveler is not an athlete at all,” he said mockingly. “Maybe he is a merchant who spends his time counting goods instead of training his body.”

The insult angered Odysseus.

He rose slowly from his seat and walked toward the field.

“Young man,” he said firmly, “your words are foolish. A man may suffer great misfortune and still possess strength.”

Nearby lay a heavy stone used in the throwing contest. Odysseus picked it up easily and swung it through the air.

The stone flew far beyond every other mark on the field before crashing into the ground.

The crowd gasped in surprise.

Odysseus turned toward the athletes.

“If any man wishes to challenge me,” he said calmly, “I will compete with him in any contest except running. After so many hardships at sea, my legs are still weak.”

Euryalus lowered his head in shame.

King Alcinous quickly stepped forward to calm the situation.

“Enough,” he said. “Our guest has shown his strength. Now let us return to the palace and enjoy the feast.”

The people followed the king back to the great hall.

During the meal a famous singer named Demodocus began to play his lyre. His voice was beautiful, and everyone listened closely as he sang.

The first song told the story of the Trojan War.

Demodocus sang about the quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus during the war. The song described the bravery and suffering of the Greek heroes.

As Odysseus listened, his heart filled with painful memories.

The years of battle, the friends he had lost, and the long journey afterward all came rushing back to his mind.

Quietly he pulled his cloak over his face and began to weep.

None of the others noticed his tears except King Alcinous.

The wise king pretended not to see, and soon he asked the singer to perform a different song.

Later Demodocus sang another tale—this time about the clever trick of the Wooden Horse that had allowed the Greeks to capture Troy.

Again Odysseus could not hold back his tears.

At last King Alcinous raised his hand and stopped the music.

“My friends,” he said gently, “our guest seems troubled by these songs. Perhaps

they remind him of painful memories.”

Then the king turned to Odysseus.

“Stranger,” he said kindly, “you have hidden your name from us, but it is time that we learn the truth. Tell us who you are and why the songs of Troy make you weep.”

The hall fell silent.

All eyes turned toward the mysterious traveler.

Odysseus knew that the moment had come.

At last he would reveal his identity and tell the story of his long and dangerous journey across the sea.

Part 9

The hall of King Alcinous grew quiet as all the people waited for the stranger to speak. The bright torches along the walls flickered softly, and no one moved.

Odysseus slowly lowered his cloak from his face.

“King Alcinous,” he began, “you have shown me great kindness. I will now tell you the truth about who I am.”

He sat upright and spoke clearly.

“My name is Odysseus, son of Laertes. I am the king of Ithaca. My home is a small rocky island, but it is dearer to me than any other land.”

At the sound of his name, the Phaeacians murmured with surprise. They had heard many stories about the clever hero of the Trojan War.

Odysseus continued.

“After the war ended and the city of Troy fell, my companions and I sailed away toward home. But many terrible adventures delayed us. I will tell you what happened.”

The people leaned forward to listen.

“First we came to the land of the Cicones,” Odysseus said. “We attacked their city and took many treasures. But my men behaved foolishly. Instead of leaving quickly, they stayed to feast and celebrate.”

His voice grew serious.

“Soon the Cicones returned with a large army. They attacked us fiercely. Many of my men were killed before we could escape to our ships.”

The hall remained silent as he spoke.

“Next we sailed onward until we reached the land of the Lotus-Eaters. The people there ate a strange plant called lotus.”

Odysseus shook his head.

“The lotus made people forget everything. When some of my sailors tasted it, they no longer wished to return home. They wanted only to remain there forever.”

He paused before continuing.

“I forced them back onto the ships and ordered the crew to sail away immediately.”

The Phaeacians listened with growing interest.

Odysseus took a deep breath.

“After that we reached a terrible place—the land of the Cyclopes.”

Many in the hall knew the stories of these giants.

“The Cyclopes are huge one-eyed monsters who live in caves among the mountains,” Odysseus explained. “They do not follow the laws of men or respect the gods.”

His voice became darker.

“My men and I discovered a large cave filled with cheese and milk. Believing the owner might offer us hospitality, we entered and waited.”

He paused for a moment.

“Soon the cave’s owner returned. His name was Polyphemus, and he was a giant Cyclops.”

The listeners shuddered.

“He rolled a massive stone across the entrance of the cave so that none of us could escape.”

Odysseus continued.

“When he saw us, he did not greet us as guests. Instead he seized two of my men and crushed them in his hands. Then he ate them.”

The Phaeacians gasped in horror.

“We were trapped inside the cave,” Odysseus said. “The stone blocking the entrance was far too heavy for us to move.”

He leaned forward slightly.

“But I began to make a plan.”

The hero described how he and his men sharpened a long wooden stake and hid it among the ashes of the fire.

“When the Cyclops returned in the evening, I offered him strong wine,” Odysseus said. “He drank it eagerly and asked my name.”

Odysseus smiled slightly.

“I told him my name was ‘Nobody.’”

The Phaeacians listened closely.

“When the giant fell asleep from the wine, my men and I heated the wooden stake in the fire. Then we drove it into his single eye.”

Odysseus raised his hand.

“The Cyclops screamed in pain and called for help. Other Cyclopes came to the cave and asked who was hurting him.”

Odysseus’s eyes shone with cleverness.

“He shouted, ‘Nobody is hurting me!’”

Laughter spread through the hall.

“The other Cyclopes thought he was mad and left him alone,” Odysseus continued.

“But we were still trapped inside the cave. In the morning the giant rolled the stone aside to let his sheep go out to pasture.”

Odysseus described the final part of his escape.

