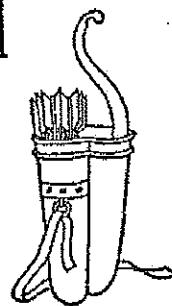


## BOOK XXIII



- The old woman, laughing loudly, went to the upper chamber  
to tell her mistress that her beloved husband was inside  
the house. Her knees moved swiftly, but her feet were tottering.  
She stood above Penelope's head and spoke a word to her:  
5     'Wake, Penelope, dear child, so that, with your own eyes,  
you can see what all your days you have been longing for.  
Odysseus is here, he is in the house, though late in his coming;  
and he has killed the haughty suitors, who were afflicting  
his house, and using force on his son, and eating his property.'
- 10    Circumspect Penelope said to her in answer:  
'Dear nurse, the gods have driven you crazy. They are both able  
to change a very sensible person into a senseless  
one, and to set the light-wit on the way of discretion.  
They have set you awry; before now your thoughts were orderly.'
- 15    Why do you insult me when my heart is heavy with sorrows,  
by talking in this wild way, and wakening me from a happy  
sleep, which had come and covered my eyes, and held them fastened?  
For I have not had such a sleep as this one, since the time  
when Odysseus went to that evil, not-to-be-mentioned Ilion.
- 20    But go down now, and take yourself back into the palace.  
If any of those other women, who are here with me,  
had come with a message like yours, and wakened me from my slumber,  
I would have sent her back on her way to the hall in a hateful  
fashion for doing it. It shall be your age that saves you.'

25 Then the beloved nurse Eurykleia said to her in answer:

'I am not insulting you, dear child. It is all true.'

Odysseus is here, he is in the house, just as I tell you.

He is that stranger-guest, whom all in the house were abusing. Telemachos has known that he was here for a long time, but he was discreet, and did not betray the plans of his father, so he might punish these overbearing men for their violence.'

So she spoke, and Penelope in her joy sprang up from the bed, and embraced the old woman, her eyes streaming tears, and she spoke to her and addressed her in winged words:

'Come, dear nurse, and give me a true account of the matter, whether he really has come back to his horse, as you tell me, to lay his hands on the shameless suitors, though he was only one, and they were always lying in wait, in a body!'

Then the beloved nurse Eurykleia said to her in answer:

'I did not see, I was not told, but I heard the outcry

of them being killed; we, hidden away in the strong-built storerooms, sat there terrified, and the closed doors held us prisoner, until from inside the great hall your son Telemachos

summoned me, because his father told him to do it.'

45 There I found Odysseus standing among the dead men

he had killed, and they covered the hardened earth, lying piled on each other around him. You would have been cheered to see him,

splattered over with gore and battle filth, like a lion.'

Now they lie all together, by the doors of the courtyard, while he is burning a great fire, and clearing the beautiful house with brimstone. He has sent me on to summon you.

Come with me then, so that both of you can turn your dear hearts the way of happiness, since you have had so much to suffer, but now at last what long you prayed for has been accomplished.

55 He has come back and is here at his hearth, alive, and has found you and his son in the palace, and has taken revenge on the suitors here in his house, for all the evils that they have done him.'

Circumspect Penelope said to her in answer:

'Dear nurse, do not yet laugh aloud in triumph. You know how welcome he would be if he appeared in the palace: to all, but above all to me and the son we gave birth to. No, but this story is not true as you tell it; rather,

some one of the immortals has killed the haughty suitors in anger over their wicked deeds and heart-hurting violence; for these men paid no attention at all to any man on earth who came their way, no matter if he were base or noble.

65 So they suffered for their own recklessness. But Odysseus has lost his homecoming and lost his life, far from Achaea.'

Then the beloved nurse Eurykleia said to her in answer:

'My child, what sort of word escaped your teeth's barrier?

70 Though your husband is here beside the hearth, you would never say he would come home. Your heart was always mistrustful. But here is another proof that is very clear. I will tell you.

That scarf, which once the boar with his white teeth inflicted.

75 I recognized it while I was washing his feet, and I wanted to tell you about it, but he stopped my mouth with his hands, would not let me speak, for his mind sought every advantage. Come then, follow me, and I will hazard my life upon it.

Circumspect Penelope said to her in answer:

80 'Dear nurse, it would be hard for you to baffle the purposes of the everlasting gods, although you are very clever. Still, I will go to see my son, so that I can look on

these men who courted me lying dead, and the man who killed them.' She speaks, and came down from the chamber, her heart pondering much, whether to keep away and question her dear husband, or to go up to him and kiss his head, taking his hands. But then, when she came in and stepped over the stone threshold, she sat across from him in the firelight, facing Odysseus, 90 by the opposite wall, while he was seated by the tall pillar, looking downward, and waiting to find out if his majestic wife would have anything to say to him, now that she saw him. She sat a long time in silence, and her heart was wondering.

