

If Zeus brings down the suitors by my hand
I promise marriages to both, and cattle,
and houses built near mine. And you shall be
80 brothers-in-arms of my Telemachus.
Here, let me show you something else, a sign
that I am he, that you can trust me, look:
this old scar from the tusk wound that I got
boar hunting on Parnassus—
85 Autolycus' sons and I.”

Shifting his rags

he bared the long gash. Both men looked, and knew,
and threw their arms around the old soldier, weeping,
kissing his head and shoulders. He as well
took each man's head and hands to kiss, then said—
90 to cut it short, else they might weep till dark—

“Break off, no more of this.
Anyone at the door could see and tell them.
Drift back in, but separately at intervals
after me.

Now listen to your orders:

95 when the time comes, those gentlemen, to a man,
will be dead against giving me bow or quiver.
Defy them. Eumaeus, bring the bow
and put it in my hands there at the door.
Tell the women to lock their own door tight.
100 Tell them if someone hears the shock of arms
or groans of men, in hall or court, not one
must show her face, but keep still at her weaving.
Philoetius, run to the outer gate and lock it.
Throw the cross bar and lash it.”

He turned back

105 into the courtyard and the beautiful house
and took the stool he had before. They followed
one by one, the two hands loyal to him.

Eurymachus had now picked up the bow.
He turned it round, and turned it round
110 before the licking flame to warm it up,
but could not, even so, put stress upon it

84 Parnassus (pär-näs'as): a mountain in central Greece.

85 Autolycus' (ô-töl'y-kas) sons: Odysseus' uncles. (Autolycus was Odysseus' grandfather on his mother's side.)

94–104 Odysseus has a plan but reveals to the servants only the details they must take care of. On the basis of the orders he gives, what do you think Odysseus is planning?

Then spoke Odysseus, all craft and gall:

“My lords, contenders for the queen, permit me:
a passion in me moves me to speak out.

125 I put it to Eurymachus above all
and to that brilliant prince, Antinous. . . .
But let me try my hand at the smooth bow!
Let me test my fingers and my pull
to see if any of the oldtime kick is there,
130 or if thin fare and roving took it out of me.”

Now irritation beyond reason swept them all,
since they were nagged by fear that he could string it.
Antinous answered, coldly and at length:

135 “You bleary vagabond, no rag of sense is left you.
Are you not coddled here enough, at table
taking meat with gentlemen, your betters,
denied nothing, and listening to our talk?
When have we let a tramp hear all our talk?
The sweet goad of wine has made you rave!”



140 At this the watchful queen Penelope
interposed:

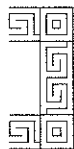
“Antinous, discourtesy
to a guest of Telemachus—whatever guest—
that is not handsome. What are you afraid of?
Suppose this exile put his back into it
145 and drew the great bow of Odysseus—
could he then take me home to be his bride?
You know he does not imagine that! No one
need let that prospect weigh upon his dinner!
How very, very improbable it seems.”

122–130 Remember that Odysseus is disguised as an old beggar. Think about the effect of an old beggar's request to try the challenge just after the finest princes in the land have failed so miserably.

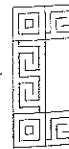
130 thin fare and roving: poor food and hard travel.

134–139 How does Antinous react to the beggar's request?

140–149 The epithet “watchful queen” characterizes Penelope as patient and observant. Here she scolds the suitors for their lack of courtesy and hospitality—values they consistently ignore—and urges them to give the stranger a chance.



AT TELEMACHUS' REQUEST, Penelope leaves the men to settle the question of the bow among themselves.



WORDS
TO
KNOW **gall** (gôl) *n.* scornful boldness