

soon to be tasted by all the feasters there.
 Setting shaft on the handgrip, drawing the notch
 and bowstring back, back . . . right from his stool,
 just as he sat but aiming straight and true, he let fly—
 and never missing an ax from the first ax-handle
 clean on through to the last and out
 the shaft with its weighted brazen head shot free!

"My son,"

Odysseus looked to Telemachus and said, "your guest,
 sitting here in your house, has not disgraced you.
 No missing the mark, look, and no long labor spent
 to string the bow. My strength's not broken yet,
 not quite so frail as the mocking suitors thought.
 But the hour has come to serve our masters right—
 supper in broad daylight—then to other revels,
 song and dancing, all that crowns a feast."

He paused with a warning nod, and at that sign
 Prince Telemachus, son of King Odysseus,
 girding his sharp sword on, clamping hand to spear,
 took his stand by a chair that flanked his father—
 his bronze spearpoint glinting now like fire . . .

[418-34]

470

480



Slaughter in the Hall

Now stripping back his rags Odysseus master of craft and battle
 vaulted onto the great threshold, gripping his bow and quiver
 bristling arrows, and poured his flashing shafts before him,
 loose at his feet, and thundered out to all the suitors:
 "Look—your crucial test is finished, now, at last!
 But another target's left that no one's hit before—
 we'll see if *I* can hit it—Apollo give me glory!"

With that he trained a stabbing arrow on Antinous . . .
 just lifting a gorgeous golden loving-cup in his hands,
 just tilting the two-handled goblet back to his lips,
 about to drain the wine—and slaughter the last thing
 on the suitor's mind: who could dream that one foe
 in that crowd of feasters, however great his power,
 would bring down death on himself, and black doom?

10

But Odysseus aimed and shot Antinous square in the throat
and the point went stabbing clean through the soft neck and out—
and off to the side he pitched, the cup dropped from his grasp
as the shaft sank home, and the man's life-blood came spurting
out his nostrils—

thick red jets—

a sudden thrust of his foot—

he kicked away the table—

food showered across the floor,

the bread and meats soaked in a swirl of bloody filth.
The suitors burst into uproar all throughout the house
when they saw their leader down. They leapt from their seats,
milling about, desperate, scanning the stone walls—
not a shield in sight, no rugged spear to seize.
They wheeled on Odysseus, lashing out in fury:
"Stranger, shooting at men will cost your life!"

"Your game is over—you, you've shot your last!"

"You'll never escape your own headlong death!"

"You killed the best in Ithaca—our fine prince!"

"Vultures will eat your corpse!"

Groping, frantic—

each one persuading himself the guest had killed
the man by chance. Poor fools, blind to the fact
that all their necks were in the noose, their doom sealed.
With a dark look, the wily fighter Odysseus shouted back,
"You dogs! you never imagined I'd return from Troy—
so cocksure that you bled my house to death,
ravished my serving-women—wooed my wife
behind my back while I was still alive!
No fear of the gods who rule the skies up there,
no fear that men's revenge might arrive someday—
now all your necks are in the noose—your doom is sealed!"

Terror gripped them all, blanched their faces white,

each man glancing wildly—how to escape his instant death?
Only Eurymachus had the breath to venture, "If you,
you're truly Odysseus of Ithaca, home at last,
you're right to accuse these men of what they've done—
so much reckless outrage here in your palace,
so much on your lands. But here he lies,
quite dead, and he incited it all—Antinous—
look, the man who drove us all to crime!
Not that he needed marriage, craved it so;
he'd bigger game in mind—though Zeus barred his way—
he'd lord it over Ithaca's handsome country, king himself,
once he'd lain in wait for your son and cut him down!
But now he's received the death that he deserved.
So spare your own people! Later we'll recoup
your costs with a tax laid down upon the land,
covering all we ate and drank inside your halls,
and each of us here will pay full measure too—
twenty oxen in value, bronze and gold we'll give
until we melt your heart. Before we've settled,
who on earth could blame you for your rage?"

But the battle-master kept on glaring, seething.
"No, Eurymachus! Not if you paid me all your father's wealth—
all you possess now, and all that could pour in from the world's end—
no, not even then would I stay my hands from slaughter
till all you suitors had paid for all your crimes!
Now life or death—your choice—fight me or flee
if you hope to escape your sudden bloody doom!
I doubt one man in the lot will save his skin!"