“Each of my men clung beneath the belly of a large sheep. I myself held onto the largest ram in the flock. The blind Cyclops felt the backs of the sheep as they left the cave, but he did not notice us beneath them.”

The Phaeacians nodded with admiration.

“Once we reached the ships, we sailed away quickly.”

Odysseus’s voice became quieter.

“But as we sailed away, I made a foolish mistake.”

He looked down.

“In my pride I shouted back to the Cyclops and told him my real name.”

The hero sighed.

“Polyphemus raised his hands to the sky and prayed to his father, Poseidon, the god of the sea.”

Odysseus spoke the terrible curse.

“‘Father Poseidon,’ he cried, ‘do not allow Odysseus to reach his home. But if he must return, let him come late and alone, after losing all his companions.’”

Odysseus looked around the hall.

“From that moment the anger of Poseidon followed me across the seas.”

The Phaeacians sat in deep silence, realizing how many dangers the hero had already survived.

But Odysseus had many more stories still to tell.

Part 10

The people in the palace listened closely as Odysseus continued telling the story of his long journey.

“After we escaped from the Cyclops,” he said, “our ships sailed on across the wide sea until we reached the island of Aeolus.”

Odysseus described the strange ruler of that island.

“Aeolus was the keeper of the winds,” he explained. “He lived in a floating island surrounded by a shining wall of bronze.”

Aeolus welcomed the travelers kindly.

“For a whole month he entertained us in his palace,” Odysseus said. “He asked me many questions about the Trojan War and listened with great interest.”

At last the time came for Odysseus to continue his voyage home.

“Aeolus wished to help me,” Odysseus continued. “He placed all the dangerous winds into a great leather bag and tied it tightly with a silver cord. Only the gentle west wind was left free to guide our ships toward Ithaca.”

The plan worked well at first.

“For nine days and nights we sailed,” Odysseus said. “At last we could see the fires burning on the shores of Ithaca. We were almost home.”

But then disaster struck.

“I had not slept during the whole voyage,” Odysseus explained. “Finally I fell asleep from exhaustion.”

While he slept, some of his sailors began to whisper among themselves.

“‘Odysseus must be hiding treasure in that bag,’ they said. ‘Why should he keep it all for himself?’”

In their foolish curiosity they opened the bag.

Odysseus shook his head sadly.

“At once the trapped winds burst out in a terrible storm. Our ships were blown far away from Ithaca and back across the sea.”

The Phaeacians murmured quietly.

“We returned to Aeolus and begged for help again,” Odysseus said. “But he believed that the gods must hate us, so he drove us away.”

The hero paused before continuing.

“Next we reached the land of the Laestrygonians.”

His voice grew grim.

“They were giants who fed on human flesh.”

Odysseus described how the giant people hurled huge rocks at the Greek ships.

“They destroyed every ship except mine,” he said. “All the other sailors were killed.”

The listeners were shocked by the terrible loss.

“With my single remaining ship,” Odysseus continued, “we sailed onward until we reached the island of the enchantress Circe.”

The palace hall remained silent as he spoke.

“Circe lived in a beautiful house deep within the forest. Wild animals wandered peacefully around her home.”

Odysseus explained how he sent some of his men to explore the island.

“They entered Circe’s house, where she welcomed them kindly and gave them

food and drink.”

But the drink was enchanted.

“With a touch of her magic wand,” Odysseus said, “she turned my men into pigs.”

A murmur of surprise spread through the hall.

“Only one man escaped and returned to warn me.”

Odysseus told how he went alone to rescue his companions.

On the way he met the god Hermes.

“Hermes gave me a magical herb that protected me from Circe’s spell,” Odysseus said.

When Odysseus entered the house, Circe tried to transform him just as she had done to the others.

But the magic did not work.

Odysseus drew his sword and confronted her.

“The enchantress was frightened,” he said. “She promised to change my men back into their human forms.”

Soon the sailors were restored.

“After that Circe treated us as guests,” Odysseus continued. “We remained on her island for an entire year.”

The Phaeacians listened with amazement.

“But eventually my men begged me to continue our journey home.”

Odysseus nodded slowly.

“Circe then gave us terrible instructions. If we wished to return home, we first had to travel to the land of the dead.”

The hall grew quiet again.

“There,” Odysseus said, “I must speak with the spirit of the prophet Tiresias. Only he could tell me how to reach Ithaca.”

The people leaned forward as the hero described the next stage of his strange voyage.

“We sailed to the edge of the world,” he said, “to a dark land where the sun never shines.”

There Odysseus dug a deep pit in the ground and poured offerings of milk, honey, wine, and blood.

“Soon the spirits of the dead rose from the shadows,” he said.

His voice softened.

“Among them I saw the spirit of my own mother. I had not known that she had died while I was away.”

Many of the listeners felt sadness when they heard this.

“But first I spoke with Tiresias,” Odysseus continued.

The blind prophet told him that Poseidon would continue to trouble him.

“Still,” Odysseus said, “Tiresias promised that I would reach Ithaca at last—though only after great suffering.”

The old prophet also warned him about the dangers still waiting on the sea.

The Phaeacians listened with deep attention.

They knew that Odysseus’s story was not yet finished, and that even greater dangers still lay ahead in his tale.

Part 11

The hall remained silent as Odysseus continued telling the story of his strange journey to the land of the dead.

“When the spirits first appeared,” he said, “they rose like shadows from the dark earth. They gathered around the pit where I had poured the offerings.”

Odysseus explained how he had drawn his sword and kept the spirits away until the prophet Tiresias arrived.

“At last Tiresias came forward,” he said. “Though he was dead, the gods had given him the power to see and understand the truth.”

The prophet drank the dark blood from the pit and then spoke.