Sometimes she would look at him, with her eyes full upon him, and again would fail to know him in the foul clothing he wore. Telemachos spoke to her and called her by name and scolded her: 'My mother, my harsh mother with the hard heart inside you, why do you withdraw so from my father, and do not sit beside him and ask him questions and find out about him? No other woman, with spirit as stubborn as yours, would keep back as you are doing from her husband who, after much suffering,

100

*Plans to deceive the people*

came at last in the twentieth year back to his own country.

'But always you have a heart that is harder than stone within you.'

Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer:

'My child, the spirit that is in me is full of wonderment, and I cannot find anything to say to him, nor question him, nor look him straight in the face. But if he is truly Odysseus, and he has come home, then we shall find other ways, and better, to recognize each other, for we have signs that we know of between the two of us only, but they are secret from others.'

So she spoke, and much-enduring noble Odysseus smiled, and presently spoke in winged words to Telemachos: 'Telemachos, leave your mother to examine me in the palace as she will, and presently she will understand better; but now that I am dirty and wear foul clothing upon me, she dislikes me for that, and says I am not her husband. But let us make our plans how all will come out best for us. For when one has killed only one man in a community, and then there are not many avengers to follow, even so, he flees into exile, leaving kinsmen and country.'

'But we have killed what held the city together, the finest young men in Ithaka. It is what I would have you consider.' Then the thoughtful Telemachos said to him in answer: 'You must look to this yourself, dear father; for they say you have the best mind among men for craft, and there is no other man among mortal men who can contend with you. We shall follow you eagerly; I think that we shall not come short in warcraft, in so far as the strength stays with us.'

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered him: 'So I will tell you the way of it, how it seems best to me. First, all go and wash, and put your tunics upon you, and tell the women in the palace to choose out their clothing. Then let the inspired singer take his clear-sounding lyre, and give us the lead for festive dance, so that anyone

who is outside, some one of the neighbors, or a person going along the street, who hears us, will think we are having a wedding. Let no rumor go abroad in the town that the suitors have been murdered, until such time as we can make our way out to our estate with its many trees, and once there see what profitable plan the Olympian shows us.'

*Odysseus reproaches Penelope*

So he spoke, and they listened well to him and obeyed him. First they went and washed, and put their tunics upon them, and the women arrayed themselves in their finery, while the inspired

singer took up his hollowed lyre and stirred up within them the impulse for the sweetness of song and the stately dancing.

Now the great house resounded along to the thud of their footsteps, as the men celebrated there, and the fair-girdled women; and thus would a person speak outside the house who heard them:

'Surely now someone has married our much-sought-after queen; hard-hearted, she had no patience to keep the great house for her own wedded lord to the end, till he came back to her.'

So would a person speak, but they did not know what had happened. Now the housekeeper Euryalos bathed, great-hearted Odysseus in his own house, and anointed him with olive oil, and threw a beautiful mantle and a tunic about him;

145 and over his head Athene suffused great beauty, to make him taller to behold and thicker, and on his head she arranged the curling locks that hung down like hyacinthine petals.

And as when a master craftsman overlays gold on silver,

150 and he is one who was taught by Hephaistos and Pallas Athene in art complete, and grace is on every work he finishes;

so Athene gilded with grace his head and his shoulders.

Then, looking like an immortal, he strode forth from the bath, and came back then and sat on the chair from which he had risen, opposite his wife, and now he spoke to her, saying: 'You are so strange. The gods, who have their homes on Olympos, have made your heart more stubborn than for the rest of womankind. No other woman, with spirit as stubborn as yours, would keep back as you are doing from her husband who, after much suffering,

155 came at last in the twentieth year back to his own country. Come then, nurse, make me up a bed, so that I can use it here; for this woman has a heart of iron within her.'

Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer:

'You are so strange. I am not being proud, nor indifferent, nor puzzled beyond need, but I know very well what you looked like when you went in the ship with the sweeping oars, from Ithaka.

Come then, Eurykleia, and make up a firm bed for him outside the well-fashioned chamber: that very bed that he himself built. Put the firm bed here outside for him, and cover it

*She tricks him into betraying himself,*

180 over with fleeces and blankets, and with shining coverlets.'  
So she spoke to her husband, trying him out, but Odysseus spoke in anger to his virtuous-minded lady:

'What you have said, dear lady, has hurt my heart deeply. What man has put my bed in another place? But it would be difficult for even a very expert one, unless a god, coming

to help in person, were easily to change its position.