His menace shook their knees, their hearts too
but Eurymachus spoke again, now to the suitors: "Friends!
This man will never restrain his hands, invincible hands—
now that he's seized that polished bow and quiver, look,
he'll shoot from the sill until he's killed us all!
So fight—call up the joy of battle! Swords out!
Tables lifted—block his arrows winging death!
Charge him, charge in a pack—

try to rout the man from the sill, the doors,
race through town and sound an alarm at once—
our friend would soon see he's shot his bolt!"

Brave talk—

he drew his two-edged sword, bronze, honed for the kill
and hurled himself at the king with a raw savage cry
in the same breath that Odysseus loosed an arrow
ripping his breast beside the nipple so hard
it lodged in the man's liver—
Out of his grasp the sword dropped to the ground—
over his table, head over heels he tumbled, doubled up,
flinging his food and his two-handed cup across the floor—
he smashed the ground with his forehead, writhing in pain,
both feet flailing out, and his high seat tottered—
the mist of death came swirling down his eyes.

Amphinomus rushed the king in all his glory,
charging him face-to-face, a slashing sword drawn—
if only he could force him clear of the doorway, now,
but Telemachus—too quick—stabbed the man from behind,
plunging his bronze spear between the suitor's shoulders
and straight on through his chest the point came jutting out—
down he went with a thud, his forehead slammed the ground.
Telemachus swerved aside, leaving his long spearshaft
lodged in Amphinomus—fearing some suitor just might
lunge in from behind as he tugged the shaft,
impale him with a sword or hack him down,
crouching over the corpse.
He went on the run, reached his father at once
and halting right beside him, let fly, "Father—
now I'll get you a shield and a pair of spears,
a helmet of solid bronze to fit your temples!
I'll arm myself on the way back and hand out
arms to the swineherd, arm the cowherd too—
we'd better fight equipped!"

"Run, fetch them,"
the wily captain urged, "while I've got arrows left
to defend me—or they'll force me from the doors

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while I fight on alone!"

Telemachus moved to his father's orders smartly.
Off he ran to the room where the famous arms lay stored,
took up four shields, eight spears, four bronze helmets
ridged with horsehair crests and, loaded with these,
ran back to reach his father's side in no time.
The prince was first to case himself in bronze
and his servants followed suit—both harnessed up
and all three flanked Odysseus, mastermind of war,
and he, as long as he'd arrows left to defend himself,
kept picking suitors off in the palace, one by one
and down they went, corpse on corpse in droves.
Then, when the royal archer's shafts ran out,
he leaned his bow on a post of the massive doors—
where walls of the hallway catch the light—and armed:
across his shoulder he slung a buckler four plies thick,
over his powerful head he set a well-forged helmet,
the horsehair crest atop it tossing, bristling terror,
and grasped two rugged lances tipped with fiery bronze.

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Now a side-door was fitted into the main wall—
right at the edge of the great hall's stone sill—
and led to a passage always shut by good tight boards.
But Odysseus gave the swineherd strict commands
to stand hard by the side-door, guard it well—
the only way the suitors might break out.
Agelaus called to his comrades with a plan:
"Friends, can't someone climb through the hatch?—
tell men outside to sound the alarm, be quick—
our guest would soon see he'd shot his last!"

140

The goatherd Melanthius answered, "Not a chance,
my lord—the door to the courtyard's much too near,
dangerous too, the mouth of the passage cramped.
One strong man could block us, one and all!
No, I'll fetch you some armor to harness on,
out of the storeroom—there, nowhere else, I'm sure,

the king and his gallant son have stowed their arms!"

150

With that the goatherd clambered up through smoke-ducts high on the wall and scurried into Odysseus' storeroom, bundled a dozen shields, as many spears and helmets ridged with horsehair crests and, loaded with these, rushed back down to the suitors, quickly issued arms. Odysseus' knees shook, his heart too, when he saw them buckling on their armor, brandishing long spears—here was a battle looming, well he knew. He turned at once to Telemachus, warnings flying: "A bad break in the fight, my boy! One of the women's tipped the odds against us—or could it be the goatherd?"

160

"My fault, father," the cool clear prince replied, "the blame's all mine. That snug door to the vault, I left it ajar—they've kept a better watch than I. Go, Eumaeus, shut the door to the storeroom, check and see if it's one of the women's tricks or Dolius' son Melanthius. He's our man, I'd say."