“Odysseus,” Tiresias said, “your journey home will not be easy. The sea god Poseidon is angry with you because you blinded his son, the Cyclops.”

Odysseus listened carefully.

“Still,” Tiresias continued, “you will reach Ithaca if you control the foolishness

of your men.”

The prophet gave an important warning.

“When you reach the island of the Sun God,” he said, “you will see sacred cattle grazing there. Do not allow your men to harm those animals. If they touch them, your ship and companions will be destroyed.”

Tiresias then told Odysseus that he would return home alone after losing all his men.

The Phaeacians listened with sympathy as Odysseus repeated the prophecy.

“After speaking with Tiresias,” he continued, “I saw many other spirits of the dead.”

His voice grew quieter.

“Among them was my mother.”

Odysseus described the moment with sadness.

“She told me that she had died from grief while waiting for my return.”

Many of the listeners lowered their heads in sorrow.

Odysseus went on.

“I also saw the spirits of many heroes who had fought at Troy.”

He spoke of Agamemnon, who had been murdered when he returned home.

“He warned me to be cautious when I reached my own house,” Odysseus said. “He told me not to trust everyone.”

Odysseus also met the great warrior Achilles.

“I told him that he was honored by all the living,” Odysseus said.

But Achilles answered sadly.

“‘Do not praise death,’ he told me. ‘I would rather be a poor farmer among the living than a king among the dead.’”

The hall remained silent as Odysseus finished describing the land of shadows.

“At last my companions and I returned to our ship,” he said. “We sailed quickly away from that terrible place.”

The people of the palace leaned forward as Odysseus continued his story.

“When we returned to the island of Circe,” he explained, “the enchantress gave us more warnings.”

She told them about the dangers waiting on their journey.

“First,” Odysseus said, “we would pass the island of the Sirens.”

The Sirens were strange creatures whose beautiful singing could lure sailors to their deaths.

“Any man who hears their song forgets his home and family,” Odysseus explained. “Their ship crashes on the rocks while they listen.”

Circe told Odysseus how to escape them.

“I filled my sailors’ ears with wax so they could not hear the singing,” Odysseus said. “Then I ordered them to tie me tightly to the mast of the ship.”

The Phaeacians smiled with admiration at the clever plan.

“When we sailed past the island,” Odysseus continued, “the Sirens began to sing. Their voices were sweeter than any music.”

He remembered the moment clearly.

“They called to me and promised to reveal all the secrets of the world.”

Odysseus shook his head.

“I begged my men to untie me so I could listen. But they obeyed my earlier orders and only tied the ropes tighter.”

Soon the ship sailed safely past the dangerous island.

But greater dangers still lay ahead.

“Next we had to pass between two terrible monsters,” Odysseus said.

One was Scylla, a creature with six long necks and six hungry heads. The other was Charybdis, a giant whirlpool that swallowed the sea three times each day.

“Circe warned me that there was no way to escape both monsters,” Odysseus said. “I had to choose the lesser danger.”

He guided the ship closer to the rocky cliff where Scylla lived.

Suddenly the monster attacked.

“Six of my men were snatched from the ship,” Odysseus said quietly.

The hall grew heavy with silence.

“I could do nothing to save them.”

After this terrible loss, the ship continued sailing.

At last they reached the island of the Sun God.

Odysseus remembered Tiresias's warning.

"I ordered my men not to touch the sacred cattle," he said. "For a time they obeyed."

But a long storm trapped them on the island for many days.

The sailors grew hungry and desperate.

"While I was asleep," Odysseus said sadly, "they killed the sacred cattle and roasted the meat."

The Phaeacians already knew what must have happened next.

"When we sailed away again," Odysseus said, "Zeus himself destroyed our ship with a thunderbolt."

The hero paused.

"All my companions were killed."

His voice became very quiet.

"Only I survived, clinging to the broken pieces of the ship."

The Phaeacians sat in silence, realizing how many terrible losses the hero had endured.

But Odysseus's story was still not finished.

Part 12

The hall remained silent as Odysseus finished describing the terrible fate of his companions.

"After Zeus destroyed my ship," he said quietly, "I was alone upon the sea."

The Phaeacians listened closely.

"I clung to the broken pieces of the ship while the waves carried me across the water," Odysseus continued. "For many hours I drifted over the dark sea."

At last he came again to the place where the great whirlpool Charybdis lay.

"Three times each day the monster swallows the sea," Odysseus explained. "Then the water bursts out again with terrible force."

He held tightly to a floating beam from the wrecked ship.

"I clung to a fig tree growing from the rocks above the whirlpool," he said.

“When Charybdis swallowed the water again, the broken beam rose to the surface. I dropped down and caught it.”

The hero shook his head slowly.

“Then the sea carried me away once more.”

For many days Odysseus drifted across the waves. At last the current brought him to the island of the nymph Calypso.

“She saved my life,” Odysseus said. “For seven years she kept me on her island and wished me to remain there forever.”

The Phaeacians now understood how the story had led to the moment when Odysseus built his raft and sailed away from the island.

When the hero finished speaking, the hall remained quiet for a long moment.

King Alcinous rose slowly from his seat.

“Odysseus,” he said, “your story is full of sorrow and bravery. You have suffered more than any man should endure.”

The king looked around at his people.

“Now we must help our guest return to his home.”

The Phaeacians agreed eagerly.

Their ships were famous throughout the world. They could travel across the sea faster than any others, and they always brought travelers safely to their destination.

That night the people prepared a strong ship for the journey.

A crew of skilled sailors was chosen, and many gifts were placed on board for Odysseus—gold, bronze, clothing, and beautiful treasures.

