

Athena sped her on to King Odysseus' house
to spare Penelope, worn with pain and sobbing,
further spells of grief and storms of tears.
The phantom entered her bedroom,
passing quickly in through the doorbolt slit
and hovering at her head she rose and spoke now:
“Sleeping, Penelope, your heart so wrung with sorrow?
No need, I tell you, no, the gods who live at ease
can't bear to let you weep and rack your spirit.
Your son will still come home—it is decreed.
He's never wronged the gods in any way.”

And Penelope murmured back, still cautious,
drifting softly now at the gate of dreams,
“Why have you come, my sister?
Your visits all too rare in the past,
for you make your home so very far away.
You tell me to lay to rest the grief and tears
that overwhelm me now, torment me, heart and soul?
With my lionhearted husband lost long years ago,
who excelled the Argives all in every strength?
That great man whose fame resounds through Hellas
right to the depths of Argos ...

And now my darling boy,
he's off and gone in a hollow ship! Just a youngster,
still untrained for war or stiff debate. *Him*,
I mourn him even more than I do my husband—
quake in terror for all that he might suffer
either on open sea or shores he goes to visit.
Hordes of enemies scheme against him now,
keen to kill him off
before he can reach his native land again.”

“Courage!” the shadowy phantom reassured her.
“Don't be overwhelmed by all your direst fears.
He travels with such an escort, one that others
would pray to stand beside them. She has power—

Pallas Athena. She pities you in your tears.
She wings me here to tell you all these things.”

But the circumspect Penelope replied,
“If you *are* a god and have heard a god’s own voice,
come, tell me about that luckless man as well.
Is he still alive? does he see the light of day?
Or is he dead already, lost in the House of Death?”

“About that man,” the shadowy phantom answered,
“I cannot tell you the story start to finish,
whether he’s dead or alive.
It’s wrong to lead you on with idle words.”

At that

she glided off by the doorpost past the bolt—
gone on a lifting breeze. Icarius’ daughter
started up from sleep, her spirit warmed now
that a dream so clear had come to her in darkest night.

But the suitors boarded now and sailed the sea-lanes,
plotting in their hearts Telemachus’ plunge to death.
Off in the middle channel lies a rocky island,
just between Ithaca and Same’s rugged cliffs—
Asteris—not large, but it has a cove,
a harbor with two mouths where ships can hide.
Here the Achaeans lurked in ambush for the prince.