And even as they conspired, back the goatherd climbed to the room to fetch more burnished arms, but Eumaeus spotted him, quickly told his king who stood close by: "Odysseus, wily captain, there he goes again, the infernal nuisance—just as we suspected—back to the storeroom. Give me a clear command! Do I kill the man—if I can take him down—or drag him back to you, here, to pay in full for the vicious work he's plotted in your house?"

170

Odysseus, master of tactics, answered briskly, "I and the prince will keep these brazen suitors crammed in the hall, for all their battle-fury. You two wrench Melanthius' arms and legs behind him, fling him down in the storeroom—lash his back to a plank and strap a twisted cable fast to the scoundrel's body,

180

hoist him up a column until he hits the rafters—let him dangle in agony, still alive, for a good long time!"

They hung on his orders, keen to do his will. Off they ran to the storeroom, unseen by him inside—Melanthius, rummaging after arms, deep in a dark recess as the two men took their stand, either side the doorposts, poised till the goatherd tried to cross the doorsill . . . one hand clutching a crested helmet, the other an ample old buckler blotched with mildew, the shield Laertes bore as a young soldier once but there it lay for ages, seams on the handstraps split—Quick, they rushed him, seized him, haled him back by the hair, flung him down on the floor, writhing with terror, bound him hand and foot with a chafing cord, wrenched his limbs back, back till the joints locked tight—just as Laertes' cunning son commanded— they strapped a twisted cable round his body, hoisted him up a column until he hit the rafters, then you mocked him, Eumaeus, my good swineherd: "Now stand guard through the whole night, Melanthius—stretched out on a soft bed fit for *you*, your highness! You're bound to see the Morning rising up from the Ocean, mounting her golden throne—at just the hour you always drive in goats to feast the suitors in the hall!"

190

200

So they left him, trussed in his agonizing sling; they clapped on armor again, shut the gleaming doors and ran to rejoin Odysseus, mastermind of war. And now as the ranks squared off, breathing fury—four at the sill confronting a larger, stronger force arrayed inside the hall—now Zeus's daughter Athena, taking the build and voice of Mentor, swept in and Odysseus, thrilled to see her, cried out, "Rescue us, Mentor, now it's life or death! Remember your old comrade—all the service I offered you! We were boys together!"

210

So he cried
yet knew in his bones it was Athena, Driver of Armies. 220
But across the hall the suitors brayed against her,
Agelaus first, his outburst full of threats:
“Mentor, never let Odysseus trick you into
siding with *him* to fight against the suitors.
Here’s our plan of action, and we will see it through!
Once we’ve killed them both, the father and the son,
we’ll kill you too, for all you’re bent on doing
here in the halls—you’ll pay with your own head!
And once our swords have stopped your violence cold—
all your property, all in your house, your fields, 230
we’ll lump it all with Odysseus’ rich estate
and never let your sons live on in your halls
or free your wife and daughters to walk through town!”

Naked threats—and Athena hit new heights of rage,
she lashed out at Odysseus now with blazing accusations:
“Where’s it gone, Odysseus—your power, your fighting heart?
The great soldier who fought for famous white-armed Helen,
battling Trojans nine long years—nonstop, no mercy,
mowing their armies down in grueling battle—
you who seized the broad streets of Troy 240
with your fine strategic stroke! How can you—
now you’ve returned to your own house, your own wealth—
bewail the loss of your combat strength in a war with *suitors*?
Come, old friend, stand by me! You’ll see action now,
see how Mentor the son of Alcimus, that brave fighter,
kills your enemies, pays you back for service!”

Rousing words—

but she gave no all-out turning of the tide, not yet,
she kept on testing Odysseus and his gallant son,
putting their force and fighting heart to proof. 250
For all the world like a swallow in their sight
she flew on high to perch
on the great hall’s central roofbeam black with smoke.

But the suitors closed ranks, commanded now by Damastor’s son

Agelaus, flanked by Eurynomus, Demoptolemus and Amphimedon,
Pisander, Polyctor’s son, and Polybus ready, waiting—
head and shoulders the best and bravest of the lot
still left to fight for their lives,
now that the pelting shafts had killed the rest.
Agelaus spurred his comrades on with battle-plans:
“Friends, at last the man’s invincible hands are useless! 260
Mentor has mouthed some empty boasts and flitted off—
just four are left to fight at the front doors. So now,
no wasting your long spears—all at a single hurl,
just six of us launch out in the first wave!
If Zeus is willing, we may hit Odysseus,
carry off the glory! The rest are nothing
once the captain’s down!”