When everything was ready, the king invited Odysseus to one final feast.

“Tomorrow,” Alcinous said kindly, “our ship will carry you home to Ithaca.”

Odysseus felt deep gratitude.

“You have shown me great kindness,” he replied. “I will never forget the generosity of the Phaeacians.”

When the feast ended, the sailors carried Odysseus to the ship.

The night was calm and quiet. The moon shone upon the sea as the vessel left the harbor.

Odysseus lay down on the deck, wrapped in a warm cloak. After so many years

of hardship, he finally felt peace.

Soon he fell into a deep sleep.

While he slept, the Phaeacian ship sped swiftly across the water. The sailors guided it silently through the dark night.

Before dawn the ship reached the rocky coast of Ithaca.

The sailors carried the sleeping hero onto the shore and gently placed him beneath an olive tree. Beside him they set the many gifts that the king had given.

Then they returned to their ship and sailed back toward their own island.

When Odysseus awoke later that morning, he looked around in confusion.

“Where am I?” he wondered.

The land looked unfamiliar, and he did not recognize his own country.

But the goddess Athena soon appeared beside him.

“Odysseus,” she said kindly, “you are home at last. This is your island of Ithaca.”

The hero stared at the rocky hills and quiet shore.

At first he could hardly believe the truth.

After twenty long years away from home, Odysseus had finally returned to his own land.

Yet his troubles were not over.

Many dangerous enemies still waited in his house, and he would need all his wisdom and courage to defeat them.

Part 13

When Odysseus heard Athena’s words, he looked again at the land around him. At first he still could not believe that he had truly returned to Ithaca.

The island seemed strange after so many years away.

“Is this really my home?” he asked.

Athena smiled gently.

“Yes,” she said. “This is the island you have longed for during all your travels.”

Then she touched Odysseus with her magic power.

At once a mist lifted from his eyes, and he recognized the familiar hills, the

olive trees, and the rocky coast of Ithaca.

Joy filled his heart.

Odysseus knelt and kissed the ground.

“At last,” he whispered, “I have come home.”

Athena stood beside him.

“But you must not reveal yourself yet,” she warned. “Many dangerous men are in your house. The suitors still crowd your hall and demand that your wife Penelope choose a new husband.”

Odysseus’s face grew dark.

“I will punish them,” he said quietly.

Athena nodded.

“Yes,” she replied, “but we must be clever. Your enemies are many, and you must act carefully.”

With a touch of her staff, the goddess changed Odysseus’s appearance. His strong body bent like that of an old man, his skin became wrinkled, and his clothes turned into those of a poor beggar.

“No one will recognize you now,” Athena said. “Even your closest friends will not know who you are.”

Odysseus looked down at himself.

“This disguise will help me learn what is happening in my house,” he said.

Athena then gave him more instructions.

“First go to the hut of your loyal servant Eumaeus, the swineherd,” she said. “He has remained faithful to you during your long absence.”

With those words the goddess disappeared.

Odysseus gathered the treasures that the Phaeacians had given him and hid them carefully inside a nearby cave.

Then he began walking across the island toward the forest where Eumaeus lived.

The path climbed through rocky hills and olive groves. As he walked, Odysseus thought about his home and family.

“What has happened to Penelope and Telemachus?” he wondered. “Have they remained safe during these long years?”

At last he reached the small hut where Eumaeus lived.

The faithful swineherd was outside the hut, building a fence to protect his pigs. Several dogs guarded the animals nearby.

When the dogs saw the stranger approaching, they barked loudly and ran toward him.

Odysseus stood still, preparing to defend himself.

But Eumaeus quickly called the dogs back.

“Quiet!” he shouted. “Do not attack the traveler.”

He hurried forward and helped the old beggar rise from the ground.

“Forgive my dogs,” he said kindly. “They guard the pigs carefully.”

Eumaeus studied the stranger with sympathy.

“Come inside,” he said. “Though I am only a poor servant, I will share what food I have.”

Odysseus entered the hut and sat beside the fire.

Soon Eumaeus placed bread and roasted meat before him.

“Eat, stranger,” he said.

Odysseus thanked him warmly.

“You are very generous,” he said.

As they ate together, Eumaeus spoke sadly about his absent master.

“My king Odysseus has been gone for many years,” he said. “Many people believe he is dead.”

Odysseus listened carefully.

“But I still hope that he will return,” Eumaeus continued. “He was a good master, and I would gladly give my life for him.”

Odysseus felt deeply moved by the man’s loyalty.

“You truly loved your master,” he said.

Eumaeus nodded.

“Yes,” he replied. “And his poor wife Penelope still waits faithfully for him. But many wicked men crowd the palace. They eat his food and demand that she marry one of them.”

Odysseus’s anger grew stronger.

“If Odysseus returned,” he said quietly, “what would happen to those men?”
Eumaeus laughed softly.

“If my master came home,” he said, “the suitors would soon regret their actions.
Odysseus was not a man to forgive such insults.”

Odysseus smiled slightly but said nothing more.

That night he slept beside the fire in the humble hut of his loyal servant.

Meanwhile Athena traveled to Sparta.

There she appeared to Telemachus in a dream.

“Telemachus,” she said, “you must return to Ithaca at once. The suitors are
planning to kill you when you sail home.”

The young man woke with a start.

He quickly told Menelaus that he must leave.

Soon Telemachus and Pisistratus prepared their chariot and began the journey
back toward Ithaca.

Father and son were now both returning to the same island.

But neither yet knew how close they were to meeting again.

Part 14

When the morning sun rose over the hills of Ithaca, Odysseus was still in the
hut of the swineherd Eumaeus. The loyal servant was already awake, preparing
food for the pigs.