But there is no mortal man alive, no strong man, who lightly could move the weight elsewhere. There is one particular feature in the bed's construction. I myself, no other man, made it. There was the bole of an olive tree with long leaves growing strongly in the courtyard, and it was thick, like a column. I laid down my chamber around this, and built it, until I finished it, with close-set stones, and spoofed it well over,

and added the compacted doors, fitting closely together. Then I cut away the foliage of the long-leaved olive,

and trimmed the trunk from the roots up, planing it with a Brazza adze, well and expertly, and tried it straight to a chalkline, making a bed post of it, and bored all holes with an anger. I began with this and built my bed, until it was finished,

and decorated it with gold and silver and ivory.

Then I lashed it with thongs of oxhide; dyed bright with purple. There is its character, as I tell you; but I do not know now, dear lady, whether my bed is still in place, or if some man has cut underneath the stump of the olive, and moved it elsewhere.'

So he spoke, and her knees and the heart within her went slack as she recognized the clear proofs that Odysseus had given; but then she burst into tears and ran straight to him, throwing

her arms around the neck of Odysseus, and kissed his head, saying: 'Do not be angry with me, Odysseus, since, beyond other men, you have the most understanding. The gods granted us misery, in jealousy over the thought that we two, always together,

should enjoy our youth, and then come to the threshold of old age. Then do not now be angry with me nor blame me, because I did not greet you, as I do now, at first when I saw you.

For always the spirit deep in my very heart was fearful that some one of mortal men would come my way and deceive me with words. For there are many who scheme for wicked advantage.

For neither would the daughter born to Zeus, Helen of Argos,

*then eliminates him*

have lain in love with an outlander from another country,'

220 if she had known that the warlike sons of the Achaians would bring her home again to the beloved land of her fathers.

It was a god who stirred her to do the shameful thing she did, and never before had she had in her heart this terrible wildness, out of which came suffering to us also.

225 But now, since you have given me accurate proof of describing our bed, which no other mortal man beside has ever seen, but only you and I, and there is one serving woman, Alctor's daughter, whom my father gave me when I came here,

who used to guard the doors for us in our well-built chamber;

so you persuade my heart, though it has been very stubborn.'

She spoke, and still more roused in him the passion for weeping. He wept as he held his lovely wife, whose thoughts were virtuous.

And as when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming,

after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward

by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them, and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;

so welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him,

240 and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms. Now Dawn of the rosy fingers would have dawned on their weeping,

had not the gray-eyed goddess Athene planned it otherwise. She held the long night back at the outward edge, she detained

Dawn of the golden throne by the Ocean, and would not let her harness her fast-footed horses who bring the daylight to people:

245 Lampos and Phaethon, the Dawn's horses, who carry her. Then resourceful Odysseus spoke to his wife, saying:

'Dear wife, we have not yet come to the limit of all our trials. There is unmeasured labor left for the future, both difficult and great, and all of it I must accomplish.

250 So the soul of Teiresias prophesied to me, on that day when I went down inside the house of Hades, seeking to learn about homecoming, for myself and for my companions. But come, my wife, let us go to bed, so that at long last

Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer:

'You shall have your going to bed whenever the spirit

desires it, now that the gods have brought about your homecoming to your own strong-founded house and to the land of your fathers. But since the gods put this into your mind, and you understand it, tell me what this trial is, since I think I shall hear of it later; so it will be none the worse if I now hear of it.'

Then in turn resourceful Odysseus said to her in answer:

'You are so strange. Why do you urge me on and tell me to speak of it? Yet I will tell you, concealing nothing. Your heart will have no joy in this; and I myself am not happy, since he told me to go among many cities of men, taking my well-shaped oar in my hands and bearing it, until I come where there are men living who know nothing of the sea, and who eat food that is not mixed with salt, who never have known ships whose cheeks are painted purple, who never have known well-shaped oars, which act for ships as wings do. And then he told me a very clear proof. I will not conceal it. When, as I walk, some other wayfarer happens to meet me, and says I carry a winnow fan on my bright shoulder, then I must plant my well-shaped oar in the ground, and render ceremonious sacrifice to the lord Poseidon, one ram and one bull, and a moulder of sow<sup>s</sup>, a boar pig, and make my way home again, and render holy hecatombs to the immortal gods who hold the wide heaven, all of them in order. Death will come to me from the sea, in some altogether unwarlike way, and it will end me in the ebbing time of a sleek old age. My people about me will prosper. All this he told me would be accomplished.'

Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer:

If the gods are accomplishing a more prosperous old age, then there is hope that you shall have an escape from your troubles. Now as these two were conversing thus with each other, meanwhile the nurse and Euryalos were making the bed up with soft coverings, under the light of their flaring torches. Then when they had worked and presently had a firm bed made, the old woman went away back to bed in her own place, while Euryalos, as mistress of the chamber, guided them on their way to the bed, and her hands held the torch for them. When she had brought them to the chamber she went back. They then gladly went together to bed, and their old ritual.

At this time Telemachos and the oxherd and swineherd stopped the beat of their feet in the dance, and stopped the women, and they themselves went to bed in the shadowy palace.

When Penelope and Odysseus had enjoyed their lovemaking, they took their pleasure in talking, each one telling his story. She, shining among women, told of all she had endured in the palace, as she watched the suitors, a ravening company, who on her account were slaughtering many oxen and fat sheep, and much wine was being drawn from the wine jars. But shining Odysseus told of all the cares he inflicted on other men, and told too of all that in his misery he had toiled through. She listened to him with delight, nor did any sleep fall upon her eyes until he had told her everything.

He began with how he had beaten the Kikonians, and then gone to the rich country of the men who feed on the lotus. He told all that the Cyclops had done, and how he took vengeance on him for his strong companions he had eaten, and showed no pity. How he came to Aiolos, who generously received him and gave him passage, but it was not fated for him to come back yet to his country, so the stormwinds caught and carried him out again on the sea where the fish swarm, groaning heavily; and how he came to Televylos of the Laistrygones, and these men had destroyed his ships and strong-greaved companions [all; but Odysseus only got away with his black ship].

He told her of the guile and the many devices of Circe, and how he had gone into the moldeining home of Hades, there to consult the soul of Theban Teiresias, going in his ship with many benches, and there saw all his companions, and his mother, who had borne him and nursed him when he was little. He told how he had heard the song of the echoing Sirens, and made his way to the Roaring Rocks and dreaded Charybdis and Skylla, whom no men ever yet have escaped without damage. He told how his companions ate the cattle of Helios, then told how Zeus who thunders on high had struck his fast ship with the snowy thunderbolt, and all his noble companions perished alike, only he escaped the evil death spirits; and how he came to the island Ogygia and the nymph Kalypso who detained him with her, desiring that he should be her husband, in her hollow caverns, and she took care of him and told him

*Odysseus goes to see his father*

that she would make him ageless all his days, and immortal,  
but never so could she persuade the heart that was in him;  
then how, after much suffering, he reached the Phaiakians,  
who honored him in their hearts as if he were a god, and sent him  
340 back, by ship, to the beloved land of his fathers,  
bestowing bronze and gold in abundance on him, and clothing.  
And this was the last word he spoke to her, when the sweet sleep  
came to relax his limbs and slip the cares from his spirit.

Then the goddess gray-eyed Athene thought what to do next.  
345 As soon as she thought the heart of Odysseus had full contentment  
of the pleasure of resting in bed beside his wife, and of sleeping,  
immediately she stirred from Ocean the golden-throned early  
Dawn, to shine her light upon men, and Odysseus rose up  
from his soft bed, and spoke then to his wife, telling her:  
350 'Dear wife, we both have had our full share of numerous trials  
now; yours have been here as you cried over my much-longed-for  
homecoming, while as for me, Zeus and the other gods held me  
back from my own country, as I was striving to reach it.  
But now that we two have come to our desired bed together,  
355 you look after my possessions which are in the palace,  
but as for my flocks, which the overbearing suitors have ruined,  
many I shall restore by raiding, others the Achaians  
shall give me, until they have filled up all of my sheepfolds.  
But now I shall go to our estate with its many orchards,  
360 to see my noble father who has grieved for me constantly.  
But I tell you this, my wife, though you have your own understanding.  
Presently, when the sun rises, there will be a rumor  
about the men who courted you, whom I killed in our palace.  
Then go to the upper chamber with your attendant women,  
365 and sit still, looking at no one, and do not ask any questions.'

He spoke, and put his splendid armor over his shoulders,  
and wakened Telemachos and the oxherd and the swineherd,  
and told all to take up in their hands their warlike weapons;  
not did they disobey him, but armed themselves in the bronze, then  
370 opened the doors and went outside, and Odysseus led them.  
By now the light was over the earth, but Athene, hiding  
these men in darkness, guided them quickly out of the city.