At his command,
concentrating their shots, all six hurled as one
but Athena sent the whole salvo wide of the mark—
one of them hit the jamb of the great hall’s doors, 270
another the massive door itself, and the heavy bronze point
of a third ashen javelin crashed against the wall.
Seeing his men untouched by the suitors’ flurry,
steady Odysseus leapt to take command:
“Friends! now it’s for *us* to hurl at them, I say,
into this ruck of suitors! Topping all their crimes
they’re mad to strip the armor off our bodies!”

Taking aim at the ranks, all four let fly as one
and the lances struck home—Odysseus killed Demoptolemus,
Telemachus killed Euryades—the swineherd, Elatus— 280
and the cowherd cut Pisander down in blood.
They bit the dust of the broad floor, all as one.
Back to the great hall’s far recess the others shrank
as the four rushed in and plucked up spears from corpses.

And again the suitors hurled their whetted shafts
but Athena sent the better part of the salvo wide—
one of them hit the jamb of the great hall’s doors,
another the massive door itself, and the heavy bronze point

of a third ashen javelin crashed against the wall.
 True, Amphimedon nicked Telemachus on the wrist—
 the glancing blade just barely broke his skin. 290
 Ctesippus sent a long spear sailing over
 Eumaeus' buckler, grazing his shoulder blade
 but the weapon skittered off and hit the ground.
 And again those led by the brilliant battle-master
 hurled their razor spears at the suitors' ranks—
 and now Odysseus raider of cities hit Eurydamas,
 Telemachus hit Amphimedon—Eumaeus, Polybus—
 and the cowherd stabbed Ctesippus
 right in the man's chest and triumphed over his body: 300
 "Love your mockery, do you? Son of that blowhard Polytherses!
 No more shooting off your mouth, you idiot, such big talk—
 leave the last word to the gods—they're much stronger!
 Take this spear, this guest-gift, for the cow's hoof
 you once gave King Odysseus begging in his house!"

So the master of longhorn cattle had his say—
 as Odysseus, fighting at close quarters, ran Agelaus
 through with a long lance—Telemachus speared Leocritus
 so deep in the groin the bronze came punching out his back
 and the man crashed headfirst, slamming the ground full-face. 310
 And now Athena, looming out of the rafters high above them,
 brandished her man-destroying shield of thunder, terrifying
 the suitors out of their minds, and down the hall they panicked—
 wild, like herds stampeding, driven mad as the darting gadfly
 strikes in the late spring when the long days come round.
 The attackers struck like eagles, crook-clawed, hook-beaked,
 swooping down from a mountain ridge to harry smaller birds
 that skim across the flatland, cringing under the clouds
 but the eagles plunge in fury, rip their lives out—hopeless,
 never a chance of flight or rescue—and people love the sport— 320
 so the attackers routed suitors headlong down the hall,
 wheeling into the slaughter, slashing left and right
 and grisly screams broke from skulls cracked open—
 the whole floor awash with blood.

Leodes now—

he flung himself at Odysseus, clutched his knees,
 crying out to the king with a sudden, winging prayer:
 "I hug your knees, Odysseus—mercy! spare my life!
 Never, I swear, did I harass any woman in your house—
 never a word, a gesture—nothing, no, I tried 330
 to restrain the suitors, whoever did such things.
 They wouldn't listen, keep their hands to themselves—
 so reckless, so they earn their shameful fate.
 But I was just their prophet—
 my hands are clean—and I'm to die their death!
 Look at the thanks I get for years of service!"

A killing look, and the wry soldier answered,
 "Only a priest, a prophet for this mob, you say?
 How hard you must have prayed in my own house
 that the heady day of my return would never dawn—
 my dear wife would be yours, would bear your children! 340
 For that there's no escape from grueling death—you die!"

And snatching up in one powerful hand a sword
 left on the ground—Agelaus dropped it when he fell—
 Odysseus hacked the prophet square across the neck
 and the praying head went tumbling in the dust.