Odysseus rose slowly from his bed beside the fire.

Eumaeus greeted him kindly.

“Good morning, old friend,” he said. “Did you sleep well?”

Odysseus nodded.

“Yes,” he replied. “You have shown great kindness to a stranger.”

The swineherd placed bread and meat before him.

“Eat,” he said. “Though I have little, I will always share it.”

As they ate, Eumaeus continued speaking about the troubles in Ithaca.

“The suitors grow worse every day,” he said angrily. “They waste the wealth of

Odysseus and show no respect for his house.”

Odysseus listened carefully.

“And what of the young prince Telemachus?” he asked.

Eumaeus sighed.

“The boy is brave, but he is still young,” he said. “The suitors hate him because he opposes them. They even plan to kill him.”

Odysseus hid his emotions.

“Such men deserve punishment,” he said quietly.

At that moment Athena returned from Sparta.

She guided Telemachus safely across the sea and brought his ship back to Ithaca before the suitors could carry out their plan.

When Telemachus reached the island, he first visited the hut of Eumaeus, just as Athena had advised.

The young prince walked along the forest path toward the hut.

Meanwhile inside the hut Eumaeus suddenly heard the barking of his dogs.

“Someone is coming,” he said.

A moment later Telemachus appeared in the doorway.

Eumaeus cried out with joy.

“My dear boy!” he shouted.

He ran forward and embraced Telemachus warmly, kissing him like a father greeting his son after a long journey.

Tears filled his eyes.

“I feared that you might never return,” he said.

Telemachus smiled.

“Do not worry, Eumaeus,” he replied. “I have returned safely.”

The prince then noticed the old beggar sitting quietly near the fire.

“Who is this man?” he asked.

Eumaeus explained.

“He is a poor traveler who has suffered many hardships,” the swineherd said.

“I welcomed him as a guest.”

Telemachus nodded kindly.

“Then he is welcome here,” he said. “My father always treated strangers with respect.”

Odysseus looked carefully at the young man standing before him.

“So this is my son,” he thought. “The child I left behind has grown into a strong young man.”

Yet he remained silent, still hidden in his disguise.

After a while Eumaeus left the hut to bring news of Telemachus’s return to Penelope at the palace.

As soon as he had gone, Athena appeared quietly inside the hut.

She touched Odysseus with her staff.

At once the old beggar disappeared. His back straightened, his face became young and strong again, and his clothes changed into those of a noble warrior.

Telemachus stepped back in surprise.

“Who are you?” he asked. “You looked like an old beggar only a moment ago.”

Odysseus smiled gently.

“I am no god,” he said. “I am your father.”

Telemachus stared at him in disbelief.

“My father?” he whispered.

Odysseus nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “I am Odysseus. I have returned home after many years of wandering.”

For a moment Telemachus could not speak.

Then he ran forward and embraced his father.

Both of them wept with joy.

“Father,” Telemachus said, “I believed you were lost forever.”

Odysseus held him tightly.

“But the gods have brought me home,” he replied.

After their joyful reunion, Odysseus spoke seriously.

“Now we must make a plan,” he said. “The suitors must be punished for the evil they have done in our house.”

Telemachus nodded.

“I will stand beside you,” he said.

Odysseus explained the plan carefully.

“I will go to the palace disguised as a beggar,” he said. “You must pretend not to recognize me.”

Telemachus listened closely.

“When the right moment comes,” Odysseus continued, “we will attack the suitors together.”

Father and son prepared themselves for the dangerous task ahead.

Soon the time would come for Odysseus to return to his own house and face the enemies who had taken it over.

Part 15

After Odysseus and Telemachus finished making their plan, Athena returned once more. With a touch of her power, she changed Odysseus back into the form of the old beggar.

“Now you must go to the palace,” the goddess said. “Watch the suitors carefully and learn who remains loyal and who is truly your enemy.”

Then she disappeared again.

Soon Eumaeus returned to the hut after delivering the news of Telemachus’s safe arrival to Queen Penelope.

“The queen was very happy to hear that the prince has returned,” the swineherd said.

Telemachus nodded.

“Good,” he replied. “But now I must go back to the palace.”

Before leaving, he spoke quietly to Odysseus.

“Remember our plan,” he said.

Odysseus answered calmly.

“I remember.”

Telemachus left the hut and walked toward the palace. Eumaeus and the disguised Odysseus followed later along the same road.

When they reached the palace gates, Odysseus saw the great house that had once belonged to him.

But the scene before him filled him with anger.

The suitors sat in the courtyard eating and drinking. Servants hurried around them carrying food and wine. The men laughed loudly and behaved like masters of the house.

Odysseus forced himself to remain calm.

“Soon,” he thought, “they will pay for this.”

As he entered the courtyard with Eumaeus, one of the servants noticed the beggar.

Some of the suitors laughed cruelly.

“Another hungry wanderer has come to join our feast,” one of them joked.

But Eumaeus spoke firmly.

“This man is a guest,” he said. “He deserves respect.”

They led Odysseus into the great hall.

There he saw many familiar objects from his old life—tables, chairs, and the walls of the house he had built long ago.

Yet the hall now belonged to strangers.

One of the suitors, a proud man named Antinous, noticed the beggar.

“Who is this filthy old man?” he demanded.

Eumaeus answered calmly.

“He is a traveler who has suffered much. I brought him here to receive food, as is the custom.”

Some of the suitors tossed pieces of bread toward Odysseus. Others mocked him loudly.

Odysseus endured the insults in silence.

But Antinous became angry.

“Why do you bring such useless people into the palace?” he shouted at Eumaeus.

Then he picked up a heavy footstool and threw it at the beggar.