Now one was left,
 trying still to escape black death. Phemius, Terpis' son,
 the bard who always performed among the suitors—
 they forced the man to sing . . .
 There he stood, backing into the side-door,
 still clutching his ringing lyre in his hands, 350
 his mind in turmoil, torn—what should he do?
 Steal from the hall and crouch at the altar-stone
 of Zeus who Guards the Court, where time and again
 Odysseus and Laertes burned the long thighs of oxen?
 Or throw himself on the master's mercy, clasp his knees?
 That was the better way—or so it struck him, yes,
 grasp the knees of Laertes' royal son. And so,
 cradling his hollow lyre, he laid it on the ground
 between the mixing-bowl and the silver-studded throne,

then rushed up to Odysseus, yes, and clutched his knees,
 singing out to his king with a stirring, winged prayer:
 "I hug your knees, Odysseus—mercy! spare my life!
 What a grief it will be to you for all the years to come
 if you kill the singer now, who sings for gods and men.
 I taught myself the craft, but a god has planted
 deep in my spirit all the paths of song—
 songs I'm fit to sing for you as for a god.
 Calm your bloodlust now—don't take my head!
 He'd bear me out, your own dear son Telemachus—
 never of *my* own will, never for any gain did I
 perform in your house, singing after the suitors
 had their feasts. They were too strong, too many—
 they forced me to come and sing—I had no choice!"

The inspired Prince Telemachus heard his pleas
 and quickly said to his father close beside him,
 "Stop, don't cut him down! This one's innocent.
 So is the herald Medon—the one who always
 tended me in the house when I was little—
 spare him too. Unless he's dead by now,
 killed by Philoetius or Eumaeus here—
 or ran into *you* rampaging through the halls."

The herald pricked up his anxious ears at that . . .
 cautious soul, he cowered, trembling, under a chair—
 wrapped in an oxhide freshly stripped—to dodge black death.
 He jumped in a flash from there, threw off the smelly hide
 and scuttling up to Telemachus, clutching his knees,
 the herald begged for life in words that fluttered:
 "Here I am, dear boy—spare me! Tell your father,
 flushed with victory, not to kill me with his sword—
 enraged as he is with these young lords who bled
 his palace white and showed you no respect,
 the reckless fools!"

Breaking into a smile
 the canny Odysseus reassured him, "Courage!
 The prince has pulled you through, he's saved you now

360

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390

so you can take it to heart and tell the next man too:
 clearly doing good puts doing bad to shame.
 Now leave the palace, go and sit outside—
 out in the courtyard, clear of the slaughter—
 you and the bard with all his many songs.
 Wait till I've done some household chores
 that call for my attention."

400

The two men scurried out of the house at once
 and crouched at the altar-stone of mighty Zeus—
 glancing left and right,
 fearing death would strike at any moment.

Odysseus scanned his house to see if any man
 still skulked alive, still hoped to avoid black death.
 But he found them one and all in blood and dust . . .
 great hauls of them down and out like fish that fishermen
 drag from the churning gray surf in looped and coiling nets
 and fling ashore on a sweeping hook of beach—some noble catch
 heaped on the sand, twitching, lusting for fresh salt sea
 but the Sungod hammers down and burns their lives out . . .
 so the suitors lay in heaps, corpse covering corpse.
 At last the seasoned fighter turned to his son:
 "Telemachus, go, call the old nurse here—
 I must tell her all that's on my mind."

410

Telemachus ran to do his father's bidding,
 shook the women's doors, calling Eurycleia:
 "Come out now! Up with you, good old woman!
 You who watch over all the household hands—
 quick, my father wants you, needs to have a word!"

420

Crisp command that left the old nurse hushed—
 she spread the doors to the well-constructed hall,
 slipped out in haste, and the prince led her on . . .
 She found Odysseus in the thick of slaughtered corpses,
 splattered with bloody filth like a lion that's devoured
 some ox of the field and lopes home, covered with blood,

his chest streaked, both jaws glistening, dripping red—
 a sight to strike terror. So Odysseus looked now,
 splattered with gore, his thighs, his fighting hands,
 and she, when she saw the corpses, all the pooling blood,
 was about to lift a cry of triumph—here was a great exploit,
 look—but the soldier held her back and checked her zeal
 with warnings winging home: “Rejoice in your heart,
 old woman—peace! No cries of triumph now.
 It’s unholy to glory over the bodies of the dead.
 These men the doom of the gods has brought low,
 and their own indecent acts. They’d no regard
 for any man on earth—good or bad—
 who chanced to come their way. And so, thanks
 to their reckless work, they met this shameful fate.
 Quick, report in full on the women in my halls—
 who are disloyal to me, who are guiltless?”