The stool struck Odysseus on the shoulder.

The hall fell quiet for a moment.

Odysseus stood still, controlling his anger.

“You may regret that action one day,” he said quietly.

Meanwhile Queen Penelope had heard that a stranger had arrived in the palace.

She spoke to her servant.

“Bring the traveler to me later,” she said. “Perhaps he has news of my husband.”

When evening came, the suitors continued their noisy feast.

Odysseus watched them carefully, studying each man.

Telemachus also sat quietly among them, pretending that nothing unusual had happened.

At last Penelope sent for the beggar.

Odysseus was led into the queen’s chamber.

Penelope looked at him with curiosity and sadness.

“Stranger,” she said gently, “have you heard any news of my husband Odysseus during your travels?”

Odysseus answered carefully, still hiding his identity.

“Yes,” he said. “I once met Odysseus. He was strong and determined to return home.”

Penelope listened eagerly.

“Tell me everything you remember,” she said.

Odysseus described his own appearance as it had been years earlier, proving that he truly knew the king.

Tears filled Penelope’s eyes.

“For twenty years I have waited for him,” she said softly.

Odysseus felt deep emotion but remained silent.

At last Penelope spoke again.

“Tomorrow I will hold a contest,” she said. “The man who can string Odysseus’s great bow and shoot an arrow through twelve iron axes will become my husband.”

Odysseus lowered his head.

“Then tomorrow will bring an important decision,” he said quietly.

Neither Penelope nor the suitors yet understood that the true master of the house had already returned—and that the contest would soon lead to their destruction.

Part 16

The next morning the palace of Ithaca was filled with excitement. The suitors gathered early in the great hall, talking loudly and laughing as they waited for the contest that Penelope had promised.

Servants carried tables, chairs, and weapons away from the center of the room so there would be space for the challenge.

Penelope soon entered the hall.

She walked slowly and proudly, though her heart was full of sorrow. Behind her servants carried the great bow of Odysseus and a box filled with arrows.

Many of the suitors stared at the bow with curiosity.

Few of them had ever seen it before.

Penelope stood before the gathered men and spoke clearly.

“Listen to me,” she said. “You have waited many years in this house, hoping that I would choose one of you as my husband.”

The hall grew quiet.

“Today I will hold a contest,” Penelope continued. “Whoever can string this bow and shoot an arrow through twelve iron axes will win the contest—and I will marry that man.”

Servants placed the twelve axes in a straight line across the hall.

Each axe had a hole through its metal head. The arrow would need to pass through every one of those holes.

The suitors looked at the heavy bow.

Antinous spoke first.

“Let the contest begin,” he said confidently.

One by one the suitors tried to string the bow.

But the weapon was strong and stiff. It had once belonged to the powerful Odysseus, and few men had the strength to bend it.

The first suitor struggled with it for a long time but failed.

Another tried next.

Then another.

Each man pulled and strained, but none could bend the bow.

Some of the men rubbed oil on their hands to gain a better grip. Others warmed the bow near the fire, hoping to make it softer.

Still no one succeeded.

Meanwhile Odysseus sat quietly among the servants, still dressed as a beggar.

He watched every attempt with calm patience.

At last he turned toward Eumaeus and spoke softly.

“May I try the bow?” he asked.

Eumaeus looked surprised.

But before he could answer, some of the suitors heard the beggar’s request.

Antinous laughed loudly.

“The old beggar wishes to try!” he shouted. “Do you think you are stronger than all of us?”

The other suitors laughed cruelly.

But Telemachus spoke firmly.

“The stranger may try if he wishes,” he said. “The bow belongs to this house.”

Antinous frowned but said nothing.

Eumaeus brought the bow to Odysseus.

The disguised hero took it calmly in his hands.

For a moment he examined it carefully, turning it slightly as though testing its strength.

The suitors watched with amusement.

But suddenly Odysseus bent the bow easily.

The strong wood curved smoothly beneath his hands.

In a single motion he strung the bow.

The hall fell silent.

No one laughed now.

Odysseus picked up an arrow and placed it on the string.

He aimed carefully at the row of axes.
The arrow flew from the bow with a sharp sound.
It passed cleanly through all twelve axes and struck the far wall of the hall.
At that moment Odysseus stood tall.
He turned toward Telemachus.
“Now the contest is finished,” he said calmly.
Then he removed the rags of the beggar and stood revealed in his true form.
The suitors stared in shock.
Odysseus’s eyes burned with anger.
“You dogs,” he said. “You believed that I would never return.”
His voice echoed through the hall.
“You have eaten my food, insulted my servants, and tried to force my wife into marriage.”
The suitors began to understand their terrible mistake.
Odysseus lifted the bow once more.
“Now you will pay for your crimes.”
The arrow flew straight across the hall and struck Antinous in the throat.
The cruel leader of the suitors fell backward and died instantly.
Panic filled the hall.
The other suitors jumped to their feet in terror.
But Odysseus and Telemachus were already standing side by side, ready to fight.
The final battle for the house of Ithaca had begun.

Part 17

When Antinous fell to the floor with the arrow in his throat, the hall filled with confusion and fear. The suitors looked at one another in shock.

For a moment no one moved.

Then one of the men cried out.

“This stranger has gone mad!”

But Odysseus spoke in a loud, terrible voice.

“I am no stranger,” he said. “I am Odysseus, the true master of this house. You men have dishonored my home and wasted my wealth.”

The suitors stared at him with growing terror.

Eurymachus, another leader among them, stepped forward.

“Odysseus,” he said quickly, “if you have killed Antinous, it was his fault. He led us in all our foolish actions. Spare the rest of us, and we will repay everything we have taken from your house.”