“Surely, child,”

his fond old nurse replied, “now here’s the truth.
 Fifty women you have inside your house,
 women we’ve trained to do their duties well,
 to card the wool and bear the yoke of service.
 Some dozen in all went tramping to their shame,
 thumbing their noses at me, at the queen herself!
 And Telemachus, just now come of age—his mother
 would never let the boy take charge of the maids.
 But let me climb to her well-lit room upstairs
 and tell your wife the news—
 some god has put the woman fast asleep.”

“Don’t wake her yet,” the crafty man returned,
 “you tell those women to hurry here at once—
 just the ones who’ve shamed us all along.”

Away the old nurse bustled through the house
 to give the women orders, rush them to the king.
 Odysseus called Telemachus over, both herdsmen too,
 with strict commands: “Start clearing away the bodies.
 Make the women pitch in too. Chairs and tables—

430

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scrub them down with sponges, rinse them clean.
 And once you’ve put the entire house in order,
 march the women out of the great hall—between
 the roundhouse and the courtyard’s strong stockade—
 and hack them with your swords, slash out all their lives—
 blot out of their minds the joys of love they relished
 under the suitors’ bodies, rutting on the sly!”

470

The women crowded in, huddling all together . . .
 wailing convulsively, streaming live warm tears.
 First they carried out the bodies of the dead
 and propped them under the courtyard colonnade,
 standing them one against another. Odysseus
 shouted commands himself, moving things along
 and they kept bearing out the bodies—they were forced.
 Next they scrubbed down the elegant chairs and tables,
 washed them with sopping sponges, rinsed them clean.
 Then Telemachus and the herdsmen scraped smooth
 the packed earth floor of the royal house with spades
 as the women gathered up the filth and piled it outside.
 And then, at last, once the entire house was put in order,
 they marched the women out of the great hall—between
 the roundhouse and the courtyard’s strong stockade—
 crammed them into a dead end, no way out from there,
 and stern Telemachus gave the men their orders:
 “No clean death for the likes of them, by god!
 Not from me—they showered abuse on my head,
 my mother’s too!

480

You sluts—the suitors’ whores!”

490

With that, taking a cable used on a dark-prowed ship
 he coiled it over the roundhouse, lashed it fast to a tall column,
 hoisting it up so high no toes could touch the ground.
 Then, as doves or thrushes beating their spread wings
 against some snare rigged up in thickets—flying in
 for a cozy nest but a grisly bed receives them—
 so the women’s heads were trapped in a line,
 nooses yanking their necks up, one by one

so all might die a pitiful, ghastly death . . .
they kicked up heels for a little—not for long.

Melanthius?

500

They hauled him out through the doorway, into the court,
lopped his nose and ears with a ruthless knife,
tore his genitals out for the dogs to eat raw
and in manic fury hacked off hands and feet.

Then,

once they'd washed their own hands and feet,
they went inside again to join Odysseus.
Their work was done with now.
But the king turned to devoted Eurycleia, saying,
"Bring sulfur, nurse, to scour all this pollution—
bring me fire too, so I can fumigate the house.
And call Penelope here with all her women—
tell all the maids to come back in at once."

510

"Well said, my boy," his old nurse replied,
"right to the point. But wait,
let me fetch you a shirt and cloak to wrap you.
No more dawdling round the palace, nothing but rags
to cover those broad shoulders—it's a scandal!"

"Fire first," the good soldier answered.
"Light me a fire to purify this house."

The devoted nurse snapped to his command,
brought her master fire and brimstone. Odysseus
purged his palace, halls and court, with cleansing fumes.

520

Then back through the royal house the old nurse went
to tell the women the news and bring them in at once.
They came crowding out of their quarters, torch in hand,
flung their arms around Odysseus, hugged him, home at last,
and kissed his head and shoulders, seized his hands, and he,
overcome by a lovely longing, broke down and wept . . .
deep in his heart he knew them one and all.



The Great Rooted Bed

Up to the rooms the old nurse clambered, chuckling all the way,
to tell the queen her husband was here now, home at last.
Her knees bustling, feet shuffling over each other,
till hovering at her mistress' head she spoke:
"Penelope—child—wake up and see for yourself,
with your own eyes, all you dreamed of, all your days!
He's here—Odysseus—he's come home, at long last!
He's killed the suitors, swaggering young brutes
who plagued his house, wolfed his cattle down,
rode roughshod over his son!"

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"Dear old nurse," wary Penelope replied,
"the gods have made you mad. They have that power,
putting lunacy into the clearest head around