Odysseus shook his head.

“No,” he replied coldly. “Not one of you will escape.”

As he spoke, Telemachus stood beside him holding a spear.

Eumaeus the swineherd and another loyal servant named Philoetius also joined them.

The four men stood together at the doorway of the hall.

The suitors realized that they were trapped.

Their weapons were gone.

Earlier Telemachus had secretly removed all the spears and shields from the hall and hidden them away.

Eurymachus shouted to the others.

“Attack him!” he cried.

He rushed forward with a sword in his hand.

But Odysseus moved quickly.

He drew another arrow and shot it straight into Eurymachus’s chest.

The man fell to the ground with a cry.

Panic spread through the hall.

Some of the suitors tried to hide behind tables. Others searched desperately for weapons.

Telemachus quickly ran to the storage room and brought back shields, spears, and helmets for himself, Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius.

Now the battle truly began.

The suitors grabbed chairs and tables to use as shields. Some threw cups and dishes across the hall.

But Odysseus continued shooting arrows with deadly accuracy.

One by one the suitors fell.

Soon Odysseus's arrows were gone.

Then he and his companions took up their spears.

The fighting became fierce and violent.

The suitors tried to rush forward together, hoping to overwhelm the small group defending the doorway.

But Athena was watching the battle.

She appeared silently in the hall in the form of Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus.

Odysseus saw her and spoke loudly.

"Mentor," he said, "will you not help your old friend in this fight?"

Athena answered calmly.

"Odysseus," she said, "now we will see whether you still possess the courage that once made you famous."

She did not fight directly, but she filled Odysseus and his companions with strength and confidence.

When the suitors threw their spears, Athena caused the weapons to miss their targets.

Then Odysseus and his allies attacked again.

One after another the enemies fell.

Soon the great hall was filled with silence.

The wicked suitors lay dead upon the floor.

Only one man remained alive.

His name was Phemius, the palace singer.

He had been forced to entertain the suitors and had taken no part in their crimes.

He fell to his knees before Odysseus.

"Please spare me," he begged. "I served the suitors only because they forced me."

Telemachus spoke quickly.

"Father, this man is innocent," he said. "He should not die."

Odysseus lowered his sword.

“Then rise,” he said to the singer. “You will live.”

Another servant named Medon also begged for mercy. He too had remained loyal to the household.

Odysseus spared him as well.

After the battle ended, the hero stood quietly in the hall.

The long years of wandering were finally over.

His enemies had been defeated, and his house had been freed from the men who had taken it over.

Yet one final test still remained.

Odysseus had not yet spoken with his wife Penelope, who still waited upstairs, uncertain whether the stranger who had defeated the suitors was truly her long-lost husband.

Part 18

After the battle ended, Odysseus stood quietly in the great hall. The long struggle was finally over. The suitors who had taken his home were gone.

Telemachus looked around the hall and spoke.

“Father, the danger inside the palace is finished,” he said.

Odysseus nodded.

“Yes,” he replied. “But the house must be cleaned, and the news must be brought to your mother.”

The servants who had remained loyal quickly began their work. They removed the bodies of the suitors and washed the hall. Fresh fire burned in the hearth, and clean cloths were spread across the tables.

Soon the palace looked peaceful once again.

Meanwhile an old servant woman named Eurycleia hurried upstairs to the queen’s chamber.

Eurycleia had been Odysseus’s nurse when he was a child. She had recognized him earlier when she washed his feet and saw the old scar on his leg.

Now she rushed to Penelope with great excitement.

“My lady!” she cried. “Wake up and come see the wonderful news! Your husband has returned and defeated the suitors!”

Penelope sat up slowly.

She looked at the old woman with uncertainty.

“Do not deceive me,” Penelope said quietly. “My heart has suffered too much already.”

Eurycleia shook her head eagerly.

“It is true,” she insisted. “Odysseus himself has returned.”

But Penelope remained calm.

“Perhaps a god has punished the suitors,” she said. “But I must see the man with my own eyes before I believe such a thing.”

Together they walked down to the great hall.

When Penelope entered the room, she saw a tall man standing beside Telemachus.

The stranger looked strong and proud, yet she still could not be certain.

Odysseus stood quietly, watching her.

Many emotions filled his heart, but he remained patient.

Telemachus spoke first.

“Mother,” he said, “why do you stand so far away? This is my father who has returned home.”

Penelope looked at Odysseus carefully.

“If he truly is my husband,” she said slowly, “then he will know the secret that only the two of us share.”

Odysseus said nothing.

Penelope turned to a servant.

“Move the great bed from our chamber,” she said. “Prepare it for this man to sleep upon.”

Odysseus suddenly stepped forward.

“Woman,” he said sharply, “who has moved my bed?”

His voice grew strong with emotion.

“No man could move that bed. I built it myself long ago.”

The hall grew silent.

Odysseus continued speaking.

“One of the legs of the bed was made from the trunk of a living olive tree. I built the room around it. The bed cannot be moved unless the tree itself is cut down.”

Penelope’s eyes filled with tears.

Now she knew the truth.

She ran forward and threw her arms around him.

“Odysseus!” she cried.

The long years of waiting and suffering were finally over.

Odysseus held her tightly.

“My faithful wife,” he said softly.

Both of them wept with joy.

After a long time Penelope spoke again.

“You have suffered greatly during your long journey,” she said.

Odysseus nodded.

“But now I have returned to you and to our son,” he replied.

That night Odysseus finally slept in his own house beside his wife.

Yet one final danger still remained.

The families of the dead suitors would soon learn what had happened. They might come seeking revenge.

But Athena was watching over the hero and his family.

With her help, peace would soon return to the island of Ithaca.

Part 19

When the sun rose over Ithaca the next morning, the island was quiet. But the news of the suitors’ deaths soon began to spread through the town.

Servants who had seen the battle spoke about what had happened in the palace. Before long the families of the dead men learned the terrible truth.

Many of them were filled with anger.

“Odysseus has killed our sons and brothers,” they cried. “We must take revenge!”

They gathered together in the town square and began shouting loudly.

Among them stood the old father of Antinous, the leader of the suitors who had been killed first.

His name was Epeithes.

His voice trembled with rage.

“My son is dead,” he said. “Shall we do nothing while Odysseus escapes punishment?”

Many men shouted in agreement.

“We must attack the palace!” they cried.

But not everyone supported this plan.

An old man named Halitherses stepped forward.

He had long been known as a wise man who understood the signs of the gods.

“Listen to me,” he said calmly.

The crowd slowly became quiet.

“You all know what the suitors did in the house of Odysseus,” Halitherses continued. “They wasted his wealth and tried to force his wife into marriage.”

He looked around at the angry crowd.

“The gods themselves punished those men. Do not bring more trouble upon yourselves by seeking revenge.”

Some people nodded, understanding the truth of his words.

But others were still blinded by anger.

Epeithes raised his spear.

“Anyone who fears Odysseus may stay here,” he shouted. “The rest of us will follow me!”

Many men followed him.

Soon they marched toward the countryside where Odysseus lived.

Meanwhile Odysseus had left the palace early that morning.

Athena had advised him to visit his father Laertes, who lived on a small farm

outside the town.

The old man had been living in sadness for many years, believing that his son had died.

When Odysseus reached the farm, he saw his father working in the fields.

Laertes looked thin and tired. His clothes were old and worn, and grief had aged his face.

At first Odysseus watched him silently.

“My poor father,” he thought. “He has suffered greatly because of my long absence.”

Finally Odysseus approached him.

Laertes looked up at the stranger.

“Who are you?” he asked.

For a moment Odysseus decided to test him.

“I once met your son Odysseus,” he said.

At the sound of that name, tears filled the old man’s eyes.

Odysseus could no longer hide the truth.

He stepped forward and spoke gently.

“Father,” he said, “it is I. I have returned home.”

Laertes stared at him in disbelief.

“If you are truly my son,” he said, “show me a sign.”

Odysseus smiled.

“Do you remember the trees in this orchard?” he asked.

“When I was a boy, you showed them to me one by one. You gave me thirteen pear trees, ten apple trees, and forty fig trees.”

Laertes recognized the memory immediately.

Tears flowed down his face as he embraced his son.

“Odysseus,” he whispered.

At that moment Telemachus and several loyal servants also arrived at the farm.

Father, son, and grandfather stood together at last.

But soon a messenger came running with urgent news.

“The families of the suitors are coming!” he cried. “They are marching here

with weapons!”

Odysseus quickly took up his armor.

“Then we must defend ourselves,” he said.

Telemachus and the others prepared for battle beside him.

Soon the angry crowd arrived at the edge of the farm.

The final conflict on the island of Ithaca was about to begin.

Part 20

The men who followed Eupheithes marched across the fields toward the farm of Laertes. Many of them carried spears and shields. Their faces were filled with anger.

“Odysseus must pay for what he has done!” Eupheithes shouted as they advanced.

Meanwhile Odysseus stood with his son Telemachus, his father Laertes, and their loyal servants Eumaeus and Philoetius.

Athena had secretly filled their hearts with courage.

Odysseus spoke calmly.

“My friends,” he said, “today we must defend our lives and our home. But do not fear. The gods are with us.”

Laertes straightened his back and held his spear firmly.

Though he was old, strength returned to him as he stood beside his son and grandson.

Soon the angry crowd came into view.

Eupheithes pointed toward Odysseus.

“There he is!” he cried. “Attack!”

The men rushed forward.

At that moment Athena appeared beside Odysseus, though most of the fighters could not see her. She had taken once again the form of Mentor.

She spoke quietly.

“Odysseus, show the courage that made you famous among men.”

Odysseus nodded.

“Now, father,” he said to Laertes, “show your strength.”

Laertes lifted his spear and threw it with surprising power.

The weapon flew through the air and struck Euphemos directly in the chest.

The leader of the attackers fell to the ground.

Seeing their leader fall, the others hesitated.

Odysseus and his companions rushed forward.

A fierce fight began among the trees and fields.

Several of the attackers fell quickly before the skill of Odysseus and Telemachus.

But before the battle could grow larger, Athena suddenly raised her voice.

“Stop!” she commanded.

Her voice carried the power of the gods.

At once the fighting ceased.

The men stood frozen in fear.

Then Zeus himself sent a loud thunderclap from the sky as a sign of his will.

Athena stepped forward and spoke again.

“The time for revenge is over,” she said. “The suitors have been punished for their crimes. Now peace must return to Ithaca.”

The people listened in silence.

Athena turned to Odysseus.

“You must accept peace,” she said. “The suffering of the past is finished.”

Odysseus lowered his spear.

“I will obey the will of the gods,” he replied.

The men who had come seeking revenge slowly laid down their weapons.

Fear and respect for the gods filled their hearts.

Athena then placed a final blessing upon the island.

“Let there be peace between all the people of Ithaca,” she declared.

And so the long conflict came to an end.

Odysseus returned to his home and ruled his kingdom wisely once more. Telemachus stood beside him as a strong and loyal son. Laertes spent his final

years in happiness, seeing his family reunited at last.

After twenty years of war and wandering, the hero of Ithaca had finally come home.